THEGOSPELCOALITION

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.

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.

EDITORIAL

But That's Just Your Interpretation!

— D. A. Carson —

D. A. Carson is emeritus professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois and president of The Gospel Coalition.

In mid-June of this year, a former theology student (let's call him Demas) posted the following. Demas had successfully completed his M.Div. at a well-known evangelical seminary, and then had served a few years as a fruitful pastor of a growing church in a metropolitan area, while pursuing a PhD in New Testament studies. He was a pretty good student, a steady preacher, and was invariably warm and personable with people. Sadly, he entered into an adulterous relationship and ended up selling real estate. Mercifully, he and his wife held their marriage together. So this is what Demas posted on social media in June of this year, several years after resigning his pastorate:

> Here's my public contribution during #PrideMonth: Whenever I talk with a conservative Christian or pastor (who [*sic*] I love and esteem, and whom I believe good things about, and which I used to be) about homosexuality now, whatever I actually end up saying to them—what I'm actually THINKING is, "Look. I've done biblical and theological training at a very high level. At least as high if not higher than you (for 99.9% of the population). And I'm telling you: *You. don't. know. for sure."*

> You don't know for sure that your reading of the Bible is right. Or if your hermeneutics are correct. You do not know for sure how interwoven or weighted the divine and human authorship(s?) of the Bible is. You do not know that.

> You don't know 100% for certain which ancient books are actually God Almighty's eternal Word. Because there were a lot of books. And we rely on these particular books because they're the ones the Church happened to be using when the Church first put a "Bible" together. Moses did not bring the whole Bible down the mountain from God. We love these books, but we have very thin understandings of how this collection of books came together and why and on who's [*sic*] authority. We do not know.

> We don't know for absolutely certain how God wanted us to use these books. How he wanted them applied to the 21st century western world.

> We do not know for certain. We cannot know for certain.

> Believing in the Bible is an act of faith. For everyone. And I believe in the Bible. But when my eyes are open to the fact that I can say BOTH "This book is holy" AND "There is a lot of uncertainty about how it should be applied to our society" I immediately

realize that I could get the "answer" to the homosexuality question wrong—one way or the other.

I could end up approving something God hates or hating something God loves. Could go either way. Because the issue is not certain. It's not. We know the same facts. You know it's not certain.

So, if my potential mistake it [*sic*] to love something God hates, then I'm going to err on the side of what looks and feels to me most like love. Because whatever else I believe about God, I believe that God Is Love. So, I should try to approve of the things that look most like love.

Which makes me an LGBTQ+ affirming Christian. And I should be willing to say that more.

Happy Pride Month.

In the past, Christians who spoke about the status of the Bible tended to speak of the Bible's truthfulness, reliability, sufficiency, inspiration, inerrancy, and so forth. In line with many contemporaries, however, Demas, without overtly calling into question any of these more familiar categories, has undermined several of them by raising epistemic and hermeneutical questions: How can I know with certainty what the Bible is saying? How can I be certain what books really belong in the Bible? How can I be sure that my interpretation of any text is correct, and, still more, what its proper application is when I draw lines from texts that are two or three thousand years old and written in another language and in another culture, to our life in the early 21st century?

At a milder level, many preachers who are not entertaining the sweep of the epistemic challenges that Demas raises may nevertheless face somewhat similar challenges as they prepare their Sunday morning sermons. Which interpretation of the text in front of me is correct? How can I declare what the Word of the Lord is saying if I cannot be certain what it is saying? Or which of us have tried to explain what the Bible says on some sensitive topic or other, only to be dismissed with the line, "But that's just your interpretation"?

The subject is much too large and multi-faceted for a brief editorial, but it may not be inappropriate to lay down a handful of markers, the first four in a little more detail than the final entry.

First, it is deceptive, and even idolatrous, to set up omniscience as the necessary criterion for "certain" or "sure" knowledge. Recall that Demas keeps saying that you cannot know "for sure" or "for certain" or "for 100% certain" and the like. His argument seems to be that if you do not know something "for 100% sure," then you do not *truly* know it. In other words, you must possess omniscient knowledge about something before you can legitimately say that you know that thing well enough to build life-decisions on your putative knowledge. In the concrete example that is the focus of Demas's concern, unless you know with omniscient knowledge that the Bible really does condemn homosexual behavior, and unless you know with omniscient knowledge that the books of the Bible with those passages in them really do belong to the canon of God-inspired books, and unless you know with omniscient knowledge that this is the way God himself wants those ancient texts to be interpreted and applied today, then you have no right to speak as if these things are truly known at all. According to Demas, you are free to choose some other path.

But it is deceptive to set up omniscience as the necessary criterion for "certain" or "sure" knowledge, and this for at least four reasons.

(1) We commonly speak of human knowing without making omniscience the criterion of true knowing. This is true even in the Bible. For example, Luke tells Theophilus that although many people had undertaken to hand down reports of Jesus' life and ministry as reported by the eyewitnesses, he himself carefully "investigated everything from the beginning," and then "decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may *know the certainty* of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3–4). Luke uses words that are entirely appropriate to human knowing, to human certainty; he is not promising omniscient knowledge to Theophilus. Again, John tells his believing readers that he is writing his first epistle "so that you may *know that* you have eternal life": he is not writing so that they may become omniscient with respect to their knowledge of their status. When Paul encourages Timothy to become "a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15), he is anticipating that Timothy will become a faithful interpreter of Scripture, but not that he will become an omniscient interpreter of Scripture.

(2) If Demas's arguments are valid for the issues that concern him—that is, if because we do not enjoy 100% certain knowledge about what the Scriptures are saying regarding these ethical issues, therefore we cannot legitimately adjudicate their rightness or wrongness—then to be consistent we must adopt the same agnostic position on everything the Bible says, including what it says about the most deeply confessional Christian truths. For example, Christians hold that Jesus is truly to be confessed and worshiped as God. But the deity of Christ is denied by Arians old and new, including Jehovah's Witnesses: one cannot say that there is universal agreement that this is what the Bible teaches. Must we therefore say that because we don't know "for sure" what the Bible says about these things, therefore we should leave the matter open?

(3) Believing in the Bible, Demas asserts, "is an act of faith." True enough. It appears, however, that Demas pits faith over against knowing. If I understand him correctly, his argument is as follows: You may *believe* that the Bible says such-and-such about LGBTQ+ issues, but you cannot *know* "for 100% sure," and therefore you are not warranted to pronounce that LGBTQ+ behavior is disapproved by God. This, however, buys into not only a misguided view of knowledge, but also contemporary secular definitions of "faith." On the streets of New York or Montreal, "faith" has one of two common meanings: either it is a synonym for "religion" (there are many "religions"; there are many "faiths"), or it refers to a personal, subjective, religious commitment, without any necessary connection to truth. Something like the latter is what Demas appears to accept, even though "faith" is never used that way in the Bible. In the Bible, faith is intimately connected with truth. The Bible never asks you to believe or trust what is not true or trustworthy. Indeed, in the Bible one of the most commonest means of strengthening faith is by articulating and defending the truth. What is to be believed or trusted is often propositional, sometimes not, but it is never *un*truth. To pit the truth of what the Bible says against the beliefs that the Bible elicits, makes, from the Bible's perspective, no sense at all.

(4) One cannot help but ask how Demas knows that God is a loving God. Many so-called "new atheists" viscerally deny that God is great or good.[1] The Bible itself depicts God as standing behind judgments that amount to genocide, and many people wrestle with God's "goodness" because of such passages. So why does Demas base his ethical decisions on his conviction that God is good? To be

---

[1] E.g., Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hatchett, 2007).

consistent, shouldn't he say that we cannot know "for 100% sure" that God is good? Isn't he making ethical decisions on the basis of what (his own logic must tell him) he cannot know?

It appears, then, that Demas has succumbed to the categories of this present evil world to arrive at, or at least support, his conclusions. Essentially, Demas is undermining the clarity and the authority of Scripture on the ground that we cannot truly know what Scripture is saying because we don't enjoy omniscient knowledge, and that even our view of the Bible is grounded not in knowledge but in (his understanding of) faith. But I have tried to show that this appeal is deceptive, for our common use of language shows that, whether in the Bible or in general usage, we commonly speak of human knowing even though such knowing is not anchored in omniscience. But the ploy is not only deceptive, it is idolatrous. It demands of human beings that they enjoy an attribute that belongs to God alone, if they are to know ("for certain"—i.e., well enough to make ethical decisions) anything at all. Of course, Demas and his friends are claiming we *don't* enjoy omniscient knowledge: we are *not* to pretend we have the attributes of God. So why am I charging them with idolatry? It is because by claiming we cannot know anything ("for certain") we are being forbidden to think about human beings and human knowing in a biblical fashion: the Bible demonstrates, often implicitly but sometimes explicitly, that human beings *can* grow in knowledge, with appropriate certainty, responding to God's revelation with thought and active faith and obedient submission to our Maker and Redeemer. The ideal of *knowing* God and making him *known* is traded in for dogmatic focus on what we cannot know, without reference to what God says about human knowing, and by the forging of epistemological chains that make us deaf to and careless about what God has disclosed of himself, of our world, of moral and ethical conduct. God has been de-godded. The name of this game is idolatry.

Second, we must at all costs avoid being manipulated by what a friend has called "the art of imperious ignorance."[2] Returning for a moment to the digital post of the man I've called Demas, the thing to note about his argument is that he not only claims that he himself does not know whether the relevant texts are from God, and/or what they mean (which is an admission of *his own* ignorance), but he also claims no one else may legitimately claim that *they* know (which is a dogmatic declaration of *their* ignorance). This is "imperious ignorance"—that is, an imperial declaration that they *must* be ignorant whether or not they admit it.

The example of imperious ignorance that Ovey provides has to do with the Council of Sirmium (AD 357). The theological debate concerned Jesus's nature: was he *homoousios*, of the same substance as the Father, or *homoiousios*, of a similar substance as the Father? The former word would be a confession that Jesus is truly God; the latter would be an indication that he is god-like, but not God. Sirmium was pro-Arian—it sided with the view that Jesus is less than God. But instead of coming out and saying so clearly, the Council came to the conclusion that the arguments on each side were so finely drawn that we *can't* know which is right. Their conclusion was that it was wrong to affirm one side or the other; indeed, their decision was an implicit prohibition against claiming anything specific, because, after all, we *can't know*. The orthodox theologians Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers criticized the decision of Sirmium, not only because, they insisted, it was wrong, but because it was blasphemous. The decree, they said, had an element of compulsion—but how can you legislate against someone else's knowledge? Indeed, because it prohibited the confession of the truth, it was blasphemous. The claim of imperious ignorance means, in practice, that people are allowed to adopt whatever position they prefer.

---

[2] Mike Ovey, "Off the Record: The Art of Imperious Ignorance," *Themelios* 41 (2016): 5–7, http://themelios. thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-art-of-imperious-ignorance.

I thought of Sirmium when a few days ago I read Andrew Bartlett's book, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*.[3] The book contains many astute exegetical observations. But more than once (e.g., on 1 Cor 14:34–35) the author argues for the view that the arguments are so finely drawn that it is impossible to decide one way or the other. This is more than an admission that Bartlett himself cannot decide; rather, it is an argument that the exegetical evidence is such that it is impossible to decide, so that others are implicitly forbidden to decide under risk of being charged with careless exegesis. This is a fine example of an appeal to imperious ignorance. I think that in every case some *can* decide, with varying degrees of certainty, even if others confess that *they* cannot decide. But that is quite different from legislating ignorance in order to avoid conclusions one wants to avoid.

Third, we should be careful to sniff out publishing ploys that seem designed to introduce new waves of uncertainty. Consider a recent book edited by Preston Sprinkle, titled *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*.[4] Most of us are familiar with the "two (or three, or four) views" books. Many of them are very helpful: four views on the millennium, say, or three views on the rapture, or whatever. In the past, the "views" books have usually dealt with debates within the constraints of Evangelicalism. Such books are usually not of the sort that claim to offer "two views on the Deity of Christ." Sprinkle's book, published by an evangelical publisher, now makes the debate about the legitimacy of homosexual practice an intra-evangelical matter. The advertising for the book maintains that both sides argue their case "from Scripture"—though of course, Jehovah's Witnesses argue their case "from Scripture," too. The point is that if there is such a thing as orthodoxy, then not all disputed things are properly disputable. Sometimes the Christian church is built up and strengthened by far-sighted publishing ventures; sometimes it is being manipulated by publishers with little or no confessional loyalty or ecclesiastical discipline.

Fourth, become informed as to the nature of some postmodern epistemologies that, though now rarely teased out, are very widely assumed. Twenty or twenty-five years ago, it was required of most students of the arts—English, history, social studies, politics, journalism, and the like—to become familiar with the ideas (and, in the better universities, the writings) of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and a host of other writers of related persuasion. In other words, it became necessary to learn and defend the *theory* that lay behind postmodernism, especially postmodern epistemology. Today relatively few study these authors, but nevertheless many have drunk deeply from the effluent of the movement. In other words, many still think in transparently postmodern ways, even though their grasp of underlying theory is relatively thin. In some cases they no longer know what Foucault meant by totalization, but they deploy a similar argument if someone makes an exclusive religious claim.

It may help to begin with an example that was much more current in the middle of the twentieth century. When I was a seminary student, one of the books on hermeneutics we had to read was Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*.[5] I was exposed to the book in its first and second editions, where there was no interaction with postmodern hermeneutics. The third edition added some material to tip the hat in that direction, but most of it shared the assumptions of the first two editions. The

---

[3] Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019).

[4] Preston Sprinkle, ed., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

[5] Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980).

task of biblical hermeneutics is to develop skills to enable "me," the interpreter, to ask questions of "it," the text. I, the knower/interpreter, direct appropriate questions to the text, and the text, as it were, answers me back with equal directness. But the "new" hermeneutic (now quite old!), i.e., postmodern hermeneutics, points out, quite tellingly, that the "I" who is asking the questions is never neutral, never reliably objective. Perhaps the "I" is a white, middle-class, Western, well-educated male, looking for tenure at a fine university. Probably the questions he asks won't be the same as the questions of an impoverished, semi-literate, street urchin in a Lagos slum, becoming interested in a health-wealth-and-prosperity gospel preached in a nearby tabernacle. Apparently neither of us asks a purely neutral question. Our social and cultural locations guarantee that my question is not a direct hit; it's more of a glancing blow that reflects an angle that says more about the "I," the knower-interpreter, than it does about the text. So similarly, the text does not answer back directly either. It responds with an answer that is substantially determined by the kind of question that has been directed to it, which itself is determined by who the "I" is. So "I" hit the text with a glancing question, and it responds with a glancing answer. The "I" is doubtless affected in some way by the answer he or she has received, so that when the "I' fires off another question, it is subtly different from the previous question, as is the answer provided by the text. And thus, text and interpreter have set up a "hermeneutical circle," with no obvious way of escaping the subjectivity. And insofar as this model is valid, it affects how we interpret literature, how we shape the history that we write and read, how we evaluate evidence, and so forth. And suddenly, we have tumbled into some profound reasons, some postmodern hermeneutical reasons, for justifying the skeptical charge, "But that's just your interpretation."

The result is a cornucopia of innovative interpretations that transform personal beliefs and (if enough people buy into them) cultural assumptions. As Richard Topping has pointed out, "Remember we live in a time when six of the seven deadly sins are medical conditions—and pride is a virtue."[6] When enough people absorb the interpretations that postmodernism has authorized, it is easy for a traditional Christian to feel excluded. Topping goes on to remind us of the well-known line from Flannery O'Connor, who said, "[Y]ou will know the truth, and the truth will make you odd."[7] By contrast, if with Demas you decide you cannot know the truth, then in the culture steeped in the effluent of postmodernism, you will not be odd. And neither do you know the truth.

The beginnings of an answer might be summarized in several points.

(1) It is important to avoid a response that is needlessly polarizing, for transparently no interpreter, no "I," no knower, is perfectly objective. The only way to achieve perfection in that department is (here we go again!) by becoming omniscient. In other words, traditional hermeneutics owes a debt of gratitude for reminding all of us how we cannot escape our subjectivity, our finiteness, our cultural blind spots.

(2) Yet it does not follow that all interpretations are equally valid, or invalid. Experience shows us our efforts at interpretation do not consign us to a hermeneutical circle; rather, our knowing, our interpretations, are rather more akin to the movement of a hermeneutical spiral: as we circle in on the text again and again, we get closer and closer to faithful understanding, even if it is never the understanding available only to Omniscience.[8] Or to change the mathematical model, persistent attempts to understand something, not least biblical texts, regularly place us on an asymptotic approach

---

[6] Richard Topping, "Theological Study: Keeping It Odd," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 37 (2019): 5.

[7] Topping, "Theological Study," 5.

[8] Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

to perfect knowledge (i.e., we will never get there [for that is the prerogative of Omniscience], but we may sidle up so closely that it's "as good as" or "as if" we managed to get all the way, much like the approximations in a discipline like calculus.)[9]

(3) The appropriateness of these models of learning and knowing (i.e., we grow closer to faithful knowing with time) is confirmed by the way we learn, whether the subject is Greek, Spenserian verse, statistics, microbiology, or biblical studies. Our first attempts at knowing any subject expose how large is the distance between what we think we know and what is actually there (as measured by those whose diligent study has brought them asymptotically close). We human beings learn; we come to know by degrees; we self-correct; we compare notes with others. None of this supports the notion that by diligent hermeneutical discipline we may obtain perfect (i.e. omniscient) knowledge, but it surely excludes the conclusion that all putative knowledge is no better and no worse, neither more faithful nor less faithful, than any competing putative knowledge. Along similar lines, while we ought to excoriate those condescending cultures that are dismissive of all other cultures, we find it hard to justify the view that all cultures are of equal value and worth to all other cultures. Is the culture of Naziism of equal value and worth to the culture of, say, Mother Theresa?

> At last we know all truth is gray: no more
> Faith's raucous rhetoric, this blinding trap
> Of absolutes, this brightly colored map
> Of good and bad: our ocean has no shore.
> Dogmatic truth is chimera: deplore
> All arrogance: the massive gray will sap
> The sparkling hues of bigotry, and cap
> The rainbow, mask the sun, make dullness soar.
>> Yet tiny, fleeting hesitations lurk
>> Behind the storied billows of the cloud
>> Like sparkling, prism'd glory in the murk:
>> The freedom of the gray becomes a shroud.
> Where nothing can be false, truth must away—
> Not least the truth that all my world is gray.[10]

(4) And finally, the models change again if we become convinced that Omniscience has kindly spoken to us in the words of human language. That does not mean that God gives us the capacity to enjoy omniscient knowledge ourselves: for that, we would have to be God. But surely it is reasonable to assume that this omniscient God knows which words and idioms and syntax and figures of speech to use so as to best communicate with his image bearers, however lost and blind they may be. And on all the topics on which he most wants us to be informed, in love he says the same thing again and again, in the words of different human authors, in different contexts. Not only so, but he liberally bestows his Spirit to enlighten their understanding. He expects his readers to be like believers in Berea, who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to *see if what Paul said was true*" (Acts 17:11)—a marvelous example of growing in knowledge without ever claiming to

---

[9] I have tried to work out these models in *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

[10] D. A. Carson, "The Postmodern," first published in *First Things* 93 (May 1999): 51, used by permission.

possess omniscient knowledge. In other words, it is possible (as well as urgent) to press toward what Paul elsewhere calls "the pattern of sound teaching" (2 Tim 1:13; cf. Rom 6:17), lest we find ourselves in the place of inverting what God declares to be the case (cf. Isa 5:20–21). The notion of a "pattern of sound knowledge" flags how much our understanding of this or that text or theme is itself shaped and re-shaped by the "givens" of our own worldview, of our preunderstandings. But that would demand at least another editorial.

Finally, this special character of the Word of God, in which the omniscient God stands behind it, however faulty our interpretive efforts of it, calls us to humility and godly fear whenever we engage the sacred text. God declares, "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, *and who tremble at my word*" (Isa 66:2). For our purposes, there are two lessons to be drawn from this assertion.

(1) The prophecy of Isaiah repeatedly makes it clear that God loathes all forms of religion that are largely for show, a veneer to mask greed, lust, and idolatry. Cognitive skills, as important as they are, guarantee nothing, for idolatry in our cognitive powers is still idolatry. So we rightly look for teachers and preachers who unambiguously place themselves *under* the Word in transparent humility, while we remain highly suspicious of those who try to be too clever by half, who with a smirk and a wink seek rather to domesticate the Scriptures, than to be mastered by them.

(2) This stance also grants the interpreter a certain kind of humble boldness. Not long ago I was speaking at a Christian meeting along the lines developed in this editorial. At the end of the session, someone approached me in anger and tears, saying that I had repeatedly hurt her deeply. It turned out that she had a lesbian daughter, and by condemning homosexuality (unlike Demas) I had wounded her badly. She was in no condition to be told that I brought up homosexuality simply because that was the hinge in Demas's argument. I might have told her that elsewhere I have tried on occasion to talk at length about this complex subject; I might have mentioned some excellent and though-provoking authors such as Rosaria Butterfield. But the woman was determined to make herself the victim, and me the abuser and victimizer. So finally I asked her, rather quietly, if her anger and hurt sprang from what I said, or from what God says in Scripture. Was she angry with me, or with God? I make it a practice to listen to alternative interpretations, and I am happy to be corrected: I too must want to be a good worker who does not need to be ashamed as I handle the Bible. But if I tremble before the Word of God, I will not duck what it has to say just because it is culturally uncomfortable. To tremble before the Word of God leaves me content to be odd in a culture that fails to recognize the authority of that Word. But it also affords me a place to shelter.

"But that's just your interpretation": well, yes, it is my interpretation. Whose else could it possibly be? But in today's climate, the question is not designed to offer a superior or better-warranted interpretation, but to relativize all interpretations. And that plea for imperious ignorance must not be allowed to stand. It is, finally, incoherent and idolatrous. A far better approach to holy Scripture is preserved for us in Psalm 119.

Remembering a Principal's Principles

— Daniel Strange —

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

Next month will be three years since Mike Ovey, the then Principal of Oak Hill College London, went to be with Jesus Christ. His loss is still felt keenly by his family, friends, colleagues and many within our evangelical world who benefited so greatly from his erudition, vision for theological education, and quite simply his person. Given I had the privilege of taking over this very *Themelios* column from Mike, writing it is always a three-times-a-year bitter sweet reminder and spur.

In the last few years it's been wonderful to see the publication of Chris Green, ed., *The Goldilocks Zone: Collected Writings of Michael J. Ovey* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), and then this July's posthumous publication *The Feasts of Repentance: From Luke-Acts to Systematic and Pastoral Theology* (London: Apollos: 2019).[1] This interdisciplinary study was material Mike had originally given at Moore College in 2008 and nearly completed into book form at the time of his sudden death. Having retrieved the material, Mark Thompson, Principal of Moore College and one of Mike's closest friends, lovingly made the final editorial touches to the manuscript, which Don Carson agreed to publish in the NSBT series. A little book on Mike's beloved Hiliary of Poitiers will, I hope, appear in the near future, and at some point I would love to see his incredible lectures get a wider audience.

Although Mike's *Themelios* column was called 'Off the Record', I want to devote this editorial to put *on the record* a little piece I asked Mike to write a few years ago and which speaks to a crucial area for those of us involved in theological education. Within academic institutions who have some kind of evangelical basis, many of us will know about, or will have experienced the constructive and complimentary harmony and blossoming that can arise from the marriage of academic work and confessional commitments. However, many will also know or will have experienced the destructive dissonance when these two are in acrimonious conflict with each other. To use a British expression, things can go 'pear shaped' pretty quickly especially when one factors in the increasing and cloying culture of juridification in which we live and move and have our being. Individuals, institutions and communities are all affected when things go awry with consequences that can be far-reaching and long-lasting. Of course, given there is nothing new under the sun, the relationship between academic freedom and confessional responsibility has been a perennial issue for theological education as old as Jerusalem and Athens, I suppose.

Given this context and having experienced both the joys and woes in this area, Mike, as *Principal*, drafted some *principles* for inclusion in the faculty handbook I was revising at the time. This draft was discussed amongst the faculty, edited, and finally agreed upon. While by no means a magic bullet or

---

[1] Editor's note: A review of *The Feasts of Repentance* may be found in this issue of *Themelios*, pp. 605–7.

panacea, they remain in our handbook even though Mike is no longer with us. For me, they offer helpful guidance and provide fertile soil out of which the highest and healthiest Christian academic work can grow. They also might serve as a preventative measure for the blight that (as history seems to show us) plagues theological colleges from time to time.

The relevant section reads as follows:

> In all that we do as a Faculty, whether teaching, caring for our students, representing the College, or engaging in writing and research, it is important for us to remember the following principles:
>
> 1. Christian academics are Christians first whose ministry and service of the Lord Jesus Christ takes place in an academic and teaching context. Our work as academics therefore needs to be set in that overall context of Christian life.
>
> 2. Like all Christians, academic staff are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and are therefore bound to listen to and obey the Spirit-inspired Scriptures of Old and New Testament, all of which testify uniquely, infallibly and inerrantly to him.
>
> 3. Like all Christians, academic staff recognise that the Scriptures are a blessing for all of God's people and that an increasing humble apprehension of those Scriptures brings greater maturity and Christ-likeness to Christians both individually and collectively.
>
> 4. As servants, academic staff are bound to seek to understand the Scriptures as deeply as they may, not for the sake of self-service and not with bare cognition as an individual end in itself, but primarily so that others may be taught, nourished and blessed through deeper apprehensions of the Scriptures which feed both proper wonder at God and mature service of him.
>
> 5. The context in which academic staff serve in this way is as employees of the College, which is governed by the College's confessional statement. This provides boundaries within which academic staff serve.[2]
>
> 6. This quest for deeper apprehensions of the Scriptures, though, inevitably leads to proposing new insights. This is right, proper and desirable in its right place.
>
> 7. It is right in that such a quest can sharpen our understanding of the wonder of the Gospel, can liberate from purely human understandings (whether articulated in a church tradition or as a current fashion) and can help us re-state the gospel more aptly and faithfully in the changing missionary circumstances in which God puts us. To this extent, academic staff have a responsibility to seek deeper apprehensions of the

---

[2] So for example, The Trust under which Oak Hill sits is bound by its charitable terms to uphold 'the Protestant and evangelical faith', defined as follows: 'The Protestant and Evangelical Faith holds to be of first importance the fundamental truths of Christianity revealed in Scripture, including those confirmed by the church's historic catholic creeds, and the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, and those set out in the three statements following, all in their clear and plain meaning without reservation'. Those statements are the Crosslinks Statement of Faith, The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Basis of Faith (older version), and the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship Doctrinal Basis. 'Articles of Association of the Kingham Hill Trust', 26 June 1999, Section 9.2.

Scriptures in their research, including the need to remain abreast of current scholarship, and to share those deeper apprehensions with students and colleagues through teaching and discussion and more widely through publication.

8. This quest must, though, be set in a servant context, especially in situations where inequality of knowledge creates real issues about the use of power.

9. As servants, academic staff must strive not to inculcate or model a love of the novel for its own sake because of the spiritual dangers this creates for other Christians.

10. As servants, where academic staff publish material which proposes tentative conclusions which represent something new (but within the framework of belief under which the College was established), they must carefully indicate that this is the case.

11. As servants, where academic staff propose ideas in lectures or seminars which represent something new, they must at some point inform students that this is the case.

12. This servant ministry must be exercised with the recognition that there may be, in the public mind, a tacit representation of the College in whatever he or she says or writes, whether as a teacher, as a scholar, or as an individual. He or she should therefore at all times be accurate, and exercise appropriate restraint.

Given the readership and *raison d'etre* of *Themelios*, my purpose in restating these principles here, given my particular UK context with my own institution's particular confessional position, is that it might act as a prompt and discussion starter for your own cultural contexts and your theological education institutions with your own confessional bases, which of course may be 'broader' or 'narrower', and/or more maximal or more minimal. Whatever the context I hope in reading them and reflecting upon them prayerfully, we will grasp the Christ-like servant-hearted nature of our calling as theological educators, a servant-heartedness I will always associate with Mike Ovey.

Cultural Marxism: Imaginary Conspiracy or Revolutionary Reality?

— Robert S. Smith —

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

******

Abstract: What are we to make of Cultural Marxism? This article seeks to answer that question, *first*, by outlining the key elements and legacy of classical Marxism; *second*, by exploring the neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci; *third*, by assessing the main ideas and impact of "the Frankfurt School"; and, *fourth*, by offering some reflections on (i) the links between these thinkers and various contemporary developments, (ii) the wisdom of employing the term Cultural Marxism, and (iii) how Christians should respond to the current "culture wars" that are polarizing the Western world.

******

The development of ideas and their links to the movements they generate or justify is often a messy process. It can be notoriously difficult to identify the precise relationship between this school of thought and that social phenomenon or to quantify the impact of particular individuals on larger social changes. Consequently, intellectual historians need to be alert to a number of dangers: mistaking correlation for causation, confusing partial understandings with more comprehensive ones, and offering reductionistic readings of complex ideological and cultural shifts. None of this, however, means resigning ourselves to skepticism. With patience, humility and skill (and often a little hindsight too!), mapping the movements of the past and evaluating their effects on the present can be done—even if never perfectly and only ever provisionally.

Nonetheless, it is not surprising that some historical reconstructions are more contested than others and different explanatory categories are deemed more or less helpful, depending on how coherent they are and how much is being claimed by them. Indeed, some terms (especially if they accrue divisive political overtones) can become what the New Zealand philosopher, Jamie Whyte, has called "boo-hooray words"[1]—words that provoke an almost visceral reaction of either disgust or delight, denunciation or celebration.

Such is the case with "Cultural Marxism" (also known as Neo-Marxism, Libertarian Marxism, Existential Marxism, or Western Marxism).[2] From one perspective, this polarized reaction is puzzling.

---

[1] Jamie Whyte, *Bad Thoughts: A Guide to Clear Thinking* (London: Corvo, 2003), 61–62.

[2] As far as I've been able to discover, the term "Cultural Marxism" was first employed (if not coined) by Trent Schroyer in *The Critique of Domination: The Origins and Development of Critical Theory* (New York: George

Cultural Marxism is a well-established term in academic circles and has appeared in the titles of numerous books and articles that treat it either dispassionately or favorably.[3] It simply refers to a twentieth century development in Marxist thought that came to view Western culture as a key source of human oppression. As such, *Cultural Marxism is nothing more than the application of Marxist theory to culture.* But over the last decade or more, the term has become increasingly explosive—so much so that on 30 December 2014, Wikipedia's editorial team took the rather extraordinary step of archiving its rather tame entry on the subject!

So why the commotion? The short answer is, due to its deployment by people like Jordan Peterson, Cultural Marxism has come to function as "shorthand for left-wing ideology," particularly as this manifests in a range "progressive" developments and social justice causes.[4] For this reason, most on the "left" side of the contemporary culture war not only hear Cultural Marxism as an accusatory "snarl word" (which it often is) but dismiss its validity, describing it as "a uniting theory for rightwingers who love to play the victim"[5] or "a conspiracy theory with an anti-Semitic twist"[6] or "the ultimate post-factual dog-whistle."[7] Others still, without disputing the phenomena behind the term, argue that calling it "Marxism" is historically inaccurate and conceptually confusing.[8]

What are we to make of all this? Is Cultural Marxism a misnomer? Is it an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory? Or is it an accurate way of describing a real ideology that is making a very real impact on our world? And, if the latter, how should we regard it and respond to it? This article will first outline the basic elements and legacy of classical Marxism. Second, it will explore Antonio Gramsci's development of Marxist thought after WWI. Third, it will examine the key ideas and impact of the German neo-Marxist think-tank known as "the Frankfurt School." Fourth, it will offer some reflections on (1) the links between these thinkers and various contemporary developments, (2) the helpfulness of employing the term Cultural Marxism to explain these developments and (3) what Christians should do in light of the "culture wars" that are currently polarizing the Western world.

Braziller, 1973). See, especially, ch. 6: "Cultural-Marxism: The Contradictions of Industrial 'Rationality'" (pp. 199–223).

[3] For example, Richard R. Weiner, *Cultural Marxism and Political Sociology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981); Ioan Davies, "British Cultural Marxism," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 4 (1991): 323–44; Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Emily Hicks, "Cultural Marxism: Nonsynchrony and Feminist Practice," in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Montreal: Black Rose, 1981), 219–38.

[4] Dominic Green, "What's Wrong with 'Cultural Marxism'?," *Spectator USA*, 28 March 2019, https://spectator.us/whats-wrong-cultural-marxism.

[5] Jason Wilson, "'Cultural Marxism': A Uniting Theory for Rightwingers Who Love to Play the Victim," *The Guardian*, 19 January 2015, https://tinyurl.com/hmhcdhh.

[6] Bill Berkowitz, "'Cultural Marxism' Catching On," *Southern Poverty Law Center,* 15 August 15 2003, https://tinyurl.com/z2gcgqt.

[7] Chris Zappone, "Cultural Marxism—the ultimate post-factual dog whistle," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November 2017, https://tinyurl.com/y2lhffdz.

[8] Gary North, "Cultural Marxism Is an Oxymoron," *Gary North's Specific Answers*, 1 July 2014, https://www.garynorth.com/public/12623.cfm.

1. Understanding Classical Marxism

1.1. Introducing Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Karl Marx was born in the Prussian town of Trier on May 5, 1818. He was the eldest child of Heinrich and Henriette Marx, a Jewish couple who had converted to Christianity—albeit to a very liberal form of Lutheranism—so that Heinrich (the son of a rabbi) could continue working as a lawyer. The family, therefore, was at best only nominally Christian and, although he was baptized in 1824 and sent to a Lutheran school, Karl was raised in an essentially non-religious home. Sometime in his childhood, he became an atheist and remained so for the rest of his life.

In 1835, Marx went to Bonn University to study law. The following year he transferred to Berlin University to study the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) under the tutelage of Hegel's former student, Bruno Baur (1809–1882). In line with his teachers, Marx soon came to embrace the idea that history follows a natural and inevitable dialectical process. However, in contrast to Hegel's *idealism*—which regarded matter as dependent upon mind and history as the progressive self-realization of an absolute Mind, Marx proposed (what was later called) *dialectical materialism*—a view which saw matter as primary and change as inherent in the nature of material reality.

It is for this reason that Marx is said to have "turned Hegel upside-down" or (in his words) "right side up." Here's how Marx put it, in 1873:

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite.… With me …, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.… With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.[9]

1.2. Marx's Diagnosis of the Problem

Two factors helped solidify Marx's interest in economic theory. The first was his association with the early communist movement in Paris, out of which grew a life-long friendship and working partnership with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). The second was the fact that in the initial phases of industrial capitalism, not only were working conditions frequently dangerous and unhealthy, but work arrangements were often cruel and exploitative. Consequently, "wealth inequality soared as the industrialists … made excessive profits while denying their workers sufficient income to flourish."[10]

This led Marx to view the fundamental human problem through two lenses: oppression and alienation. Oppression is a consequence of living in a society of stratified classes, an arrangement exacerbated by the exploitation inherent in capitalism. The capitalist class (the *bourgeoisie*), as the owners of the means of production, use the working class (the *proletariat*) to make profits for themselves. This is done either by under-paying the workers or by adding value to their products. Such oppression leads to a four-fold experience of alienation for the worker: first, from the act of production; second, from the

---

[9] Karl Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," in *Das Kapital* (1873), in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 102–3.

[10] Kenneth J. Barnes, *Redeeming Capitalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 50.

product made; third, from other workers; and fourth from his or her *Gattungswesen* (species-essence)—i.e., humanity.

Although capitalism had intensified this problem, Marx contended that the problem itself was nothing new. Due to the inequitable realities embedded in the class system, human societies have always been marked by division (e.g., between the "haves" and the "have-nots") and injustice (e.g., with the rich exploiting the poor).

1.3. Marx's Outline of the Solution

What, then, was Marx's solution to this problem? Marx was convinced that the capitalist system contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. Continued exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie would lead to mounting resentment. This would eventually and inevitably boil over into a proletarian revolution in which the bourgeoisie would be violently overthrown and out of which a new, classless society would finally emerge.

Marx's "dialectical materialism" embraced the related concepts of "historical materialism" and "economic determinism"—language which inferred that the transition from capitalism to communism would be unstoppable due to the natural "evolution of the material forces of production."[11] Nevertheless, he clearly believed that violence was a necessary part of the process. He thus spoke freely of "the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie,"[12] and even felt justified in inciting such violence. This is borne out by the closing lines of *The Communist Manifesto*:

> The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

> WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE![13]

Elsewhere in his writings, Marx is even more explicit, declaring that "there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror."[14] Furthermore, between the time of revolutionary terror and the arrival of a communist utopia, a transitional government of the working class—what Marx's colleague, Joseph Weydemeyer, called "the dictatorship of the proletariat"—would also be necessary.[15]

But, supposedly, all the trauma and bloodshed would be worth it. For in the wake of capitalism's demise, a truly humane society would appear, governed by the principle: "from each according to his

---

[11] Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, 494.

[12] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, reprint ed. (1848; Oxford: OUP, 1992), 15.

[13] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 39.

[14] Karl Marx, "The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna," *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 136 (November 1848), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/11/06.htm. While some of Marx's later writings suggest a more gradual and evolutionary (as opposed to violent and revolutionary) way from capitalism through socialism to communism, he never resiled from his earlier statements.

[15] Elsewhere Marx makes clear that this "dictatorship of the proletariat" is what he means by "socialism." See "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850" (1895), in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 1:139–242.

abilities, to each according to his needs!"[16] In such a society, all land, industry, labor and wealth would be held in common and freely shared. Nothing would be privately owned. This is why "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."[17]

Such an abolition would also bring about another of Communism's stated goals: the eradication of the family. Marx and Engels were aware that "even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists."[18] Nevertheless, they were unmoved by charges of destroying "the most hallowed of relations" and replacing "home education by social." The family had to, and indeed would, go. For "the bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement [private property] vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital."[19]

1.4. Marx's Catastrophic Legacy

What, then, can be said of Marx's legacy? Despite being voted "thinker of the millennium" in 1999 and having had his 200th birthday celebrated around the world in 2018, the short answer is that his legacy is appalling. Everywhere his ideas have been implemented—be it Russia, China, Cambodia, Cuba, Burma, the Congo, Zimbabwe, East Germany, North Korea or Venezuela—the results have been nothing short of catastrophic; dystopian not utopian. With a body count of around 100 million, the Marxist experiment has led to more deaths than any other ideology our world has ever known.[20]

Furthermore, attempts to exonerate Marx—as if the problems only have to do with corruptions of his philosophy—betray a disturbing ignorance of the facts. True, Marx was not personally responsible for Stalin's Gulag or Mao's Cultural Revolution or Pol Pot's Killing Fields, but his ideas certainly were (as is clear from the speeches and writings of these followers).[21] For once you abolish private ownership and replace it with state control of the economy, not only is society is deprived of the incentives that drive it forward and help it function, but people are robbed of what is rightfully theirs. Other rights and freedoms soon disappear, and the end result is, unavoidably, totalitarian.[22]

Yet it is unlikely that any of this would have troubled Marx. For despite having much to say about exploitation and oppression, he seems to have been more or less indifferent to human misery. According to the Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski (himself a former Marxist), "evil and suffering, in [Marx's] eyes, had no meaning except as instruments of liberation; they are purely social facts, not an essential

---

[16] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875), in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 2:24.

[17] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 18.

[18] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 21.

[19] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 22.

[20] Matt Ridley, "Marxism Belongs in History's Bin after 100 Years of Hellish Failure," *The Australian*, 2 January 2017, https://tinyurl.com/y4rbnyx3.

[21] It is certainly true that "Marx's theory contributed strongly to the emergence of totalitarianism, and that it provided its ideological form." Leszek Kolakowski, "What's Left of Socialism?" *First Things* (October 2002): https://www.firstthings.com/article/2002/10/what-is-left-of-socialism.

[22] George Reisman, "Why Nazism Was Socialism and Why Socialism Is Totalitarian," *Mises Institute*, 11 November 11 2005, https://mises.org/library/why-nazism-was-socialism-and-why-socialism-totalitarian.

part of the human condition."[23] Such indifference appears to have been symptomatic of the fact that Marx was driven less by a love for the proletariat and more by a hatred of the bourgeoisie.[24]

1.5. Reasons for Marxism's Failure

Motivations aside, Marx's economic philosophy is riddled with numerous flawed assumptions and mistaken claims. As subsequent history has repeatedly shown,

> Economics is not a zero-sum game, and wealth is not the sum total of the use-value of commodities. Additionally, Marx's notion of an abstract labor value and the general value form, based on the cumulative effects of all labor, as opposed to either particular labor or the demands of the market, are both fallacies. And finally, he clearly misunderstood the relationship between commodities, money, and capital.[25]

Moreover, Marx was wrong about virtually everything he predicted. For example, he claimed that the working class would increase in number and decrease in wealth, while the capitalist class would decrease in number and increase in wealth. Neither happened. He also predicted that socialist revolutions would first take place in the most advanced capitalist nations (Britain, America and France). Instead they took place in some of the least developed regions of the world (Russia, Latin America, and parts of Asia).[26]

But Marx was more than a false prophet (as Karl Popper rightly called him);[27] he was an intellectual fraud. As has been painfully demonstrated ever since the 1880s, when two Cambridge scholars first started "fact checking" his work, Marx was chronically dishonest in his use of the sources, and regularly engaged in the deliberate distortion of data. Why would he do this? Paul Johnson explains:

> The facts are not central to Marx's work; they are ancillary, buttressing conclusions already reached independently of them. *Capital* … should be seen, then, not as a scientific investigation of the nature of the economic process it purported to describe but as an exercise in moral philosophy.… It is a huge and often incoherent sermon, an attack on the industrial process and the principle of ownership by a man who had conceived a powerful but essentially irrational hatred for them.[28]

None of this is to deny the inspirational nature of Marx's vision, or that he got some things right. Indeed, his "condemnation of the evils of child labor and the scandals of abuse and of indifference on the part of those who had the means to correct a myriad of society's ills" is admirable.[29] The problem, however, is that he is too often wrong and, as Johnson concludes, "can never be trusted."[30] Moreover, his philosophy has spawned a range of reductionistic conflict theories that tend to exacerbate (if not

---

[23] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1:338.

[24] See Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (London: Phoenix, 1988), 69–75.

[25] Barnes, *Redeeming Capitalism*, 56.

[26] For a longer and more detailed list of Marx's failed predictions, see Kolakowski, "What's Left of Socialism?"

[27] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 294.

[28] Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 63.

[29] Barnes, *Redeeming Capitalism*, 57.

[30] Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 68.

create) the very problems they claim to address. And yet, despite the fact that his "Godless, loveless, materialism has left a devastating legacy for the world,"[31] not only does Marx's reputation survive but among millennials his ideas are making a marked comeback![32]

2. The Neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci

In the early part of the twentieth century, however, many of Marx's most ardent disciples were fast becoming aware of insoluble problems with classical Marxist theory. This brings us to the inter-war neo-Marxists and, in particular, to the contribution of the Italian Communist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci.

2.1. Introducing Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

Born in Sardinia in 1891 to a working-class family, Gramsci became politically aware in his teens. Nevertheless, it was not until 1913 (at the age of 22) that he first joined a political party: the Italian Socialist party. Although he was an able student with a very sharp mind, a combination of health problems and financial difficulties, together with his growing political commitment, led him to abandon his studies in early 1915.

At this point Gramsci gave himself fully to political activism and quickly rose to prominence in the Italian Communist party. In 1919, he founded the party newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* ("The New Order") and, in 1924, become party head. It was during these years that he was both befriended and influenced by a contemporary Hungarian Marxist, György Lukács.[33]

Although Gramsci had at one time worked closely with Benito Mussolini, once the Fascist regime came to power in 1922, Gramsci came to be regarded as a serious threat to national stability. He was eventually arrested in 1926 and charged with attempting to undermine the Italian state. At his trial, the government prosecutor is reported to have said: "For twenty years, we must stop that brain from working."[34] After conviction, he was sent to the prison island of Ustica.

He was released some eight years later, in 1934, but in a very weakened state. He would only live for another three years, dying in 1937 at the age of 46. But despite the deprivations he experienced in prison, the bulk of his writing took place there. *The Prison Notebooks* (as they came to be called) were the result. However, it was not until 1948 that they were first published, and not until the 1970s that they were translated into French, German, and English.

2.2. Gramsci's Diagnosis of the Problem

Although slow to emerge, *The Prison Notebooks* have come to have a profound effect upon subsequent generations. It is, therefore, important for us to understand their main thesis and what happens to classical Marxism in Gramsci's hands.

---

[31] David Robertson, "Should Christians Celebrate the Birthday of Karl Marx?," *Christianity Today*, 7 May 2018, https://tinyurl.com/yxs2d95c.

[32] "Millennial Socialism," *The Economist*, 14 February 2019, 9–10; "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Property," *The Economist*, 14 February 2019, 16–20.

[33] For discussion of György Lukács, see section 3.2.1 below.

[34] Christopher Hill, "Antonio Gramsci," *The New Reasoner Spring* 4 (1958): 107.

While in prison, Gramsci turned his mind to the question that haunted classical Marxism: Why hadn't Marx's predictions worked out in practice? Why, for instance, hadn't the Russian revolution of 1917 replicated itself in other Western European nations? The answer, Gramsci believed, lay in the persistence of capitalist ideas embedded in the institutions of "civil society" (e.g., the family, the church, trade unions, the education system)—all the consensus-creating elements of society that are independent of "political society" (e.g., the police, the army, the legal system).[35]

The problem, then, was that the "culture" of Western society was blocking the proletarian uprising. As Gramsci wrote in *The Prison Notebooks*: "The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses."[36] Furthermore, these "fortresses" were inseparable from the west's *Christian* heritage and, despite the secularizing impact of the Enlightenment, remained undergirded by a latent Christian worldview. Consequently, until Christianity's "cultural hegemony" was broken, no communist revolution would take place and no utopia could arrive.

All of this required a major rethink of Marx's philosophy. Marx clearly believed that religion dulled people to their oppression by giving them hope beyond it. It thereby dampened their revolutionary instincts (hence his calling it "the opiate of the masses"). Yet his doctrines of "historical materialism" and "economic determinism" also gave him an unshakable belief in the natural escalation of class conflict and, therefore, the inevitability of revolution. For Marx, then, the material conditions of economic existence ("the base") determine all other aspects of society ("the superstructure").[37]

2.3. Gramsci's Outline of the Solution

What Gramsci realized was that this was back to front. Although there might be an interplay between material life conditions and intellectual life processes, it is the latter that largely determines the former. Otherwise put, *culture is not downstream from economics, but economics is downstream from culture*. What this meant was that Marx was fundamentally wrong, and Hegel was essentially right. Gramsci thus turned Marx upside down (or right side up).

The significance of this inversion of classical Marxism is profound. What it means is that if you want to change the economic structure of society, you must first change the cultural institutions that socialize people into believing and behaving according to the dictates of the capitalist system. The only way to do this is by cutting the roots of Western civilization—in particular, its Judeo-Christian values, for these (supposedly) are what provide the capitalist root-system. In short, *unless and until Western culture is dechristianized, Western society will never be decapitalized*.[38]

---

[35] David McLellan, *Marxism After Marx* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 203–4

[36] Notebook 7, §16, cited in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 238.

[37] In Marx's words, "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, reprint ed. [1859; Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976], 3).

[38] See further, John Fulton, "Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction," *Sociological Analysis* 48 (1987): 197–216.

How might this be accomplished? By an army of Marxist intellectuals undertaking (what was later called) "the long march through the institutions of power";[39] that is, by gradually colonizing and ultimately controlling all the key institutions of *civil society*. As Gramsci put it, "In the new order, Socialism will triumph by first capturing the culture via infiltration of schools, universities, churches and the media by transforming the consciousness of society."[40] The larger goal, however, is control of all the major institutions of *political society* as well (e.g., the police, law courts, civil service, local councils). Gramsci referred to this process as "becoming State."[41]

The program, then, at least in theory, is simple: *subvert society by changing its culture and change its culture by infiltrating its institutions.* The goal is likewise clear: *destroy capitalism and replace it with a communist counter-hegemony.* This is why many see Cultural Marxism as an accurate description of Gramsci's neo-Marxist philosophy. "The long march through the institutions" is likewise regarded as an apt summary of his strategy for establishing the necessary conditions for a socialist takeover and the (supposed) arrival of a communist utopia.

2.4. Digging Deeper into the Details

What will this mean in practice? Gramsci was clear that it will necessarily involve the destruction of all hierarchies. As one of his biographers has put it, the marginalized must "rouse themselves to bring down the entire hierarchical system that has prevailed in various forms from the beginning of civilization."[42] But the goal here is not merely a *flattening* of the system, but a *flipping* of the system; the creation of what Gramsci called a "periphery-centred society."[43] In other words, insiders must be turned into outsiders and underdogs into overlords. Likewise, oppressors must now be oppressed and those formerly privileged must have their privileges taken away.

Above all, Christianity must be replaced by "the total praxis of socialism."[44] As Gramsci wrote in 1916: "Socialism is precisely the religion that must kill Christianity. [It is a] religion in the sense that it too is a faith … [and] because it has substituted for the consciousness of the transcendental God of the Catholics, trust in man and his best strengths as the sole spiritual reality."[45] What this "trust" really means, however, is "an immense allocation of power to those appointed to 'administer' things."[46] This is clear from the way Gramsci employs Machiavelli's notion of "The Prince" as his preferred way of talking about the new ruling class—which, for him, meant the communist party:

---

[39] This phrase was first used by Rudi Dutschke, a prominent spokesperson of the German student movement of the 1960s and a great admirer of Gramsci.

[40] Cited in Damien Tudehope, "What's Left of Western Culture? Just about Everything," *The Spectator*, 9 October 2017, https://tinyurl.com/y4jdlbhg.

[41] Notebook 25, §5, cited in Pietro Maltese, "A Pedagogy of the Subalterns: Gramsci and the Groups 'on the Margins of History,'" in *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World*, ed. Nicola Pizzolato and John D. Holst (Cham: Springer, 2017), 188.

[42] Dante Germino, *Antonio Gramsci—Architect of a New Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1990), 68.

[43] Germino, *Antonio Gramsci*, 179.

[44] Fulton, "Religion and Politics in Gramsci," 202.

[45] Antonio Gramsci, "Audacia e Fede," *Avanti*, 22 May 1916; reprinted in *Sotto la Mole: 1916–1929* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), 148, author's translation.

[46] Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 206.

As it grows, the modern Prince upsets the entire system of intellectual and moral relations, for its development means precisely that every act is deemed useful or harmful, virtuous or wicked, depending on whether its point of reference is the modern Prince and whether it increases the Prince's power or opposes it. The Prince takes the place, in peoples' consciousness, of the divinity and of the categorical imperative; it becomes the basis of a modern secularism and of a complete secularization of all of life and of customary relationships.[47]

2.5. Assessing Gramsci's Influence

What might we say about Gramsci's influence? A recent article in *New Statesmen* describes him as "the Marxist thinker for our times."[48] Is this an expression of hope or a reflection of reality? As we have already seen, it took some decades for *The Prison Notebooks* to be translated and disseminated. But once they were, their impact has been "strikingly diverse and enduring."[49] Indeed, according to Frank Rosengarten,

By the 1950s, and then with increasing frequency and intensity, his prison writings attracted interest and critical commentary in a host of countries…. Some of his terminology became household words on the left, the most important of which, and the most complex, is the term "hegemony" as he used it in his writings and applied [it] to the twin task of understanding the reasons underlying both the successes and the failures of socialism on a global scale, and of elaborating a feasible program for the realization of a socialist vision.[50]

Gramsci has also been a major influence on a range of philosophers, historians, sociologists, educationalists, and, especially, cultural theorists.[51] Indeed, the whole discipline of "cultural studies" is largely the result of his influence and his impact on the humanities and social sciences has been nothing short of immense.[52] As Andrew Roberts summarizes, "Gramsci was perhaps the most important communist thinker in the West since Marx himself, whose views he modernized and adapted for the twentieth century, and nowhere were his ideas followed more effectively than in academia."[53]

How, then, might we evaluate this influence? From one point of view, Gramsci's neo-Marxism is a significant improvement on classical Marxism, in that it advocates what Gramsci called a "war of position" instead of a "war of manoeuvre"; that is, *sustained ideological subversion* rather than *violent political revolution*. However, this is simply a difference of means, not of end. The goal remains the same:

---

[47] Notebook 8, §21, cited in Guido Ligouri, *Gramsci's Pathways*, trans. David Broder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 216.

[48] George Eaton, "Why Antonio Gramsci is the Marxist Thinker for Our Times," *New Statesman America*, 5 February 2018, https://tinyurl.com/ya4jlt5v.

[49] F. B., "The Strange Afterlife of Antonio Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks,'" *The Economist*, 7 November 2017, https://tinyurl.com/yxn4cz75.

[50] Frank Rosengarten, "An Introduction to Gramsci's Life and Thought," *Marxists Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/intro.htm.

[51] For example, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Stuart Hall.

[52] Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 208.

[53] Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* (New York: Harper, 2007), 476.

the destruction of Western culture and the replacement of the Christian church with the communist state.

Furthermore, as superficially comforting as it is to think that this could somehow be accomplished bloodlessly, it is (arguably) even more insidious. For this is a revolution by stealth; an exercise in systematic brainwashing by sustained subversion from within. As Angelo Codevilla writes: "forceful seduction, not rape, is Gramsci's practical advice regarding 'cultural hegemony' … Gramsci means to replace Western culture by subverting it, by doing what it takes to compel it to redefine itself, rather than by picking fights with it."[54]

Here, then, is a strategy for the communist conquest of capitalist cultures. Nor was Gramsci alone in thinking along these lines. While he was languishing on Ustica, a group of German Marxist intellectuals, quite unaware of *The Prison Notebooks*, was exploring similar ideas. This brings us to a consideration of the work of the Frankfurt School.

3. The Frankfurt School

3.1. The Institute for Social Research

The origins of the Frankfurt School can be traced to 1923, when the radical Hungarian Marxist, György Lukacs, was invited to chair a week-long symposium in Frankfurt, Germany. Out of this came a vision for a Marxist think-tank and research centre, modelled after the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. The centre was originally to be called "The Institute for Marxism." But for public relations purposes, a more benign name was finally chosen: "The Institute for Social Research." Because of its founding location and original link with Goethe University in Frankfurt, the Institute is commonly known as "the Frankfurt School." Stuart Jeffries thus describes it as "part Marxist cuckoo in Frankfurt's capitalist nest and part monastery devoted to the study of Marxism."[55]

While the early work of the Institute moved in a classically Marxist direction, this all changed in 1930 when Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), a young philosophy professor at Frankfurt University, took over as Director. Under his leadership, the School quickly moved in a decidedly neo-Marxist direction. Historian of the Frankfurt School, Martin Jay, sums up the change this way:

> If it can be said that in the early years of its history, the Institute concerned itself primarily with an analysis of bourgeois society's socio-economic sub-structure, in the years after 1930 its primary interests lay in its cultural superstructure. Indeed the traditional Marxist formula regarding the relationship between the two was brought into question by Critical Theory.[56]

We will explain Critical Theory in greater detail shortly. In brief, it is a form of biting social critique aimed at exposing and dismantling the corrupt foundations and oppressive nature of capitalist society. In his 1937 essay, "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer put it like this:

---

[54] Angelo M. Codevilla, "The Rise of Political Correctness," *Claremont Review of Books* 16.4 (2016): 40.

[55] Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2017), 71.

[56] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 21.

> The critical theory of society is, in its totality, the unfolding of a single existential judgment. To put it in broad terms, the theory says that the basic form of the historically given commodity economy on which modern history rests contains in itself the internal and external tensions of the modern era; it generates these tensions over and over again in an increasingly heightened form; and after a period of progress, development of human powers, and emancipation for the individual, after an enormous extension of human control over nature, it finally hinders further development and drives humanity into a new barbarism.[57]

In other words, like Gramsci, Horkheimer was convinced that the major obstacle to human liberation was the capitalist ideology embedded in traditional Western culture. That, fundamentally, was what needed exposing, criticizing and changing.

To help in this task, Horkheimer recruited a range of up-and-coming Marxist intellectuals—notably, Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse (whom we will meet shortly)—who could help to blend classical Marxist doctrines with both Darwinian sociology and Freudian psychology. The aim was to produce a new, synthesized form of Marxism that would do the job that classical Marxism failed to do; radically transform Western culture and so help pave the way for a communist utopia.

Nevertheless, under Horkheimer's leadership, the Institute headed in an academic (rather than political) direction. Indeed, Horkheimer was convinced that political independence from the communist party was necessary for the school's intellectual freedom to be maintained. Therefore, the work of its members took the form of published books and articles, rather than manifestos and calls for action. In 1931, the school also launched its own journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (*Journal of Social Research*), with Horkheimer taking the role of editor.

In 1933, when the Nazis came to power, most members of the Frankfurt School (being not only communists but also Jewish) were forced to flee the country. Initially, they relocated to Geneva, where they already had a satellite campus. But eventually they settled in the United States and, in 1935, the Institute for Social Research affiliated with Columbia University, New York City, and its journal was renamed *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*.[58]

In 1941, Horkheimer moved to Los Angeles for health reasons, and was soon followed by Adorno and Marcuse. In 1951, given that the war was now over and the Nazi regime long gone, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt to resume their work and, in 1955, Adorno took over as the Institute's Director. Marcuse, however, stayed behind in the US, first taking up a teaching post at Brandeis University in Boston and, in 1965, another at the University of California, San Diego.

But before we look further into Marcuse's work (especially his impact upon the 1960s revolution), it will help us to learn more of some of the other members and associates of the Frankfurt School and their main contributions to the cultural Marxist cause.

---

[57] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 2002), 227.

[58] During the years of American exile, Horkheimer also "insisted that the M word and the R word (Marxism and Revolution) be excised from its papers so as not to scare the Institute's American sponsors" (Jeffries, *Hotel Grand Abyss*, 72).

3.2. Introducing the Key Players

3.2.1. György Lukács (1885–1971)

We begin with György (or Georg) Lukács, not because he was himself a member of the Frankfurt School but because he chaired the week-long symposium that led to its founding. As an acquaintance of Gramsci, it is just possible that Lukács was something of a conduit through which some of Gramsci's ideas found their way into the Institute for Social Research. But this is not certain. Indeed, as Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) reveals, he still held to the classical Marxian tenet that it is "not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[59]

What is especially noteworthy is Lukács's brief stint, in 1919, as the People's Commissar for Education and Culture under the Bolshevik regime in Hungary. In the few months that he occupied this role, Lukács launched a very particular program with a very particular purpose. The program was called "Cultural Terrorism" and its purpose was "the annihilation of the old [cultural] values and the creation of new ones by the revolutionaries." For Lukács, "the revolutionary destruction of society" was "the one and only solution to the cultural contradictions of the epoch."[60]

One of the chief goals of Lukács's short-lived campaign was the destruction of Judeo-Christian sexual ethics and the weakening the bourgeois family. To this end, he introduced a radical sex education program into all schools. As a result, "Hungarian children learned the subtle nuances of free love, sexual intercourse, and the archaic nature of middle-class family codes, the obsolete nature of monogamy, and the irrelevance of organized religion, which deprived man of pleasure."[61] Women were called to flaunt traditional sexual mores and wives to rebel against their husbands.

Lukács's program met with strong opposition, not only from the Catholic Church but from the general population. Ironically, it most offended and alienated the very people who were meant to take up the revolutionary cause: the working class. But none of this tempered Lukács's determination to destroy capitalism in any way possible and as quickly as possible.[62] Indeed, such was his commitment to Marxist ideology (which he described in terms of "conversion")[63] that he quoted with approval the words of the German idealist philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte: "If theory conflicts with the facts, so much the worse for the facts."[64] In other words, for Lukács, "even if recent research had disproved—decisively

---

[59] Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 3.

[60] György Lukacs, "Mon chemin vers Marx" (1969), *Nouvelles Etudes hongroises* (Budapest, 1973), 8:78–79, cited in Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács—From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: NLB, 1979), 93.

[61] William A. Borst, *The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2004), 105.

[62] György Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, ed. Istvan Eörsi, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1983), 60.

[63] Lukács, *Record of a Life*, 63.

[64] Georg Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics: Political Writings, 1919–1929*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. Michael McColgan (London: NLB, 1972), 27.

and once and for all—every one of Marx's substantive claims, then the intellectual standing of Marxism would remain intact."[65]

According to Roger Scruton, the only way to account for such blind dogmatism is to see that "the root fallacy of Marxism, the belief in a real 'essence' of which our social life is only an 'appearance', had colonized Lukács's brain, and taken the form of an immovable religion."[66] Therefore, Scruton continues, "with Lukács we have to do not with the anti-bourgeois snobbery of a Foucault…. We have to do with hatred. And while this hatred embraces all the 'appearances' of the 'bourgeois' world, it is directed beyond and behind them, to the hidden devil that they conceal. The devil is 'capitalism', and hatred of capitalism is total and unconditional, justifying every moral breach."[67] Consequently, "Communist ethics," declared Lukács, "makes it the highest duty to accept the necessity to act wickedly."[68]

3.2.2. Erich Fromm (1900–1980)

Erich Fromm was a social psychologist who, despite having declared himself an avowed atheist at the age of 26, maintained a deep and abiding interest in theology and wrote several books on the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis. He became an associate of the Frankfurt School in 1930 and was the first to attempt an integration of Marxian and Freudian thought. He was also one of those who not only sought refuge in the United States but remained there until only a few years before his death.

While mostly remembered for books like *The Art of Loving* (1956) and *The Heart of Man* (1964), one of Fromm's life concerns was to provide a penetrating analysis of the (supposed) capitalistic roots of totalitarianism. Thus, in *Escape from Freedom* (1941), he argued that early capitalism created a social order that bred a sadomasochistic and authoritarian character of which Luther and Hitler were prime examples. He also claimed that the authoritarian character experiences only domination or submission and sees all differences, whether of sex or race, in term of either superiority or inferiority.[69]

His views on human sexuality, at least in his earlier writings, were also marked by a radical constructionist outlook. For instance, "Fromm contended that sexual orientation is merely a social construct, that there are no innate differences between men and women, and that sexuality and gender roles are socially determined. Furthermore, he argued that sexually repressed societies discourage sexual experimentation and practices such as homosexuality due to manmade legal codes and moralistic taboos that are psychologically inhibiting and counter-productive."[70]

Interestingly, in later writings, Fromm backed away from some of his more extreme notions and, in fact, became increasingly socially conservative. He likewise "began to spiritualize sexuality into

---

[65] David Leopold, "Dialectical Approaches," in *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches,* ed. David Leopold and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

[66] Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 119.

[67] Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 120.

[68] Cited in Frank Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 172.

[69] Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt, 1941), 63ff.

[70] Jefrey D. Breshears, "The Origins of Cultural Marxism and Political Correctness: Part 2," *The Areopagus* (2016), 31, https://tinyurl.com/y5atcw94.

'loving relationships' as a result of his interest in matricentric cultures."[71] These shifts led Marcuse to criticize him for capitulating to conformity and reinforcing the status quo.[72] Nevertheless, as much as any member of the Frankfurt School, "Fromm remained true to the concrete moment, the humanistic spirit, and the transformative purpose of critical theory."[73]

3.2.3. Theodor Adorno (1903–1969)

Theodor Adorno was something of a polymath (or "renaissance man"), being equally at home in philosophy, sociology, psychology, literature, poetry, and musicology. As such, he embodied the interdisciplinary ideal of the Frankfurt School within his own person. Arguably "the most dazzling philosophical mind of the age," his "influence on contemporary understandings of critical theory is without parallel."[74] In terms of his larger intellectual project, Adorno "was intent upon articulating the inherently flawed character of civilization while rejecting every attempt to identify the individual with the collectivity."[75] Indeed, he was deeply concerned with the way in which mass culture produced conformity and passivity in individuals, and so became the seed-bed of political totalitarianism.[76]

It was this particular concern that motivated Adorno, along with several other members of the Institute, to author *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950).[77] Based on analytical studies of German society that were begun in 1923, the book claimed to have identified (what Adorno called) "a new anthropological type"—the authoritarian character. This character was a product of capitalism, Christianity, conservatism, the patriarchal family and sexual repression. And, according to the Frankfurt School, it was precisely this combination that induced the prejudice, anti-Semitism and fascism that had engulfed Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

Because the authoritarian character was the exact opposite of the desired revolutionary character, it was important to be able to identify those who possessed such a character. To this end, Adorno constructed a 30-item personality test called the "F-Scale" (Fascist-Scale), which claimed to measure the nine different personality variables that determine whether or not one is a fascist. These are:

1. *Conventionalism*: Rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values;
2. *Authoritarian Submission*: Submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group;
3. *Authoritarian Aggression*: Tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values;
4. *Anti-intraception*: Opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded;

---

[71] Robert Bocock, *Freud and Modern Society: An Outline and Analysis of Freud's Sociology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1976), 149.

[72] See Herbert Marcuse, "Epilogue: Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism," in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), 238–74.

[73] Stephen E. Bronner, *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

[74] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 15.

[75] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 15.

[76] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 218.

[77] Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, ed. Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

5. *Superstition and Stereotype*: The belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate; the disposition to think in rigid terms;

6. *Power and "Toughness"*: Preoccupation with the dominance/submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; overemphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness;

7. *Destructiveness and Cynicism*: Generalized hostility, vilification of the human;

8. *Projectivity*: The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses; and

9. Sex: Exaggerated concern with sexual "goings-on."

However, despite its claim to measure prejudice and anti-democratic tendencies at the personality level, the validity of the F-Scale has been challenged by a range of psychologists and social scientists. Both its ideological nature and its attempt to associate societal processes with personality characteristics have been severely criticized. If it can be said to reveal anything, it is perhaps a better indicator of conservatism than it is of authoritarianism.[78]

However, according to Jay, *The Authoritarian Personality* was really trying to study "the character type of a totalitarian rather than an authoritarian society."[79] In this light, it can be faulted for drawing an exclusive connection between authoritarianism and fascism. Why not communism also? As Jay asks: "Why was political and economic conservatism seen as connected with authoritarianism, while the demand for state socialism was not? In short, why was the old left-right distinction upheld, when the real opposition was between liberal democracy and totalitarianism of both extremes?"[80]

Answers to these questions are not obvious. But given that the members of the School were generally (even if not sufficiently) skeptical of the soviet experiment, it is most likely that their personal experience of Nazi Germany made them hyper-sensitive to dangers on the right but far less attuned to equal dangers on the left.

3.2.4. Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979)

Like Eric Fromm, Herbert Marcuse was convinced that for cultural liberation to be complete sexual liberation was vital. This, at least, was the case he sought to make in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955). As the subtitle reveals, the book was a further attempt to combine neo-Marxism with neo-Freudianism.

Despite its density and opacity, *Eros and Civilization* eventually caught the attention of the 1960s counterculture and soon became one of the founding documents of the sexual revolution. It also helped to bring the work of the Frankfurt School to the attention of numerous student activist groups, and their various writings into colleges and universities around the world. Thus, of all the members of the Frankfurt School, it was Marcuse who did the most to provide the intellectual justifications for the adolescent sexual rebellion of the 1960s, and *Eros and Civilization* became the textbook.

The main thesis of *Eros and Civilization* is that the only way for human beings to escape the one-dimensionality of advanced industrial society is to rebel against "technological rationality" (i.e., the

---

[78] See, for example, Ferdinand A. Gul and John J. Ray, "Pitfalls in Using the F Scale to Measure Authoritarianism in Accounting Research," *Behavioral Research in Accounting* 1 (1989): 182.

[79] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 247.

[80] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 247–48.

repressive values of capitalist morality),[81] and to liberate our erotic side, our sensuous instincts. This means casting off sexual restraint in favor of "polymorphous perversity"—a term Marcuse borrowed from Freud.[82]

Given its origins, it is important to understand what Freud himself meant by this expression. He explains, "What makes an infant characteristically different from every other stage of human life is that the child is polymorphously perverse, is ready to demonstrate any kind of sexual behavior, with any kind of pleasure, without any kind of restraint."[83] But the child is not meant to remain like this, argued Freud. Indeed, maturation and "civilization" emerge only after such polymorphous perversity is restrained and responsibly rechanneled. Moreover, in Freud's mind, such restraint and rechanneling are profoundly necessary; for heterosexual procreation is necessary for the continuation of our race, and so heterosexual coupling is essential for civilization itself.

In Marcuse's view, however, true sexual liberation involves not a disciplining of our polymorphous desires but their indulgence. The goal is "to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor."[84] For human emancipation is tied to "the primacy of pleasure and the liberation of Eros."[85] Behind this thought was the conviction that because advanced capitalist society had effectively de-eroticized the human body (except for the genitals), liberation required "the eroticization of the entire organism."[86] As Marcuse explained, "this spread of the libido would first manifest itself in a reactivation of all erotogenic zones and, consequently, in a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality and in a decline of genital supremacy."[87]

Marcuse is open about the fact that this "change in the value and scope of the libidinal would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family." Nevertheless, he did not believe that the "transformation of the libido" would lead to "a society of sex maniacs."[88] Supposedly, "eroticizing previously tabooed zones, time and relations, would minimize the manifestations of mere sexuality by integrating them into a far larger order." Indeed, "the libido would not simply reactivate precivilized and infantile stages, but would also transform the perverted content of these stages."[89]

And yet, as far as Marcuse is concerned behaviors traditionally regarded as "perversions" (like coprophilia and homosexuality), particularly when employed in "a free libidinal relation," can be expressed in ways that are "compatible with normality in high civilization."[90] He even speaks affirmingly

---

[81] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 85–86.

[82] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 226, 263 and *passim*. Marcuse also uses the terms, "polymorphous sexuality" (xv, 201, 211) and "polymorphous eroticism" (215).

[83] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), cited in Albert Mohler, "The Age of Polymorphous Perversity, Part One," *Albert Mohler*, 19 September 2005, https://tinyurl.com/y5r7lxho.

[84] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xv.

[85] Simon J. Williams and Gillian A. Bendelow, *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues* (London: Routledge, 1998), 104.

[86] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 208.

[87] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 201.

[88] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 201.

[89] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 202.

[90] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 203.

of the classical Greek notion that "the road to 'higher culture' leads through the true love of boys."[91] It is little wonder that Marcuse is regarded as having had a major influence not just on the sexual revolution of the 1960s in general, but on the gay liberation movement in particular.[92]

Marcuse was well aware of the political dimension of the kind of sexual revolution he was advocating. This is apparent in the "Political Preface" to the 1966 edition of *Eros and Civilization*. Here he insists that if we are to maintain "mental health" and "our capacity to function as unmutilated humans" our instincts must be expressed, not repressed. He thus calls upon Western youth to "live and fight for Eros against Death," and to engage in "counter-organization." He concludes by saying: "Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the *political* fight."[93]

Marcuse's other lasting political contribution was his radical redefinition of tolerance, argued most forcefully in his 1965 essay, "Repressive Tolerance."[94] Repressive Tolerance was Marcuse's way of referring to the kind of indiscriminate, "pure" tolerance championed in classically liberal societies, typified by the writings of John Stuart Mill, and expressed in the famous saying (wrongly attributed to Voltaire): "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

In Marcuse's estimation, while such a view of tolerance may sound good in theory, in practice it actually fosters inequality and serves the cause of oppression. How so? Because "the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with education, truth with falsehood."[95] Therefore, the only way to overcome this problem is by "censorship, even pre-censorship." This is the way of "Liberating Tolerance." Marcuse expands on his thinking as follows:

> Tolerance cannot be indiscriminate and equal with respect to the contents of expression, neither in word nor in deed; it cannot protect false words and wrong deeds which demonstrate that they contradict and counteract the possibilities of liberation. Such indiscriminate tolerance is justified in harmless debates, in conversation, in academic discussion; it is indispensable in the scientific enterprise, in private religion. But society cannot be indiscriminate where the pacification of existence, where freedom and happiness themselves are at stake: here, certain things cannot be said, certain ideas cannot be expressed, certain policies cannot be proposed, certain behaviour cannot be permitted without making tolerance an instrument for the continuation of servitude.[96]

Marcuse goes on to explain that such "liberation" would not only mean "the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion" but also the oppression of those who "oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc."[97] In other words, "liberating

---

[91] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 211.

[92] See Kevin Floyd, "Rethinking Reification: Marcuse, Psychoanalysis, and Gay Liberation," *Social Text* 19.1 (2001): 103–28.

[93] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxv.

[94] Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon, 1965), 81–117.

[95] Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 94.

[96] Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 88.

[97] Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 100.

tolerance" means (and Marcuse is completely candid about this) "intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left."[98]

Here, again, we see something of the extent of his commitment to a "root and branch" disintegration of Western culture. As Marcuse himself put it,

> One can rightfully speak of a cultural revolution, since the protest is directed toward the whole cultural establishment, including the morality of existing society … there is one thing we can say with complete assurance: the traditional idea of revolution and the traditional strategy of revolution has ended … What we must undertake is a type of diffuse and dispersed disintegration of the system.[99]

3.3. Understanding Critical Theory

There is considerably more that could be said not only about the central figures of the Frankfurt School (i.e., Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) but about other members and associates too (e.g., Friedrich Pollock, Walter Benjamin, Leo Löwenthal, and Jürgen Habermas). But in order to evaluate their work as a whole, we need to return to their chief collective enterprise: the development of Critical Theory.

As noted earlier, Critical Theory is a form of incisive social critique which aims at undermining the status quo in the hope of changing it for the better. It thus stands opposed to (what Horkheimer called) Traditional Theory, which aimed only at *explaining* society. The way here had been paved by Marx, who in the last of his famous "Theses on Feuerbach" had criticized philosophers for only having sought to interpret the world, when "the point is to change it."[100] Critical Theory was also indebted to Marx in that it took its starting point from his injunction to engage in a "ruthless critique of everything existing."[101] Like Marx, Horkheimer had no idea what kind of a world such criticism would produce. Yet he was convinced that it would "liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them."[102] Critical Theory was thus avowedly utopian, aimed at creating "a world which satisfies the needs and powers" of all people.[103]

What must not be missed, however, is that, despite its (hoped-for) positive outcomes, *Critical Theory is an essentially negative exercise.* It is intentionally destructive and only accidently constructive. In part, this negativity reflects the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer, who feared that "the possibility of radical social change had been smashed between the twin cudgels of concentration camps and television for the masses."[104] Consequently, Critical Theory was long on trenchant, unremitting criticism of any aspect of Western culture that was deemed to be oppressive or dehumanizing, but short on

---

[98] Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," 109.

[99] Herbert Marcuse, "On the New Left," in *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 3*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2005), 124.

[100] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 1:15.

[101] See Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge (Kreuznach, September 1843).

[102] Max Horkheimer, "Postscript" (1937), in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 2002), 244.

[103] Horkheimer, "Postscript," 246.

[104] Ian Craib, *Modern Social Theory: From Parson to Habermas* (Harlow: Pearson, 1992), 209.

alternative proposals. The reason for this lop-sidedness is provided by Marcuse at the very end of *One Dimensional Man*:

> The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal.[105]

3.4. Assessing the Work of the Frankfurt School

Assessing the work of the Frankfurt School is no simple task. Not only did members come and go (and one, tragically, committed suicide),[106] but the line between members and associates was not always clear. Furthermore, even those who belonged to the inner circle sometimes had strongly differing opinions and also underwent significant developments in their thought. The Frankfurt School was, thus, neither uniform nor fixed in its views. Horkheimer, for example, became increasingly theological in his reflections over time and even flirted with Catholicism toward the end of his life.[107]

Nevertheless, the primary project of the Frankfurt School was clear and unwavering: to identify the economic and social structures that had been created by industrial capitalism and to critique the ideas that defended the disparities of class and race.[108] For this reason, the label "Cultural Marxism" is an entirely fitting description of the school's philosophy. This is evident from Stephen Bronner's summary:

> The Frankfurt School called outworn concepts into question. Its members looked at cultural ruins and lost hopes and what hegemonic cultural forces had ignored or repressed. They demanded that those committed to the ideal of liberation respond to new contingencies and new constraints. They also intimated the need for a new understanding of the relation between theory and practice.[109]

Of course, no proper assessment of the Frankfurt School can be made without appreciating the historical context in which it developed, and its work was carried out. Living through the horrors of World War I (1914–1918), the failed Spartacist Uprising in Germany (1919), the experience of the Great Depression (1929–1939) and the rise of both Nazism and anti-Semitism (1932–1945) gave the members of the Institute plenty to critique and genuine reasons for pessimism. The dislocation of being "émigré scholars," the destructiveness of World War II and, finally, the Jewish Holocaust (1939–1945) only added to their anxieties. For all these reasons, "it appeared to the Frankfurt School as if Western civilization had generated not human development but an unparalleled barbarism."[110] Critical Theory needs to be understood against this backdrop. It is a reactionary theory, generated by the emotional, intellectual

---

[105] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), 261.

[106] Once Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) became convinced that he could not escape Europe and would soon be handed over to the Nazis, he took his own life with an overdose of morphine tablets.

[107] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 10.

[108] Stephen Whitfield, "Refusing Marcuse: 50 Years After One-Dimensional Man," *Dissent* (Fall 2014): https://tinyurl.com/yyhwszt8.

[109] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 113.

[110] Bronner, *Critical Theory*, 4.

and, indeed, civilizational traumas of the first half of the twentieth century. The subtitle of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951) illustrates the point powerfully: *Reflections on a Damaged Life*.

Moreover, even after their move to the US, when the focus of the inner circle's concerns shifted to the domination of the "cultural industry" and the manipulation of mass society, their criticisms were not without point. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno's conviction that "the system of cultural production dominated by film, radio broadcasting, newspapers, and magazines, was controlled by advertising and commercial imperatives, and served to create subservience to the system of consumer capitalism" is difficult to gainsay.[111] Likewise, their contention that, under such conditions, the apparent freedom to choose "everywhere proves to be freedom to be the same" is also salutary.[112] Finally, their concern for the fate of the individual in mass society is insightful and commendable.

Nevertheless, a recognition of valid insights ought not to be confused with an endorsement of the Frankfurt School project as a whole. As we have seen, the general consensus of its members was that Western civilization was effectively responsible for all the manifestations of aggression, oppression, racism, slavery, classism and sexism that marked post-industrial society. Marcuse even went so far as to call democracy "the most efficient system of domination."[113]

Such a view, however, is not only simplistic but an indefensible misrepresentation of historical reality.[114] While majoritarian systems always have the potential to become tyrannous, and the track-record of Western civilization is far from unblemished, to demonize the key elements and attainments of Western culture—e.g., Christian morality, family, hierarchy, loyalty, tradition, the rule of law, sexual restraint, universal suffrage, property rights, patriotism, capitalism, and technology—is both myopic and ungrateful. Furthermore, criticizing an imperfect system when you have no idea how to build a better one is more than idealistic; it is irresponsible. On this point, Scruton's assessment of the general approach of the Frankfurt School is worth quoting at length:

> By constantly notching up the critique of American capitalism and its culture, and making only muted or dismissive references to the real nightmare of communism, those thinkers showed their profound indifference to human suffering and the unserious nature of their prescriptions. Adorno does not explicitly say that the "alternative" to the capitalist system and the commodity culture is Utopia. But that is what he implies. And Utopia is not a real alternative. Hence his alternative to the unreal freedom of the consumer society is itself unreal—a mere noumenon whose only function is to provide a measure of our defects. And yet he was aware that there was an *actual* alternative on offer and that it involved mass murder and cultural annihilation. For Adorno to dismiss this alternative merely as the "totalitarian" version of the same "state capitalism" that he had witnessed in America was profoundly dishonest.[115]

---

[111] Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Marxism and Cultural Studies" (2004), 6, https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/culturalmarxism.pdf.

[112] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 136.

[113] Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 56.

[114] See, for example, Nick Spencer, *The Evolution of the West: How Christianity Has Shaped Our Values* (London: SPCK, 2016).

[115] Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 143–44, italics original.

To make matters worse, the school's skepticism extended beyond a general critique of Western civilization to a specific critique of Western rationality. Indeed, they charged "instrumental reason" (i.e., practical or scientific reason) with producing the oppressive industrial culture of capitalism, as well as a heartless domination of nature.[116] While there is, once again, some substance to this critique, it is dangerously one-sided (for instrumental reason is just as easily used for good as it is for evil) and, ultimately, destructive of the scientific method and all it has produced.

In addition to this, the charge is philosophically vague, as Critical Theory never really defined what it meant by reason, nor its relationship to truth. Perhaps the explanation for this is that (in Horkheimer's mind at least) there is no absolute truth; rather, each historical era has its own truth.[117] This led him to the conclusion that "logic is not independent of content"[118] and that truth "is whatever fosters social change."[119] But such a position is not only inherently amoral (for if followed consistently, anything could be justified on this basis!) but self-refuting. As philosopher and political theorist Nikolas Kompridis writes,

> Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* steered the whole enterprise, provocatively and self-consciously, into a skeptical cul-de-sac. As a result they got stuck in the irresolvable dilemmas of the "philosophy of the subject," and the original program was shrunk to a negativistic practice of critique that eschewed the very normative ideals on which it implicitly depended.[120]

Beyond this, there is also the problem of hypocrisy. The members of the Frankfurt School were highly privileged individuals, each benefitting from the commercial success of his father and the education that wealth provided. And yet, their entire intellectual enterprise was "Oedipally fixated on bringing down the political system that had made their lives possible."[121] While such rebellion was not without its reasons, did they practice their own theory? The short answer is "no." As Jay writes, "Despite their fervent expressions of solidarity with the proletariat that appeared throughout their work in the pre-emigration period, at no time did a member of the Institut affect the life-style of the working class."[122] In other words, "the Institut's members may have been relentless in their hostility toward the capitalist system, but they never abandoned the life-style of the *haute bourgeoisie*."[123] Curiously, then, despite being intellectual iconoclasts in the Marxist tradition, the school "denied the necessary connection

---

[116] Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: Verso, 2012).

[117] Max Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Hunter, M. Kramer and J. Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 177–215.

[118] Max Horkheimer, "Dämmerung," in *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926–1931 & 1950–1969*, trans. M. Shaw (New York: Seabury, 1978), 18.

[119] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 63.

[120] Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 256.

[121] Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 18.

[122] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 35.

[123] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 36.

between radical theory and the proletariat."[124] This denial earned them the ire of many classical Marxists, prompting Lukács to refer to the school as the "Grand Hotel Abyss."[125]

Furthermore, as we have noted, the writings of the Frankfurt School are plagued by an unresolved tension between utopianism and pessimism—a tension that sometimes reflects differences between different members of the school and at other times appears within the works of individual authors.[126] While the tension is partially comprehensible when viewed as a dialectic between *what is* and *what could be*, the future is always vague and, ultimately, unrealizable. Consequently, Fromm's and Marcuse's prescription for sexual liberation "tends towards utopian word magic—'if only the world could be like this'—whether it be Fromm's world filled with loving persons or Marcuse's world after the abolition of surplus repression and the performance principle."[127] Ultimately, then, the overall message that emerges from the school is one of hopelessness. As Adorno concedes, the "negation of the negation, that dream of alienation returning to itself which motivated both Hegel and Marx, must remain frustrated."[128]

Finally, Marcuse's belief in the right of revolutionary minorities to suppress the "repressive" opinions of the majority is not only anti-democratic and inherently unjust but "a doctrine which if it were widely held would be an effective barrier to any rational progress and liberation."[129] It is also profoundly elitist, for it ultimately forces Marcuse to see the majority of people "not as semi-rational human beings … but rather as irrational objects of manipulation … The majority must be liberated from themselves by the Marcusian minority which alone is rational."[130] Even more troubling is the fact that Marcuse's "radical case against intolerance makes those radicals who espouse it allies of the very forces which they claim to attack."[131] In this sense, Critical Theory turns out to be a manifestation of the very disease of which it purports to be the cure.

3.5. The Lasting Impact of The Frankfurt School

What, then, can be said regarding the lasting impact of the Frankfurt School? In a provocative speech given in January 2018, the German journalist, Robert Grözinger, likened the impact of the School to the story of the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.[132] For Grözinger, one line of Goethe's original poem is particularly poignant: "The spirits which I summoned, I now cannot get rid of."[133] In Grözinger's view, the members of the Frankfurt School set in motion a whole generation

---

[124] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 292.

[125] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 22.

[126] For example, "In Adorno's philosophy the hope is of the eventual, but impossible, reconciliation of human and society … It is, if you like, a tragic philosophy of history, but not necessarily a pessimistic one" (Ian Craib, *Modern Social Theory*, 227).

[127] Bocock, *Freud and Modern Society*, 158.

[128] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 278.

[129] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse* (London: Fontana, 1970), 90.

[130] Charles Taylor, "Marcuse's Authoritarian Utopia," *Canadian Dimension* 7.3 (1970): 51.

[131] MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, 91.

[132] Robert Grözinger, "The Frankfurt School and the New Left: Sorcerer's Apprentices and Hobgoblins," *Equity & Freedom*, 5 February 2018, https://tinyurl.com/yy6zuz7l.

[133] German: "Die ich, die Geister, werd ich nun nicht los" (lines 91–92).

of "hobgoblins"—the (so called) "68ers"—but, like the sorcerer's apprentice, were increasingly appalled by the "terrible waters" they had unleashed.

There is strong evidence of this, especially in the cases of Adorno and Habermas. For example, in a 1969 interview, Adorno distanced himself from the revolutionaries, declaring, "When I made my theoretical model, I could not have guessed that people would try to realise it with Molotov cocktails."[134] Indeed, so much did the revolutionaries replicate the repression they were (supposedly) reacting against that Adorno regarded the same "authoritarian personality type that thrived under Hitler and its attendant spirit of conformism to be alive and well in the New Left and the student movement."[135] Similarly, when faced with repeatedly disrupted lectures at the Institute and ever increasing violence in the streets, Habermas went so far as to accuse the radicals of "left-wing fascism."[136]

The gap between the Frankfurt School and their progeny widened further still after Adorno called the police on a group from the Socialist German Student Union who had occupied a room at the Institute and refused to leave. In a letter to Marcuse (dated 19 June 1969), he too accused the student radicals of fascist-like tactics, including "calling for a discussion, only to then make one impossible" and "the barbaric inhumanity of a mode of behaviour that is regressive and even confuses regression with revolution." In a final letter to Marcuse (dated 6 August 1969—the day of Adorno's death), he described the larger movement as being "mixed with a dram of madness, in which the totalitarian resides teleologically."[137]

Marcuse, however, took a very different view. In a letter to Adorno (dated 4 June 1969), he argued that "there are situations, moments, in which theory is pushed on further by praxis—situations and moments in which theory that is kept separate from praxis becomes untrue to itself." This, for him, was one of those moments. He, therefore, expressed pride in the influence that the Frankfurt School had exerted on the student movement, and criticized Adorno for labelling the student radicals as "fascists" and especially for calling the police on them. He also made clear that he was willing to tolerate their destructiveness because, in his view, "the defence and maintenance of the status quo and its cost in human life is much more terrible."

This response should not have surprised Adorno. As seen in our sampling of Marcuse's writings, he was always of a more radical stripe (increasingly so in the late 1960s/early 1970s) and "far more willing to foresee that the eclipse of the liberal state might be positive, a way to discover and explore the instinctual life of freedom."[138] Indeed, such was his hatred of capitalism that he had long set himself the task of "erasing the residues of puritan morality as well as the constraints of the Protestant ethic."[139]

---

[134] Cited in Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 279.

[135] Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 4.

[136] To better understand Habermas's justification for using this label and the phenomenon that gave rise to it, see Russell A. Berman, "From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism: Radicalism as Reaction," *Democratiya* 13 (2008): 15–16.

[137] The 1969 correspondence between Adorno and Marcuse regarding the German Student Movement has been translated into English by Esther Leslie and may be found here: https://tinyurl.com/y2rl73fq.

[138] Whitfield, "Refusing Marcuse."

[139] Whitfield, "Refusing Marcuse."

This was the only way he could imagine "the triumph of play over work, of emotional fulfilment over economic performance, of Eros [Desire] as a viable rival to Thanatos [Death]."[140]

However, Marcuse realized that the working class could no longer be relied on as the instruments of social change; they had become too deeply integrated into the capitalist system. But, he believed, "certain other groups, not so well integrated, could provide the spark which would awaken others: intellectuals, students, minority groups, Third World nations."[141] Therefore, Stephen Whitfield writes,

> In 1964 he looked for the agents of change among those without stakes in an "advanced industrial society." Three decades after the German proletariat had failed to stop Nazism, Marcuse's revolutionary faith was limited. It was invested in "the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted," and even in "the unemployed and the unemployable." To this rather baggy list, he would add oppositionists who were marked neither by homogeneity nor unity: the middle-class white youth who formed the New Left in Europe as well as the United States; the black underclass in the ghettoes; the National Liberation Front in Vietnam; and the Cuban revolutionaries. Marcuse praised them all for subscribing to what he called "the Great Refusal."[142]

In light of this, it is "easy to see why Marcuse was to become popular during the 1960s—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and the student revolt all spoke for his theory."[143] Consequently, at the Paris riots of May 1968 students held up placards with the names "Marx/Mao/Marcuse" emblazoned on them, "hailing a new revolutionary trinity."[144] Nor is it surprising that Marcuse gave his public support to the leader of the Communist Party USA and member of the Black Panther Party, his former student, Angela Davis. Therefore, as much as he rejected the title, *TIME* magazine was right to call him "the guru of the New Left."[145]

Marcuse's impact also extends far beyond the 1960s. The main reason for this is that he "tutored a generation of young radicals, who, after the 1960s, gained a toehold in tenure by writing university press books."[146] Moreover, these radicals not only became lecturers and authors, they also became "teachers, media employees, civil servants and of course politicians." As a consequence,

> They and their later progeny are endowed with a sense of mission and the illusion of being on the side of moral righteousness. In thousands of more or less important, but always influential, positions of authority, they succeed in injecting entire generations with a disgust for their own culture and history, and a selective inability to think. With their allegedly liberating tolerance, they have torn down natural or culturally nurtured inhibitions and replaced them with state enforced prohibitions on thinking and acting.

---

[140] Whitfield, "Refusing Marcuse."

[141] Craib, *Modern Social Theory*, 210.

[142] Whitfield, "Refusing Marcuse." The internal quotes are taken from Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, 260–61.

[143] Craib, *Modern Social Theory*, 210.

[144] Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 4.

[145] Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 41.

[146] Ben Agger, "Accidental Hero: Marcuse's 'One-Dimensional Man' at 50," *Truthout*, 9 September 2014, https://tinyurl.com/yxlumnv6.

These in turn have almost completely destroyed the natural workings and defense mechanisms of a healthy society.[147]

This, for Grözinger, is part of the reason why the Frankfurt School's "hobgoblins" are still with us and the "terrible waters" of Cultural Marxism continue to rise.

4. Concluding Reflections

4.1. Cultural Marxism: Fact or Fiction?

It is time to return to our questions: Is Cultural Marxism a myth? Is it a misnomer? Is it an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory? Or is it an accurate way of describing a real ideology that is making a very real impact on our world? And, if the latter, how should Christians respond to it?

It would be both simplistic and unwarranted to lay the entire blame for the contemporary crisis in the West at the feet of either the Frankfurt School or Antonio Gramsci. Many others theorist and activists have made significant contributions (e.g., Sartre, Beauvoir, Foucault, Derrida, Althusser, Kristiva, Said, Badiou, Rorty, Butler, etc.) and numerous historical and technological streams have helped feed our current cultural and political divisions—not least, the advent of social media.[148] Furthermore, in regard to the Frankfurt School, since the 1970s, and particularly under Habermas's leadership, its focus and energies have moved in a very different direction.

Nevertheless, as ongoing interest in their work testifies,[149] there is no denying that the first generation of the Frankfurt School (in general) and Marcuse (in particular) have played a significant role in shaping the contours of the current Western civilizational divide. Political correctness,[150] the new intolerant-tolerance and ever-increasing erotic liberty are part of their legacy.[151] Similarly, Gramsci's ideas have also borne very real (and not particularly appetizing) fruit—not least in the arena of identity politics, intersectionality and the rise of victimhood culture (today's versions of "class consciousness"), as well

---

[147] Grözinger, "The Frankfurt School and the New Left."

[148] See Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

[149] For example, Stuart Jeffries, "Why a Forgotten 1930s Critique of Capitalism Is Back in Fashion," *The Guardian*, 9 September 2016, https://tinyurl.com/z7xj5h9; Stuart Walton, "Theory from the ruins," *Aeon*, 31 May 2017, https://tinyurl.com/ybncfufl; Stuart Walton, *Neglected or Misunderstood: Introducing Theodor Adorno* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2017).

[150] "Political Correctness" has long been associated with communism. Leninists used it to describe steadfastness to party affiliations, Stalinists used it to evoke a sense of historical certitude, and Mao Zedong used it in his Little Red Book.

[151] Connections have also been drawn between the writings of the Frankfurt School and various other social and ideological developments—e.g., postmodernism, environmentalism and second-wave feminism. On postmodernism, see Craib, *Modern Social Theory*, 214–15, 225–27. On environmentalism, see Stephen T. Schroth and Michael J. Whitt, "Frankfurt School," in *Green Technology: An A-to-Z Guide*, ed. Dustin Mulvaney (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 191–94. On second-wave feminism, see Douglas Kellner, "Erich Fromm, Feminism, and the Frankfurt School," *Illuminations: The Critical Theory Project* (N.D.): https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina Folder/kell8.htm.

as in the fact that, in the fields of media and academia (and politics too), the "long march through the institutions" is virtually complete.[152]

The answer to our first two questions, then, is straightforward: rightly understood, *Cultural Marxism is neither a myth nor a misnomer*. While not a label worn by either Gramsci or the Frankfurt School, it helpfully describes the particular form of Marxist ideology they pioneered, and it is a label many of their disciples have been more than happy to apply to them and to wear themselves.[153]

4.2. What about the Conspiracy Theories?

The answer to the third question, however, is more complex. There are numerous Cultural Marxist conspiracy theories, especially surrounding the Frankfurt School—some superficially plausible, others patently laughable (like the one is which Adorno wrote all of the Beatles' songs), some blatantly anti-Semitic and others just plain scary (like Anders Breivik's *Manifesto*).[154] In light of this, there is some justification for describing Cultural Marxism as "a viral falsehood used by far-right figures, conspiracy theorists, and pundits to explain many ills of the modern world."[155]

Of course, the main problem with all conspiratorial versions of Cultural Marxism is the same: *for something to be a conspiracy it needs to be a secret*. But there never was anything secret about the publications of Gramsci, the members of the Frankfurt School or any of their disciples. Their writings were and are readily available and repay careful reading. I am not, however, wanting to downplay the seriousness of the subversion these thinkers were advocating, nor am I denying the reality of plots (both human and demonic) against the Lord and his anointed (Ps 2). But I am doubting the existence of a faceless cabal of Cultural Marxists covertly operating behind the scenes of Western society. Rather, contemporary proponents of Cultural Marxism (whether or not they own the label) are usually loud and proud, making no secret of their aims and ambitions.[156]

As to the anti-Semitic versions of a Cultural Marxist plot, not only are these plainly racist but they fall prey to their own twisted version of identity politics—for they use the actions of a handful of individuals to smear an entire ethnic group! Furthermore, not all members of the Frankfurt School were Jewish (e.g., Habermas), and Antonio Gramsci was Italian.

Therefore, to all who are too easily drawn into a conspiratorial mindset, the prophet Isaiah's challenge is pertinent:

> Do not call conspiracy
>   everything this people calls a conspiracy;
> do not fear what they fear,
>   and do not dread it.

---

[152] Tudehope, "What's Left of Western Culture?"

[153] Kellner, "Cultural Marxism and Cultural Studies," 7.

[154] Regarding the origins of the various Frankfurt School conspiracy theories, see Martin Jay, "Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment: The Frankfurt School as Scapegoat of the Lunatic Fringe," *Salmagundi* 168/169 (2010): 30–40.

[155] Zappone, "Cultural Marxism."

[156] See Pat Byrne, "Safer Schools or a Radical Marxist Sexual Revolution?," *You're Teaching Our Children What?*, 1 March 2016, http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/2016/03/2166.

> The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
>> he is the one you are to fear,
>> he is the one you are to dread. (Isa 8:12–13)[157]

4.3. This Calls for Wisdom

Given the existence of conspiratorial explanations of the nature and goals of Cultural Marxism, is there a case for avoiding the term and using an alternative (e.g., neo-Marxism or Critical Theory)? In my view, there is no inherent problem with the label, but Christians ought to be careful with *how* (and *to whom*) it is applied. It really can function as a kind of "weaponised narrative" that paints anyone who gets tagged with it as being "beyond the pale of rational discourse."[158] It can even be a way of dismissing fellow believers who display a concern for justice or environmental issues or who are mildly optimistic about the possibilities of cultural transformation.[159] We should certainly discuss and debate such matters, but Carl Trueman is right: "Bandying terms like 'cultural Marxist' … around simply as a way of avoiding real argument is shameful and should have no place in Christian discourse."[160]

Furthermore, given that God alone knows people's hearts, we should be slow to demonize the motivations of those who pioneered this form of neo-Marxism—even if we have good grounds for critiquing their judgment. In regard to the Frankfurt School, as we have seen, these thinkers were deeply affected by their experience of Nazism and anti-Semitism (and especially the evil of the Holocaust) and so were highly suspicious of mass movements, mass culture and anything remotely totalitarian. In short, they were reacting to what they thought (sometimes rightly) were the problems of our world and proposing what they believed (often wrongly) were the solutions.

This highlights the most important issue of all. Alasdair MacIntyre once described Marxism as "a secularism formed by the gospel which is committed to the problem of power and justice and therefore to themes of redemption and renewal."[161] The problem, however, is that its diagnosis is superficial, and its cure fatal. For this reason, Marxism, whether in classical or cultural form, can be viewed as a corruption or parody of the gospel—replete with its own false prophet (Marx), false Bible (*Das Kapital*), false doctrine (dialectical materialism), false apostles (Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Marcuse), and false hope (a communist utopia).[162] Therefore, the fact that Cultural Marxism is a real ideology making a real impact on our world is not good news.

---

[157] "Conspiracy" here probably refers to the coalition mentioned in Isaiah 7:2. However, it could also be translated "league" and so be the term Ahaz was using for his alliance with Assyria. Whatever the case, Alec Motyer's comment is apposite: "Isaiah and his disciples are to have no part in a fear-ridden society but to be conspicuous for a different life-style, unmoved by the fears around; a calm in the midst of life's storms and menaces" (J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993], 95).

[158] Zappone, "Cultural Marxism."

[159] See, for example, Carl Trueman's defense of Tim Keller: "Is Tim Keller a Cultural Marxist?," *White Horse Inn*, 8 October 2018, https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2018/10/the-mod-is-tim-keller-a-marxist.

[160] Carl Trueman, "We All Live in Marx's World Now," *The Gospel Coalition*, 19 March 2019, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/live-marxs-world-now.

[161] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1953), 18.

[162] I am indebted to Melvin Tinker for this insight. See *That Hideous Strength: How the West Was Lost: The Cancer of Cultural Marxism in the Church, the World and the Gospel of Change* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2018), 33.

4.4. How Should Christians Respond?

What, then, is the way ahead?[163] First, Christians need to realize that we have a far more penetrating analysis of both the problem and the solution. For in Scripture we have a divine diagnosis of the fundamental human sickness—universal slavery to sin—and God-given knowledge of the remedy—the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we have nothing to learn about oppression and injustice from other quarters, but it does mean that we better understand both the underlying cause and its ultimate cure, and so have an infinitely better hope to proclaim.

Second, while we are not to cast "pearls before pigs" (Matt 7:6), we must not only be ready to answer those who inquire about our hope (1 Pet 3:15), but to "preach the word … in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). For the gospel is still the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1:17). Furthermore, the reaction of our hearers is not our responsibility; only faithfulness is. And, as we learn from both Scripture and history, "sometimes faithfulness leads to awakening and reformation, sometimes to persecution and violence, and sometimes to both."[164]

Third, in terms of what H. Richard Niebuhr labeled a "Christ the transformer of culture" approach, there is scope for us to go one better than the Frankfurt School and develop what Christopher Watkin calls "biblical theory"; a theory that not only critiques contemporary culture but provides a more compelling vision for true human flourishing.[165] Otherwise put, we need to *explain our culture through the Bible* that we might better *explain the Bible to our culture*.[166] The goal of such "kategorics" (or "offensive theology") is "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

Fourth, while there may be wisdom in pursuing some version of "the Benedict Option,"[167] most of us can learn to engage in fruitful neighborly conversation or workplace discussion about moral, social and spiritual issues. Some may even be in a position to impact public policy formation—perhaps in schools, businesses or some level of government.[168] In all our efforts to serve the common good, it is imperative that we show a better way; one that models civility, speaks graciously, avoids an "us-versus-them" mentality and, if possible, transcends political polarization.

Finally, as turbulent as the current cultural waters may feel, we all have an ongoing responsibility to pray for our world (both its citizens and its governments) and to exercise godly influence in the way we live, love, listen, speak, write, protest and vote.[169] While we have solid biblical reasons for seeing

---

[163] In addition to the points that follow, see the helpful ten-point summary of "ways ahead" in D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 161–76.

[164] D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 228.

[165] Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 142. Editor's note: a review of *Thinking Through Creation* may be found in this issue of *Themelios*, pp. 629–32.

[166] Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation*, 138. R. Albert Mohler's daily "Briefings" are one example of how this can be done.

[167] That is, engaging in "strategic withdrawal" in order to develop "creative, communal solutions to help us hold on to our faith and our values in a world growing ever more hostile to them" (Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* [New York: Penguin, 2017], 2).

[168] For a series of insights into the complexities and possibilities of such engagement, see Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 196–200.

[169] I am not suggesting there is always only one way a Christian should vote. It will depend on the issue and the options. Normally, given that human solutions to social and political problems are only ever partial at best and

ourselves as "strangers and exiles on earth" (Heb 11:13), "we must not exile ourselves, and we certainly must not retreat into silence while we still have a platform, a voice, and an opportunity. We must remind ourselves again and again of the compassion of truth and the truth of compassion."[170]

Each of these points deserves elaboration and others could be added to them. But whatever combination of opportunities and responsibilities God grants us, Os Guinness's summation of the challenge we face and the response it demands is pertinent:

> Our Western nations have both forgotten God and forgotten where they have come from. Now they are attempting to complete the process of severing the roots of Western civilization, destroying its root system, poisoning its soil and ruining its entire spiritual, moral and social ecology. Our Western societies may persist in forgetting God and rejecting his way. But whatever our societies do around us, we are to remain faithful … and therefore unmanipulable, unbribable, undeterrable and unclubbable…. Let us then determine and resolve to be so faithful in all the challenges and ordeals the onrushing future brings that it may be said of us that we in our turn have served God's purpose in our generation.[171]

---

often create new problems in the process, Christians should not only listen to and learn from each other, but also give each other freedom to disagree as to the best way forward.

[170] R. Albert Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), 151.

[171] Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 222–23.

Adam and Sin as the Bane of Evolution? A Review of *Finding Ourselves After Darwin*

— Hans Madueme —

Hans Madueme is associate professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

******

Abstract: The diverse essays in Stanley Rosenberg's edited volume *Finding Ourselves After Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018) offer a Christian analysis of the human person in light of evolutionary thinking. The recommendations to revise our understanding of original sin and theodicy raise particularly challenging questions. Traditional interpretations of Scripture, for instance, are often devalued in order to reduce tensions with our current scientific understanding. Additionally, the more radical arguments undercut doctrines that earlier Christians believed are pivotal to the biblical story. Overall, these noteworthy essays represent a wide range of creative possibilities for updating our theological anthropology in line with a post-Darwinian setting, but they are less convincing when justifying the theological cost for doing so.

******

There was a time when evangelical scholars argued over the age of the planet. Young and old earth creationists sparred over the length of the days in Genesis 1, they debated whether fossils provided evidence for deep time, and so on. The lines of the dispute placed evolutionary perspectives largely beyond the pale of evangelicalism. However, the anti-evolutionary rhetoric of mid-to-late 20th century evangelicalism does not tell the whole story. In fact, the original fundamentalists in the early decades of the 20th century did not oppose the idea of evolution. They were convinced that God's two books of creation and Scripture would never contradict each other. As George Frederick Wright argued, "if it should be proved that species have developed from others of a lower order, as varieties are supposed to have done, it would strengthen rather than weaken the standard argument from design."[1] Other Calvinist evolutionists like James McCosh and Asa Gray concluded similarly that God used an

---

[1] George Frederick Wright, "The Passing of Evolution," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al., reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:77.

evolutionary process as his providential mode of creation.[2]

Almost a century later, in some quarters, Christian evolution has once again become an acceptable option for evangelicals as the debate shifted to questions surrounding Adam and Eve (e.g., did they ever exist in our space-time history? Does Scripture support the Western idea of the fall? Should Christians retain the Augustinian doctrine of original sin?).[3] For instance, in 2007 Francis Collins founded the BioLogos organization, which would become the mecca for evangelical reflection on evolution. In September 2010, the evangelical journal *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* ran a theme issue on the historicity of Adam and Eve in light of evolution and genetics. Some of the essays argued against the scientific and exegetical legitimacy of the traditional view of Adam and the fall.[4] Roman Catholic and Protestant mainline scholars had already resolved these issues decades earlier, in light of their respective traditions. However, for North American evangelicalism, these early rumblings signaled a controversy brewing within their churches and institutions. Everyone had an opinion about Adam.[5]

1. A Big Book on Darwin and the Human Condition

What then is really at stake for Christians trying to make sense of it all? The new volume edited by Stanley Rosenberg has the potential to bring clarity to questions swirling around Adam: *Finding Ourselves After Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). Some years ago, I co-edited a volume covering similar topics and it suffered some of the symptoms of "anthologitis" (uneven chapters and key scientific areas unaddressed).[6] Thanks to the skillful editorial hand of Stan Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin* did not contract that infection; it hangs together well, structurally and thematically.

Spanning a range of perspectives, this anthology was part of a Templeton research project based at Oxford University. The book opens with two introductory essays, and the remaining chapters probe the implications of evolution on three areas of theological anthropology: the image of God (five chapters);

---

[2] For analysis, see David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Bradley Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). See also B. B. Warfield, *Evolution, Scripture, and Science: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Noll and David N. Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

[3] For the view that evangelicals should not accept evolutionary thinking, see Norman Nevin, ed., *Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009); J. P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

[4] See Dennis Venema, "Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Hominid Population Size," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (2010): 166–78; Daniel Harlow, "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (2010): 179–95; John Schneider, "Recent Genetic Science and Christian Theology on Human Origins: An 'Aesthetic Supralapsarianism,'" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (2010): 196–212.

[5] For example, see Richard N. Ostling, "The Search for the Historical Adam," *Christianity Today* (June 2011): 23–27; Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "Evangelicals Question the Existence of Adam and Eve," National Public Radio, 9 August 2011, https://tinyurl.com/3wfynte.

[6] Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

original sin (six chapters); and evil (seven chapters).[7] Each group of essays has an introduction and conclusion that bring coherence to the contributions.

If, like me, you think evolutionary theory presents deep, perhaps insurmountable, problems for Christian theology, this book has the potential to relieve your central worries. I have reservations with recent attempts to rethink the doctrine of sin in light of evolution, so I was eager to read these essays. I will restrict my remarks to the chapters on evil and original sin, because I think the tension between evolution and Christian faith is most intensely felt there. Where then do we find ourselves after Darwin?

2. A Methodological Roadmap

The first chapter by Benno van den Toren makes a distinction between *doctrine* and *theological theory*. A doctrine is a church teaching about the faith, whereas a theological theory denotes "theories that theologians have developed to explain and make sense of these doctrines" (p. 13). One of his examples is the Eucharist, which Christians down the ages have explained in diverse ways, sometimes appealing to Aristotle's metaphysics, sometimes to speech-act theory, and so on. The Eucharist as a core doctrine is unchanging, while our theological theories come and go. Doctrines are essential; theological theories, he says, are nonessential.

Van den Toren seeks to highlight the point that conflicts between science and faith are often the fault of theological theories, *not* essential doctrines. For example, even if modern neuroscience is hard to reconcile with supernatural souls, dualism is only one of many theological theories for the image of God. As van den Toren suggests,

> The real or perceived dissonance between the Christian faith and scientific theories can cause severe faith-stress and thereby diminish Christian conviction and commitment, finally leading to a departure from the faith…. [T]he development of appropriate theological theories that help to coordinate Christian doctrine with modern science can be a significant part of the apologetic response that the Christian community provides. (p. 21)

This is an insightful chapter. Van den Toren lays the groundwork for the rest of the book and uses categories that are brimming with theological nuance and missiological wisdom.

Most of his argument is helpful and convincing, but I disagree with how he frames the fundamental issue as a distinction between doctrine and *theological theory*. For starters, appealing to Eucharistic debates only gets us so far. Christians in church history who disagreed over the meaning of doctrine rarely questioned the historicity of the underlying events; *metaphysical significance* was the thing. However, in van den Toren's proposal the historicity of specific canonical persons and events, particularly related to Adam and Eve, becomes negotiable—*adiaphora*—a move that seems more modern than premodern.[8]

The doctrine-theory distinction ultimately begs the question. On what grounds do we determine that a particular theological interpretation is a (secondary) theological theory as opposed to a (primary)

---

[7] All the contributors accept an ancient earth and universal common ancestry, with the possible exception of C. Ben Mitchell (chapter 14) and C. John Collins (chapter 10), who seem agnostic on Darwin's theory of common ancestry.

[8] That judgment is based on his acceptance of the mainstream evolutionary story (p. 12), which automatically forces nonliteral decisions about Adam and Eve and their role in the biblical story.

doctrinal position? People will disagree depending on the issue, which is my point. The doctrine-theory tool is too blunt, too convenient for theologians itching to revise tradition by the lights of current science.

In my view, a better approach draws the line between doctrine and *Scripture*, which then allows us to measure all our doctrinal formulations against the canonical rule. Some doctrines faithfully render the core affirmations of Scripture, others less so. The church has always operated with a concept of dogmatic rank that distinguishes between primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines—all these doctrinal constructions warranted, to greater or lesser degrees, by the underlying exegetical support. Granted, van den Toren's proposal draws on the same modes of thought. My concern, however, is that his doctrine-theory model encourages a kind of theological theorizing that is largely abstracted from relevant exegetical details, which potentially gives the reconstructed theological theory more plausibility than it deserves.[9] But I'm getting ahead of myself: The remainder of the book takes up van den Toren's methodological charter and puts it to work in interesting if sometimes problematic ways.

3. Evolution and Original Sin

In chapter 12, van den Toren himself uses evolutionary thinking to revise our theological theory of original sin. Recent studies in evolution have argued for a closer causal dependence of nature on culture in the evolutionary story. As he explains,

> Culture is not an accessory to the species' nature or a second layer added to a nature that exists independent of culture. Human nature as it currently presents itself never existed without culture. It cannot survive, let alone thrive, without its cultural form and embedding. The development of culture is the fruit of the unique evolution of human nature. (p. 177)

This predisposition to cultural formation is a mixed bag. We not only imitate our parents—and others in our social sphere—for good, but we also imitate them for evil. We learn from other people how to do evil to one another.

According to van den Toren, this cultural socialization helps explain the inheritance of sin. New insights from evolutionary biology suggest that we are "biologically hardwired" to imitate the practices of others (p. 182); this emphasis on innate dispositions strikes van den Toren as Augustinian rather than Pelagian. Furthermore, van den Toren warns that religious scholars who describe human aggressive, egotistical desires *as* original sin are unwittingly reviving the old heresy of Manicheanism; his proposal avoids Manicheanism, he says, because the egotistic desires we inherit are *morally neutral* and only become sinful if directed in self-serving ways.

There is too much to unravel here. To begin with, I am not convinced that van den Toren's proposal should be construed as an Augustinian account. His proposal seems to accept a biological and cultural determinism that is ultimately anti-Augustinian. For example, it is difficult to see how Jesus Christ can be sinless. The implication of van den Toren's analysis is that Jesus, being fully human, was hardwired biologically to imitate sinful practices, and cultural forces compelled him to imitate the sin of others

---

[9] His doctrine-theory model tends to obscure exegetical questions that might challenge the new theological theory; that was my impression from reading his arguments in chapter 12 for an evolutionary doctrine of original sin. I elaborate this point below.

around him—I say "compelled" because, according to van den Toren's evolutionary proposal, sinfulness seems to be implicit in what it means to be human. As he puts it, "if nature and culture are as deeply intertwined as recent evolutionary theory suggests, we cannot inherit our nature from the community that births and raises us without inheriting its culture, *including its sinful biases*" (p. 184, my emphasis).

Happily, van den Toren's position avoids the Christological problem by describing inherited egotistic desires as morally neutral (p. 184), but that move needs more justification than he provides in this essay. Scientific pressures aside, it is not obvious to me that he is right to normalize egotistic desires or to collapse them into the evolutionary process. He assumes that such desires are ontologically continuous with the "egotistic" instincts of nonhuman evolutionary ancestors, and thus morally neutral. I worry that this proposal ends up biologizing sin in ways that are difficult to square with Scripture, including passages like Ps 51:5 and Eph 2:3 that arguably imply a moral culpability associated with our natures quite apart from any conscious willing.

But my broader concern is methodological. At the start of the chapter, van den Toren defines the *doctrine* of original sin as follows: "every human in the world as we currently know it is born with a sinful disposition, a tendency to sin and an inability not to sin. The sinfulness of humankind means not only that humans do sinful actions but also that every human born in this world is bound to or enslaved by sin" (p. 176). I like his definition, but in this chapter it is largely *abstracted from the wider biblical warrants* (e.g., the scriptural witness to Adam and Eve, their historicity, their connection to the rest of humanity, the origin of sin, and so on), which lends a certain artificiality to his constructive proposal. Canonically speaking, human sinfulness does not make sense apart from the Adamic, biblical-theological matrix. Consistent with his doctrine-theory model, then, he takes this lean doctrine of original sin to serve as the foundation on which he builds his new theological theory. In my judgment, van den Toren's theological theory is far less plausible when assessed in light of the wider exegetical basis for original sin. However, readers who take the standard evolutionary picture for granted will likely find his proposal compelling.

In another chapter on original sin, chapter 8, Gijsbert van den Brink asks us to "recontextualize" rather than abandon Augustine's ancient doctrine. He summarizes the traditional core of the doctrine as an inclination to sin, a tendency that begins from birth, affects all human beings, pervades every facet of our lives, and is the wellspring of all actual sins we commit. All of these features, he thinks, are consistent with an evolutionary picture and make unnecessary the radical proposals by Denis Lamoureux and others who reject original sin in the name of evolution.[10]

Nonetheless, van den Brink does outline key changes to the traditional doctrine of original sin. He jettisons Augustine's theory of original guilt and sexual transmission as lacking biblical support. In his judgment, science has ruled out monogenesis, therefore humanity did not arise from an original couple. He hypothesizes that when moral consciousness emerged from the early hominids, God instructed the first humans to live a life of obedience.

My main reaction to van den Brink's proposal is that it is overly sanguine about its theological price tag. In the first place, many Christians will find his rejection of monogenesis unpersuasive; he too quickly dismisses the exegetical and theological rationale for monogenesis, and he too quickly accepts

---

[10] Van den Brink critically reviews the arguments from Denis Lamoureux, "Beyond Original Sin: Is a Theological Paradigm Shift Inevitable?," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 67 (2015): 35–49.

the scientific consensus against it.[11] In the second place, Christian evolutionists who are physicalists and who adopt his version of original sin will be left, ironically, without a viable concept of sin. If moral consciousness arose naturally in the human community, and if human beings do not have immaterial souls, the concept of moral responsibility collapses and you lose the very idea of sin.[12] When scientific conclusions play such a pivotal role in doctrinal construction and development, the results can be surprising and even alarming.

That worry loomed large as I read Christopher Hays's essay, the most lucid chapter in the book.[13] He dismisses the historicity of Adam and Eve—and the entirety of Genesis 2–3—for hermeneutical and scientific reasons. While admitting that the apostle Paul believed Adam was historical, Hays assures us that *we* don't have to since the New Testament is "accommodated" to a first century Jewish view of the world. Since Paul was not *defending* the historicity of Adam, we don't have to either. Hays rejects original guilt and roots human moral corruption in "the confluence of *biological*, *sociological*, *cultural-evolutionary*, *spiritual*, and even *supernatural* factors"—just not in a historical fall (p. 200).

These conclusions reflect a defective doctrine of revelation and an implausible concept of accommodation. The principle of accommodation was standard procedure throughout church history, but Hays's version seems reckless. He thinks any biblical claim is non-binding if it is shared by the biblical writer's contemporaries *and* negated by our current scientific understanding. Really? If that were true, then Christians should dismiss the scriptural teaching on heaven, hell, the devil, prophecy, miracles, and much else besides. Those beliefs are hardly consonant with modern science, as commonly understood, yet they were sober truth for contemporaries of the biblical writers. In fairness, Hays might reply that we have no scientific evidence against heaven, hell, the devil, and so on, and indeed, that such evidence might be impossible *in principle*, since the fact that scientists have not observed the devil hardly counts against his existence (the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence!). And yet, we *do* have genetic evidence against a historical Adam—thus, Hays might say, my critique misfires. For my part, however, I question whether the genetic evidence is as airtight as he thinks;[14] more broadly, my own view is that scientific evidence is often more ambiguous than he lets on.

To his credit, Hays applies his notion of accommodation inconsistently since he accepts a supernatural fall of angels (p. 202). Nevertheless, his use of Scripture seems unstable. That comes out in his handling of Romans 5:12–21. Hays argues that Paul's contrast between Adam and Christ does not depend on a historical Adam, much like Jesus's teaching in the Parable of the Good Samaritan does not depend on an underlying historical event (pp. 198–99). But there's a relevant difference between the two cases, since Jesus intended his parable to be non-historical, whereas Paul assumes the historicity of both

---

[11] Recent scientific debates on this question are not addressed in this chapter or elsewhere in the book. E.g., see Richard Buggs, "Adam and Eve: Lessons Learned," *Nature Ecology & Evolution Journal Club*, 14 April 2018, https://tinyurl.com/y3crzabk.

[12] For the argument, see Hans Madueme, "From Sin to the Soul: A Dogmatic Argument for Dualism," in *The Christian Doctrine of Humanity*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 70–90. Christian evolutionists these days usually reject monogenism and (anthropological) dualism—e.g., see Ronald Cole-Turner, *The End of Adam and Eve: Theology and the Science of Human Origins* (Pittsburgh: TheologyPlus, 2016), 139–43.

[13] For his earlier argument, see Christopher Hays and Stephen Lane Herring, "Adam and the Fall," in *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism*, ed. Christopher Hays and Christopher Ansberry (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 24–54.

[14] See note 11 above.

protagonists, Jesus and Adam. His acceptance of evolution and his rejection of a historical fall leaves Hays with an extremely fragile doctrine of original sin. In his words,

> Insofar as humans emerged through the process of natural selection, these same impulses (violence, selfishness, sexual concupiscence) ostensibly contributed to our emergence and remain present in our genetic composition. This suggests that we are, to a degree, spring-loaded toward behaviors that, among morally conscious beings, are properly categorized as sinful. (p. 200)

In other words, God built sin into the very process of (evolutionary) creation. He fashioned us with an innate tendency to sin, a tendency born from our being created and not merely fallen. Such claims threaten the goodness and holiness of God, yet Hays offers no way out of this problem of Christian theodicy.[15]

4. Untying the Theodicy Knot

In chapter 19, Christopher Southgate takes on the theodicy question directly. He concedes that natural evil is inevitable in God's evolutionary creation—by divine design. As he puts it, "there seems to be so much disvalue, so much suffering, alongside the values that have arisen within creation" (p. 293). However, he has no time for fall theodicies, whether Adamic or angelic, but instead lays out two other types of theodicies that he finds more promising.

The first argument is evil as the cost of the *freedom* that God gifted to nature. God values the freedom of creation so much that he is willing to risk evil as a byproduct (Southgate dubs arguments in this category "free-process arguments"). The second argument is that our universe with its history of suffering and evil was the *only way* God could have brought about our world with all its complexity and beauty ("only way arguments"). Southgate judges free-process and only-way arguments to be essential components of any theodicy, though he augments them with the perspective of eschatology and God as *co-sufferer* with creation.

Nearly a century ago, N. P. Williams raised a question that still lingers for non-fall evolutionary theodicies like Southgate's. Once you lose a historical fall, the only remaining option for the origin of evil is cosmological dualism or monism—evil as an eternal principle alongside God (dualism), or evil and good mingled within God himself (monism).[16] Since sin and evil are intrinsic to Southgate's evolutionary creation, his proposal seems to threaten God's holiness. Anticipating this concern, Southgate draws on Old Testament scholarship that defines the Hebrew word for "good" in Genesis 1 as "'fit for purpose' rather than 'perfect' or yet 'beautiful'" (p. 303). Genesis 1, he claims, does not bind us to the idea that original creation was free from evil. However, I think the real issue is bigger than a linguistic quibble. Although the origin of evil presents difficult questions for all Christian traditions, the specific challenge facing Southgate's proposal is that God creates the world with evil present *from the beginning.* Can one

---

[15] Not everyone thinks that resolving questions of theodicy is a worthy Christian enterprise—for two noteworthy cautions, see Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

[16] For the same verdict, see N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1927), xxxiii; T. A. Noble, "The Spirit World: A Theological Approach," in *The Unseen World: Christian Reflections on Angels, Demons, and the Heavenly Realm*, ed. Anthony N. S. Lane (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 205.

reconcile this picture with the thrice-holy God (Isa 6:3), the God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)?

Michael Lloyd's two chapters tackle the same challenge of theodicy. While Lloyd accepts the need for a historical fall, he offers several reasons for rejecting the fall of Adam and Eve as the source of *natural* evil. He thinks the more ancient fall of angels instigated widespread disorder and disintegration in the created order. Lloyd's key concept is the idea of "ontological" goodness:

> Creation is not now *as* God intended, but it is still *what* he intended.… Even a fallen world remains ontologically good in the estimation of its Creator. Seen in this way, Genesis 1:31 does not contradict either the findings of modern evolutionary science or the fall-of-the-angels hypothesis" (p. 275).

By appealing to ontological goodness, Lloyd is able to affirm that God's original creation in Genesis 1 and 2 was good even though it was fallen.

Lloyd's chapters are theologically incisive and engagingly written; his angelic fall thesis coupled with ontological goodness offers an intriguing evolutionary theodicy. But one of my concerns with a good-but-fallen *original* creation is that it seems hard to reconcile with Paul's claims about the cosmic significance of Adam's fall. I endorse an angelic fall, of course, but I am not convinced that this event can replace the significance of Adam's disobedience in the arc of the biblical story.[17] For example, in Paul's commentary on Genesis 3:17–19 in Romans 8:19–23, corruption and death in the cosmos result from God's curse of the ground—a consequence of the Adamic, *not* angelic fall.[18]

As an aside, Lloyd's thesis implies that demonic activity is the *causal* origin of pre-Adamic natural evil, including animal violence, predation, and suffering. Such a claim raises all kinds of questions, e.g., by what mechanism did demons instigate pathology and predatory behavior in the animal world? Perhaps Lloyd is agnostic on specific metaphysical details, but a more developed account of these elements—even if speculative—would strengthen his overall argument.[19]

---

[17] The evil serpent in Genesis 3 points to a Satanic influence, an evil presence in the angelic—*not* human—realm; though I can't develop the point here, I take it that a prior angelic fall in heaven is consistent with an originally sinless earth.

[18] According to Joseph Fitzmyer, Paul realizes "that through Adam came not only sin and death (5:12–14), but 'bondage to decay' and 'slavery of corruption,' which affect all *material* creation, even apart from humanity (8:19–23)" (*Romans*, AB 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 505). See also C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1–8*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 1993), 411–12: "The only interpretation of κτίσις in these verses which is really probable seems to be that which understands the reference to be to the sum-total of sub-human nature both animate and inanimate." Fitzmyer and Cranfield are merely representative; for a different (though minority) interpretation of Romans 8:19–23, see Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 92–101.

[19] E.g., see contrasting perspectives of Shandon Guthrie, "Christian Demonology: A New Philosophical Perspective," in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin McGraw and Robert Arp (New York: Routledge, 2017), 59–74; and Travis Dumsday, "Is There a Problem of Special Angelic Action?," *Theology and Science* 16 (2018): 79–81. For a fascinating analysis of this problem, drawing on medieval scholasticism, see Travis Dumsday, "Natural Evil, Evolution, and Scholastic Accounts of the Limits on Demonic Power," *ProEccl* 24 (2015): 71–84.

5. *Theologies of Retrieval*

Some have asked, if Augustine's doctrine of original sin got us into this mess, why not seek patristic help from elsewhere? In particular, Irenaeus's doctrine of creation had developmental elements, prompting many Christian evolutionists to recruit him to their cause. Andrew McCoy's chapter cautions against these superficial attempts to develop an Irenaean understanding of original sin.

But non-fall theodicies will find no help in Irenaeus, for his recapitulation motif is empty without an originating fall of Adam and Eve. One difficulty for Christian evolutionists is that physical death cannot be the result of Adam's fall. At the end of his chapter, McCoy hints at how a more nuanced reading of Irenaeus might provide a way out of this puzzle by reframing evolutionary death "as experiences of human finitude and development and not sin" (p. 171). That means evolutionary suffering arises from creaturely finitude *not* fallenness—and thus, the theological dilemma evaporates. His remarks are suggestive, but they are too brief and raise more questions (as McCoy would be the first to admit).

If not Irenaeus, then *who*? Rosenberg's essay ponders whether we have misunderstood Augustine himself. In his chapter, "Can Nature Be 'Red in Tooth and Claw' in the Thought of Augustine?," Rosenberg argues that for Augustine the fall does not extend to the physical world. Adam's fall was *relational* only, an ever-widening circle of broken relationships with God, others, and our selves. Physical disasters, animal predation, and even death are all part of God's good creation. They may cause us distress and suffering, but they did not arise from Adam's fall.

Rosenberg's argument goes like this. Augustine interpreted the cosmos through the lens of Christian Platonism, so that decay and death are *necessary* features of creaturely reality. "Existence for creatures is not absolute," Rosenberg explains, "and so return toward nonbeing is a 'natural' movement to be expected unless there is direct, divine intervention to sustain the creature's state" (p. 238). Only God has absolute being, all else tends toward nonbeing. When Adam and Eve turned against God the very source of their being, they succumbed to their intrinsic mortality. Augustine understood their creaturely contingency aesthetically: "the whole contains and demonstrates a beauty that both gathers together and transcends its individual parts. The goodness of the whole includes the frailty of individual creatures" (p. 241).[20] The eons of evolutionary violence and disorder are symptoms of creation's finitude.

This chapter is an excellent counterpoint to Lloyd's argument that nature is "in some sense fallen" (p. 246).[21] However, Augustine's view of nature is more nuanced than Rosenberg allows. As Lloyd remarks in another chapter, "Augustine's theodicy did not depend on the resource of a nonbeing approach alone. He also believed in the fall of Adam and Eve and in the fall of the angels" (p. 253n28). In his attempt to correct the received picture of Augustine, I wonder if Rosenberg has swung too far in the other direction. At one point, he writes, "nowhere do I find Augustine saying that the corporeal world has metamorphosed into something else as a result of the fall and is alienated from God" (p. 242). Let me point out, however, a couple of examples where Augustine suggests that the corporeal world *was* transformed by the fall. In his commentary on Genesis 3:18, Augustine granted that thorns existed prior to Adam's fall. They were part of the animal diet and harmless. Yet Augustine believed that the *nature*

---

[20] Rosenberg's account of Augustine recalls the aesthetic argument in Schneider, "Recent Genetic Science and Christian Theology on Human Origins."

[21] For a non-fall theodicy, see Bethany Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy without a Fall* (New York: Routledge, 2019). See also Jon Garvey, *God's Good Earth: The Case for an Unfallen Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019).

of the thorns changed after Adam sinned, now harmful and exacerbating human labor.[22] Rosenberg's relational account downplays the extent of the fall in Augustine's theology. It is true that Augustine, like Aquinas, believed that animal predation was a pre-fall reality, yet he also believed that the fall induced changes in humans *and* in nature itself. Another example: Augustine seems to blame Adam's fall for a wide range of natural evils, including extremes of heat and cold, storms, floods, famine, cannibalism, lightning, thunder, hail, earthquakes, toxic fruit, rabid dogs, and so on.[23] In the end, Rosenberg's chapter leaves out important aspects of Augustine's view of the relation between nature and the fall.

6. Closing Thoughts

How to separate gold from dross has always been the pressing question for doctrinal developments. As John Henry Newman remarked, "it becomes necessary in consequence to assign certain characteristics of faithful developments, which none but faithful developments have, and the presence of which serves as a test to discriminate between them and corruptions."[24] There lies perhaps the central difficulty with revising doctrines of the fall and original sin in light of evolution. By the end, do we still inhabit the same biblical story, the faith which was once delivered unto the saints?

A tricky question. The few essays of theological fine-tuning in this book are more obviously in continuity with the received tradition. The resulting doctrinal model, being only a slight upgrade, will therefore still have deep tensions with the current scientific picture—but then, wasn't that the presenting problem? Have we gained anything? Conversely, the chapters that do make radical changes to received doctrines have relieved the tensions with science, but now the dissonance with tradition and (more importantly) traditional interpretations of Scripture becomes louder, sharper. And round it goes.

Although the more controversial essays make good use of Scripture, my impression is that traditional ways of reading it are downgraded whenever the canons of science pull in a different direction. This tendency—rightly or wrongly—gives the sense of Scripture as inconvenient, a hurdle to circumvent, rather than the trustworthy guide for doctrinal construction. My primary worry, then, is that the more radical revisions in this book tend to undermine doctrines that the church historically considered of high dogmatic rank. Of course, this alone is not an argument against such revisions, but it registers a caution. Tremors in the doctrine of the fall and original sin are only the bellwether, for a theology that absorbs standard evolutionary theory will deform the shape of the gospel story itself (more noticeably than most of the authors acknowledge).[25]

By the close of the book, readers undecided about whether an evolutionary creationism can absorb the theological challenges will be left with lingering questions, which is no doubt unavoidable. A few of the chapters do offer intriguing proposals for how a Christian evolutionist can preserve a recognizable doctrine of sin, yet other chapters are fraught with difficulties. Inevitably, reactions to a book like this will

---

[22] For Augustine's discussion, see *Gen. litt.* 3.18.27, in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City, 2002), 232–33.

[23] Augustine, *Civ.* 22.22.

[24] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1878), 170.

[25] See the remarks by a Christian evolutionist on the challenges evolution presents for creedal theology in Ernst Conradie, "The Christian Faith and Evolution: An Evolving, Unresolved Debate," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39 (2018): 1–14.

depend on one's take on evolutionary theory, on prior theological commitments, and related matters. This volume is a remarkably clear and provocative inquiry into the human person in light of evolutionary questions. It repays careful reading. Yet for reasons hinted at above, I remain unpersuaded.[26]

---

[26] My thanks to Mitch Stokes for helpful feedback on an earlier draft.

Do Formal Equivalent Translations Reflect a Higher View of Plenary, Verbal Inspiration?

— **William D. Mounce** —

Bill Mounce is founder and president of <u>BiblicalTraining.org</u>, serves on the Committee for Bible Translation, and is the author of Basics of Biblical Greek*.*

******

Abstract: The article begins by establishing five categories of translation theory and argues that functional translations like the NIV do in fact reflect the meaning of every Greek word, but not in the same way as formal equivalent translations do. Therefore, formal equivalent translations cannot claim a higher view of inspiration.

******

In this article I'll address the claim that formal equivalent translations show a higher view of inspiration since they try to translate every Greek and Hebrew word.[1] But I need to start with a few disclaimers. (1) I was the New Testament chair of the ESV for ten years. (2) I have been on the CBT (Committee on Bible Translation) that controls the text of the NIV since 2010. (3) As you might suspect, I'm going to use Greek examples, even though the issues raised by translating Hebrew are much more severe than translating Greek.

1. Categories of Bible Translations

First, let's agree on our categories of translations. Much of the current misunderstanding is due to putting Bible translations in the wrong category, or putting two translations together that should be kept separate. I believe there are five, not two or three, categories of translations, and have written in detail on this point.

1. The category of "literal" translations should only include interlinears, and in fact I don't like the term "literal" at all since we use the word in a way that is contrary to its actual meaning. The word "literal," in any English dictionary, literally means "without embellishment," and it should never be used in a discussion of translations.

There is no such thing as a literal meaning of a word—what does λόγος "literally" mean?—no such thing as a literal translation of a verse, and therefore there is no such thing as a "literal translation" or even an "essentially literal" translation. Even interlinears are technically not literal but are, to some degree,

---

[1] An earlier version of this article was delivered at the ETS Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, 14 November 2018.

interpretive. The minute you translate τοῦ θεοῦ as "of God," you are no longer literal but interpreting a genitive noun construction with a prepositional phrase and dropping ὁ, a word that actually has no precise equivalent in English.

No competent translator should say that their translation is literal. The problem is that the folks in our churches mistakenly equate "literal" with "word-for-word" and think that means "accurate." It is our responsibility to help people see the error in this thinking.[2]

2. "Formal equivalent" refers to translations that show a strong preference for replicating the form of the Greek and Hebrew, and only move to meaning when translating words doesn't make sense. This category includes the NASB, ESV, CSB (to some extent), KJV, RSV, and NRSV (except for gender language). I also use the term "direct translation" for this category.

The ESV marketers have invented a category called "essentially literal," which only means they are more willing than others to leave the original words and translate the meaning of the words. However, when Grudem[3] includes the NASB and RSV in this category, I wonder if there are any translations left for the category of "formal equivalent." I suspect that "essentially literal" is an attempt to abandon the linguistic baggage of formal equivalence. For the purpose of this paper, I place the ESV, along with many other fine translations, in the category of "formal equivalent," acknowledging their commitment to translate the *meaning* of every word and not just every word.

3. "Functional equivalent" refers to the translation process that places primary emphasis on the meaning of each of the original words understood in context. These translations are more willing to move to meaning more quickly than formal equivalent translations, but they still try to honor the structure of the original if possible. This is where the NIV and NET fit.

Some people include the NLT in this category, but that is far from accurate. Whatever terms you use, the NIV and the NLT are fundamentally different and must be kept in separate categories.

4. "Natural language" translations are those that follow the teaching of Eugene Nida and his emphasis on the reader's response. For the sake of clarity, and since Nida created the term "dynamic equivalent," I use the term "dynamic" for natural language translations, not functional equivalent translations. This is where the NLT belongs, and much of the criticism of functional equivalent translations really belongs in this category.

5. I have no term for the fifth category other than perhaps "paraphrase," but even that is an improper title since the word "paraphrase" refers to the simplification of a text in the *same* language. Thus, the original *Living Bible* is a true paraphrase of the ASV, and I also put *The Message* here as well.

In light of these clarifications, here are my questions. (1) What are the implications of the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration in relationship to translation theory, if any? (2) Is translation about translating every *word*, or is it about translating the *meaning* of every word?

---

[2] For more on this topic, see my paper, "The Myth of Literal Translation," http://doxa.billmounce.com/02-Myth_Literal_Translation.pdf.

[3] Wayne Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God? Why Plenary Inspiration Favors Essential Literal Bible Translation," in *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 30.

2. Plenary Verbal Inspiration

Second Timothy 3:16 defines "inspiration" as the doctrine that Scripture ultimately comes from God, that it is "God-breathed." 2 Peter 1:21 adds that the authors were in some way "carried along (φερόμενοι) by the Holy Spirit."

I believe this is all the further we dare go in defining what inspiration *must* mean. It would be nice if Peter had defined what he meant by "carried along," but φέρω is too general a word to give us any specificity. The idea that God determined every single word and every grammatical construction simply goes beyond what Scripture says about itself, and we should be cautious at being more specific than Scripture is.

2.1. Plenary Inspiration

"Plenary inspiration" is the view that all of Scripture is God-breathed. This is in accordance with Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, and it is included in ETS statement of faith: "The Bible alone, and the Bible *in its entirety*, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs" (italics mine). In my commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, I defend the translation "All Scripture is God-breathed" rather than "every Scripture that is inspired," and I suggest that translating πᾶς as "every" is even more emphatic; every single statement and affirmation in Scripture is God-breathed.[4]

But does this mean that every single *word* should be represented in translation, or does it mean that the *meaning* of every single word should be represented in translation? I have two responses.

1. Inspiration applies to the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, not the English. As Mark Strauss wrote several years ago, "All participants in this debate believe that all the *Hebrew and Greek words* of Scripture are fully inspired. The question we must ask is whether the *meaning* of those Greek and Hebrew words is most accurately rendered in English by following a literal method or a more idiomatic one."[5]

Having been on both the ESV and NIV committees, I can assure you that all of us believe that all of the Hebrew and Greek words are inspired. Where we differ is in how to express those words in meaningful English.

2. No translation explicitly translates every word. Formal equivalent translations try to translate every single word, but they are admittedly not successful in that effort. I am thankful that Grudem agrees on this point, as we will see.

- Who translates ὁ θεός as "the God"? Rather, they all drop the article.
- Who translates every μέν or δέ or initial καί?
- What translation always indicates the expected answer of a question prefaced with οὐ or μή?

The answer is, of course, not a single one. So in what sense is any translation "literal" when in fact every single verse in the Bible is not translated word-for-word? Despite a translation team's best intentions or a publisher's marketing or the misunderstandings running through our churches, no

---

[4] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 565–66.

[5] Mark Strauss, "Do Literal Bible Versions Show Greater Respect for Plenary Inspiration? (A response to Wayne Grudem)" (paper presented at the ETS Annual Meeting, Valley Forge, PA, 16 November 2005).

English translation translates every Greek word but in fact omits thousands of words (and as we will see, adds thousands more).

I find myself in good company with Grudem when he says the *meaning* of every word must be translated.[6] He is not asking for every Greek word to be explicitly translated. He is saying that if a word expresses a specific meaning, then that meaning must make its way into the translation. Grudem even admits that there doesn't have to be a one-to-one correspondence, and that sometimes multiple Greek words are best translated by a single English word, or even by punctuation. Given that this is the case, no one should insist that every Greek word must have a corresponding English word.

Personal experience has shown that both the ESV and the NIV translators have an extremely high regard for every word of Scripture. The difference is in how they view the relationship between words and meaning. I watched the ESV agonize over how to translate as many of the words as possible in a faithful and meaningful and consistent manner. And I watch as the CBT agonize over how to accurately translate all the meaning conveyed by all the words in a faithful and understandable way.

It is important to state up front that plenary inspiration does not of necessity require every word to be explicitly translated. If no translation explicitly translates every word, if every translation omits thousands of Greek words, then this is not an appropriate application of the doctrine of plenary inspiration.

2.2. Verbal Inspiration

Article VI of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy says, "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, *down to the very words of the original*, were given by divine inspiration" (italics mine). It then goes on to say in Article VIII, "We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use *the very words that He chose*, overrode their personalities" (italics mine).[7]

I find myself troubled by this statement, primarily because it claims something that the Bible does not claim for itself, and hence I am under no obligation to accept it, just as many evangelical scholars chose not to sign the Chicago Statement. This is not the place to go into a detailed, theological discussion of verbal inspiration, but allow me to share a few ideas.

I don't believe that God inspired the authors with vague, general ideas, which the biblical authors may or may not have accurately expressed in words. I agree with Article III of the Chicago Statement that says, "We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity."

We often talk about the theory of "dynamic inspiration." We affirm that God superintended the writing process, but not at the expense of the author's writing style. John wrote as John thought and wrote. Peter wrote as Peter thought and wrote. But God insured that what they wrote was what he wanted said.

This requires an acceptance of mystery, as do many of the beliefs we hold—such as the Trinity and the incarnation. The authors write, and God ensures that what they write is not only true but that it is what he wanted to communicate. But that does not require me to believe that God controlled every

---

[6] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 20.

[7] https://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf.

word choice that was made. If that were the case, then we must all abandon any sense of mystery and accept the dictation theory of inspiration for all biblical texts.

I have always been comfortable with the concept of mystery.

- It is a mystery that my wife loves me.
- It is a mystery that an airplane can sit in the sky or that flash memory actually works.
- It is a mystery that each individual, elect or not, is responsible for his/her own decisions.
- And it is a mystery how God did not override the authors' personalities and yet insured that what they said was what he wanted to be said.

But to say that God chose every word, in essence imitating the author's style, removes all mystery; in that case, I think we would need to be honest and say we believe the Bible was dictated. It does no good to hide behind the cloak of "mystery" if God picks every word.

Think about this. When God inspired Luke to record the parable of the prodigal son, what did he inspire Luke to write in 15:20 about the father? That the father "embraced him" (ESV, NASB), "threw his arms around his neck" (CSB), or "hugged his son" (NET)? Or did God inspire Luke to write specifically ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ?

The first option, that God inspired Luke to say that the father hugged his son, makes perfectly good sense to me and does not go beyond what Scripture says about itself. The second option, that God in essence dictated every single word and every single grammatical construction imitating the author's personal writing style, is unnecessary.

It certainly sounds good in an evangelical setting to say that God determined every single Greek and Hebrew word, but it must be acknowledged that Scripture does not say this about itself, and it is significantly beyond the meaning of "carried along by the Holy Spirit" in 2 Peter 1:21.

"Verbal inspiration" means that the Bible is God's revelation in human language. There is an element of mystery as to how this came to be. The biblical writers got it absolutely right. There is no need to define the doctrine any further.

The implication of all this to our current topic is that if God did not dictate every word to the biblical authors, then it *lessens* the argument that every word must be *explicitly* translated. If God inspired the authors to write in their own style, and superintended the process so that what was written was what he wanted said, then the issue is not the *words* but the *meaning conveyed by the words* that must be conveyed in translation.

3. The Nature of Language

The second topic I want to address is the nature of language and translation. The point I will be making is that all true translations are meaning-based, not word-based.

But first, I should affirm what we all know: the doctrine of inspiration extends only to the autographs; no translation is inspired. Therefore, my previous thoughts could actually be irrelevant to the question at hand. Even if God did determine every single Greek and Hebrew word, that potentially has no necessary bearing on the issue of translation. The Greek is inspired, not the English. Inspiration asserts something about the *source* of the words; translation theory asserts something about communicating the *meaning* of every word.

We all implicitly agree that the purpose of translation is not to merely convey the words from one language to another; otherwise, the only English Bibles that would be for sale in book stores would be interlinears.

As Grudem states, the purpose of an "essential literal translation" is to render "the *meaning* of every word in the original language, understood correctly in its context, into its nearest English equivalent" using "ordinary English word order and style, as far as that is possible without distorting the *meaning* of the original."[8] Of course, there is a sliding scale, and some translations lean more toward the word side (formal equivalent) and others lean more toward the meaning side (functional equivalent), but all true translations ultimately translate meaning, not just the words.

To be sure, at a practical level, formal and functional translations tend to translate word-for-word until going word-for-word makes no sense. Then what do they all do? They all look at the *meaning* of the words and translate *meaning*. So in what real sense is any translation "literal"? And does this not prove that *meaning* is primary, and the form of expressing the meaning is secondary?

The RSV's policy was, "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." In other words, stick with the words until they don't make sense, and then translate what they mean. But does this not prove the point, that meaning is primary to form, and words are translated only when they convey meaning?

Grudem defines an "essentially literal" translation as one that "*translates the meaning of every word in the original language*, understood correctly in its context, into its nearest English equivalent and attempts to express the result with ordinary English word order and style, as far as that is possible without distorting the meaning of the original."[9] What a great definition of "*functional* equivalence."

4. Specific Issues in Bible Translation

1. Frequency. How often does a formal equivalent translation leave the words and translate meaning? Once a page? Once a paragraph? Once a sentence? Once a phrase? When is any translation "*essentially* literal" or "*highly* literal"? I would challenge anyone to find a single sentence in any translation of Greek or Hebrew that explicitly translates every word and every grammatical construction word-for-word. So, if no translation actually translates word-for-word all the time, then why do the folks in our churches believe they do? Why do marketers imply that they do?

2. Words. The nature of language is such that words have no "literal" meaning. The definitions we teach in first-year Greek grammars are merely glosses, approximations of the main uses of the word in various contexts. So, if it is not words but the *meaning of those words* that matters, there is no reason to insist that every word be *explicitly* translated.

Take the issue of Greek word order. Default Greek order is conjunction, verb, subject, direct object (if the verb is transitive). Greek wants an initial conjunction to indicate the relationship of a sentence to its preceding context. English doesn't do this; it lets the sequence of sentences carry the thought, indicating minor and major breaks with punctuation and paragraph breaks. In fact, it is incorrect English grammar to begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction.

Is it therefore wrong, for example, to not translate an initial καί or δέ or even γάρ? No, since in essence they are often redundant because of how we hear sequence, and because many are translated

---

[8] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 20, emphasis added.

[9] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 20.

by punctuation. And yet the 1984 NIV was often attacked for not translating every γάρ, even when γάρ was used to merely indicate continuation.

It is our responsibility, in our teaching and preaching and writing, to let our people understand this fact about the concept of "literal" translation. When someone says, "the Bible says 'flesh,'" we need to help them see that the Bible says σάρξ, and σάρξ has many meanings determined by context. I will never forget the time in a translation meeting when an excellent scholar was arguing for his translation. He concluded by pounding his fist on the table and said, "and the Bible says 'brother.'" I concluded my argument to the contrary by pounding my fist on the table (I probably shouldn't have done that) and saying, "and the Bible says ἀδελφός." I lost the vote, but I was right.

3. Added words. If someone sees verbal inspiration as God dictating every single word, and hence thinks that our role in translation is to explicitly translate every single word, then is it not wrong to add in *new words*, whether you use italics or not?

For example, we know that Greek often does not require a direct object when English does. Is it wrong to add in the direct object? What translation doesn't break Ephesians 1:3–14 into multiple sentences and add in the necessary words? If every word is specifically chosen by God, then is it not wrong to add more words to God's revelation in our translations?

4. Phrases. How do we translate phrases? Do we translate every word in the phrase, or do we translate the meaning of the phrase?

Consider Romans 6:1–2 in the KJV. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid" (μὴ γένοιτο). In a translation that most people feel is word-for-word, this is a wonderfully dynamic translation. Neither the word "God" or the word "forbid" occurs in the Greek, and yet "God forbid" is the strongest negation in the English language and hence does the best job at translating Paul's meaning.

Proper translation looks at all the words in the phrase and translates the phrase's meaning. No translation translates μὴ γένοιτο as "not it be wished." They say things like "May it never be!" (NASB); "By no means!" (ESV); "Absolutely not!" (CSB). Unfortunately, the anemic translation, "Of course not!" (NLT), uncharacteristically misses the force of the phrase. But the point is, they are all translating meaning, not words.

5. Idioms. Everyone agrees that idioms cannot be translated word-for-word, but in saying that once again we see that everyone agrees that meaning is primary to form.

The ESV of Acts 20:37 reads, "And there was much weeping on the part of all; they *embraced* Paul and kissed him" (ἐπιπεσόντες ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τοῦ Παύλου). No one would translate that they "threw themselves on Paul's neck," which, according to the footnote in the NASB, is what the text "literally" says. If this is what the text *literally* says, then why is the *literal* translation in the footnote?

(By the way, can we please pressure publishers to stop putting the word "literally" in footnotes? If that is what the Greek "literally" says, and if the translation claims to be a "literal" or "essentially literal" translation, then those footnotes should be in the text. But since those footnotes rarely make any sense, can we pressure publishers to be honest and put something like "Greek, 'threw themselves on Paul's neck'" in the footnote? I wouldn't hold my breath.)

6. Metaphors. The challenge in translating metaphors is whether they are understandable in the target language, whether in the language's active or passive vocabulary. Is the metaphor alive or dead? If they are not understandable, then the metaphors must be interpreted. After all, the purpose of

translation is to convey the message of God to a sick and dying world. What good would it do to repeat a meaningless metaphor?

I am a little old-fashioned at this point; apparently, I hear words like a much older person does. "Behold" makes good sense to me. Translating περιπατέω as "walk" and not "live" is my preference. And when Jesus says μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί (John 15:4), I think it is more accurate to translate "Abide in me," rather than "Remain in me."

However, the real question is whether or not the metaphor is understandable in the receptor language; in my experience, there is a wide range of opinion as to whether a certain metaphor is alive or dead. In 2 John 12, the ESV reads, "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk *face to face*, so that our joy may be complete." "Face to face" is a dynamic translation of the Greek, στόμα πρὸς στόμα, "mouth to mouth," but that metaphor would have a rather different connotation in American English!

What about the account of the evangelism happening in Antioch, and "the news about them *reached the ears* of the church at Jerusalem" (NASB, Acts 11:22). The ESV says, "the report of this *came to the ears* of the church in Jerusalem." When the NIV translates, "news of this *reached* the church in Jerusalem," are they dropping out the word "ear"? Of course not, no more than the NASB can be faulted for translating ἠκούσθη as "reached" and the ESV for using "came," two English words that you would never find in BDAG's definitions of ἀκούω. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem *heard* about God's activity in Antioch. That's what the Greek means. That's what God inspired. Greek uses one set of words to convey this meaning, and translations use another set of words to convey the same meaning.

It is at this point I must seriously disagree with Grudem. In his chapter in the book *Translating Truth*, he has a section on the "missing words" in dynamic translations.[10] While his critique is primarily on what I call "natural language" translations, his conclusion is that the NIV (1984) is unreliable. Why would Grudem critique the NLT and then draw a conclusion about the NIV? Why would he critique the TNIV and state his conclusion about the NIV?

He lists nine "missing words," like God bearing the "sword," and the "wrath" of God.[11] However, in only one of the nine does the TNIV not keep the metaphor ("by his hands)." The CBT apparently thought the metaphor was dead; Grudem thinks it is alive. However, in three of the nine examples of missing words, Grudem acknowledges that the TNIV keeps the "missing words," and five other times the TNIV keeps the "missing words" and *yet he does not even acknowledge that fact.* So, the TNIV keeps eight of Grudem's nine missing words.

It is wholly inappropriate to critique natural language translations, to not acknowledge the facts of the NIV and its significant difference from natural language translations, and then draw a negative conclusion about the NIV. I must say that I was disappointed in Grudem's conclusion that "although the NIV is not a thoroughly dynamic translation, there is so much dynamic equivalence influence in the NIV that I cannot teach theology or ethics from it either."[12] What is disappointing is his misuse of the data. Five out of the nine times he does not even admit that the TNIV keeps the metaphors, and the TNIV keeps eight out of the nine "missing words."

---

[10] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 30–45.

[11] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 31–34.

[12] Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God?," 48.

When it comes to metaphors, every translation committee must decide whether the metaphor is alive or dead. This is an exegetical judgment; it is not an issue of one's view of inspiration. Grudem here is confusing hermeneutics with translation theory.

7. Syntactic Correspondence. It is often said that translations should honor the syntax of the Greek. (Good luck doing that with Hebrew.) If God inspired the author to use a participle, then we should use a participle. If God inspired a prepositional phrase, we should not turn it into a relative clause. The problem of course is that in reality not a single translation always reflects the underlying structure. Every single one abandons syntactic correspondence when necessary to convey meaning.

We see this for example when syntax is changed to complete an anacoluthon such as 1 Timothy 1:3. Both the NASB and the ESV change the infinitive προσμεῖναι to an imperative. "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, *remain on* at Ephesus." It is also seen when Greek stylistically writes long sentences in its hypotactic style, and English must shorten the sentences and write in its paratactic style. Syntax must be changed.

I favor syntactic correspondence when it accurately conveys meaning. I especially want to know when a verbal form is dependent or independent. But the point of translation is meaning, and sometimes meaning is best conveyed with different parts of speech.

8. Context. Finally, the fact that literary and cultural context is so important in determining meaning should caution us from placing an undue focus on individual words.

Suppose the year is 2418, and you are an African archaeologist supervising a dig in what is now called "Tell New York." You come across a scrap of paper with the words, "You dirty rat." How would you translate it? It's not the individual words that would matter as much as the phrase's *cultural* context.

- If the parchment came from a truck that had equipment used to kill rodents, you would think the driver found a rat that was dirty.
- If it was from a movie script about Al Capone, you would realize that it indicates scorn and aggression.
- If it was a note between two friends playing cards, you would realize that it was actually an expression of endearment, expressing the loser's frustration at losing to a friend.

When I speak to university students, I like to gauge their literary sensitivities with two words. If I say "plethora," some of the older faculty laugh and the students stare with blank expressions, because they are unaware of that great cinematic achievement, "The Three Amigos" and its line, "A plethora of piñatas." But if I say that something is "inconceivable," the roles are reversed, the students are surprised that I am familiar with the cult classic "The Princess Bride," and the faculty scratch their head in bewilderment.

Words have meaning only in context—sometimes a literary context and other times a cultural context. All translators agree that context is essential for faithful translation, and all recognize that our knowledge of cultural context is limited (extremely limited in the case of Hebrew). But my argument is that it is not just words that we should be translating, but the meaning of the words informed by their context, both literary and cultural. This is functional equivalence.

5. Conclusion

Before I conclude, I want to add a final note. I understand that a word and its meaning are not separated. Words and their meanings are tied together in a complicated mesh. But I have been writing this way in order to drive the point home that all translations are, to one degree or another, meaning-based.

It is not appropriate for any translation to say it is "literal" or "essentially literal." There is no such thing as a "literal" translation. No word has a "literal" meaning. There is not a single verse in any Bible that goes word-for-word, not a single translation that translates every single Greek word with an English word. If one translates eight out of ten Greek words, why would that person think that they have a higher view of inspiration than the person who translates seven out of ten? Given the significant freedom each and every translation exercises with the Greek and especially the Hebrew, should not we all admit that we translate thought-for-thought, trying as hard as we can to communicate *every single piece of meaning* possible, and if possible replicating the form of the original?

Plenary inspiration requires us to believe that every piece of meaning conveyed by all the words of Scripture is true. Verbal inspiration requires us to believe that the words used by the human authors accurately reflect the mind of God. Therefore, if I wanted to be argumentative, I would argue that translations focused on *meaning* show a higher view of inspiration because they are not content to use words that are vague or confusing or unnecessarily ambiguous. They work harder to convey the inspired meaning given to the authors by God.

But every translator I know, which is many of them, has an extremely high view of Scripture, and is doing his or her best to accurately convey all the meaning of the original text. I would never confuse translation theory with a high or low view of inspiration.

Power for Prayer through the Psalms: Cassiodorus's Interpretation of the Honey of Souls

— Matthew Swale —

Matt Swale teaches high school Bible at Cornerstone School in Birmingham, Alabama, and is a PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

******

Abstract: Exegesis, prayer, and spiritual formation converge in the Psalms commentary written by Cassiodorus (490–584). Each psalm's exegesis ends with a "conclusion" considering the implications for morality, doctrine, or prayer. This study focuses on how Cassiodorus's exegesis of the Psalms provides power for prayer. First, Cassiodorus's rich expositions of the Psalms of Ascent and Psalm 142 illustrate his approach to the Psalter as God's provision of superior, life-changing words. Second, prayer flows from Cassiodorus's handling of individual psalms in four ways: prayerful exegesis, prayer exemplars, prayer templates, and prayer as the means to psalmic formation.

******

Now a truism, theological educators periodically lament the bifurcation of exegesis and spiritual formation.[1] Ironically, and at considerable cost, this "rupture"[2] extends to the biblical book that provided the "backbone"[3] for Christian devotion for the bulk of the last two millennia—the Psalms. Many who seek to repair the fissure do so despite their exegetical method rather than through it.[4] Precritical exegesis, especially that of the Psalms, possessed no breach to reconcile.[5] In

---

[1] Cf. Bruce Waltke, "Exegesis and the Spiritual Life: Theology as Spiritual Formation," *Crux* 30.3 (1994): 28–35.

[2] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 509.

[3] Ray Van Neste, "Introduction," in *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, ed. Ray Van Neste and C. Richard Wells (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), 1. On the cost, Bonhoeffer says, "Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power" [*Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1970), 26].

[4] Childs, *Introduction*, 509. He argues that this ignores "real exegetical and hermeneutical problems raised by the historical critical approach."

[5] They seamlessly applied their exegetical work on the Psalter to "apologetic, doctrinal and pastoral purposes," according to Craig A. Blaising, "Introduction," in *Psalms 1–50*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin, ACCS 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), xvii.

part because their exegetical method provided seamlessly for devotion, perhaps contemporary Psalms exegetes need premodern conversation partners if the fracture will be healed.[6]

Cassiodorus deserves consideration as one such conversation partner for three reasons. First, as a hinge-figure he either channels or influences the entire precritical era of church history. As the first and only surviving complete Psalms commentary in Latin from the patristic era, his three-volume *Explanation of the Psalms* (*Exp. Ps.*) intentionally distills the major Psalms interpretations preceding him.[7] This work influenced medieval monastic interaction with the Psalms more than nearly any other work.[8] Luther cites Cassiodorus frequently, demonstrating high regard for his exegesis of the Psalms.[9] Second, Cassiodorus offers unmined Psalms exegesis—only one book-length study exists in English of his most influential work.[10] Third, he addresses the contemporary need noted above. Each psalm in his commentary concludes with a section synthesizing its exegetical content with spiritual formation.

After a brief biography of Cassiodorus, his approach to the Psalms will be surveyed, followed by an examination of the commentary sections germane to the intersection of interpretation and "the formation of Christians"[11] through prayer. Upon surveying and categorizing prayer-related commentary portions according to their foci (see Table 1), it becomes apparent that Cassiodorus demonstrates and

---

[6] David C. Steinmetz argues that precritical exegesis "made it possible for the church to pray directly and without qualification" even the most difficult psalms ("The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *ThTo* 37 [1980–1981], 30). He suggests that the bifurcation mentioned above will continue until "the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy" (38).

[7] Augustine's *Enarrations* are homilies rather than commentary, but that is the only other Latin work from the era on the whole Psalter according to Martin R. P. McGuire, review of Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, *CBQ* 21 (1959): 547. James J. O'Donnell notes the pioneering of Cassiodorus's commentary for the era (*Cassiodorus* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979], 244). Cassiodorus intentionally incorporates Ambrose, Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, and the concepts of Athanasius (P. G. Walsh, "Introduction," in *Cassiodorus: Explanations of the Psalms*, [New York: Paulist, 1990], 1:5–6, 19). McGuire notes his use of Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great as well (review of Cassiodorus, 547).

[8] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 243. Sought after by monastic libraries, it "possesses intrinsic value, in that it has fostered the spiritual formation of many generations of monastic writers" (Walsh, "Introduction," 19). Susan Gillingham places him alongside Augustine as one of the "great influencers in shaping later medieval interpretation of the psalms" (*Psalms through the Centuries* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2012], 1:58). It could be argued that his work influenced more than Augustine's, because he made Augustine's interpretive views more accessible than the massive *Enarrations* would have otherwise been, as a "much bulkier and less well-organized collection of sermons" (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 243).

[9] After Augustine and Jerome, Cassiodorus appears to be the next most cited patristic-era voice in Luther's Psalms volumes. A searchable form of his five volumes of Psalms lectures indicates that Cassiodorus's interpretation is explicitly cited by Luther 37 times in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Vols. 10–14 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955–1976).

[10] "Because … it tells us more about the Psalms than about Gothic or monastic history, it has been the least fully studied of all Cassiodorus' works" (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 136). Paradoxically, O'Donnell explains that it "was the most successful of Cassiodorus' own works" (243). Three German dissertations exist on his Psalms work (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 136n6), and recently Derek A. Olsen published the first book-length study in English, *Honey of Souls: Cassiodorus and the Interpretation of the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2017).

[11] This is Cassiodorus's term (*Explanation of the Psalms*, trans. P. G. Walsh (New York: Paulist, 1991), 2:209). The commentary implies that he believes this is a grace-wrought, Bible-informed, prayerful, character-shaping process.

prioritizes the intention of the Psalter to *form* its readers theologically, morally, and spiritually. He demonstrates this third intention, spiritual formation, through the way his interpretive work flows into and informs prayer. Such formational exegesis aims at total Christian formation through psalm-shaped prayer.

1. Biographical Overview

Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator (490–584)[12] "started life as a wealthy scion of one of Italy's great families and ended it as a simple monk."[13] Three roles demarcate the major periods of his life: public official, refugee writer, and monastic leader.

1.1. **Cassiodorus the Public Official (507–539)**

A fourth generation public servant for Roman rulers, Cassiodorus's thirty-year government career began when a speech in praise of the king earned him a job as ghostwriter[14] for the Gothic Theodoric the Great (507–511) and culminated in the highest civilian position available in Rome, *praetorian prefect* (533–538).[15] At the end of this career he compiled 468 of his bureaucratic correspondences into the *Variae*, one of his most studied works for its window into Rome at the time.[16] Two developments demonstrate this enigmatic period of his life. First, in his role as Master of Offices[17] (523–527) he succeeded the famous philosopher and theologian Boethius (480–524), who was executed on questionable allegations of treason.[18] Some historians speculate that Cassiodorus contributed to this plot.[19] Amid often tumultuous leadership changes, the "habitually submissive" Cassiodorus always emerged unscathed and somehow favored.[20]

Second, in the early 530s Cassiodorus evidences growing spiritual interests. In a ghostwritten letter for king Athalaric, Cassiodorus describes himself as growing in religious character through sacred reading of the Scriptures (i.e. *lectio divina*).[21] During the papacy of Agapetus (535–536), Cassiodorus

---

[12] Only government service dates and a few authorship dates are firmly fixed. The range of possible dates for his birth is 484–90 and for his death is 584–90 (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, xv).

[13] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 62.

[14] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 62.

[15] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 18–20; Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 69.

[16] M. Simonetti, "Cassiodorus, Flavius Magnus Aurelius," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald J. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 299.

[17] This was something like a modern-day chief of staff. He oversaw all administration of court and provincial officials, soldiers in the royal household, foreign affairs germane to the royal household, and the royal food supply (Charles Kannengiesser, "Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans [Oxford: Blackwell, 2001], 28).

[18] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 68.

[19] "There is no interpretation of Cassiodorus' actions that fully exonerate him from all suspicion of having participated in the downfall of Boethius, if only by profiting personally from promotion in Boethius' stead" (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 30).

[20] Simonetti, "Cassiodorus," 298.

[21] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 81. Olsen explains that this did not yet connote the monastic method of spiritual reading, but it certainly entailed growing disciplined interaction with the Bible.

lamented Rome's complete lack of schools for theological training. His lobbying secured finances but failed due to war, but Agapetus built what seems to be a library meant for the failed school.[22]

Spiritual growth culminated in Cassiodorus's self-proclaimed *conversion* in the late 530s. Historians associate this with his literary turning point from governmental to theological literature in the writing of *On the Soul* (538).[23] In early medieval Christianity *conversio* could mean (a) a withdrawal from public vocation to "an explicitly religious way of life" such as monasticism[24] or (b) simply a "profound alteration of interests."[25] Cassiodorus seems to have begun with the latter and led to the former.

1.2. **Cassiodorus the Refugee Writer (540–554)**

The year 540 began with Cassiodorus in the early stages of his three volume *Explanation of the Psalms* in Ravenna, Italy. He "thrust aside the anxieties of official positions and the flavour of secular cares with their harmful taste… [and] sampled that honey of souls, the divine psalter … to drink in sweet draughts of the words of salvation after the deep bitterness of my active life" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:23). The year ended, however, with him living as a refugee in Constantinople after Justinian's Byzantine forces conquered that region of Italy—it is not known if Cassiodorus went voluntarily.[26] He held no public positions there but closely associated with and received commendation from the "captive pontiff" Vigilius,[27] to whom he dedicated the Psalms commentary.[28] The end of the Gothic War allowed him to return to Italy around 554.

Cassiodorus probably spent most of his time in Constantinople writing the *Explanation of the Psalms* (540–548).[29] This proved providential. The commentary intends to distill Augustine's sermons on the Psalms, but he only personally possessed twenty of these sermons.[30] The imperial library in Constantinople, however, provided him with all or most of Augustine's sermons. This accounts for the volume of references to Augustine in Cassiodorus's commentary. *Explanation of the Psalms* frequently references monastic rhythms of life, indicating either that he had already founded his monastery or that

---

[22] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 31, 182–84, 192.

[23] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 111; S. J. B. Barnish, "The Work of Cassiodorus after His Conversion," *Latomus* 48 (1989): 157. *On the Soul* is an "encyclopedic" work on the nature and destiny of the soul essentially distills the views of Tertullian, Augustine, and others (Simonetti, "Cassiodorus," 299). Perhaps Cassiodorus intentionally mimicked his theological hero, Augustine, whose first theological writing after baptism was on the soul also—*De immortalitate animae* (Peter R. L. Brown, Augustine *of Hippo: A Biography* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 64).

[24] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 111.

[25] Barnish, "The Work of Cassiodorus," 158.

[26] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 105–6.

[27] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 78.

[28] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 143.

[29] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, xv. This is not a scholarly consensus, but he argues persuasively from internal and external evidence that Constantinople is where most of the commentary was written and where it was finished (170–73).

[30] *Exp. Ps.* 1:23. When writing the *Institutes* from the monastery, Cassiodorus says he only possessed "two decades" (20 psalms) of Augustine's homilies on the Psalms (*Institutes of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul*, trans. James W. Halporn [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004], 120).

he intended to build it and use the commentary for its enrichment upon his return home.[31] He probably also secured many of the volumes that would make up the monastery's substantial library while in Constantinople.[32]

1.3. **Cassiodorus the Monastic Leader (555–584)**

Either during a lull in public service in the 530s or after his return from Constantinople, Cassiodorus founded the Vivarium monastery on an idyllic family estate in his remote hometown of Squillace in Italy.[33] He retired there in 555. O'Donnell suggests three purposes for this: (1) at about age 65, he needed rest from a tiresome career; (2) his own growing quest to know God; (3) his failed educational plan in Rome could be fulfilled in a monastic setting.[34]

Two writings during this time typify his monastic mission. The first, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning,* contains two volumes meant to be a classical education self-study equipping monks to apprehend and perpetuate the Christian intellectual tradition.[35] This work surrogated his failed vision for Christian education: "since I could not [build a school in Rome] because of raging wars … I was moved by divine love to devise for you, with God's help, those introductory books to take the place of a teacher."[36] He intended for the Psalms commentary to provide a companion volume, viewing the Psalms as "the ideal starting place for literacy, uniquely suited as a text from which to learn to read and to acquire the deeper arts of… learning."[37]

---

[31] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus,* 173–74.

[32] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus,* 192. O'Donnell argues for this based on the uncharacteristically large library and its catalogue of volumes written in Greek.

[33] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus,* 190–93. Cassiodorus describes the monastery as safe, secluded, self-sustaining, surrounded by the Mediterranean, filled with great fishing spots and man-made baths fed by springs (*Institutes,* 162).

[34] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus,* 222.

[35] Barnish, "The Work of Cassiodorus," 177. The *Institutes* includes functions like a syllabus with recommended reading for hermeneutics, theology, and the seven liberal arts of classical Roman education (Simonetti, "Cassiodorus," 299).

[36] Cassiodorus, *Institutes,* 105.

[37] Olsen, *Honey of Souls,* 148. Although the English edition does not contain it in the text of the commentary, this intention on Cassiodorus's part is evident in an introductory key explaining an extensive system of marginal notes (also not in the English edition) meant to teach figures of speech, rhetorical devices, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy from the text of the Psalms commentary (Olsen, *Honey of Souls,* 148). The English edition does, however, include appendices that locate Cassiodorus's extensive in-text use of terms germane to logic, rhetoric, etc. (cf. *Exp. Ps.* 1:588–95). Merging rhetoric with exegesis makes Cassiodorus's commentary "far more original than most of his modern readers have recognized," according to Rita Copeland, "Cassiodorus' Hermeneutics: The Psalms and the Arts of Language," in *Patristic Theories of Interpretation: The Latin Fathers,* ed. Tarmo Toom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 172. For an extended treatment of this aspect of *Explanation of the Psalms,* see P. G. Walsh, "Cassiodorus Teaches Logic Through the Psalms," in *Nova & Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton,* ed. John Petruccione (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 226–34.

The second work was the last he wrote around age 93, *De Orthographia*, which is essentially a book on spelling and grammar abridging several Roman grammarians.[38] Without this, monks could not fulfill what he saw as a primary goal at Vivarium:

> Of all the tasks that can be achieved among you by physical labour, what pleases me most … is the work of scribes if they write correctly. By repeated reading of Scripture they instruct their minds and by writing they spread the beneficial teachings of the Lord far and wide. A blessed purpose, a praiseworthy zeal, to preach to men with the hand, to set tongues free with one's fingers and in silence to give mankind salvation and to fight with pen and ink against the unlawful snares of the devil.[39]

He reports that monks complained of being ill-equipped to produce Scriptural and patristic manuscripts, so he wrote *De Orthographia* to train them. He died shortly thereafter, and evidence suggests that Vivarium did not survive long in his absence.[40] Historians debate the nature of his legacy.[41]

2. Cassiodorus's Interpretive Approach to the Psalms

Cassiodorus delineates his approach to the Psalter in a seventeen-part preface patterned after Hilary of Poitiers's pioneering preface.[42] Four aspects of the preface introduce his methodology: his dependence on Augustine, his monastic intentions, his categorization of psalms, and his fourfold commentary format. First, out of deep esteem he calls his commentary a distillation of Augustine's

---

[38] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 230–33.

[39] Cassiodorus, *Institutes*, 163.

[40] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 238.

[41] Historians debate the influence of Cassiodorus. On one end of the spectrum is Philip Schaff who says Cassiodorus's "services to classical literature cannot be overestimated" and that he initiated the monastic scribal tradition [Philip Schaff and D. S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 4:654.] On the other end is James O'Donnell who does not consider Cassiodorus influential, instead an unoriginal but "respected author" at best, because the vision of Vivarium and Christian education was never replicated and direct links between his scribal system and those in later monasticism do not exist (*Cassiodorus*, 239). In between are scholars like Mark Vessey who attributes O'Donnell's assessment to the fact that Cassiodorus's vision was not for a popular movement but a socially distinct class of guardians of the Christian intellectual tradition—which would not be detectable as an *influential* movement ("Introduction," in *Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004], 99–101). Thus, scholars like Kannengiesser and Laistner argue that though perhaps unoriginal, his work helped shape the next era in Western civilization (Kannengiesser, "Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great," 28–30; Barnish, "The Work of Cassiodorus," 187; M. L. W. Laistner, "The Value and Influence of Cassiodorus' Ecclesiastical History," *HTR* 41 [1948]: 51–67). Scholars seem to agree, however, that *Explanation of the Psalms* was his most influential work, widely read in the medieval period (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 243). Olsen surveys medieval manuscript evidence and notes that more MSS survive than Augustine's Psalms sermons revealing a substantial literary presence until the late medieval period (*Honey for Souls*, 274–81).

[42] Hilary is the first Latin writer on the Psalms to do this in his *Tractates on the Psalms* (P. G. Walsh, Introduction to *Cassiodorus: Explanation of the Psalms* [New York: Paulist, 1990], 1:5). Olsen notes Hilary's apparent pioneering work here, noting, "Some [topics in Cassiodorus's preface] are taken over directly from Hilary; others address the same topics but come to very different conclusions" (*Honey of Souls*, 164).

Enarrations on the Psalms intended to be more accessible to the church (*Exp. Ps.* 1:23–24).[43] Elsewhere he calls his work a *goose's cackle* compared to the *melodious swan* of Augustine.[44] This self-deprecation leads some to disregard Cassiodorus's substantial hermeneutical and literary innovation—assuming he merely mimics Augustine.[45] While his humility is no doubt genuine, he was also paying homage to tradition to avoid appearing a theological rogue.[46]

Second, Cassiodorus intends for his commentary to augment monastic rhythms of prayerful psalm-recitation. He alludes to monastic liturgy when he says that psalms will be sung at various hours of the day (*Exp. Ps.* 1:25).[47] He wants his commentary to deepen this practice: "But we are not to sing them like parrots and larks which seek to imitate men's words but are known to be utterly unaware of what they sing" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:25).[48]

Third, Cassiodorus presents twelve topical categories in the Psalms: (1) Christ's "bodily life"; (2) the "nature of the Godhead"; (3) those seeking to destroy Christ; (4) warning the Jews of judgment; (5) Christ's prayers to the Father regarding the "future benefit" of the resurrection; (6) penitential psalms; (7) "direct conversation" between Christ and the Father reflecting his divinity and humanity; (8) "figurative allusions" to Christ; (9) Hallelujah psalms; (10) psalms of ascent; (11) the Trinity; (12) the seven psalms that culminate the Psalter (*Exp. Ps.* 1:43–44).[49] Susan Gillingham identifies this list as Cassiodorus's main

---

[43] He also purports to add interpretations that have materialized since Augustine, and he will include Hilary, Jerome, and Ambrose, etc.—while usually giving pride of place to Augustine's view (Walsh, "Introduction," 6).

[44] Cassiodorus, *Institutes*, 120, quoting Virgil, *Eclogues*, 9.36.

[45] "He is much more original than his own statement of [his] dependence on St. Augustine would indicate" (McGuire, review of Cassiodorus, 547).

[46] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 120. Olsen explains, "In truth, Cassiodorus was a synthesist. While he relied chiefly on the work of Augustine for his inspiration, he produced a commentary that neither looks nor functions like Augustine's, that pulls in material from other authors, and then communicates a paradigm built on Augustinian ideals for reading that is vastly different from Augustine's commentary" (*Honey of Souls*, 120). Olsen notes that misunderstanding this may partially account for the paucity of attention this commentary receives (personal communication, 6 June 2018).

[47] This reflects the Divine Office which surfaces well before Cassiodorus and likely included reciting the entire Psalter weekly and memorizing it. He adds, "the psalms make our vigils pleasant when in the silence of the night the choirs [we] hymn their praise" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:24). Cassiodorus mentions morning, evening, third, sixth, and ninth hour prayers, like the hours of prayer attested by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and Cyprian (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1184–85]. Liturgical scholar Susan Boynton says, "Learning these chants and readings, as well as many others, seems to have occupied every moment of the day" (quoted in Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 51). St. Benedict called weekly singing of the entire Psalter a "lukewarm" concession to lazy monks, whereas he preferred singing the whole Psalter daily, which supposedly St. Patrick also practiced (Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 56–57).

[48] He borrows this metaphor from Augustine's comments about knowledgeably reciting the Psalter: "We should understand what the Psalm means. Sing it with human reason, not like birds. Thrushes, parrots, ravens, magpies and the like are often taught to say what they do not understand. To know what we are saying—that was granted by God's will to human nature" (*Enarrations on the Psalms*, 18:2, cited in Brown, *Augustine*, 135–36).

[49] Cassiodorus calls the Psalter's genre variety "differing sweetness" to prevent readers' boredom (*Exp. Ps.* 3:137). Oddly, he does not list psalms for each of the twelve categories. O'Donnell attributes this to Cassiodorus placing several psalms in multiple categories. He will also talk about acrostic psalms extensively, apparently leaving it off of this list desiring to maintain the number twelve due to his numerological concerns and giving priority in the list to Christological themes (O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 145–46).

contribution to the Psalter's reception history, calling it an early predecessor to Gunkel's form-critical categories.[50]

Fourth, Cassiodorus forecasts his four-section commentary strategy for each psalm. He first expounds the superscription, usually allegorically (*Exp. Ps.* 1:35).[51] He will then, in a manner original in its thoroughness,[52] divide each psalm according to two factors: (1) "change of subject" and (2) "the introduction of different speakers" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:33, 35). Here he respects the literary artistry of each psalm and maintains a close reading.

Next, Cassiodorus provides a verse-by-verse analysis to "show the hidden meaning of the Psalm, which varies with the spiritual sense, the historical perusal, and the mystical meaning" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:35). While he mentions four senses here, throughout the commentary the terms *allegorical*, *spiritual*, and *mystical* are not differentiated and seem to be used interchangeably.[53] He clarifies that there is "common language" which is readily understandable, underneath which "are hidden senses of truth, so that the vital meaning must be most carefully sought out" with the help of the Holy Spirit (*Exp. Ps.* 1:37). While there are similarities to the fourfold method associated with medieval exegesis (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), his collapsing of figural senses and suspension of any moralizing until after the exegetical section suggests he follows Augustine in a twofold literal/figural method.[54]

As an extension of this, like several church fathers, Cassiodorus explains figural meaning in the psalm numbers in keeping with church fathers before him.[55] Two factors mitigate this seemingly odd practice. First, no other biblical book contained chapter numbers at this point in Christian history. Reasoning that there is no wasted space in the Scriptures, he seeks to understand their significance.

---

[50] While a few earlier authors attempt something similar, none so systematically and analytically use categories to "create a theology of the Psalter" (Gillingham, *Psalms*, 57, 201).

[51] He explains that "from [the headings] issues the meaning of the divine preaching like milk from breasts compressed" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:35). He handles these allegorically in part because of his commitment to Davidic authorship of the entire Psalter (*Exp. Ps.* 1:29). The common phrase "to the choirmaster" was, in the Vulgate, rendered "unto the end." This provides a prime example of Cassiodorus's spiritual interpretation of the headings. He relates "end" to Christ in Romans 10:4: "So whenever you find the phrase, *Unto the end*, in psalm-headings, concentrate your mind keenly on the Lord Saviour, who is the End without end, and the full perfection of all blessings" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:30).

[52] Walsh, "Introduction," 6.

[53] Walsh, "Introduction," 9; Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 196–97.

[54] Walsh notes the separation of the moral sense ("Introduction," 10). Henri de Lubac explains, "For Augustine, then for Cassiodorus, the liquid honey was the exterior doctrine, 'the open teaching of wisdom,' or the [OT], whilst the comb signified the mysteries hidden in the depths of the cells" (*Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 2: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 163). The connection to the OT is interesting; Lubac notes that Cassiodorus's later work on the Pauline Epistles is extremely literal. With Augustine, Cassiodorus handles the OT in a figural manner because in it the NT is hidden. Since the NT reveals what was hidden, less figural reading is needed (216–17).

[55] *Usually* because he states that the significance of all psalm-numbers are not *yet* understood (*Exp. Ps.* 1:36) and omits the consideration for some psalms. Gillingham notes the strongest patristic connection to Augustine's numerology (*Psalms*, 57). The following are examples: Psalm 2, Christ's two natures (1:67); Psalm 17[18], Decalogue and the sevenfold Spirit (1:195); Psalm 24[25], my favorite, "twenty-four elders with unwearied voices sing together praises to the Lord in sweet melody, reminding us to imitate them and to sing this psalm with repeated devotion" (1:256). He typically includes this in the fourth commentary section for each psalm, but it relates to his allegorical interpretation and is thus listed here.

Second, Cassiodorus explains his numerological motivation: "I think that we should note also that all the ensuing psalms mount in a marvelously prearranged scheme" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:56). Impressively, the quest for a *prearranged scheme* only recently resurfaced after an historical-critical hiatus.[56]

Finally, and wholly original,[57] Cassiodorus adds what he will call in the commentary the psalm's *conclusion*:

> I will try briefly to expound the *power* of a passage as it demands, so that the *purpose* of a poem's division may by God's gift be clear to inner eyes. By the *power* of a psalm I mean the divine inspiration by which God's *purpose* is revealed to us, keeps us clear of faults through David's words, and persuades us to live an upright life…. In the final section I draw together briefly a summary of the whole psalm, or say something in opposition to heresies which are to be extirpated, for true love of the Lord lies precisely in regarding his foes with perfect hatred. (*Exp. Ps.* 1:37, italics added).

Three elements of this innovation bear on the present study. First, he indicates that exegesis alone does not do justice to each psalm. There is an added divine *purpose* for each psalm: *power* for Christian formation. Second, he believes moral and doctrinal growth comprise the formation intended by the Psalter. Third, he does not mention how this formation occurs, suspending the question until the body of the commentary. Therein, sixty-nine of the *conclusions* concern prayer (the most frequent teaching point in the *conclusions*, see Figure 1). This indicates that praying the Psalms facilitates the formation (moral and doctrinal) the Psalter intends.[58]

Cassiodorus does not believe he has properly commented on the Psalter until he has addressed its intention: holistic formation. His view of the illocutionary force (i.e. *purpose*) of the Psalter undergirds this method. Cassiodorus engages in *prayerful, formational* biblical interpretation. If each psalm contains *power* for formation, Cassiodorus believes prayer accesses this transforming power. Olsen encapsulates Cassiodorus: "He is best read and understood as a teacher of theology at prayer."[59]

---

[56] Gunkel wrote, "No internal ordering principle for the individual psalms has been transmitted for the whole," quoted in John E. Anderson, "Remembering the Ancestors: Psalms 105 and 106 as Conclusion to Book IV of the Psalter," *PRSt* 44 (2017): 185. Gerald Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985) is credited with beginning a still booming push to understand editorial evidence and intention in the Psalter. I am fascinated that, though we scoff at precritical interpretive moves like psalmic-numerology, here Cassiodorus understood something that the godfather of form-critical Psalms studies missed.

[57] Walsh, "Introduction," 6.

[58] Cassiodorus has identified the three main ways the NT uses the Psalter: doctrinal, ethical, and liturgical. The doctrinal/Christological use of Psalms in the NT is well attested (cf. Psalm 110 in various passages). The moral formation component is prominent in 1 Peter, noted by Sue Woan ("The Psalms in 1 Peter," in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten Menken [New York: T & T Clark, 2004], 213–30). This intention by the Psalms is argued for recently in Gordon Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012). The Psalms as intended for prayerful spiritual formation is evident in their use in Acts 4:23–30; Col 3:16–17. For the often neglected and extensive liturgical use of the Psalms in the worship scenes of Revelation, see Sung Kuk Kim, "Psalms in the Book of Revelation" (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2013).

[59] Olsen, *Honey of Souls*, 295.

Figure 1: Psalm Conclusions by Theme[60]

Prayer Formation	Moral Formation	Doctrinal Formation
5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 36, 41*, 42*, 45, 48, 51, 54, 55*, 57*, 59, 60, 62*, 63*, 65, 66*, 67*, 68*, 69*, 70*, 73*, 74*, 76*, 77, 87*, 89*, 90, 91*, 96, 97*, 98*, 100*, 101*, 102* 103*, 106, 109*, 110*, 111*, 113, 116*, 118, 123*, 127*, 128*, 129*, 131*, 135, 136, 137*, 140, 142, 143, 145, 146*, 147*, 149, 150*	1, 4, 12, 16, 19, 26, 31, 33, 38, 39, 41*, 42*, 43, 44, 46, 49, 56, 62*, 70*, 73*, 74*, 75, 78, 79, 88, 89*, 91*, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97*, 98*, 99, 100*, 101*, 102*, 103*, 105, 111*, 114, 115, 116*, 120, 121, 122, 123*, 124, 125, 127*, 128*, 130, 131*, 132, 133, 134, 137*, 138, 141, 144, 146*, 147*, 150*	2, 3, 8, 11, 14, 17, 18, 21, 38, 29, 30, 34, 35, 37, 40, 41*, 47, 50, 52, 53, 55*, 57*, 58, 61, 62*, 63*, 64, 66*, 67*, 68*, 69*, 71, 72, 76*, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 87*, 104, 107, 109*, 110*, 112, 117, 119, 126, 139, 147*, 148
69 psalms	63 psalms	51 psalms

3. Cassiodorus on the Psalms and Prayer

After surveying two expositions of prayer, the four ways in which Cassiodorus employs the Psalms to teach prayer will be explored: prayerful exegesis, exemplars of prayer, psalms as useable prayers, and prayerful formation.

3.1. Two Expositions of Prayer

Two sustained expositions reveal the psalm-shaped life of prayer Cassiodorus envisions. First, actualizing a concept Augustine briefly recommended,[61] Cassiodorus sees in the Psalms of Ascent a microcosm of the spiritual formation program of the Psalter. He takes Psalm 83:6 [84:5 ET] as his key for interpreting them as a spiritual ascent: "In his heart he has disposed to ascend by steps, in the [wail] of tears" (Vulgate).[62] Cassiodorus frames this as prayerful entreaty:[63]

1. Psalm 119[120]: Abandon things of the earth for virtue (*Exp. Ps.* 3:265).
2. Psalm 120[121]: By grace, take hold of God's strength (*Exp. Ps.* 3:270).
3. Psalm 121[122]: Observe the deepening, sweetening words of Psalms (*Exp. Ps. 3:277*).
4. Psalm 122[123]: Persevere in prayer as enemies seek to hinder ascent (*Exp. Ps. 3:281*).
5. Psalm 123[124]: Humbly trust the Lord to avoid downfall (*Exp. Ps.* 3:287).

---

[60] Hebrew/English numbering; asterisk indicates multiple categories.

[61] "But degrees, as they are used in this Psalm, are of ascending…. Who are they that ascend? They who progress towards the understanding of things spiritual…. When therefore a man hath commenced thus to order his ascent; to speak more plainly, when a Christian hath begun to think of spiritual amendment, he beginneth to suffer the tongues of adversaries. Whoever hath not yet suffered from them, hath not yet made progress; whoever suffereth them not, doth not, even endeavor to improve…. Let him begin to improve, let him begin to wish to ascend, to wish to despise earthly, fragile, temporal objects, to hold worldly happiness for nothing, to think of God alone." Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 120.2 (*NPNF*[1] 8:1170). Olsen (in personal correspondence) suggests that Cassiodorus takes this basic concept and adds regimentation to it.

[62] The numbering of the Psalms here follows the Vulgate, with English numbering in brackets.

[63] "We shall deserve to mount these steps only if we prostrate ourselves for our sins. So let us continually entreat the Lord" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:260).

6. Psalm 124[125]: Recount God's help during "past ills" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:291).
7. Psalm 125[126]: Behold the prefigured Christ in the Old Testament (*Exp. Ps.* 3:295).[64]
8. Psalm 126[127]: Study the Scriptures and find mercy there (*Exp. Ps.* 3:301).[65]
9. Psalm 127[128]: Pray with "vehement entreaty" for a pure fear of God (*Exp. Ps.* 3:306).
10. Psalm 128[129]: Pray for the repentance or judgment of God's enemies (*Exp. Ps.* 3:311).
11. Psalm 129[130]: Humbly confess sin, thus slaying pride (*Exp. Ps.* 3:316).
12. Psalm 130[131]: Humbly repeat the words of this psalm (*Exp. Ps.* 3:320).[66]
13. Psalm 131[132]: Behold "the brightest light in the Lord's coming" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:332).[67]
14. Psalm 132[133]: Love one's neighbor, which increases love for God (*Exp. Ps.* 3:336).
15. Psalm 133[134]: Praise culminates in greater love for God (*Exp. Ps.* 3:341).

He concludes, "So let us continually meditate on the hidden nature of this great miracle, so that by ever setting our gaze on such things, we may avoid the deadly errors of the world" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:341). These fifteen steps include moral and doctrinal formation through prayer, presenting a microcosmic version of Cassiodorus's view of the formational intent of the Psalter.

The next exposition of prayer is occasioned by the superscription, "a prayer," in Psalm 141[142], leading Cassiodorus to expound his sevenfold vision of prayer (*Exp. Ps.* 3:404–5):

1. "Sign our lips with the seal of the cross," and pray for their cleansing.
2. "Pray in words not so much as human longings prompt, but those which the Godhead Himself has granted as a remedy from wickedness."
3. Pray these words humbly.
4. Behold God "in mental contemplation" to see "what sort of person you should be."
5. Pray with confidence to "Him who is almighty."
6. Allow God to transform the prayer being offered.[68]
7. Know that God hears "if grace is lent" to a humble heart.[69]

He views the Psalter as God's provision of superior, life-changing words to be used at prayer.

3.2. Prayerful Exegesis

Cassiodorus indicates the importance of prayer for exegesis in two ways. First, thirty-two times in his handling of a psalm's *conclusion*, he resorts to writing prayers into the commentary. For example,

---

[64] This psalm represents a figural transition between the Old and New Testaments. For Cassiodorus (*Exp. Ps.* 2:181), the fifteen psalms here and the one hundred fifty in the Psalter represent the Old and New Testaments. The first seven psalms of ascent, like the first seventy psalms, represent the Old Testament because seven represents Sabbath worship. The remaining eight (or eighty in the case of the Psalter) represent New Testament worship which occurs on the eighth day.

[65] He adds, "It is there that we find the Lord, if we succeed in truly studying them." In so doing, we will "be raised up by the Lord on the wings of His mercy."

[66] He says, "If some [monk] at leisure in his cell uttered such sentiments, he would glow with the great glory of his patience."

[67] "If we mount these steps with pure minds, we shall attain the most glorious vision of Him."

[68] "The humble plea which we are to utter in divine praise we virtually realize as we pray" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:405).

[69] He concludes in librarian fashion by referring interested readers to read Cassian's exposition of prayer in the ninth and tenth *Conferences* (*Exp. Ps.* 3:406).

after commenting on the "marriage-song" of Psalm 44[45], he prays, "We have feasted, good King, and drunk heavenly delights at your wedding-feast. Wondrous Bridegroom, grant that we who have here rejoiced in hope may be filled with the most perfect joy in the life to come" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:452). Often, these prayers ask for grace to be formed by the psalm (e.g. on Ps 58[59]). Elsewhere he demonstrates hermeneutical humility, as he asks regarding Psalm 86[87], "Grant, Lord, that what we cannot explain here in words we may behold there by your gift" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:341). He teaches readers by example the centrality of prayer *in* exegesis.

Second, Cassiodorus encourages readers to pray *for* the interpretive process. Interpreters only enjoy their task through prayer: "Let us ask God to open our understanding to all things, and by His enlightenment to lead us to true wisdom; for whatever you read, whatever you think through, will succeed in tasting sweet to you only if you season it with the spice of heaven's gift" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:379). He seeks prayer for his own interpretive work when, regarding Psalm 75[76], he says, "The text of the psalms has here reached the half-way mark…. Let us pray that He who granted us grace in the psalms that lie behind us may grant us effective help in those yet to come" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:238). The commentary itself concludes with a lengthy prayer "that having granted me devoted words, You may also bestow on Your servants praiseworthy action" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:468). Thus, for Cassiodorus, there is no exegesis without prayer.

3.3. Prayer Exemplars

Cassiodorus elucidates three prayer exemplars in the Psalter: the psalmist, Christ, and the Church. Regarding Psalm 12[13], he writes, "Let us view the prophet engaged in blessed contemplation, and note [the longing with which he prayed] … we realize what a gift it is which we have obtained, when we observe that a powerful king and a holy prophet [prayed with such enthusiasm]" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:148). To learn prayer from the psalmist in Psalm 122[123], he writes, "Let us look closely at [the psalmist], remarkable as he is in perseverance in prayer" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:281). Modern Psalms scholarship, in its quest to understand the editorial intention of the Psalter, agrees with Cassiodorus's instinct to find spiritual exemplars therein.[70]

The next two exemplars exhibit the point at which Cassiodorus's theology of prayer flows most noticeably from his exegetical method. Noted briefly above, Cassiodorus traces the "introduction of different speakers" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:35). Known as prosopological exegesis, this is "a reading technique whereby an interpreter … [assigns] nontrivial prosopa (i.e. nontrivial vis-à-vis the 'plain sense' of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text."[71] Rhetoricians, church fathers, and even NT writers employ prosopological exegesis.[72]

---

[70] For example, Brevard Childs's influential study of the psalm titles contends that they serve to personalize the prayers in the Psalter and invite readers into the inner life of the psalmists. This makes the prayer life exemplified in the Psalms "immediately accessible" to the reader (Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 [1971]: 149).

[71] Michael W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 218.

[72] Regarding its use by rhetoricians, see Bates, *Hermeneutics*, 187. Walsh notes its use by Origen, Ambrose, and Augustine ("Introduction," 6). The NT employs this reading technique, for example, when Hebrews 2:11–13 places a string of psalm texts on the lips of Jesus and then invites the readers to follow his example when "we can confidently say" Psalm 118:6 (Heb 13:6 ESV). See Harold W. Attridge, "The Psalms in Hebrews," in *The Psalms in the New Testament,* ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 211–12.

When Cassiodorus finds the voice of Christ in the Psalms, he judges that it is present because, "He … afforded an example" of prayer (*Exp. Ps.* 2:336). When readers "ponder the humility of the prayer poured out to the Father by the Lord Saviour," they may avoid error "by following His footsteps" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:336). When his voice is found in the Psalter, "Christ prays to teach us, rises again to raise us, praises the Father to instruct us" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:44). Cassiodorus relishes the opportunity to listen in on the prayers of Christ, "he who hears this Man at prayer must note than that He is to be praised also as Creator" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:175).

The Church provides the final exemplar. It is not always clear why he attributes the voice to the Church rather than the psalmist.[73] Nevertheless, it clearly informs prayer. The Church offers an example, "Let us listen to how the Church … cries to her Liberator" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:256). Moving beyond mere example, he notes regarding Psalm 110[111] that "our mental eagerness is enhanced when we drink in the sweet taste of another's joyful utterance" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:131). Elsewhere, he reasons, "So like a revered mother she transmits to her little ones words for them to speak…. So let us say what she urges" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:89). By placing the reader in ecclesiastical continuity with the speaker, Cassiodorus provides the reader with a clear entrance into the prayer life of the Psalter.[74] Cassiodorus sees in psalmist, Christ, and Church diverse tutors in prayer for the Psalter's ecclesial audience.

3.4. Prayer Templates

In the Preface, Cassiodorus intimates that he shares a view of the Psalter with Athanasius, who said in his letter to Marcellinus, "Whoever recites the words of a psalm seems to be repeating his own words, to be singing in solitude words composed by himself…. He seems to be expressing the kind of language used as if spoken from the heart. He seems to offer words to God."[75] Elsewhere, Cassiodorus refers to Athanasius's approach as prescribing remedies from the Psalms to various predicaments.[76] Both of these citations suggest dependence on Athanasius's letter, but the body of the commentary never refers to it.[77] It appears that Cassiodorus seeks to mobilize in commentary form the vision for psalmic prayer for which Athanasius only provided an outline. The vision undergirds a significant amount of Cassiodorus's prayer-related content in the commentary—in at least two ways.

---

[73] Cf. Psalm 39[40]; *Exp. Ps.* 1:397–407. At times he blends it with Christ's voice, reasoning that what the Head says the members of the body do also (*Exp. Ps.* 2:83). Elsewhere the psalm alludes to a wider geographic location than one person's, so the church rather than an individual speaks (i.e. "I cried from the ends of the earth"; Ps. 60[61]; *Exp. Ps.* 2:71). In Psalm 5, he reasons from an ambiguous term in the superscription that the Church speaks. Psalm 5's superscription contains an unknown Hebrew term נְחִילוֹת rendered by the ESV, "for the flutes." Cassiodorus's Latin translation indicates, "for her that obtaineth the inheritance." This leads him to interpret the whole Psalm as spoken by the Catholic Church. He borrows this interpretation from both Jerome and Augustine (*Exp. Ps.* 1:81n1).

[74] Gerda Heydemann notes this utility: "This oratory approach to psalms "provided a particularly effective way of persuading his readers to assume the position of the speakers or audience of the Psalms, and to refer to themselves the messages and teachings contained in the text" ("The Orator as Exegete: Cassiodorus as a Reader of the Psalms," in *Reading the Bible in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jinty Nelson and Damien Kempf, Studies in early Medieval History [New York: Bloomsbury, 2015], 40).

[75] Athanasius, *Ep. Marcell.* 11, cited in Cassiodorus, *Exp. Ps.* 1:41.

[76] Cassiodorus, *Institutes*, 121.

[77] See Walsh's indices: *Exp. Ps.* 1:610; 3:535.

First, Athanasius suggests that Christians "do not hesitate… to repeat the very things [individual psalms] say."[78] For thirteen psalms, Cassiodorus recommends this verbatim praying of the psalm text.[79] For instance, regarding Psalm 50[51], Cassiodorus prescribes that "an individual can practice repentance regularly by himself [without need of a priest;] … this psalm … if recited with a pure heart, looses sins, cancels the bond of our debt" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:512). Psalm 90[91] "should be recited … when night sets in after all the activities of the day" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:387). Again, amid "worldly pains" he urges us to pray the opening words of Psalm 116: *I have loved, because the Lord has heard the voice of my prayer*" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:155).

Second, Athanasius sees the Psalms as a teacher of prayer in various situations: "we are taught how one must call out while fleeing … in the Psalms we are instructed how one must praise the Lord and by speaking what words we properly confess our faith in him."[80] He relates this to psalm genres, saying worshipers can find "a fit form of words wherewith to please the Lord on each of life's occasions."[81] Cassiodorus follows suit in twelve instances.[82] Of Psalm 6, he writes, "pay particular attention to the psalms of the penitents, for they are like suitable medicine prescribed for the human race" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:98). On Psalm 53[54] he draws attention to "the form of the request [which] is certainly impressive … so that whatever the dangers overhanging us we may make our entreaty with a trusting heart" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:17). With Athanasius, and filling out his vision with exposition, Cassiodorus sees the Psalter as offering both specific words and situational rubrics to be used at prayer.

3.5. Prayerful Formation

Noted above, Cassiodorus believes the illocutionary intent of the Psalter is Christian formation (moral and doctrinal). He proposes that prayer facilitates this in at least three ways. First, Cassiodorus exemplifies the necessity of prayer for formation when his in-text prayers ask for divine assistance. Regarding the virtues presented in Psalm 23[24], he prays, "Now grant, Lord, that we who have entered the gates of Your mercy by the font of sacred rebirth may not depart from them with sins hounding us" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:246). He clarifies the text-prayer-formation nexus when commenting on Psalm 72[73], "The formation of the Christian is completed by this advice, so that he who hastens to commend himself to the Lord does not fail through debased thoughts. Grant, O Lord, that You do not make us envy [evil men] … for only those who follow Your wishes with a most devoted heart can have their portion with you" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:209). The *interpreter* only experiences the formation proposed by the text through humble prayer.

Second, and related, Cassiodorus instructs his *readers* to pray for the formation the text seeks. Formation of soul occurs through prayerful rejoicing, "Let us store in our minds the song of this heavenly pipe [Psalm 23], close packed with its ten virtues, and note how sweet a lay it has sung with health-giving delight to the soul. In this way through rejoicing in the divine mystery we may acknowledge not

---

[78] Athanasius, "A Letter of Athanasius, Our Holy Father, Archbishop of Alexandria, to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," in *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist, 1980), 109.

[79] Psalms 5, 6, 40[41], 50[51], 65[66], 69[70], 83[84], 90[91], 105[106], 114[116], 135[136], 141[142], 144[145].

[80] Athanasius, "A Letter of Athanasius," 109.

[81] Athanasius, "A Letter of Athanasius," 107. The genre focus, clearly Athanasius's point in context, is clearer for this quote in St. Vladimir's translation used in this instance. See *St. Athanasius: On the Incarnation* (New York: St. Vladimir, 1982), 97–119.

[82] Psalms 6, 31[32], 53[54], 64[65], 73[74], 99[100], 100[101], 101[102], 108[109], 128[129], 136[137], 142[143].

our ears' pleasure but the gaining of health for our souls" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:240). The virtues commended in the Psalms benefit the soul through prayerful rejoicing. Cassiodorus insists that character formation, commended in the Psalter, necessitates prayer: "so let us beg God more profusely … [for] a most salutary change of ways" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:134).

Finally, Cassiodorus suggests that the inherent power of the Psalms affects formation in those who meditate on, sing, or pray them. Psalm 67[68] "is a river to be drunk by the mind … which ever irrigates without watering; it inebriates pure minds, and brings back to mental sobriety those who are drunk on sins. It is the water which at once removes thirst and hunger … and which once drunk perpetually increases. Let us pray that this stream may uninterruptedly possess us" (*Exp. Ps.* 2:140). Singing Psalm 41[42] "induces goodly longing and instruction … [in order that the baptized] may hasten to the Lord with total purity of heart" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:423). If Christians chant Psalm 21[22], "as we listen to it, we happily weep, for we can be fashioned by it" (*Exp. Ps.* 1:234). He even speaks of "the spiritual depths of the psalms with their perennial cleansing" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:466). For Cassiodorus, the Psalter itself possesses transformative power. The church accesses its power through prayer.

4. Conclusion

Cassiodorus engages in enough allegorical interpretation to make contemporary interpreters uncomfortable.[83] Fortunately, his prayer-formation content is extricable from those allegorical elements.[84] Cassiodorus's interpretation of the Psalms flourishes at the point where contemporary interpretation falters—integrating spiritual formation. His *conclusions* suggest that without this integration, hermeneutics are *inconclusive.* Placing contemporary scholarship in dialectic conversation[85] with Cassiodorus's formational exegesis may help compensate for what lacks in the academy and church today.[86] Cassiodorus achieves this in his *conclusions,* the effect of which O'Donnell summarizes helpfully:

> [The *conclusions*] have the function of calling the reader back from a too-studious approach to the Psalm merely as a document of doctrine and the rhetorical arts … [serving] to make vivid again the profoundly spiritual nature of the experience towards which the study of the Psalm is meant to lead. Having taken the Psalm out of its context,

---

[83] Gerald Bray notes the relatively recent eschewal of allegorical interpretation ("Allegory," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 36). John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno have demonstrated well that the primary accusations against allegorical interpretation, lack of discipline and subjectivity, may not account for the *actual* intensive, associative, and typological strategies employed by the church fathers (*Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005]).

[84] Olsen, personal correspondence. Cassiodorus's prosopological method excepts this but accounts for only a portion of his extensive material on prayer.

[85] I agree with the sentiment expressed by Timothy George: "The appeal to the superiority of premodern biblical exegesis is a protest against the reductionism inherent in the longstanding monopoly of the historical-critical method, not a rejection of rigorous study of the Bible" (*Reading Scripture with the Reformers* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011], 31).

[86] Leslie Hardin ("Searching," 147) argues that the lack of focus on spiritual formation in modern exegesis results in "knowledge-based elitism," ignoring moral formation, and "a marked disparity in spirituality from those in the church community and [a tendency] to place scholarship above the spiritual formation of [seminarians] and their parishioners." Essentially, contemporary engagement with the Bible "is not working."

examined it from every side, and presented it to the student with all its rivets undone and seams unzipped, the commentator is here putting the whole thing back together again, synthesizing his own analytical labors into the text of the word of God, always for the purpose of intensifying the devotional experience that the Psalm's student is meant to undergo.[87]

Cassiodorus's *conclusions* reveal a range of psalmic prayer: prayerful exegesis, exemplars of prayer, psalms as useable prayers, and prayerful formation. This formational exegesis demonstrates and prioritizes the intention of the Psalter to *form* its readers theologically, morally, and spiritually—all through prayerful interaction with the text. One scholar suggests that modern exegetical methods deal well with the text but prove ill-suited to deal with God.[88] Cassiodorus sought to do both, suggesting that in rigorous interaction with Scripture "we find the Lord, if we succeed in truly studying them" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:301), and that when this is done in prayerful humility "we shall attain the most glorious vision of Him" (*Exp. Ps.* 3:332).

---

[87] O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, 164.

[88] Waltke, "Exegesis," 30.

The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism: Initial Encounters

— **Kenneth J. Stewart** —

Ken Stewart is professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

******

Abstract: Commemorations of the birth of the Oxford Movement (later known as Anglo-Catholicism) have regularly intimated certain early commonalities with evangelicalism, especially within the Church of England. It was so at the 1933 centenary of the launch of the movement; such hypotheses have been given fresh life with the 2017 release of the *Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement.* This essay examines the basis for these suggestions and finds them wanting.

******

The recent publication of *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement,*[1] a comprehensive single-volume guide to this nineteenth century party and ideology, has served to revive a discussion which is now well over a century old. That discussion centers upon the question of what was the original and ongoing relationship between existing evangelical Protestantism and the emerging Oxford, or Tractarian Movement. The *Oxford Handbook* renews consideration of whether evangelical Protestantism in its Church of England expression was not a formative or contributing factor in the rise of the other movement which radiated outward from Oxford after 1833.[2] What might seem at first glance to be a rather arcane inquiry about the descent of this movement is in fact anything but that. At stake is the important question of what possible affinity and relationship might be possible between the two movements as they continue to exist down to the present. This essay will explore the contested question of interrelationship and draw out some implications of this issue for the present day.

---

[1] Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereira, eds., *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See the review in *Themelios* 43.3 (2018): 498–500.

[2] Note especially the following entries in *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*: ch. 3, Grayson Carter, 'The Evangelical Background' (which sees continuity between the two) and ch. 12, Andrew Atherstone, 'Protestant Reactions: Oxford, 1838–1846' (which takes a more cautious view). The discussion of this question had been anticipated by an earlier Peter B. Nockles essay, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism: Parallels and Contrasts in Two Nineteenth Century Movements of Religious Revival', in *Perfection Perfected: Essays in Honor of Henry D. Rack*, ed. Robert Webster (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 233–59.

1. The Two Movements

The 'Oxford Movement' was an anti-Erastian tendency within the Church of England, begun in 1833. In response to Parliament's readiness to reduce by half the number of dioceses in the Protestant Church of Ireland and to abolish traditional confessional 'tests' for those seeking to enroll in England's universities, the movement set about publishing 90 pamphlets ('Tracts' they were called) exalting the spiritual independence of their national church via an alleged apostolic succession of bishops. Principal persons in this movement also promoted doctrinal and liturgical emphases closely associated with the era of Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645) and with various divines dating from the Restoration-era Church of England. Nineteenth century Tractarian writers were widely construed as maneuvering towards a closer Anglican conformity with Roman Catholicism.[3]

After the departure of John Henry Newman and some other early participants in the movement around 1845 for Roman Catholicism, this 'party' continued on as 'Puseyism' (taking its name from the Oxford professor of Hebrew, E. B. Pusey [1800–1882], who was also a participant) and still later as 'Anglo-Catholicism', the name by which we know it today. In this latter form, it absorbed two related groups: a Cambridge-originated movement seeking the reintroduction of pre-Reformation liturgies, and another that advocated for the use of Gothic church architecture—a style then being championed by no one so much as the Victorian architect, Augustus Pugin (1812–1852).[4]

By comparison, evangelical Protestantism was the conversionist and biblicistic form of Christianity that, having emerged in the Renaissance and Reformation periods,[5] existed first within the national churches of England, Ireland and Scotland.[6] Then—after failed attempts at restoring national religious comprehension in the era of the restored Stuart monarchy (1660)—it re-asserted itself as a pan-denominational movement in the era we call the Great Awakening/Evangelical Revival after 1730. In the post-Restoration period this movement eventually brought together in an informal alliance of pastors and people within and beyond the national churches.

By the late-Georgian and early Victorian era that concerns us today, the pan-denominational evangelical movement had demonstrated its ability to collaborate across church lines in support of cooperative agencies such as the London Missionary Society (founded 1795), the Religious Tract Society (founded 1799) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded 1804).[7] In the period we

---

[3] A most helpful introduction to the leading personalities and contested questions of this period is provided in *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*, Part II, 'The Movement's Spring and Summer'.

[4] See particularly *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*, Part V, 'Cultural Expressions, Transmissions, and Influences'. On Pugin, see Alexandra Wedgwood, 'Pugin, Augustus', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 45:52–54. Pugin, who himself converted to Roman Catholicism in 1835, stood in reaction to the Evangelicalism of his youth; with his mother he had been an adherent in the London congregation served by the renowned Edward Irving.

[5] Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 26.

[6] On the Continent, this strain of Protestantism was known as Pietism; it also existed first *within* and later beyond the territorial Protestant churches of the Reformation.

[7] This late Georgian blossoming of cooperative evangelical enterprises has been explored by Roger Martin in *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain 1795–1830* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1983). The contemporaneous similar efforts in young America are explored in Charles L. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Isabel Rivers

now consider, this same pan-denominational movement would collaborate further in the founding of the Evangelical Alliance at London (1846) with affiliate alliances soon following in Europe and North America.[8]

2. The Question of Relationship

At least since the 1930s, the dominant approach taken in explaining the mutual relations between these two movements has been one which has stressed their common roots and common aspirations. What supporting evidence is there for assertions of commonality?

First, some leading Tractarian personalities, notably J. H. Newman (1801–1890),[9] R. W. Church (1815–1890), and Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802–1857) with brother, Henry William Wilberforce (1807–1873) had in common an upbringing within Anglican evangelicalism.[10] Further, it is suggested that these two movements had in common a desire to advance the pursuit of holy living by professed Christians. Still further, it is also said that both of these movements (as found within the Church of England) shared common misgivings about the wisdom of that church being as subject to the control of parliament as it was. Parliament exercised control in the matter of the nomination and selection of bishops and archbishops. It also controlled the funding of new church construction (something highly important in that age of mushrooming metropolitan populations). Parliament also hindered the meeting of deliberative assemblies of the Church of England (i.e. the Convocations of the Provinces of Canterbury and York) between 1717 and 1852.[11] This Parliament had also recently terminated the effective monopoly on the exercise of religion enjoyed across England by the Church of England. Parliament, earlier comprised entirely of persons who were at least outwardly loyal to the established Church of England, after 1828 was opened to include elected members who were Protestant Nonconformists and (after 1829) Roman Catholics. It is a fact that Oxford Movement stalwarts (soon known as Tractarians,

---

has shown that these cooperative enterprises were anticipated by the launch in 1750 of the collaborative 'Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor'. See Rivers's essay, 'The First Evangelical Tract Society', *The Historical Journal* 50.1 (2007), 1–22. On both sides of the Atlantic, this collaborative pan-denominational effect preceded most denomination initiatives of a similar type.

[8] The origin and spread of the Evangelical Alliance has most recently been explored in Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).

[9] Newman drew attention to notable evangelical influences in his upbringing in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* published in 1864, a work written to show that rather than being duplicitous and concealing Catholic sympathies for years while continuing as an ordinand in the Church of England, he had been on a steady trajectory towards his Catholic position from his very early years.

[10] R. W. Church became the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and was the author of the early history, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years,* 1833–1845 (1891; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Robert Wilbeforce (1802–1857), second son of the emancipation advocate, William Wilberforce, and brother to Church of England bishop, Samuel Wilberforce (1705–1773), was a Church of England minister of Tractarian sympathies who converted to Roman Catholicism near the close of his life.

[11] 'Convocations of Canterbury and York', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) credits the joint action of Oxford Movement supporters with the Evangelical party with the re-instatement of Convocation.

after their pamphlets) and Anglican evangelicals shared both a sense of unease at these changes and an uncertainty as to know how to respond.[12]

Traces of this view of 'commonality' may be traced back to William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), who became prime minister of Great Britain in 1869. Having been raised in an evangelical home in Liverpool and come under the influence of the Oxford Movement while at Oxford, he drew attention to affinities between the two. Gladstone gave it as his opinion that 'the Evangelical movement may have stood in some relation of parentage to the Tractarian. But if so, it was hardly a conscious or voluntary parentage'. He ventured that most who joined the Tractarian movement and eventually re-affiliated to Rome 'owed the buddings of their religious life to the Evangelical movement'.[13] We may say that since the 1933 centenary of the launch of the Tractarian movement, writers have returned to these themes repeatedly.[14]

The Swedish church historian, Yngve Brilioth (1891–1959), an acute observer of Anglo-Catholicism, began where Gladstone left off in his 1933 lectures on the subject.[15] Brilioth reminded readers of Newman's own acknowledged indebtedness to Evangelical authors such as Thomas Scott, William Romaine, John Newton and Joseph Milner in his youth.[16] He was able to show that through the 1820s, John Henry Newman kept up some involvement with evangelical agencies such as the British and Foreign Bible Society and Church Missionary Society.[17] Brilioth showed that in the immediate aftermath of the launch of the first of the eventual 90 tracts in 1833, Newman was gratified to learn that these early literary productions had met with support from some evangelical as well as High Church readers.

Yet by the mid-1830s, any early sense of shared purpose had evaporated. Individual tracts released by the movement argued not only for an Apostolic Succession active in the national church, but for a consequent inauthenticity of sacraments administered within other Christian denominations. The evangelical Protestant stress on the importance of the spiritual unity of all genuine believers through the church invisible was held up for ridicule by Tractarians who argued in favor of the Church of England

---

[12] On these common interests and shared concerns, see Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology: 1833–1856* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979), 23–24.

[13] W. E. Gladstone, 'The Evangelical Movement: Its Parentage, Progress, and Issue', in *Gleanings of Past Years* (London: John Murray, 1879), 7:224, 231. Similar observations were made by a Gladstone contemporary, Anglican bishop Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873), who held somewhat aloof from the movement; see Peter B. Nockles, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism', in *Perfecting Perfection: Essays in Honor of Henry D. Rack*, ed. Robert Webster (Eugene: OR, Wipf & Stock, 2015), 245

[14] Andrew Atherstone shows how actively this view was promoted by Church of England bishops in connection with the 100th anniversary of the Oxford Movement in 1933, in 'Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement Centenary', *Journal of Religious History* 37 (2013): 98–117, esp. 113–15.

[15] Atherstone, 'Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement Centenary', 113–14, explains that Brilioth was not a partisan-advocate of the view that stressed that the Oxford Movement was completion of evangelicalism. His lectures were invited as a means of encouraging a judicious assessment of the movement at the very time (i.e. the centenary) when partisan writers were advancing the continuity idea.

[16] Yngve Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 6, 24. Newman acknowledged the importance of these writers on his early development when writing his 1864 *Apologia Pro Vita Sua.* See the edition edited by Wilfrid Ward, *Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua: The Two Versions of 1864 and 1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 107–11.

[17] Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*, 27. The extent of these involvements is examined in some detail by T. C. F. Stunt, 'John Henry Newman and the Evangelicals', *JEH* 21 (1970): 65–74.

as *the* visible church. A view of Christian baptism was being circulated in these tracts that made the reception of salvation to be inseparably associated with the administration of that rite.[18] Early tracts had claimed to take up a stance *against* Roman teaching (*Tract 71* and *Tract 72* provided reasons for discounting Rome's claims). Yet readers were nevertheless baffled to be told (in *Tract 80*) of the need for reserve and reticence in attempts to set out, by oral persuasion, the mystery of the cross of Christ.[19] Eventually, the bishop of Oxford responded to the widespread outcry that *Tract 90* (which had urged that the Anglican *Articles of Religion* could bear a Roman Catholic interpretation) was a vehicle for advancing Roman teaching; he obliged Newman to halt to all further production.[20] Brilioth did not deny any of this, though he mostly stressed observable commonalities.

Having adjudicated Gladstone's earlier contention that 'most' of the early Tractarians owed something to evangelical Christianity, Brilioth admitted that proof was lacking for any similar indebtedness on the part of John Keble, Hurrell Froude, or E. B. Pusey (all collaborators with Newman). Regarding Pusey, he could only plead that he had a better understanding of European Protestantism— and of Pietism—than his comrades had.[21] For examples of the indebtedness to evangelical Christianity which Gladstone had claimed to be widespread, Brilioth needed to look to two of the three sons of the famous abolitionist, William Wilberforce (1759–1833): these were Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Henry William Wilberforce. He also named Frederick Oakley (1802–1880).[22]

This claim of Evangelical-Tractarian affinity has not been forgotten in more recent decades. Writing in 1963, David Newsome pursued it in exploring how those Wilberforce brothers (Robert Isaac and Henry William) became alienated from the evangelicalism of their upbringing to embrace Tractarianism (and in the case of the second brother, eventually Roman Catholicism).[23] Writing in 1997, Michael Testa drew fresh attention to evidences of lingering evangelical emphases in Newman's preaching through the mid–1830s.[24] In 2015, Peter B. Nockles argued that Newman and the Oxford Movement represented an expression of 'religious revival', i.e. an intensification of religious commitment and zeal following an earlier torpor, and that this intensity of belief and religious feeling qualified the movement to be ranked with various other movements of spiritual awakening.[25] In this argument, he has been followed in 2017 by Grayson Carter, who insisted that 'the relationship between Evangelicals and the Tractarians was, at least in the initial phase of the Oxford Movement, largely complementary'.[26] Carter went on to cite

---

[18] I refer here to Tracts 15, 20 and 40 as published collectively in *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford, Vol. 1* (London: Rivingtons, 1834).

[19] Tracts 71, 72 and 80, in *Tracts for the Time, Vol. 2* (London: Rivingtons, 1840).

[20] Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*, 28–29.

[21] Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*, 31–37.

[22] Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*, 37.

[23] David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (1963; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 169–72. At p. 172 Newsome reports, 'The Tractarians seemed to be supplying the deficiencies of the Evangelicals and correcting their excesses'.

[24] Michael A. Testa, 'Newman and the Evangelicals', *EvQ* 68 (1997): 237–44.

[25] Nockles, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism', 233–34.

[26] Carter, 'The Evangelical Background', 46. Carter explicitly acknowledges that he is extending the perspective set out by Nockles in 2015.

shared interests in the necessary distinction between society and the church, upon holiness, and upon earnestness in worship.[27]

Yet even when we have come this far, advocates of commonality are required to admit, in candor, that such evidence of shared concerns suffers for lack of wider corroboration. The trail seems to 'grow cold' and disappears considerably earlier than the wave of conversions to Rome by members of the Tractarian movement circa 1845—a move first involving Tractarian writer W. G. Ward and then J. H. Newman, as well as many students under Newman's influence.

3. Evidence of Incompatibility between These Movements

By 1838, there had been two dramatic developments beyond the *Tracts* themselves which illustrated that whatever commonalities and shared values there might have been at an earlier stage, these were far from enduring.[28] The first was the Tractarian takeover of a High Church periodical, the *British Critic.* Newman had become involved with it, editorially, in 1836 and this involvement had opened the way for his Tractarian colleagues to exercise an ever-more pervasive influence as contributors to the periodical. Beginning in 1838, other viewpoints (mostly High Church) began to be crowded out and the *British Critic* rapidly became an ideological 'engine'. First under Newman's editorship, and then under the editorship of his surrogate, Thomas Mozley, a kind of combat was carried on with other viewpoints in the Church of England. Though Anglican evangelicalism was not the sole target, it –with High Church Anglicanism—was treated as 'fair game' by the *British Critic.*[29] Observing this development, the strident evangelical Anglican periodical, *The Record,* opined, 'The Puseyite party have bought up the *British Critic,* which publication will from henceforth be dedicated to the promulgation of their principles'.[30]

Yet this first development, the impact of which became more apparent over time, was soon eclipsed by the bombshell effect of the publication in 1838–1839, after joint editorial work by Newman and John Keble, of the two-volume *Remains* of Newman's former bosom friend, Hurrell Froude (1803–1836). Froude, also a fellow (with Newman) at Oxford's Oriel College, had battled tuberculosis; before his early demise Froude had travelled widely in the Mediterranean (accompanied by Newman) in search of health. Upon his death, the release of his diaries and letters astonished many of those who read them. They disclosed an open disdain for the English Reformers ('As for the Reformers, I think less and less of them'[31]) and open devotion towards Rome. The release and circulation of these opinions was 'intentionally provocative',[32] for Newman and Keble would clearly have been able to anticipate the

---

[27] Carter, 'The Evangelical Background', 47.

[28] Carter, 'The Evangelical Background', 48, allows that Newman himself observed a withdrawal of evangelical sympathy for his movement in the 1834–1836 period.

[29] Simon Skinner, 'The British Critic: Newman and Mozley, Oakley and Ward', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereira (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 289–303.

[30] Newman recorded the *Record's* opinion in his diary, preserved in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. C. S. Dessain (London: Oxford University Press, 1961–2008), 6:186, quoted in Skinner, 'The British Critic', 293.

[31] Hurrell Froude, *Literary Remains*, ed. John H. Newman and E. B. Pusey (London: Rivington, 1838–1839), 1:379, quoted in Andrew Atherstone, 'Protestant Reaction', 167.

[32] Atherstone, 'Protestant Reaction', 167. See also Carter, 'The Evangelical Background', 48–49

criticism they would draw from both the high church and evangelical wings of the Church of England. Bear in mind that in 1838 there had, as yet, been no Anglican defections to Rome; neither had there yet been any Episcopal action to halt publication of the *Tracts.*

The thesis of commonality is therefore undermined by three factors:

1. The proportion of supporters of the early Oxford or Tractarian movement with Evangelicalism in their pasts was small; this background was never characteristic of the movement considered as a whole. Any list of Tractarians from evangelical backgrounds is a very short list.[33]
2. The direction of the published views of the Tractarians after about 1835—both in the Tracts and in their acquired journal, the *British Critic*, was one of hostility to all viewpoints beside their own.
3. The decision to publish the literary *Remains* of the deceased Tractarian, Froude, was a decision to employ his criticisms of English Protestantism as a vehicle for the views of those who released them to the public. Their editorial work was a piece of literary ventriloquism.

4. Features of Early Victorian Evangelical Opposition to the Oxford Movement

Diarmaid MacCulloch has observed that, with the exception of E. B. Pusey (who had studied in Germany), the early Tractarian writers were very poorly informed about the sixteenth century Reformation on the Continent, as well as the emergence of the Reformation in their island-nation. He has drawn attention to an 'Anglo-Catholic re-writing of English church history pioneered by John Keble and John Henry Newman in the 1830s'.[34] While they in fact wrote and worked under a handicap (as did most of their contemporaries), the polemical efforts of the Tractarians to drive a wedge between the Church of England and the Reformation of the sixteenth century had the unintended effect of generating tremendous renewed interest across the English-speaking world in the leading personalities and writings of the Reformation. Some examples will help to make this development concrete.

4.1. The Oxford Martyr's Memorial

A proposed Oxford Martyr's Memorial to Edwardian Protestant bishops Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer, all burned at the stake in Oxford in the reign of Mary Tudor, had languished for lack of adequate financial support after the completion of its design in 1838. However, Anglicans of various allegiances united to see this project brought to completion by 1843 in the face of the negative aspersions against the English Reformers cast by various Tractarian writings.[35]

---

[33] Nockles, 'The Oxford Movement and Evangelicalism', 253, perceptively points out that the 19th century figures (such as Gladstone) who promoted the linkage between Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement were ex-evangelicals who 'had made the switch to Tractarianism and sometimes to Rome. They tended to make the comparison at the expense of or to the detriment to Evangelicalism itself.'

[34] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 197.

[35] Andrew Atherstone, 'Protestant Reactions', 168, and *Oxford's Protestant Spy: The Controversial Career of Charles Golightly* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2007).

4.2. Parker Society, Religious Tract Society, Calvin Translation Society

In the same years, efforts were undertaken to re-circulate the writings of the English Reformers of the sixteenth century through the efforts of the newly-founded (1840) Parker Society (named in honor of Elizabethan archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker [1504–1575]). In due course, 7,000 member-subscribers would receive 54 volumes of treatises, letters, and documents pertaining to the Reformation in England and its relations with the Continent. While the Parker Society reflected the particular priorities of concerned persons within the Church of England,[36] it was not alone in seeking to address the 'stir' created by the Tractarians. The pan-denominational Religious Tract Society (founded 1799), had, for reasons of its own, set in motion a publishing program that would address this emerging situation; already in 1828 the Society had begun to circulate the *Select Writings of the British Reformers* in twelve volumes. It concluded that series with an 1833 volume, *Lives of the British Reformers*.[37]

In part because the Tractarians had identified Reformation Geneva as a source of the spread of rationalism in religion, concerned individuals in both England and Scotland joined together in this period to found the Calvin Translation Society. For a subscription of £1 annually, readers would eventually receive Calvin's *Institutes* in the two-volume Beveridge translation, the three-volume *Tracts and Treatises,* and 45 volumes of his biblical commentary.[38] Once more, the Tractarians provided the stimulus.

4.3. Direct Challenges to Tractarianism from within the Church of England

Reference has already been made to the qualified interest which certain evangelicals expressed towards the early efforts of the Tractarians in 1833 to raise up a movement which shared their antipathy to Parliamentary encroachments. But chronologically parallel to those qualified expressions of interest there was growing up among strands of Anglican evangelicalism a deep concern at this movement. In 1836, Edward Bickersteth (1785–1850) by then closely associated with the Church Missionary Society, authored *Remarks on the Progress of Popery*—a treatise not about Popery but about Tractarianism. There were similar oppositional efforts offered in response to Tractarian claims about primitive unwritten tradition and baptismal regeneration.[39] George Stanley Faber (1773–1854) responded to John Henry Newman's vacillating writings on justification with his own *The Primitive Doctrine of Justification Investigated* (1837). A visiting American Episcopal bishop of Ohio, Charles P. McIlvaine (1799–1873) lingered in England long enough to pen *The Oxford Divinity Compared with that of the Romish and Anglican Churches* (1841).[40]

---

[36] Andrew Cinnamond, 'The Reformed Treasures of the Parker Society', *Churchman* 122 (2008): 221, reports that the Society, representing the interests of both High Church and Evangelical wings of the Church of England, was comprised of 7,000 subscriber-members.

[37] William Jones, *The Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1850), 132, 144. The final volume, *Lives of the British Reformers*, was also published at Philadelphia by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in 1843.

[38] The author's copies of the *Tracts and Treatises* (published 1851) contain a bound-in leaflet furnishing these details. All the volumes originally released by the Calvin Translation Society have been kept in print in their Victorian translations.

[39] Toon, *Evangelical Theology*, 26.

[40] Editions were published in both London (Seeley and Burnside) and Philadelphia (Whetham and Son) in that year.

This existing concern was intensified when with the year 1840, the Tractarians circulated their *Tract 90,* purporting to show how the Anglican *Articles of Religion* could bear a Catholic (rather than a Protestant) sense. This provoked William Goode (1801–1868), the editor of the *Christian Observer*, to go into print with a major critique, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* (1842).[41] William Patrick Palmer (1803–1885), until the publication of *Tract 90* a Tractarian sympathizer, turned on his former fellows with the publication of his *A Narrative of Events Connected with the Publication of the 'Tracts for the Times'* (1843).[42]

4.4. Challenges to Tractarianism from beyond the Church of England

Protestant Nonconformity, whose recovery of the right to vote and to be seated in Parliament was so objectionable to the Tractarians,[43] was following these events just as closely. John Stoughton (1807–1897), then a Congregationalist minister in Windsor but later the church historian at New College, Hampstead, issued his *Lectures on Tractarian Theology* in 1843.[44] The publication in the next year of Tractarian W. G. Ward's *The Ideal of a Christian Church* (1844), a treatise in which the Roman Church was set up as the virtual ideal, provoked another watchful Nonconformist, George Redford of Worcester (1785–1860) to supply a 40-page critical review in the *British Quarterly Review.*[45] This united concern, within and beyond the Church of England goes some distance to explain why the Congregational Union in framing a May 1842 call that would help to bring into being the World's Evangelical Alliance in 1846, stated its alarm at the advance of 'Popery, Puseyism, and Plymouth Brethrenism'.[46]

4.5. Stimulus to the Study of Reformation History

Taking a broader view, we may say that the challenge of Tractarianism unwittingly served as a stimulus to the fresh investigation of Reformation history.[47] In the same period (beginning 1841) there appeared in the United Kingdom and America the English translation of the multi-volume *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (1835–1853) by the Genevan writer, J. H. Merle D'Aubigné (1794–1872). D'Aubigné devoted his fifth volume to England's Tudor Reformation.[48] That D'Aubigné was

---

[41] Portions of Goode's treatise on the supremacy of biblical authority are reprinted in Elizabeth Jay's *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 65–85.

[42] The story of opposition to the Tractarian movement from within the Church of England subsequent to Newman's departure for Rome in 1845 is helpfully narrated by Nigel Scotland in 'Evangelicals, Anglicans and Ritualism in Victorian England', *Churchman,* 111 (1997): 249–65.

[43] This objection reckoned that with the removal of these restrictions, the country had ceased to be a "confessional state" enshrining any particular expression of Christianity.

[44] John Stoughton, *Lectures on Tractarian Theology* (London, Jackson & Wallford, 1843).

[45] George Redford, 'Tractarian Theology: Ward's *Ideal of a Christian Church*', *British Quarterly Review* 1 (1845): 37–78.

[46] J. B. A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain* (Goes, the Netherlands: Oosterbaan, 1968), 17, and Ruth Rouse, 'Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate', in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517 to 1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 319.

[47] As distinguishable from the martyrology and theological texts of the Reformation era, mentioned above.

[48] The paucity of reliable information about the Reformation era was attested to by the Scottish theologian, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), who having examined the just-published English translation of D'Aubigné's *History*, remarked on how the Continental Reformation was 'little known in this country'. See 'Thomas Chalmers to J.

thinking of contemporary developments in Britain as he wrote is clear from his pamphlet-writing in the same period. These pamphlets included *Puseyism Examined* and *Geneva and Oxford*, both published in 1843. The latter reflected aspersions cast on Geneva by the Tractarians as the mother of rationalism in religion.[49] Another Genevan, later a Huguenot minister at Berlin, Paul Emil Henry (1792–1853), saw his two-volume *Life and Times of John Calvin* (1835) appear in an English translation at London by 1849.[50] The provocation of the Tractarians also served to stimulate fresh historical examination within the Church of England of the Lutheran Reformation. Julius Hare's intriguingly titled volume, *Vindication of Luther against His Modern Assailants* (1854), was directly aimed at countering the dismissive attitude exhibited toward the Reformation by the Tractarians.[51]

5. Drawing Some Threads Together

It was not until the autumn of 1845 that two notable Tractarians of Oxford, William George Ward (1812–1882) and John Henry Newman (1801–1890) formally entered the Roman Catholic Church. In their doing so, they seemed to confirm what so many had long suspected and suggested in print, i.e. that the natural tendency of the Tractarian Movement had been Rome-ward. The fact that students associated with Newman in his quasi-monastic establishment at Littlemore (outside Oxford) had preceded him in his re-affiliation to Rome also seemed to confirm this hypothesis. The *Record* newspaper of the militant-Tory evangelical wing of the Church of England proceeded to publicize the names of each such convert.[52] And before long, there were circulating suggestions that Newman (in particular) had been a closeted-Catholic for an extended time prior to his making the actual break. His later *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* of 1864 was composed to answer just such insinuations of duplicity.

Thus, this essay judges that evangelical sentiment both inside the Church of England and beyond it towards Tractarianism had overwhelmingly been one of suspicion of its motives and distrust of its agenda from the point when it moved beyond its initial opposing of further Parliamentary intrusions into church affairs and began to elaborate its views on church, ministry and sacraments. The Oxford Movement, taken as a whole, did not grow out of evangelicalism (as though the latter was the parent of the former). It is fairer to say that a handful of early Tractarians did in fact spurn their evangelical pasts and later acknowledged those pasts. But in Newman's own case, the move was not directly from Evangelicalism to Tractarianism, but from Evangelicalism to a form of early theological liberalism and

---

H. Merle D'Aubigné 14 Feb. 1846', in *A Selection from the Correspondence of the Late Thomas Chalmers, D.D.*, ed. William Hannah (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1853), 447.

[49] E. B. Pusey had published *A Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury* in 1842 warning the Church of England against entering into an alliance with the German Protestant Church in establishing a Protestant bishop at Jerusalem (the so-called 'Jerusalem bishopric'). As a reason for not entering such an alliance, Pusey cited the rationalistic character of European Protestantism and named Geneva as the exemplar of this tendency. On the episode, see Kenneth J. Stewart, *Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicals and the Francophone Réveil 1816–1849*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 213.

[50] Paul Emil Henry, *The Life and Times of John Calvin, the Great Reformer*, trans. Henry Stebbing (London: Whitaker, 1849).

[51] See the comment on Hare's work in E. G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), 50–51.

[52] Toon, *Evangelical Theology*, 61.

from that (in reaction) to Tractarianism.[53] Yet such a conclusion does not exhaust the original question of interrelationship of two movements which all admit were in interaction with one another.

6. An Alternative Way of Construing Evangelical-Tractarian Relationships

If we set aside as inadequate the suggestion that evangelical Christianity within the Church of England stood in a parental relationship to Tractarianism, there are still other possible interrelationships which can be explored. A survey of the broader scene within Victorian Protestantism will enable us to see that the situation is the opposite of what might be termed 'mono-causal'. The mistake has been that of concentrating almost exclusively on the Evangelicalism-Tractarianism interplay in isolation from a larger pattern of ferment and upheaval.

The mere fact that by 1842 the Congregational Union could simultaneously draw attention to the perceived danger posed by 'Romanism, Puseyism and Plymouth Brethrenism' in its call for united evangelical Protestant action[54] points us in the direction of seeking just such a wider matrix of relationships. The three tendencies identified in this Congregationalist appeal were themselves combinable in two alternate ways. Romanism and Puseyism were suspected of being in league in an era when the right to vote had been restored to Roman Catholics, large-scale Irish Catholic immigration had flowed into England[55] and Pope Pius IX would shortly aim to re-establish a Catholic hierarchy of bishops in England and Wales.[56] At the same time, this same Puseyism (or, the Oxford Movement) was perceived to have some affinity with the emerging Plymouth Brethren movement.[57] The latter was a second movement for which leaders were furnished from within the established churches of England and Ireland); like the Tractarian movement, this embodied a quest to recover a more primitive and apostolic Christianity than either could credit the national Church with upholding. Each movement had lost confidence in the national Protestant establishment. And both of these movements also engaged in prophetic speculation, a Christian tendency fueled by the horrifying excesses of France's Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.[58]

---

[53] Carter, 'The Evangelical Background', 45, speaks of Newman's circuitous pilgrimage from Evangelicalism which 'involved a brief sojourn among the Oxford Noetics' in the late 1820s. Frank M. Turner, *Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 11, speaks of a phase in young Newman involving the 'loss of religious faith'.

[54] See footnote 46 (above).

[55] This immigration was fueled by the ongoing potato famine in Ireland.

[56] In September, 1850 Pope Pius IX would replace his hitherto-representatives in England, papal nuncios, with a Cardinal-Archbishop and twelve diocesan bishops. This papal resolve came to be termed the "papal aggression". The period and its developments are discussed in B. G. Worrall, *The Making of the Modern Church: Christianity in England Since 1800*, 3rd ed. (London: SPCK, 2004), ch. 9.

[57] In a paper shortly to appear in *SBET* 37.2 '"Popery Unmasked":Opposition to the Oxford Movement among Late Nineteenth-Century Dissenters', Mark Stevenson has shown that the young J. N. Darby, an eventual pioneer of the Brethren, had a passing fascination with the ideas championed by the Oxford Movement while still a Church of Ireland minister.

[58] On this point, see the insightful article of David Bebbington, 'The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism Since 1800', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9.2 (1988), 103–14. The Scottish manifestation of this early 19th century trend is highlighted by Crawford Gribben, 'Andrew Bonar and the Scottish Presbyterian Millennium', in *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880*, ed. Crawford Gribben

Yet, having identified dissatisfaction with the existing Parliamentary jurisdiction over the nation's life and national church as a factor equally characteristic of Tractarianism and the early Plymouth Brethren, we can find the same traits in a movement centering around the evangelical parliamentarian, banker and philanthropist, Henry Drummond (1786–1860).[59] Drummond denigrated the parliamentary actions empowering Roman Catholics to vote and the ending of confessional tests for university entrance (thus opening England's universities not only to Protestant Nonconformists and Roman Catholics, but those of no religious profession whatsoever) just as did the Tractarians. At his Surrey estate, Albury Park, Drummond, held by-invitation conferences for the consideration of biblical prophecy; these discussions, carried on in the 1826–1830 period, were informed by the same world-pessimism which fastened on Revolutionary and Napoleonic France as the omen of coming world cataclysm.[60] In this period, Drummond was an active Church of England layman of considerable means who exercised the hereditary right of presentation of candidates for appointment to the Albury parish church. From this nexus at Albury Park would eventually emerge the openly-restorationist Catholic Apostolic Church, in which both Drummond and London Scots preacher, Edward Irving (1792–1834), would figure prominently.[61] Significant for the purposes of this discussion is the fact that the Catholic Apostolic Church would distinguish itself not only for its bold claim to exercise the charismata of the Apostolic age, but also for its lavish liturgies borrowed from the pre-Reformation church, both East and West.

Frustration over the religious policies of the Parliamentary government of the 1830s was equally a feature north of the border in Scotland. What has come to be called the 'Ten Years' Conflict', was an extended period of struggle during which the Church of Scotland's failed in her attempts to secure funding for the expansion of the national church into newly crowded urban settings in which church facilities were completely unequal to the needs posed. The parliamentary government went so far as to oppose the incorporation of privately financed new church construction into the pre-existing parish structure.[62] And yet, while this struggle with an unresponsive parliament unfolded (leading in 1843 to the departure from the Scottish national Church of a large constituency which would be known as the Free Church of Scotland), there was all the while underfoot another tendency that in its own way echoed trends in the southern nation: the serious attempt to deepen and enrich the liturgical life of the Scottish Church through the fresh appropriation of liturgical materials from the Reformation era and earlier. This attempt, claimed one late twentieth century commentator, reflected an upsurge of

---

and Timothy C. F. Stunt (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 177–202. As regards how prophetic study affected the Tractarians, see Paul Misner, 'Newman and the Tradition concerning the Papal Antichrist', *Church History* 42 (1973), 377–95

[59] See Grayson Carter, 'Henry Drummond', in *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography: 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1:326–28.

[60] The best available treatment of Drummond and his Albury Park conferences is provided in Ernest A. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (1970; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), ch. 1. See also Stewart, *Restoring the Reformation*, 176–88, and Tim Grass, *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 1–8.

[61] The now-standard account is that of Tim Grass, *The Lord's Work.* It should be noted that there were important voices of dissent at the Albury conferences, both as regards the strident premillennialist interpretation of prophecy pursued there and the notion that all the charismatic gifts of the Apostolic age need reappear.

[62] The decade-long conflict is described in J. H. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1960), 334–69.

interest by the upwardly mobile in the aesthetic aspect of worship as well as the Romantic aspiration that worship address the affective as well as the cerebral.[63]

The point of view maintained here, therefore, is that we do well to concentrate not purely on the question of the relation of Tractarianism to the pre-existing evangelical party of the Church of England, but to consider as well the larger picture. In that larger picture, Christians in the established churches of neighboring nations found themselves frustrated at their central government's failure to adequately advance the interests of the state churches, while being very open to the re-appropriation of past ways of worshipping God.[64]

7. Our Contemporary Situation

Since the 1930s, there has been a steady stream of commentators urging modern Christians to view Tractarianism (and its later expression of Anglo-Catholicism) as the natural offspring of an earlier evangelicalism so that some kind of 'détente', or better, collaboration might follow. But such advocacy is fraught with difficulty, and not only because (as this essay has shown) forms of evangelical Christianity (within and beyond Anglicanism) have almost from the first found fault with Tractarianism on biblical and doctrinal grounds, but also because of unfolding developments.

Anglo-Catholicism's commitment to the supreme authority and trustworthiness of Scripture—something that the early Tractarians shared with forms of evangelical Christianity—subsided by the closing decades of the nineteenth century so that then and since this movement has proved highly accommodating to critical theories about Scripture and its interpretation. The 1889 publication of the epoch-making volume, *Lux Mundi*, marked a watershed in this respect.[65] Editor Charles Gore (1853–1932) who in 1889 was principal of Pusey House, Oxford (an Anglo-Catholic study center) endorsed critical views of the composition of the Pentateuch and denied the notion of predictive prophecy within the Old Testament. Gore nevertheless went on to become Anglican bishop of Worcester in 1902 and of Oxford in 1911. His publicised critical views ensured that his elevation to the episcopate would be opposed by evangelicals in the Church of England.

The second consideration is an extension of the first. Anglo-Catholicism as it exists in the Anglican Communion today, in direct relationship to its shift of attitude towards Scripture in the late nineteenth century, currently finds itself divided and enfeebled by the questions which in recent decades have roiled the entire global Anglican Communion. There has been no single Anglo-Catholic approach to the question of gender and the church; there is not either a single Anglo-Catholic approach to the difficult

---

[63] See the helpful account of this Scottish movement in A. C. Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk: Victorian Scotland's Religious Revolution* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1983), ch. 4.

[64] Carter acknowledges this wider ferment, 'The Evangelical Background', 43, but not in a way that properly acknowledges the common grievances that gave rise to such a range of responses. A more judicious approach is displayed by Timothy Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), chs. 7–9, which explores the concurrent ferment in Ireland, England and Scotland.

[65] This is the thrust of Timothy Larsen, 'Scripture and Biblical Interpretation', in *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereira (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 231–43.

questions posed for the modern church in the realm of sexuality.[66] Pre-*Lux Mundi* Anglo-Catholicism would have seen things in a different way.

Therefore, a judicious appraisal of the Tractarian Movement's actual original relationship to evangelicalism and theological developments within that movement since the late nineteenth century make plain that this is no natural ally.

---

[66] See the frank admission of the current disarray within Anglo-Catholicism in Colin Podmore, 'Afterword: The Oxford Movement Today—The Things that Remain', in *The Oxford Handbook to the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereira (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 622–31.

Athens without a Statue to the Unknown God

— Kyle Beshears —

Kyle Beshears is teaching pastor at Mars Hill Church in Mobile, Alabama and teaches courses on worldview and religion at the University of Mobile. He is the author of the forthcoming book Apatheism: How We Share When They Don't Care.

******

Abstract: Apatheism is indifference and apathy toward the existence of God. In our secular age, a person adopts apatheism when they feel a sense of existential security absent God, effectively dissolving their reason, motivation, and will to care about questions related to his existence. This indifference presents a stronger challenge for evangelism than does religious pluralism, agnosticism, and atheism. For this reason, evangelicals ought to explore ways of engaging apatheism.

******

I'm sure that you've experienced it before; that passionless, detached "meh" you receive in response after asking someone questions about their belief in God. Those crucial questions to philosophy, faith, and the meaning of life, which you ponder and return to over and again, are dismissed with the kind of disinterest typically experienced by a policy specialist at the IRS when they explain what they do for a living. As a committed believer, you happily engage someone with the kind of dialogue that stirs your mind to explore the most significant questions human beings can ask. But, to your surprise, the person is wholly indifferent to the topic. You ask, "Do you believe in God?" And they respond with a deflating grin and shrug-of-the-shoulders reminiscent of *The Office's* Jim Halpert deadpanning Camera 2 after his buffoon manager, Michael Scott, asked him a ridiculous question.

Sometimes, the disinterest comes from the kind of person you would expect—an agnostic who, after years of oscillating between religious and areligious beliefs, has finally thrown their hands in the air and given up. Other times, the disinterest comes from the kind of person you would least expect—a self-described religious person who, for one reason or another, is utterly indifferent to the very foundations upon which their worldview was constructed. Either way, the result is the same. In our culture, there seems to be a growing apathy toward theism. In conjunction with declining religious service attendance and the rising of the religiously unaffiliated has come a new challenge to evangelism. It is no longer the pugnacious New Atheism at center stage, but something far less passionate—*apatheism*. This nonchalant attitude toward God is more challenging to evangelism than religious pluralism, agnosticism, and atheism. For this reason, the phenomenon should be taken seriously. Evangelicals ought to examine and

understand it for the sake of the gospel. The more that we understand apatheism, the better equipped we are to engage it.

1. What Is Apatheism?

Apatheism—a portmanteau of *apathy* and *theism*—is, in part, the belief that God and questions related to his existence and character are irrelevant.[1] These God questions (GQs) are the big ones: Does God exist? Can we know if God exists? If so, how does he reveal himself, and what is he like? What is the nature of his person and character? And what does God do? If God does not exist, then what does his non-existence mean? Apatheism is wholly indifferent to these questions. Philosopher Milenko Budimir noticed that this indifference distinguishes apatheism from otherwise intuitively related positions. He observed,

> Classical theism is the position that a god or gods exist. In contrast, atheism argues that a god or gods do not exist. Lastly, there is agnosticism which holds that there is just not enough evidence to prove or disprove the existence of a god. Now apatheism is the position that whether or not a god exists is just not that important of a question, that it has little relevancy.[2]

Philosophers Trevor Hedberg and Jordan Huzarevich put it more succinctly:

> [Apatheism] is distinct from theism, atheism, and agnosticism. A theist believes that God exists; an atheist believes that God does not exist; an agnostic believes that we cannot know whether God exists; an apatheist believes that we should not care whether God exists.[3]

They concluded that apatheism is "a general *attitude* of apathy or indifference regarding how we answer [existence questions relating to God]."[4] They further emphasized that apatheism is a *belief* related to an *attitude*, i.e., what one *thinks* about GQs fosters how one *feels* about God and even *vice versa*.

Unsurprisingly, then, apatheism is best known by what it produces, apathy toward God. Recently, philosopher Gabriel Citron coined the term "theapathy" to describe the state of being completely

---

[1] Pronounced "apathy-ism," Robert Nash was the first to note that apatheism is, at its core, apathy toward questions of God's existence or nonexistence (*Religious Pluralism in the Academy: Opening the Dialogue* [New York: Peter Lang, 2001], 27). Trevor Hedberg and Jordan Huzarevich paired apatheism with "existence questions" in their excellent treatment on the topic, "Appraising Objections to Practical Apatheism," *Philosophia* (2016): 1–20. I prefer the term "God questions" over "existence questions" because apatheism moves well beyond mere indifference toward God's existence into related topics concerning his person, character, and actions and our relation to him. My preference is not to be read as rebuffing or disagreeing with Hedberg and Huzarevich, whose project was limited to one's affectivity specifically toward existence questions.

[2] Milenko Budimir, "Apatheism: The New Face of Religion?," *Philosophy of Religion* 45 (2008): 88–93.

[3] Hedberg and Huzarevich, "Appraising Objections to Practical Apatheism," 3. These authors wrote as an apologetic for apatheism. In 2018, philosopher Tawa Anderson offered a rebuttal to their argument, warning that "apatheism leads to the vices of acedia (failure to care sufficiently about things that deserve close consideration) and misology (hatred of reasoned argumentation)" ("The Big Questions: Prudence, Passion, and the Vice of Apatheism" [paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Denver, CO, November 2018]).

[4] Hedberg and Huzarevich, "Appraising Objections to Practical Apatheism," 3, emphasis added.

apathetic or indifferent towards God.[5] Apatheism manifests itself in theapathy, for if a person does not believe GQs are important (apatheism), then it naturally follows that they will express apathy toward God (theapathy). For this reason, I define apatheism as indifference toward GQs manifested as theapathy. Put differently, apatheism is when a person *believes* questions about God are irrelevant and *feels* apathetic toward him. This definition bifurcates belief and attitude in apatheism while noting the relationship between the two.

One question quickly arises: Is apatheism a bounded linear system that begins in belief and ends in attitude? Does cognitive indifference always come before theapathy? It would make sense, for how could a person express feelings about something without thinking it through? However, I doubt this is always the case, and the answer lies in a both/and rather than an either/or solution. Apatheism is reciprocal. The more convinced a person becomes that GQs are irrelevant, the more likely they will approach God in apathy, and the longer a person approaches God in apathy, the more convinced they become that GQs are irrelevant. Neither one, belief nor attitude, necessarily carries the prerequisite role of initiating the reciprocation. For some people, it may be that their cognitive indifference toward GQs affects their feelings about God. For others, theapathy influences how GQs are valued. Their dulled heart convinces their mind that God is irrelevant.

It seems counterintuitive that how we feel about something influences what we think about it. But psychologists have noticed that attitudes can influence beliefs because our emotional responses to objects (or affect) are not strictly post-cognitive, i.e., we do not experience affective reactions only after we have sufficiently thought things through.[6] For example, imagine a hiker in the forest who encounters a bear. The hiker immediately experiences the activation of both affective information (e.g., danger, fear, self-preserving stimuli, etc.) and cognitive information (e.g., the size of the bear, the color of its fur, etc.). The affective information takes primacy, distressing the hiker before she's had a chance to sort through the cognitive information. She didn't need to know what kind of bear she met to know that she ought to flee. This affective primacy, in the words of psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist, means that "one's feelings are not a reaction to, or a superposition on, one's cognitive assessment, but the reverse: the affect comes first, the thinking later."[7] The hiker fled the bear first and only later recalled its size and fur color. So, it is possible that a person acts in apathy toward GQs *before* they have thought it through. Their apatheism is a reaction to their theapathy, rationally justifying how they already feel.

Beliefs shape attitudes, but attitudes can also shape beliefs. Indeed, there is a powerful impulse within us that seeks to avoid cognitive dissonance so that a person will attempt to maintain consistency between their beliefs and attitudes. It is unlikely that someone would believe GQs are irrelevant but feel something toward God. It is just as unlikely for someone who is theapathetic to find GQs interesting.

---

[5] Gabriel Citron, "Theapathy and Theaffectivity: On (Not) Caring about God," unpublished paper received in communication with the author, 19 November 2018.

[6] Robert Zajonc, "Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences," *American Psychologist* 35 (February 1980): 151–75. See also Robert Zajonc, "On the Primacy of Affect," *American Psychologist* 39 (February 1984): 117–23; Stanley Rachman, "The Primacy of Affect: Some Theoretical Implications," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 19 (1981): 279–90; and Vicky Tzuyin Lai, Peter Hagoort, and Daniel Casasanto, "Affective Primacy vs. Cognitive Primacy: Dissolving the Debate," *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (July 2012): 1–8.

[7] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 184.

Regardless of which causes what, two distinct elements constitute apatheism—belief and attitude. This distinction is not always discerned by observers, which typically results in a description of apatheism as mere attitude absent belief. For example, in 2003, journalist Jonathan Rauch penned an essay, "Let it Be," that popularized the concept of apatheism.[8] He denounced religion as the "most divisive and volatile of social forces," evidenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[9] Rauch argued that zealous dogmatism, whether "fanatical religiosity" or "tyrannical secularism," is an unfortunate natural state for humans.[10] These ideological fundamentalisms severely jeopardize the progress and safety of society. So, if a religious impulse exists to care too much for ideologies, which results in terrorism or tyranny, societies ought to adopt apatheism to neutralize those threats. In other words, societies should care less about religion to cool the dogmatic fever that lays dormant in each of us. Apatheism enables a sort of ideological *enkrateia*, self-control over radical impulses caused by zealotry. Our reward for ideological *enkrateia* is tranquility of the collective mind undisturbed by dangerous enthusiasm that upsets the social order.[11] Apatheism, according to Rauch, should be celebrated as "nothing less than a major civilizational advance."[12]

He defined apatheism as "a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people's [religion]."[13] Apatheism is not concerned with *what* you believe but *how* you believe—it is "an *attitude*, not a belief system," Rauch claimed.[14] He is not wrong, but he is not entirely right. By focusing on theapathy, he overlooks the associated belief that God is irrelevant. Apatheism is a 'what' of belief inseparably connected to a 'how' of belief. Rauch himself cannot help but notice the *–ism* of apatheism, for he elsewhere described it as an "effort to discipline the religious *mindset*."[15] True, apatheism is not a belief system, but it is surely a belief. Ask an apatheist why they are uninterested in God, and their response will likely be that they don't *believe* God is relevant to their life.

---

[8] Jonathan Rauch, "Let It Be," *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2003): 34–35, https://tinyurl.com/y4heuznr. It is a common misconception that Rauch coined the term apatheism, a claim he does not make. The term was first coined by Canadian sociologist Stuart Johnson to describe the kind of indifference toward religion that accompanies an ever-secularizing society ("The Correctional Chaplaincy: Sociological Perspectives in a Time of Rapid Change," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Justice* 14 [1972]: 179). Robert Nash mistakenly claimed that he coined the term in 2001 [*Religious Pluralism in the Academy*, 27]. While Rauch did not invent the term, he certainly popularized it. Nearly every work written on apatheism in the past two decades has cited his article.

[9] Rauch, "Let It Be," 34.

[10] Rauch, "Let It Be."

[11] Rauch's call for ideological *enkrateia* is not a bad thing. However, as philosopher Randal Rauser noted, Rauch is asking for the right thing *via* the wrong method because he conflates apatheism with *enkrateia*. If Rauch's goal is to tame ideological zeal, then *enkrateia*, not apatheism, should be the goal. See Randal Rauser, "A Defense of Apatheism, sort of" (paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Denver, CO, November 2018).

[12] Rauch, "Let It Be," 35. Philosopher Paul Copan challenged Rauch's cheery disposition toward apatheism, arguing that it represents a decline in civilization due to its negative "intellectual, cultural, moral, and existential implications." See Paul Copan, "Apatheism and the Unexamined Life: Part 1," *The Worldview Bulletin Newsletter*, 22 April 2019, https://worldviewbulletin.substack.com/p/apatheism-and-the-unexamined-life.

[13] Rauch, "Let It Be," 35.

[14] Rauch, "Let It Be," 35.

[15] Rauch, "Let It Be," 35, emphasis added.

2. Is Apatheism merely Practical Atheism?

One might argue that apatheism is merely a subset of atheism, especially in its practical form. The result is certainly the same: a life spent ignoring God. However, practical atheism is disregard for the answers to GQs, not a disregard for GQs *per se*. Unlike atheism proper, the practical atheist acts as if God does not exist and has no authority over his life despite his belief in God. Hence, *practical* atheism and not *actual* atheism. The psalmist berates this behavior, warning that these "foolish people" intentionally suppress knowledge of God to indulge in moral corruption (Pss 14:1; 53:1). These "fools" do not cognitively reject God's existence but deny his authority as moral standard and law-giver. They believe that God exists but act as if he does not. Apatheists, however, do not care at all about God and, thus, act as if he does not exist. It is essential to keep these two positions, practical atheism and apatheism, distinct from one another.[16] Otherwise, one risks issuing the wrong diagnosis.

3. Why Apatheism?

So, why apatheism? Why is it that affections toward God today in Western society are so inert? It is difficult to imagine that a person could be so apathetic five centuries ago. Back then, questions about God's province over salvation and moral duty dominated the public imagination. Everyone asked these questions because they believed that ultimate meaning is found beyond humanity and nature. Religion, especially the Christian faith, offered answers to questions of meaning, so GQs were very important. But something changed. Western society began to separate itself from religion or, at least, no longer aligned with a particular religion. This separation led to questioning whether or not God is involved in our lives (deism), if we can know God (agnosticism), or if he even exists (atheism). After a while, some people began to question the relevancy of GQs themselves, like Denis Diderot (1713–1784), who famously quipped, "It is very important not to mistake hemlock for parsley, but to believe or not believe in God is not important at all."[17] In short, apatheism has become possible because society has secularized.

When we read the word "secular," we often think in terms of religion vs. *a*religion, especially as the debate relates to private and public spaces. We take the term "secular" to mean having no religion whatsoever. While this is true, it is not always the case, and it is not that useful for understanding why apatheism exists. (Remember, an apatheist can be religious, so they are not always secular in the areligious sense.) In *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor helpfully explained that secularization is not necessarily the overthrow of religious belief by areligious belief in public spaces. Instead, secularization

---

[16] Recently, philosopher Ian von Hegner suggested the possibility of apatheism falling under the *genus* practical atheism (or "pragmatic atheism"). He defined apatheism as a "form of indifference [toward] deities and religious postulates," and then proposed that it "can fall under pragmatic atheism if by this one means negative atheism," i.e., implicit disbelief in God. In doing so, von Hegner conflated practical atheism and negative atheism, where the former acts as if God does not exist and the latter implicitly denies God's existence because a person does not or cannot articulate his or her beliefs (e.g., infants, people afflicted with intellectual or developmental disabilities, etc.). Practical atheism believes GQs are important but acts with disregard to that belief while negative atheism might also believe GQs are important but have not explicitly articulated their rejection of God. In stark contrast to both, apatheism does not care to believe and may or may not act contrary to that indifference. See Ian von Hegner, "Gods and Dictatorships: A Defense of Heroical Apatheism," *Science, Religion and Culture* 3 (2016): 31–48.

[17] Denis Diderot, "Letter from Diderot to Voltaire, June 11, 1749," ed. Arthur M. Wilson, *Revie d'Historie Littéraire de la France* 51 (September 1951): 258–60, quoted in Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 225.

is a pivot in how our society approaches belief.[18] In a former age, belief in God was uncontestable. Everyone cared about God and affirmed his existence. Now, in our secular age, as Taylor called it, belief in God is not only contestable but merely one option among many alternatives. As Taylor observed, our society shifted from being one in which "belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[19] If religious belief is merely one option among many alternatives, then it is reasonable to imagine that some of us dismiss GQs as irrelevant because we are overwhelmed by our options or we find some of the options too difficult to embrace, especially Christianity. In a former time, GQs offered us answers to ultimate meaning because they provided the framework in which we understood our world. We had ample reason, motivation, and will to ask and answer GQs. Now, however, there are alternatives to Christianity, especially those beliefs that appear to offer greater existential security and liberal autonomy.

But dismissing God does not terminate our quest for meaning. The very moment an apatheist sets down GQs is the same moment they pick up a feeling that there must be something more that is missing. Taylor argued that our age "suffers from a threatened loss of meaning."[20] And with this loss of meaning comes a force that "pushes us to explore and try out new solutions, new formulae."[21] We are, after all, creatures meaningfully created by a God who is the very source of all meaning. Even if we find the source of all meaning irrelevant, we cannot find meaning itself irrelevant. So, an apatheist seeks meaning, but they lack the reason, motivation, and will to consider GQs the avenue to meaning's source.[22]

Take, for example, lacking a reason to care about GQs. Non-religious explanations of origins and nature discount the need for God. Formerly, a person might have held, either tightly or loosely, to the supernatural for filling in the gaps of their knowledge. Yet, if they reject supernatural explanations in favor of, say, naturalism, then the importance of God becomes negligible. Their new beliefs provide all the rational answers they need, so GQs are no longer important. And, if GQs are not important for explaining the world and our place in it, then God is unlikely to help explain personal meaning. But atheists and agnostics come to this same conclusion. So, what sets apatheism apart? Atheists and agnostics still find GQs interesting. "God is dead," they agree with Nietzsche, and ask with him, "What does that mean for us now?" An apatheist, in contrast, does not find GQs interesting. So, apatheism is born when a god-of-the-gaps dies but no one bothers to attend the funeral. "God is dead," they say, "but who cares?"

A person might also lack the motivation to find GQs important. Comfortable with their beliefs, they find it easier to let bygones be bygones, viewing arguments over God's existence or non-existence as trivial as Pepsi vs. Coca-Cola. Or perhaps they are too distracted and lack time to consider GQs. In our digital age, a person might lose motivation because they are continually interrupted by a cacophony

---

[18] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–3, 19.

[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303.

[21] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303.

[22] Elsewhere, I have argued that apatheism is caused by the lack of reason, motivation, or will to express interest in religious belief. See Kyle Beshears, "Apatheism: Engaging the Western Pantheon of Spiritual Indifference," *Churches on Mission: God's Grace Abounding to the Nations*, ed. Geoff Hartt, Christopher R. Little, and John Wang (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017): 257–75.

of chimes and beeps from their smartphones. One moment they are contemplating life's biggest questions. The next moment they are streaming funny cat videos and reading about the top ten fabric softeners ranked according to Star Wars fans.[23] How can they care about God if they are distracted and demotivated continuously?

Still, others might lack the will to care, fearful of leaving what they know for the unknown. They don't want to change because they enjoy their autonomy and are unwilling to amend their beliefs. Taylor sees this kind of behavior as a product of our secular age. With so many beliefs competing for our attention, we have become highly suspicious of outside forces seeking to manipulate our thoughts, especially religious ideas. So, we construct a buffer between our inner experience and the outer world to shield us from manipulation. We become, as Taylor called us, a "buffered self."[24] Buffered apatheists lack the will to care about God because they do not want to change, unless that change comes from within. Philosopher Douglas Groothuis sensed this kind of apatheism when he observed that it excludes "in principle the discovery of and adherence to any truths not found comfortable by people who place tranquility above reality."[25]

All three of these factors—a lack of reason, motivation, and will—share one commonality: a sense of existential security absent God. For these apatheists, enough conditions have been met for feeling secure in life without God, so they see no point to him. As psychologists Will Gervais and Ara Norenzayan put it, apatheism "arises from conditions of existential security."[26] They argued that the frequency and intensity of religious belief in a society decline as a sense of existential security increases (e.g., decreased poverty rates, lower infant mortality, longer life-spans, economic stability, and reliable government services and social safety nets).[27] To this list of socio-economic conditions, I add self-directed meaning, i.e., meaning created by one's own preferences and decisions without being told what to prefer or think. Gervais and Norenzayan concluded, "Where life is safe and predictable, people are less motivated to turn to gods for succor."[28] And the less motivated people are to turn to God, the less likely they will find his existence relevant. After all, why concern yourself with God if you feel secure in body, mind, and soul without him?[29] Apatheism, then, exists when a person in a secular society achieves a sufficient sense of existential security absent God.

---

[23] Alan Noble offers helpful insight into the relationship of distractions, secularism, and the Christian witness. See *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

[24] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37–39.

[25] Douglas Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Postmodern Times," *JETS* 47 (2004): 450.

[26] Ara Norenzayan and Will M. Gervais, "The Origins of Religious Disbelief," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 17 (January 2013), 21–22.

[27] Norenzayan and Gervais, "The Origins of Religious Disbelief," 21.

[28] Norenzayan and Gervais, "The Origins of Religious Disbelief," 22.

[29] Norenzayan and Gervais argued that "where life *is* safe and predictable, people are less motivated to turn to gods for succor" ("The Origins of Religious Disbelief," 21, emphasis added). However, can it be said that life *is* safe and predictable? Is not our sense of safety and predictability subjective in a dangerous and unpredictable world? I would rather say that where life *feels* safe and predictable, people are less motivated to turn to God. After all, from a Christian perspective, safety and predictability are not guaranteed within the kingdom of God, let alone outside of it. We do feel, however, a measure of eternal safety and divine predictability in that God is good, faithful, and able to accomplish his will for our good and his glory.

4. Is Apatheism Growing?

Can we determine the scope of apatheism and measure its growth? After all, if it is an anomaly restricted to a small portion of society, then (ironically) who cares? In short, it is impossible to determine the population of apatheists and to know with certainty to what degree apatheism is growing, if at all. Polls that gauge religious life in America typically don't ask whether or not people care about belief in God, only whether or not they believe.[30] It would be beneficial if a new option appeared on future polls that indicated whether or not people cared at all about belief in God. We can, however, monitor two categories where apatheism most likely plays a role in behavior and identity change—declining religious activity and the rising of the religiously unaffiliated, or Nones.

An increase in apathy toward one's religious views intuitively parallels declining participation in religious activities. Over the past few decades, religious organizations across America, especially Christian churches, report declining attendance at their services. According to a 2017 Gallup poll, the number of people who claim to attend religious services weekly or almost every week has declined slightly by four percent between 2008 and 2017.[31] Sociologist Mark Chaves, whose work considered an array of data over decades, calculated a decline of one-quarter of a percentage point per year since 1984, or approximately eight percent overall.[32] These numbers might elicit a yawn from those unconcerned with such a marginal loss. However, as sociologist Philip Brenner demonstrated, Americans tend to over-report their service attendance—a phenomenon dubbed the "halo effect"—so any decline might be more significant than the data appear.[33]

Moreover, this decline confirms what other sociologists have noticed is a slow and gradual waning of religious activity.[34] Chaves noted the difficulty of measuring the decline, saying that "only with the most powerful lens provided by more than forty years of data have we been able to see through the noise of yearly fluctuations to discern that attendance in fact has been slowly declining for decades."[35] Chaves, along with his colleague David Voas, elsewhere concluded that "the evidence for a decades-long decline in American religiosity is now incontrovertible."[36] American religious activity—as truthfully reported by those surveyed—is declining, which could come as a result of apatheism, at least in part.

---

[30] One notable exception is a 2016 poll from PRRI that specifically addresses apatheism. It defines apatheists as those for whom "religion is not personally important to them, but believe it generally is more socially helpful than harmful" (Betsy Cooper, Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch, and Robert P. Jones, *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back* [Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, 2016], 13).

[31] Frank Newport, "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance," *Gallup*, 7 September 2018, https://tinyurl.com/yy8e77dn.

[32] Mark A. A. Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 47. Notably, Chaves pitted the inconsistent yet gradual decline in self-reported religious attendance from the General Social Survey against the more reliable American Time Use Survey, which shows a definite decline in religious attendance (pp. 41–46).

[33] Philip S. Brenner, "Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity? Overreporting of Church Attendance in the U.S.," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (2011): 19–41.

[34] Mark A. A. Chaves and David Voas, "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?," *American Journal of Sociology* 121 (2016): 1517–56.

[35] Chaves, *American Religion*, 47.

[36] Chaves and Voas, "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?," 1524.

Even apatheists who retain their religious identity are less likely to participate in religious services than those in their communities who care about their religion. I am not saying that apatheism pushes people out of religious service attendance—no, there are apatheists in the pews. But theapathy is undoubtedly a poor motivator for attending church to worship a God you don't care about.

Relatedly, the rising of the Nones could also provide some evidence of apatheism's growth. According to a 2016 Public Religion Research Institute study, one-quarter of all Americans identify as religiously unaffiliated.[37] This group has grown consistently since the early 1990s, and there is no sign of slowing.[38] It makes sense that apatheism would find a comfortable home among the Nones. Again, it is important to remember that apatheism permeates all religious and areligious beliefs. Apatheism lurks in religious categories where indifference about one's own religion and the religion of others does not necessarily demand they identify as a None. These apatheists are like Rauch's Christian friends who, he noted, "betray no sign of caring that [he is] an unrepentantly atheistic Jewish homosexual" and apatheistic to top it all off.[39] Still, it is hard to imagine that the None category is not flush with apatheism. When faced with so many religious options on a poll, the apatheist simply shrugs and circles "None."

So, if religious service attendance is declining and the Nones are rising, then apatheism is likely a cause for and result of both.[40]

5. The Challenge of Apatheism

To recap, apatheism manifests theapathy, thus the response "Meh" to the question, "Do you believe in God?" When asked the same question, a theist responds, "Yes," an agnostic, "Perhaps," and an atheist, "No." Regardless of their diversity, all three of these responses invite a subsequent conversation about GQs. An apatheist, however, responds with disinterest, terminating the conversation prematurely as their apathy overwhelms and drains the question of its power. This draining is the reason why apatheism is far more challenging to evangelism than religious pluralism, agnosticism, and atheism. An unbeliever—be they religious, agnostic, or atheist—cares about GQs, and is typically willing to have a conversation about them. The apatheist, however, does not find GQs important, so they do not care to have a conversation about them, effectively closing the opportunity for gospel conversation.

Consider, for a moment, how contemporary apologetic approaches will fare against apatheism. We often look to the Apostle Paul's famous Areopagus discourse as the quintessential model for Christian

---

[37] Cooper, Cox, Lienesch, and Jones, *Exodus*, 2.

[38] Younger generations are more likely to identify as None than previous generations. Within the Nones, people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine represent 38%, those who are between thirty and thirty-nine represent 29%, and forty-to-forty-nine represent 23%. See Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas* (Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, 2017), 25.

[39] Rauch, "Let it Be," 34. Rauser is quick to note that these friends might care without displaying it in a manner unrecognizable to Rauch. Rauser elaborated, "These Christians may not 'care' in the sense of engaging in public and visible displays whereby they confront and condemn Rauch's beliefs and actions. But that hardly entails that they do not truly care about their non-Christian brother. Indeed, for all we (or Rauch) know, they may pray for him for *hours* a day" ("A Defense of Apatheism").

[40] I do not mean to say that apatheism is the sole cause of declining church attendance and increasing Nones, only that apatheism is *a* cause and *a* reason for both.

engagement with unbelief (Acts 17:16–34), and rightly so.[41] The apostle gives us an example of engaging culture in ways it understands by addressing mutually common interests. After seeing a pantheon with a catch-all statue dedicated to an unknown god, Paul took for granted that he and his audience shared a minimally common belief (theism) and shrewdly leveraged this shared conviction to make a case for the gospel. Paul proclaimed with clarity the god whom the Athenians worshiped in ignorance.

Now, imagine for a moment that the Athenians were apatheistic. What if they did not care about the gods? There would be no pantheon, no statue to the unknown god, and, if there were, the statue would be concealed by overgrown vines and soot, evidence that the gods no longer captured the kind of interest they used to. How could Paul have proclaimed to them what they worshiped as unknown?

What if we are living in an Athens without a statue to the unknown god?

6. Approaching Apatheism

When approaching apatheism, evangelicals first need to understand its duality, that it is a belief and attitude, both cognitive and affective. A right understanding of apatheism will afford us the insight needed in assessing whether a person is a practical atheist or an apatheist, and, if an apatheist, whether their indifference stems from primarily rational or emotional reasons.

Second, it is vital for evangelicals to recognize that apatheism represents a significant challenge to the Christian faith because it affects the church inside and out, in both discipleship (with apatheism in the pews) and evangelism (apatheistic unbelievers). For discipleship, the concern is unquestionably apparent. As Groothuis noted, apatheism is "antithetical to the teachings of all religions: that one should care about one's convictions and put them into practice consistently."[42] Christian apatheism (if such a thing could be called "Christian") has all the trappings of nominal Christianity with the additional flaw of theapathy. They are "Christians" and "theists" in name only. How can an apatheist possibly love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind if their heart is listless and their mind indifferent to him (Matt 25:36–37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27a)?

For evangelism, apatheism requires us to rethink how we present the gospel. How do we walk toward the Way with someone who is constrained by spiritual inertia? Some of us will hope to find the answer in apologetics. But even our apologetic methods will need modification because, as we have seen with the Aeropagus, many of these methods have been built upon the assumption that both parties, the believer and unbeliever, are interested in GQs. Think about how an apologist approaches atheism with the classical method. Their first step is to present the atheist with arguments for the plausibility of God's existence (e.g., transcendental, teleological, ontological, etc.). This step is possible because both parties hold a minimally common interest in GQs. That same apologist would find an apatheist intolerably frustrating because they will dismiss the apologist's arguments as meaningless and boring.

---

[41] See Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014). Daniel Strange called the speech "subversive fulfillment par excellence," and an "exemplar of the apostolic preaching to pagans" in *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 286. K. Scott Oliphint described Paul's address as an "instructive" model for evangelism in his *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 229. Paul Gould likewise called it "instructive," adding that it is a "helpful model for engaging 'our Athens,'" in *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 25–27.

[42] Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters," 450.

To an apatheist, talking about GQs is like listening to a lecture on tariffs by Ferris Bueller's history teacher. "Anyone, anyone?"

To be clear, we do not need to throw the baby out with the bathwater. It would be foolish to junk two millennia of thoughtful and effective apologetics simply because these arguments fall on deaf ears. Instead, we need to supplement our methodology with a prefatory maneuver, one that determines whether or not both parties hold a minimally common interest in GQs. If they do not share that interest, then an effort must be made to regain common interest before moving forward into familiar apologetic territory.

Third, because apatheism is two-fold, evangelicals ought to develop strategies for engaging apatheists that speak to both their mind and heart. And, considering our secular context, we need to show that our faith is not one option among many alternatives, nor is it merely something we add to our lives. Speaking on religious indifference, philosopher Ingolf Dalferth outlined our objective well:

> Christians must find ways to show and communicate to their contemporaries that faith, hope, and love in God [transform] all areas of human life by changing the *mode* in which humans live their lives. Christian faith does not add a dispensable religious dimension to human life but rather transforms its existential mode from a self-centered to a God-open life that puts its ultimate trust not in any human institution, whether religious or non-religious, but in the creative presence of God's love.[43]

The Christian faith transforms the entire "existential mode" of a person, a mode that must be reoriented wholly from death to life. Our faith is not merely an ornament to be donned and removed when desired; it is *the* fundamental recreation and renewal of our whole person, our resurrection from death into the life of a "new creature" in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). In him, we find true existential security having been conformed to a new existential mode after his image (Rom 8:29). If apatheism is a result of existential security absent God, then it ought to be demonstrated to the apatheist that such security is illusory. There is no existential security absent the faith, hope, and love of the gospel—the "creative presence" of the Creator's love.

With these three suggestions in mind, how ought we approach apatheism? First, and foremost, we remember that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit must fill the apatheist with affection for the God they do not care about. His work, and his work alone, brings about a renewed mind and softened heart where indifference and apathy once reigned. One way we can join the Spirit in his work is by leveraging the apatheist's curiosity to stoke interest in self-reflection that leads to disillusionment with their beliefs, exposing the fragile state of their security.[44] In doing so, we plough the soil of their hearts and minds to upend the apatheist's sense of security. Elsewhere, I have suggested that presuppositional methods of worldview analysis accompanied by penetrating questions stoke curiosity.[45] These questions force the apatheist to consider shortcomings in their beliefs. How can their curiosity be stoked? By examining the apatheist's beliefs to expose inconsistencies.

---

[43] Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Post-secular Society: Christianity and the Dialectics of the Secular," *JAAR* 78 (2010): 339.

[44] What follows is a recommendation for approaching apatheism from a cognitive avenue. I have chosen this route to offer one possible approach, specifically for the apatheist who is curious about other things besides or tangential to GQs. This is an approach that I have found useful. Naturally, given the cognitive-affective nature of apatheism, there is an emotional avenue to approaching theapathy that also ought to be explored.

[45] Beshears, "Apatheism," 271–75.

This suggestion is by no means novel. Francis Schaeffer long ago argued for the same thing. He reasoned that whoever holds to non-Christian beliefs necessarily holds presuppositions that do not agree with the real world. Consequently, unbelievers are "far from reality," and this distance can be demonstrated to them by uncovering "points of tension" in their beliefs.[46] All people, as image bearers of God, are pulled toward his objective sense of love, beauty, meaning, significance, and truth. But, because we desire autonomy from him, we create our own myopic and disoriented sense of love, beauty, meaning, significance, and truth. We become caught between the objectivity of the holy Creator and the subjectivity in the fallen creation. We try to march according to our own beat, but the loudspeaker of God's standards persistently thuds and pulses in our soul, undermining our project of rebellious liberty. These are points of tension. What is love? Why is something beautiful? From where do I receive absolute meaning? Am I significant? What is truth? But people do not like their autonomy challenged, so they shelter themselves from the thuds and pulses. A "roof is built as a protection against the blows of the real world, both internal and external," Shaeffer explained, anticipating Taylor's buffered self.[47] For Schaeffer, a goal of evangelism is to penetrate this roof so that we may press hard on tension points to reorient unbelievers toward God. If we remove the roof, then the apatheist's buffered self is no longer buffered. And when we push on points of tension, we expose the inconsistency with the way the apatheist lives and how things really are. The apatheist finally has a reason to care, being motivated by curiosity as to why those inconsistencies exist. So, we ought to remove the roof and push hard on tension points, causing the kind of discomfort that compels them to care, if even for a moment, and to doubt their existential security that has now been exposed as fragile.

Herein lies the key ingredient—*doubt*. Riffing off Søren Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus*, a triad of anti-apathy—doubt, interest, and objective thinking—will compel the apatheist toward a sustained self-reflection that holds their interest long enough to allow for objective thinking about GQs. Kierkegaard argued that "doubt is a higher form than any objective thinking, for it presupposes the latter but has something more, a third, which is interest or consciousness."[48] If the apatheist is asked to think objectively about their beliefs without doubt, then disinterest will drain power from any penetrating questions asked. Objective thinking alone is powerless against apathy. We must first take a step backward in these dialogues to enlist the apathy-neutralizing aid of doubt. If the apatheist first *doubts* their beliefs, then their doubt will stir within them a curiosity-driven *interest*, which prevents their doubt from being defused in apathy and, further, inspires an exploration of self-discovery as they *think objectively* about their beliefs. Doubt about shortcomings in their beliefs stimulates an apatheist's interest. Only then, having meet this prerequisite, can we ask the apatheist to think objectively about GQs. Doubt first, interest second, GQs third. Finally, we are able to have a conversation about the new "existential mode" in which God calls us to live by the gospel. We can proclaim, with Paul, that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We can declare that God cares for them always, even when they did not care for him.

In sum, apatheism is indifference toward GQs manifested as theapathy, making it distinct from theism, atheism, and agnosticism. A person adopts apatheism when they feel existential security absent

---

[46] Francis Schaeffer, "The God Who Is There," in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 129–35.

[47] Schaeffer, "The God Who Is There," 140.

[48] Søren Kierkegaard, *Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 170.

God, effectively dissolving their reason, motivation, or will to care about GQs. Apatheism is more challenging to evangelism than other forms of unbelief. We ought to recognize that apologetic methods take for granted that people share a minimally common interest in GQs. Absent this common interest, apatheism requires us to explore new ways to generate interest in GQs before we can discuss them. One way to generate such interest is to cause an apatheist to doubt their existential security absent God by pushing on tension points in their beliefs.

At any rate, let us welcome one another to this new Athens without the statue to the unknown god, not in pessimistic despair but delighted hope, recognizing that, in the whole history of the church, we have been given a truly unique stewardship opportunity for the gospel.

Inerrancy Is Not a Strong or Classical Foundationalism

— Mark Boone —

Mark Boone is assistant professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University.

******

Abstract: The general idea of strong foundationalism is that knowledge is founded on well warranted beliefs that do not derive any warrant from other beliefs and that all our other beliefs depend on these foundational ones for their warrant. Although inerrancy posits Scripture as a solid foundation for theology, the idea that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy involves a strong foundationalist epistemology is deeply problematic. In fact, inerrancy does not require any particular view of the structure of knowledge, and notable sources on inerrancy tout it in ways inconsistent with most forms of strong foundationalism.

******

Discussions of biblical authority and hermeneutics have long considered epistemology, that branch of philosophy that studies the nature, origins, and structure of knowledge. Stanley Grenz and John Franke have said that inerrantist theology is linked to a particular view of the structure of knowledge, *classical foundationalism* or *strong foundationalism* (hereafter the latter).[1] The general idea of strong foundationalism is that knowledge has a foundation in well warranted beliefs that do not derive any warrant from other beliefs and that, moreover, all our other beliefs depend on these foundational ones for their warrant. Alvin Plantinga further posits as an essential trait of strong foundationalism its unduly restrictive criterion for a foundational belief—that it be self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible.[2]

---

[1] The major sources include Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); John R. Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy: The Bible as Witness to Missional Plurality," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 259–85; and Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[2] Among other sources, Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Noûs* 15.1 (March 1981): 41–51; and "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 60.

Grenz's and Franke's view is no stranger to criticism.[3] However, it appears that a criticism emerging from a careful study of the structure of knowledge has not yet been made. The doctrine of inerrancy has almost nothing to do with strong foundationalism. Inerrancy does not require any view of the structure of knowledge, and notable sources including the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter CSBI) tout inerrancy in ways inconsistent with most forms of strong foundationalism. There are three types of warrant—what I call inferential, coherential, and foundational warrants. Different views of the structure of knowledge are different accounts of how these types of warrant are arranged. Strong foundationalism has it that knowledge has a foundation in beliefs warranted by foundational warrant alone. If inerrancy is a strong foundationalism, then the doctrine itself must be alleged to be warranted in this manner, or else built on beliefs that are. Critics seem to not fully appreciate this point, not explaining the relation of inerrancy to basic beliefs and instead observing that inerrantists build on Scripture as a foundation.

The biggest problem with tying inerrancy to strong foundationalism is that more than one variety of warrant is said to support the doctrine. Notable sources point to warrant of the foundational variety, derived from the Holy Spirit's testimony about the Bible, and also to inferential warrant, often said to derive from the authority of Christ; coherential warrant is also a factor. This would render inerrancy incompatible with most forms of strong foundationalism, although I can think of one interesting exception (on which more in good time). There are smaller problems. Inerrancy does not necessarily entail *any* view of the structure of knowledge; in particular, the inference from the authority of Christ need not rely on any particular view of the structure of knowledge, or may rely on strong or weak foundationalism or neither. Moreover, by Plantinga's definition any inerrantist appeal to the Holy Spirit as directly warranting inerrancy clashes with strong foundationalism's criterion for a belief's having foundational warrant.

In short, that inerrancy resembles strong foundationalism is correct only to the extent that inerrancy posits Scripture as a solid foundation for theology. The structure of the doctrine does not commit it to any such epistemology, and some proponents employ epistemologies incompatible with most forms of strong foundationalism.

In what follows I shall first explain the building blocks of knowledge and some major views of the structure of knowledge. Then I shall consider the charge that inerrancy is a strong foundationalism. Then I shall review some justifications for biblical inerrancy and explain why inerrancy is not a strong foundationalism. I will close with some remarks on the prospects for a strongly foundationalist inerrancy.

1. The Structure of Knowledge

Knowledge is a system of beliefs; it has a structure, an arrangement. Knowledge is always true belief; I can only know what I believe, and if I believe something false my belief is error rather than knowledge. Plato explains that we need a third thing to tie belief down to the truth (*Meno* 96d–98b). That thing, as

---

[3] For critiques concerning truth, objectivity, evangelism, and the viability of weak foundationalism see Robert C. Kurka, "*Before* 'Foundationalism': A More Biblical Alternative to the Grenz-Franke Proposal for Doing Theology," *JETS* 50 (2007): 145–65; Albert J. Mohler, "Response to John R. Franke," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 288; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Response to John R. Franke," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 304.

Plantinga puts it, is *warrant*, that "quality or quantity enough of which, together with truth and belief, is sufficient for knowledge."[4] Warrant frequently involves evidence or justification; a belief is justified by other beliefs. But justification does not spontaneously arise; those justified beliefs had to get their warrant from somewhere; the process of justification needs a beginning.

Thus, epistemologists have discovered two other varieties of warrant. After explaining these, I shall explain why a good view of the structure of knowledge requires taking all three into consideration, and this at all levels of that structure. Coherentism and most forms of strong foundationalism are failures, while two other views (foundherentism and weak foundationalism) are at least viable. (I have explained this material in more detail elsewhere, and it is recommended for the reader with a particular interest in epistemology.[5])

1.1. Three Varieties of Warrant

Inferential warrant is easily understood. A belief often has evidentiary support from other beliefs. When a belief or a set of beliefs is warranted and provides good enough support for another belief, at least some of that warrant is extended to the supported belief.

Inferential warrant is derivative; a belief gets it from other warranted beliefs, whose own warrant must either be inferential, or not. If it is inferential, it too comes from other warranted beliefs. This process cannot go on into infinity, since we do not have an infinite number of beliefs. So inferential warrant must be rooted in some other variety of warrant.

Hence a *foundational* warrant is one that is *not* derivative. A belief has it without getting it *from* anywhere. Beliefs arising directly from sensory experience ("I see something blue," "I feel pain"), truths of reason ("2 and 2 make 4," "If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man then Socrates is mortal"), and other common-sense beliefs ("The evidence of the senses can be trusted," "The world outside my mind exists") are examples of beliefs with foundational warrant. I know them, but not by inference from other beliefs.

There is a third way a warranted belief can be connected to the system of knowledge. If a belief is consistent with a system of warranted belief, especially one which concerns the topic of the belief, it is (all else being equal) more likely to be true than one not thus consistent. Accordingly, this consistency confers another variety of warrant on a belief: *coherential* warrant.

1.2. All Three Varieties Are Necessary

All three of these types of warrant are necessary, and an accurate and thorough theory of the structure of knowledge must account for all three and acknowledge that beliefs with foundational warrant have the other kinds.

To deny that inferential warrant is a part of the structure of knowledge is to deny that we know anything based on evidence. So obviously inferential warrant is necessary.

Inferential and coherential warrants are both derivates, and they must have something from which to derive—namely, foundational warrant. The beliefs of a person in the Matrix, or of the philosopher's famed brain-in-a-vat, may have as much inference and coherence as my beliefs or yours. But his beliefs

---

[4] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), v.

[5] Mark Boone, "Inferential, Coherential, and Foundational Warrant: An Eclectic Account of the Sources of Warrant," *Logos & Episteme* 5 (2014): 377–98.

do not track reality; their warrant is illusory, and he lacks knowledge. Our beliefs, which *do* track reality, are different from his mainly in having foundational warrant.

Coherential warrant is also important. A system of beliefs could hardly be *knowledge* if it had a high degree of inconsistency. Even beliefs with foundational warrant need coherential warrant. Say I look out the window and my perceptual faculties, generally reliable and functioning properly at the time, lead me to believe that there is an animal in the yard. Plantinga would say (rightly, I think) that such a belief has foundational warrant. Say, furthermore, that the belief I form is "There is a sparrow outside my window." Say that on another occasion the same thing happens for the belief "There is a tyrannosaurus rex outside my window." This belief is less warranted than the other because of the coherential warrant the former enjoys—since my beliefs tell me that, although sparrows are a common animal around here, dinosaurs, sadly, are not.

1.3. Coherentism and Strong Foundationalism

Since all three varieties of warrant are part of the structure of knowledge, the correct account of its structure must include them. Classical coherentism intentionally leaves out foundational warrant, positing that the warranting process never actually *begins* anywhere.[6] Accordingly, coherentism is mistaken.[7]

Strong foundationalism is likewise mistaken, or at least most versions of it are. Let us first take a closer look at the relevant terms. *Foundationalism* is the theory that there are such things as *properly basic beliefs*, beliefs with enough foundational warrant to be known on its strength alone.[8]

It can be difficult to nail down just one definition of *strong foundationalism*, although by most definitions Descartes's foundationalism will be the strongest. The strength of a foundationalism comes in degrees, and in fact a foundationalism may be strong in at least three senses. Plantinga's approach suggests the first—the fewer beliefs, or varieties of belief, recognized as properly basic, the stronger the foundationalism. Second, the more certain the basic beliefs are, the stronger the foundationalism; indeed, the special epistemic status attributed to basic beliefs is sometimes treated as the essence of strong foundationalism.[9] Third, the *less often* a foundationalism recognizes beliefs which have foundational warrant but not enough to be known without some other kind of warrant, or basic beliefs which also have coherential or inferential warrant, the *stronger* it is.[10]

Strong foundationalism thus implies that a belief may be warranted by foundational warrant alone; inferential and coherential warrants lend no support to basic beliefs. Strong foundationalisms are

---

[6] Laurence BonJour's earlier work is a fine example of coherentism: *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); and "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 1–13.

[7] For more on this see Boone, "Inferential, Coherential, and Foundational Warrant," 388–97.

[8] I discuss this and two alternative definitions of foundationalism in Boone, "Inferential, Coherential, and Foundational Warrant," 390–92.

[9] For example, Ted Poston, "Foundationalism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 4.a.i, https://www.iep.utm.edu/found-ep/; however, note that Poston turns to the third sense when defining *weak* foundationalism (4.a.iii).

[10] For an alternative definition of classical foundationalism, see Richard Fumerton's working definition as "foundationalism committed to *internalism*" ("Classical Foundationalism," in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, ed. Michael DePaul [Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000], 4).

typically wrong because our beliefs with foundational warrant often *do* have inferential or coherential warrant, and often *need* it. The other forms of warrant work closely with foundational warrant. Susan Haack has done some good work explaining this,[11] and John Zeis has applied her work to religious epistemology.[12] Zeis uses a convenient illustration, which I here modify to fit my own life: I remember some years ago running into my friend John at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Plantinga would correctly say that my belief here has foundational warrant; however, it matters to its warrant that I know, independently of the memory, of such a place as the D-FW airport and of such a person as John. I also know that some years ago I flew through D-FW on American Airlines on the way to San Francisco for a meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, where I delivered a paper on Plantinga's epistemology. I also remember that John and I were in the same graduate school program. I have a vague memory that he read a paper at the same conference. In the absence of all this I would probably write off my memory as some confused dream. My belief derives from that particular memory alone insufficient warrant for knowledge or rational belief, but the strong coherential warrant derived from all these other beliefs makes a big difference in favor of the belief. Typical strong foundationalisms, denying this, are accordingly mistaken.

Recall Plantinga's more restrictive definition of strong foundationalism: the view that only beliefs self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses can have foundational warrant—a too-short list of properly basic beliefs. Plantinga's critique is not on the grounds that strong foundationalism has the wrong account of the structure of knowledge. The problem is with how beliefs in the structure's *foundation* are warranted. Plantinga gives various reasons this view is mistaken.[13] Here is another, borrowed from the history of philosophy. Hume observed that knowledge gained from experience requires some principle or principles *by which* we gain knowledge from experience—for example induction or the uniformity of nature.[14] These are not evident to the senses (being themselves the knowledge we bring *to* the senses in order to learn from them), nor incorrigible (being dubitable), nor self-evident like "Two and two make four" is self-evident (and were not evident to Hume, though he recommended believing them).

Before going on, we need to take a look at one promising account, Timothy McGrew's "classical foundationalism" in *The Foundations of Knowledge*.[15] McGrew argues that knowledge is rooted in incorrigible beliefs about our mental states, and he employs in his chapter 7 an interesting probabilistic argument that these mental states can ground knowledge of the world outside the mind. If I understand it rightly, his account is not subject to my major objection to strong foundationalism, at least as concerns basic beliefs, for the basic beliefs he identifies concern awareness of our mental states, which does not require inferential or coherential warrant, although these would still be necessary for beliefs just a few levels up. (Indeed, I think McGrew might well agree with me on that much; I take it that his account of mutual support among beliefs would preclude a foundationalism strong in the third sense from applying

---

[11] Susan Haack, "Double-Aspect Foundherentism: A New Theory of Empirical Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993): 113–28; "Précis of 'Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology,'" *Synthese* 112 (1997): 7–11; "Reply to BonJour," *Synthese* 112 (1997): 25–35.

[12] John Zeis, "A Foundherentist Conception of the Justification of Religious Belief," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005): 133–60.

[13] Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" and "Reason and Belief in God." See also James Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology: An Evaluation of Alvin Plantinga's Religious Epistemology* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 47.

[14] David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Edinburgh: Kincaid, 1760).

[15] Timothy McGrew, *The Foundations of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

anywhere except to basic beliefs.[16]) McGrew's is a promising account, assuming the chapter 7 argument is solid, although this is not the place to put that argument to the test. (We will return to McGrew's account in relation to inerrancy later.)

1.4. Foundherentism or Weak Foundationalism

Two major theories on the structure of knowledge are viable. Roughly, foundherentism is the theory that some beliefs have foundational warrant, but none have *enough* of it to be *known* without some help from the other varieties of warrant.[17] On a viable model of *weak* foundationalism, at least *some* beliefs with foundational warrant have *enough* of it to be known; but *some* beliefs with foundational warrant, including the ones that *can* be known on its strength alone, can *also* be warranted by inferential or coherential warrant.

Foundherentism and weak foundationalism, then, agree that all three varieties of warrant matter, and that even beliefs with foundational warrant can enjoy other varieties. Their only salient disagreement is whether *some* beliefs with foundational warrant sometimes have *enough* of it to be known on its strength alone. One of these theories is likelier to be true than coherentism or most forms of strong foundationalism.

And what is the connection of all this to biblical inerrancy? Let's find out.

2. Does Inerrancy Entail a Strong Foundationalism?

The charge that inerrancy is a strong foundationalism is ambiguous. On the one hand, it may mean that inerrantists have had a strong foundationalist epistemology, perhaps treating inerrancy as a properly basic belief or trying to base it on other properly basic beliefs. How inerrantists are supposed to have attempted this is not entirely clear. On the other hand, the charge may be simply that inerrantists attempt to build their theology on the foundation of the Bible much as a strong foundationalist would attempt to build knowledge on the solid foundation of basic beliefs. If this is the case, inerrancy may have nothing to do with foundationalism beyond this point of comparison, and why exactly that particular point of comparison would be a problem is unclear. Inerrancy, if true, guarantees that the Bible is a solid foundation for theology. But this does not make inerrantists into strong foundationalists; whether they are depends on why they accept the Bible's authority.

In *Renewing the Center*, Grenz gives us a fair description of strong foundationalism, often referring to it simply as "foundationalism." He notes that it is motivated by the desire to escape from uncertainty, and rightly associates it with Enlightenment figureheads Locke and Descartes.[18] He states that according to foundationalism "reasoning moves in only one direction—from the bottom up, that is, from basic beliefs or first-principles to resultant conclusions."[19] This is actually Haack's definition of foundationalism, and a fine definition of *strong* foundationalism as I use the term.[20] As Grenz tells the

---

[16] McGrew, "How Foundationalists Do Crossword Puzzles," *Philosophical Studies* 96 (1999): 333–50.

[17] For more detailed presentations of foundherentism, see the aforementioned articles by Haack, Zeis, and Boone.

[18] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 194–95.

[19] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 194.

[20] Boone, "Inferential, Coherential, and Foundational Warrant," 390–97.

tale, Enlightenment theology followed Enlightenment foundationalism, tending towards deism.[21] Then Enlightenment theology was abandoned, by some in favor of blind Christian faith and by others in favor of a "skeptical rationalism."[22] A new theological perspective emerged in the 1800s.[23] This was a theology aimed at satisfying the demands of strong foundationalism and employing the Bible as the foundation. The doctrine that every proposition in the Bible is true was used as the foundation for all knowledge. Thus began what we now think of as fundamentalism or inerrantist evangelicalism. So contemporary inerrancy was infected with strong foundationalism from its beginning and, indeed, developed precisely because of the presumption of strong foundationalism.

But this is ambiguous. Is the charge that inerrantists actually *are* strong foundationalists? Or is it that they do theology in the same manner in which a strong foundationalist like Descartes does philosophy, using the doctrine of inerrancy as a foundation? These are very different claims. If the charge is that inerrantists really *are* strong foundationalists, it follows that the inerrantist accepts the doctrine of inerrancy itself on strongly foundationalist grounds. However, on the latter charge, inerrantists may or may not be strong foundationalists, depending on why they accept the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. If the doctrine of inerrancy is accepted without regard to the standards of strong foundationalism, then the inerrantist is not a strong foundationalist at all. He is simply an inerrantist; inerrancy entails that the Bible is a solid foundation for theology, and it is not clear what is the point of making the comparison to strong foundationalism.

Grenz writes as if he has the latter idea in mind when he says these theologians "were confident that they could deduce from Scripture the great theological truths that lay within its pages."[24] The former, however, is suggested by Grenz's description of this theology as treating "the veracity" of the Bible as "unimpeachable when measured by the canons of human reason."[25] Instead of specifying on what strongly foundationalist grounds inerrancy was justified, Grenz returns to the latter alternative, saying that inerrancy treats the Bible as "an incontrovertible foundation."[26] If the canons of reason establish biblical inerrancy, then inerrancy rests on a foundation of some sort and cannot itself *be* such a foundation. If, however, the charge is that the inerrantist uses the Bible as a foundation in the manner of a foundationalist, this has nothing to do with inerrancy *being* a foundationalism. In this case there is a resemblance between the inerrantist's use of the Bible and Descartes's use of the proposition "I exist": Both serve as a solid basis for other knowledge. But the resemblance is superficial if the inerrantist thinks he has some evidence for inerrancy, and why we should care about the resemblance is a mystery.

Franke, in his contribution to *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, makes some similar claims, albeit with kind words for inerrantists and some appreciation for the doctrine.[27] Franke writes,

> As a whole, the Chicago Statement is reflective of a particular form of epistemology known as classic or strong foundationalism. This approach to knowledge seeks to

---

[21] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 195–98.

[22] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 197.

[23] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 197.

[24] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 198.

[25] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 198.

[26] Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 298.

[27] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 259–87.

overcome the uncertainty generated by the tendency of fallible human beings to error, by discovering a universal and indubitable basis for human knowledge.[28]

Citing Grenz, he correctly points to Enlightenment philosophy as the origins of this epistemology.[29] But why should we think that the CSBI reflects this Enlightenment perspective? Franke explains that according to it "Scripture is the true and sole basis for knowledge on all matters which it touches," and he adds that inerrantists display strong foundationalist presumptions about knowledge whenever they claim that any error in Scripture would render the whole of Scripture suspect.[30]

This is a little puzzling. To begin with, it is doubtful that any inerrantist ever thought the Bible is the *sole* source of knowledge on any matter it touches. The Bible tells us to expect to die (Heb 9:27), but inerrantists are well aware that this can also be learned from experience.

More importantly, what does Franke mean by claiming that inerrantists are thinking like strong foundationalists? He suggests they "view Scripture as a foundation for human knowledge."[31] He may mean that inerrantists regard the Bible's truthfulness as a properly basic belief like Descartes regards "I exist"—as having absolute certainty which is entirely underived from any other known beliefs.[32] But Franke does not cite any inerrantists claiming this, and indeed the CSBI and other sources justify inerrancy on various grounds, which precludes the Bible's being *this* sort of foundation.

Alternatively, Franke may simply mean that inerrantists *act as if* the Bible were absolutely certain by believing everything it says. But what sort of a charge against inerrancy is that? If inerrantists really believe that the Bible is always correct, should they *not* believe all things it teaches? In any case, this does not make inerrancy a strong foundationalism unless it is *itself* accepted without any evidence.

Perhaps Franke only wants inerrantists to humbly recognize the possibility that they got it wrong—that maybe inerrancy is mistaken or their interpretation of the Bible on some point is wrong. Well and good. But epistemic humility is fully compatible with biblical inerrancy.[33]

Franke, noting that inerrantists now tend to style themselves as weak foundationalists, says, "In the framework of weak foundationalism, inerrancy could be mistaken and should be subject to critical scrutiny."[34] Is this not the attitude of the authors of the CSBI, who "invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture"?[35] Franke asks, "What might the doctrine of inerrancy look like in a fallibilist perspective?"[36] I think it would look much

---

[28] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 261.

[29] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 261.

[30] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 262.

[31] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 264.

[32] Vanhoozer reads Franke as critiquing a largely Cartesian perspective ("Response to John R. Franke," 303).

[33] Noted by Vanhoozer, "Response to John R. Franke," 305–6. See also Mark Boone, "Ancient-Future Hermeneutics: Postmodern, Biblical Inerrancy, and the Rule of Faith," *CTR* 14 (2016): 35–52.

[34] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 263.

[35] CSBI, Preface.

[36] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 263.

like the CSBI. Or, contrary to his suspicion that CSBI inerrancy employs concepts foreign to church fathers,[37] a fallibilist inerrancy might look rather like Augustine![38]

Grenz and Franke join forces in *Beyond Foundationalism*, claiming that inerrantists have treated the Bible as an "invulnerable foundation."[39] This might be interpreted to mean simply that inerrantists have thought they could trust whatever the Bible says; this, once again, is just what inerrancy means. Alternatively, it might mean that inerrantists have had 100% confidence in their theology, in which they might be said to have erred, although it is unclear how this weighs against their theology. (If I have 100% certainty that Tolkien is a better writer than Lewis, I am overconfident, but that is no evidence that I am *mistaken*.) They also claim that *some*, but not all, inerrantists try to justify the doctrine "by appeal to rational argument,"[40] but at most this applies only to some inerrantists, not to inerrancy itself, and in any case the link to strong foundationalism remains unclear.

Brian McLaren, following Grenz and Franke, suggests that conservatives and liberals have the same roots in Enlightenment theology.[41] Yet the convergence of evangelical conservatism with foundationalism is in its conception of "an error-free Bible as the incontrovertible foundation of their theology."[42] He does not explain why we should not treat the Bible as an incontrovertible foundation if indeed we take it to be without error, nor why he thinks evangelicals who have thus taken it did so on strong foundationalist grounds.

Others have found this critique a bit confusing. Peter Leithart notes that it is difficult fully to understand; he observes Franke has professed inerrancy in the past, that inerrancy might well be compatible with some non-foundationalist epistemology, and that much depends on how these technical terms are defined.[43] Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that Franke errs in thinking inerrancy is necessarily linked to a theory of knowledge. Inerrancy is a theory in *theology* allowing us to treat the Bible as theologically foundational, but that does not mean that people who do so have any particular theory in epistemology.[44]

We should consider these charges more systematically. We may distinguish three.

First, there is the charge that, in seeking knowledge built on Scripture as a foundation, the structure of inerrantist thought resembles that of strong foundationalist thought. This is correct. It is also irrelevant. The very *meaning* of the doctrine of inerrancy entails that we can build on Scripture as a solid foundation for knowledge. Should we *not* act as if we believe our theology just because in doing so we might happen to resemble Descartes in some respect? Whence comes this rule for doing theology?

---

[37] Franke, "Recasting Inerrancy," 260–61.

[38] Boone, "Ancient-Future Hermeneutics," 35–52.

[39] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 34.

[40] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 34.

[41] Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am A Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 10–11.

[42] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 11.

[43] Peter Leithart, "Foundationalism and Inerrancy," *Patheos*, 29 December 2005, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2005/12/foundationalism-and-inerrancy/.

[44] Vanhoozer, "Response to John R. Franke," 304.

Perhaps the critic simply thinks that treating the Bible as a solid foundation for knowledge is *incorrect.* But this is no more than to say that *inerrancy* is incorrect. An argument against inerrancy and relying on this as a premise is fallaciously circular. As a counter-assertion, it is interesting but not an argument.

Second, there is the charge that inerrancy is part of a strongly foundationalist epistemology. If the idea here is that inerrancy *necessarily* is such, the charge is simply false. Inerrancy can only be part of a strong foundationalism if the doctrine is considered *either* to be a properly basic belief with no warrant derived from other beliefs at all, *or* to be derived from such beliefs. However, inerrancy may be supported with arguments, and these arguments may or may not conform to any particular epistemological outlook. If some inerrantist happens to accept the doctrine using a bad epistemology, perhaps that is his problem rather than inerrancy's. In any case, inerrancy is commonly supported in ways inconsistent with strong foundationalism—on which more anon.

Third, there is the charge that inerrancy is not epistemically humble—that it trusts too much in the human ability to gain certainty. This objection seems to miss the point that inerrancy looks to the *divine* aspect of the Bible, thinking only *God* can give us any infallible knowledge. One major reason inerrancy matters is that we humans *lack* the ability to reach certain knowledge of God. Moreover, the inerrantist has plenty of room for humility about what he thinks the Bible means. He can even admit that he might be wrong about inerrancy!

3. What View of Knowledge Does Inerrancy Involve?

Several kinds of evidence are given for biblical inerrancy. The argument from the authority of Jesus Christ is significant. There is also a claim—not a giving of evidence *as such*—that the Holy Spirit tells us that the Bible is God's holy word. Sometimes there is an appeal to the effect of Scripture on our lives or to the Bible's consistency with currently available human knowledge. I will not thoroughly survey the scholarship in defense of inerrancy, for it is legion. Instead, I will consider the salient logical features of some significant justifications of inerrancy offered in the CSBI and by three of its signers—William E. Bell, J. I. Packer, and Kenneth Kantzer. We will see that inerrancy need not have anything to do with strong foundationalism. Moreover, by Plantinga's definition strong foundationalism limits the criterion for proper basicality to a belief's being incorrigible, self-evident, or evident to the senses, which would rule out the Holy Spirit's testimony as a source of warrant. Most importantly, these appeals from the CSBI tradition are to inferential, foundational, *and* coherential warrants on behalf of the doctrine, and this rules out most strong foundationalisms.

In what follows I shall look at the Christological argument for inerrancy, the appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and coherential warrant for inerrancy; then, finally, I shall explain more directly why inerrancy is not a strong foundationalism, although it is consistent with at least one form of it.

3.1. The Christological Argument: Inferential Warrant

An important argument for inerrancy is the Christological one. Roughly, it goes like this: What Jesus teaches we must accept, Jesus teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and so we must accept that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. A supplementary argument might be offered for Jesus's infallibility, or, as some do, we may simply point out that people who acknowledge Jesus as Lord must accept what he teaches. A supplementary argument that Jesus teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of God must be made in two parts, one for each Testament. Roughly, the first part would present

New Testament evidence that Jesus accepted a doctrine of Old Testament inerrancy (cf. his citations of the Old Testament as authoritative in John 5:39; 1035; Luke 24:44; Matt 5:17–18; 7:12; 22:31; 23:2–3). The second part would present New Testament evidence that Jesus gave his authority to the apostles for the teaching and settling of doctrine and gave the Holy Spirit to make sure they got it right; passages such as Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:18, and John 14:26 might be cited along with the record of the Holy Spirit's coming in Acts 1–2, and perhaps also an analysis of the origins of New Testament scripture in the authoritative apostolic testimony. (We might even posit a coextension of apostolic preaching, the Gospel, oral tradition, and written Scripture—a coextension leading naturally to written canonization.[45]) Given that the apostles bore the authority of the risen Messiah, the holy status of the resulting writings would be taken as an extension of Jesus's authority.

William Bell's main argument for inerrancy is a fine example, and I shall look at it in some detail, showing that it says nothing about the structure of knowledge and is consistent with several views on the subject.[46] Then I shall more briefly consider Packer and Kantzer. Then I shall show that the Christological argument is in the CSBI itself. Then I shall review how this argument appeals to inferential warrant on behalf of inerrancy.

Despite having "no published works to speak of," Bell's "influence has been extensive and profound."[47] As a signer of the CSBI, he meticulously expounded inerrancy for his students. His lectures are available online.[48] His case for inerrancy is found in the "Doctrine of Scripture" lectures numbers 4–7; lectures 5–6 concern "The Christological Argument." Bell begins on historical and inductive grounds, making a secular case for the historical reliability of the Gospels, appealing to Gottschalk's criteria for the historical reliability of ancient testimony. This, by itself, would not be a very strong case for the inerrancy of the Gospels. Such a methodology might be used to establish the historical reliability of non-inerrant texts from Herodotus, Josephus, or Aristotle. More generally, this sort of inductive evidence can only guarantee some finite degree of historical reliability. Inerrancy is a universal denial of *any* errors in the original biblical text, a claim of *total* reliability which cannot be guaranteed by such an argument.

Fortunately, Bell makes no such case. His goal is to establish on secular, historical standards a few claims which fit them—historical ones. He argues that the Gospels show that Jesus accepted the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament—as the inerrant Word of God, and that he pre-authenticated the New Testament Scriptures, stamping them with his own authority. Thus, Bell argues, the Bible has inerrant authority because Jesus, with his own inerrant authority, treats it as such. Bell acknowledges that his argument is useless without Jesus's authority; he is arguing against those who acknowledge Jesus's authority but *not* the Bible's; "and for Christians," says Bell, "he is the Lord of glory," and we must not deny his teaching.

We must note some salient features of Bell's argument. First, note that biblical inerrancy is established by premises able to establish it. Only an infallible source of knowledge is sufficient to guarantee by its testimony that some source of knowledge is infallible. An argument from an infallible authority can

---

[45] A helpful book on this way of thinking is Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

[46] Bell's teaching on inerrancy and other theological topics is available at "William E. Bell," *Discipleship Library*, http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/dr_bell.php.

[47] Michael R. Gilstrap, "Dispensationalism's Achilles' Heel: Part One," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 2.2 (February 1989), 1, https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/a_pdfs/newslet/dt/8902.pdf.

[48] http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/dr_bell.php.

guarantee any conclusion, given the truth of the premises.[49] If Christ be infallible, what he teaches is true, and he may teach us anything he likes.

Second, note that the argument is not circular, a danger Bell carefully avoids. The argument *would* be circular if it relied on inerrancy, but it only relies on the historical reliability of the Gospels and then proves their inerrancy on other grounds—Jesus's authority. Inerrancy is not in the premises of Bell's argument, as in the flawed argument *The Bible is inerrant, and it teaches that Jesus teaches inerrancy, and therefore inerrancy is true.* The historical reliability of the Gospels, if well established, is enough to establish that Jesus said something. If what he says happens to concern the same documents, no problem. An argument may establish whatever conclusion its premises support, and an infallible authority may tell us what he may.

Bell's conclusion of inerrancy does entail his premise of the Gospels' reliability, but this only goes to show that an argument's conclusion may occasionally have some support for its premise. Say I find evidence that Smith knows economics based on his understanding of the principle of comparative advantage and other insights in economics with which I am familiar. Once Smith's economic authority is established, it so happens that his testimony in favor of comparative advantage—an economic principle the truth of which was a premise in my reasoning to Smith's authority—also counts in its favor. Similarly, if Jesus is infallible, he can teach us what he wants, even about the same texts through which we know about *him*. The Gospels' historical reliability is a matter for the standards of history to establish. If they work for, say, Herodotus and if the Gospels satisfy the same standards well enough, then the historical premises of Bell's argument are established.

In short, Bell's argument is very well constructed; by relying on secular historical standards, it avoids circular reasoning. It depends on inductive evidence of a sort quite sufficient to get its own job done—to establish the historical facts about what Jesus said. Yet, and second, it also uses a premise powerful enough to establish the inerrant authority of the Bible—the inerrant authority of Jesus Christ.

The premise that Christ really *has* this authority is the argument's vulnerability. Here is a third salient feature of Bell's argument: *There is no sub-argument for the crucial premise concerning Jesus's authority*. What are we to make of this premise? We might accept it as an article of pure unreasoning faith, or we might suggest that we know directly that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah, perhaps explaining things Plantinga's way by saying that we have a God-given faculty for knowing the truths of Christianity.[50] We might argue for Christ's authority on the basis of the authority of the Church; this authority in turn, as Zeis suggests in his epistemology, might be recognized as a sort of (rational) leap of faith,[51] or explained in Plantingian fashion. Alternatively, we might find some other evidence for the authority of Jesus, perhaps by expanding Bell's argument from the historical reliability of the Bible and taking the Resurrection and other miracles of Jesus as evidence for his authority. In this case, some leap would remain from the inductive evidence for these events to the total commitment to Christ's authority which the events warrant. (We might argue that this leap is rational much like a young man's leap from his inductive evidence that *Miss S. R. is the woman who should be my wife* to his total commitment to Miss S. R. in marriage.)

---

[49] On this aspect of arguments from infallible authority, see Frances and Daniel Howard-Snyder and Ryan Wasserman, *The Power of Logic*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), ch. 10, section 2.

[50] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[51] See Zeis, "A Foundherentist Conception," 154–55.

If we take this last approach we would likely end up using some form of weak foundationalism. The fundamental premises of the study of history would be foundational. What these premises actually *are* would be a question for another study, but they would surely include the existence of the past, the reality of minds other than ourselves, and the fact that their testimony is a source of knowledge. This works well enough in a weak foundationalism. Taking such beliefs as properly basic automatically rules out strong foundationalism on Plantinga's definition.[52] Alternatively, we might follow Haack and Zeis and treat historical evidence as warranted along foundherentist lines. Or we might treat these properly basic beliefs as deriving no warrant from other beliefs and thus expand Bell's arguments along the lines of a *strong* foundationalism.

Thus, Bell's approach is consistent with foundherentism, weak foundationalism, and strong foundationalism (by my looser definition, although not by Plantinga's). In short, Bell's main argument—bracketing the whole question of how we know that Jesus is infallible—*implies nothing at all about the structure of knowledge.* More importantly for our purposes, Bell here uses inferential warrant, to the significance of which we will soon return.

Bell is not unique. Packer's little book *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* presents the case for biblical inerrancy in chapter 3, and his argument is much like Bell's.[53] Packer likewise does not present a case for the authority of Jesus, presumably because he is also addressing those who accept the authority of Christ but not Scripture: "If we accept Christ's claims, therefore, we commit ourselves to believe all that He taught—on His authority."[54] There is also Kantzer, who notes that Jesus "placed his imprimatur upon the Old Testament canon of the Jews."[55] Moreover, "The processes involved in the formation and reception of the New Testament duplicate those he approved in the Old Testament."[56] And Jesus commands that we recognize the authority of the Bible: "The real Jesus, the only Jesus for whom we have any evidence whatever, believed that the Bible was true and that it was the very word of God. He commanded his disciples to believe it and obey it."[57] The fundamental issue is whether we are willing to submit to Christ.[58]

The Christological argument is also in the CSBI, which comments on the importance of Christ as incarnate God, as mediator, as Messiah, and as "the central theme of Scripture."[59] It observes that "Christ testifies that Scripture cannot be broken"; Christ submitted to its authority, and requires the

---

[52] Plantinga makes this point with respect to memory beliefs in "Reason and Belief in God," 60.

[53] J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 54–64.

[54] Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, 59.

[55] Kenneth Kantzer, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 112.

[56] Kantzer, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," 112.

[57] Kantzer, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," 118.

[58] Kantzer, "Parameters of Biblical Inerrancy," 118–19. Kantzer, much like Bell, states that those who doubt inerrancy should first answer the question of "the Lordship of Jesus Christ," which is a separate question; Kantzer, "Parameters," n. 39, p. 125.

[59] The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition" (Chicago, 1978), Exposition, Authority: Christ and the Bible. Although some say that the Statement does not include the Exposition, I follow the Draft Committee's Preface in including it.

same of us.[60] By recognizing the Old Testament canon as authoritative and as defining his own mission, he testified to its authority; and the New Testament is "the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit."[61]

There are other sources for the Christological argument, including John Wenham and Alec Motyer.[62] However, we are not aiming at a scholarly survey so much as a study of the logic of the inerrantist position, which plainly has a notable tradition of appealing to the authority of Christ.

As we have seen, this argument by itself is compatible with several views on the structure of knowledge. More crucial for our purposes, the Christological argument employs inferential warrant on behalf of inerrancy. For, quite simply, it is an *argument*—from a premise concerning the authority of Christ and some premises (themselves having sub-arguments) about what Christ taught to the conclusion that what he taught is true. *Any* argument for *any* proposition is a use of inferential warrant—from premises to conclusion. The same points could just as easily be made regarding any justifications of inerrancy based on other arguments, such as arguments from the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture[63] or Albert Mohler's "cumulative argument."[64]

3.2. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit: Foundational Warrant

The Christological argument, as noted, may be developed so as to point to foundational warrant in one way or another. More importantly for our purposes is the fact that *the doctrine of inerrancy itself* is said to have foundational warrant. We may note influential sources including Augustine, Calvin, and Plantinga; more important for our purposes, the CSBI is quite clear on this, along with Packer and Kantzer.

The CSBI's introduction states, "The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning."[65] Again, in the Articles of Affirmation and Denial: "WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word."[66] We know of the Bible's truth through the Holy Spirit who informs us of it.

The appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit parallels Plantinga's critique of strong foundationalism on the grounds that it improperly restricts the criteria for a belief with foundational warrant. By Plantinga's definition, any inerrantist source pointing to the Holy Spirit's testimony on inerrancy is inconsistent with strong foundationalism, for it posits as a source of foundational warrant the testimony of the Holy Spirit, not a noetic faculty recognized by strong foundationalism—neither self-evident nor

---

[60] CSBI, Exposition, Authority: Christ and the Bible.

[61] CSBI, Exposition, Authority: Christ and the Bible.

[62] See John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3d ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), esp. 11–15; Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 21–22. Motyer is remarkably similar to Bell save that he apparently takes the last approach I suggested above for establishing the authority *of Christ* (*Look to the Rock*, 21).

[63] A justification found in CSBI, A Short Statement.

[64] Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classical Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 36–43.

[65] CSBI, A Short Statement.

[66] CSBI, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, Article XVI.

evident to the five senses nor incorrigible. Plantinga himself goes over the rudiments of this idea.[67] The interplay of faith, the Holy Spirit's work, and the Bible produces warrant independent of inference—foundational warrant. He suggests one way this might work: "the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that this book is indeed from God," and goes on to explain several other ways the Holy Spirit might warrant our belief in biblical authority.[68]

The idea that God directly informs us of the truth of the Bible is very old. Augustine prays, "You told me with strong voice in the ear of Your servant's spirit, breaking through my deafness and crying: 'O man, what my Scripture says, I say….'"[69] Similarly, Calvin says that the Bible "owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit."[70] Following and citing Calvin as well as the Westminster Confession and other sources, Packer emphatically concurs.[71] Kantzer also speaks of the Holy Spirit working in us to show that the Bible is the Word of God.[72]

We have already noted the inconsistency with strong foundationalism according to Plantinga's definition. Regarding strong foundationalism as I define it, we need only reiterate that the appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit is an appeal to foundational warrant for the doctrine of inerrancy itself, or else to the doctrine which immediately justifies it, that the Bible is the Word of God.

3.3. Coherential Warrant

Inerrantists also appeal to coherential warrant on behalf of inerrancy. This may be seen primarily in the claim that the Bible is consistent with other relevant areas of human knowledge. There is also a strong coherential aspect of the doctrine as articulated in the CSBI.

Bell is again a convenient illustration. After making the Christological argument he briefly reviews some other evidences for inerrancy.[73] For example, he notes the remarkable consistency of the teachings of so large a document composed over so long a period of time. He notes the considerable degree of confirmation from archaeology for claims made in the Bible. He also comments on the Bible's consistency with the observable facts of life concerning death and depravity and notes the positive effects the Bible has made in people's lives. Bell recognizes that "these are supplemental arguments" less binding than the authority of Christ. He follows it up with two more lectures on "Dealing with Biblical Difficulties,"[74]

---

[67] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 374.

[68] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 380. Several of these involve inferential warrant for that belief, but all involve foundational warrant by the proper functioning of our spiritual noetic faculties; Plantinga notes that we need not choose just one. That knowledge of the Bible's authority might have inferential as well as foundational warrant is more evidence that Plantinga's epistemology is a weak foundationalism. For more on Plantinga as a weak foundationalist see Mark Boone, "Proper Function and the Conditions for Warrant: What Plantinga's Notion of Warrant Shows about Different Kinds of Knowledge," *Philosophia Christi* 14 (2012): 373–86. Note that Plantinga is not explicit on biblical "inerrancy" here—only on biblical *authority*.

[69] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 13.29.44. Note the similarity to the final words of the CSBI: "We affirm that what Scripture says, God says."

[70] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.5.

[71] Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, 118.

[72] Kenneth Kantzer, "Inerrancy and the Humanity and Divinity of the Bible," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 157–58.

[73] Bell, "Doctrine of Scripture," lecture 7.

[74] Bell, "Doctrine of Scripture," lectures 8–9.

aimed to show how we can confirm that the Bible, at various points where it has been critiqued, is consistent with itself and with human knowledge generally. The general idea is that inerrancy so far appears consistent with itself and such other areas of knowledge and experience as are relevant to it. This is no positive proof, but it matters; in other words, it is coherential warrant.

Packer also delves into the coherential warrant for inerrancy.[75] Similarly, Greg Bahnsen, following Van Til, explains that the confirmation of Bible from history and science matters a great deal; even the believer who presupposes inerrancy seeks to confirm his theology inductively from other areas of human knowledge.[76] More generally, find any inerrantist who thinks it *matters* whether the tendency of human knowledge from science, psychology, archaeology, or whatever else is to cohere with Scripture, and you will find an inerrantist appealing to coherential warrant; and any such case is incompatible with most forms of strong foundationalism.

Finally, we can find in the inerrantist tradition an interesting coherential notion in the claim that the authority of Christ and of the Bible mutually confirm each other. In the same passage inferring the authority of Scripture from that of Christ, the CSBI tells us that the inference goes the other way as well. The Bible testifies to the authority of Christ, and so the Statement says, "the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one."[77] The inference is symmetrical: "By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority."[78] This is an aspect of coherentism—the mutual confirmation of beliefs. It is not, strictly speaking, what I am calling coherential warrant, although it is not typical of strong foundationalism. (This bi-directionality of warrant is inconsistent with *all* foundationalisms as defined by Haack.)

Of course, if this were all the CSBI could say on behalf of inerrancy, it would be a poorly defended doctrine indeed. It would rest on a sample of purified circular reasoning, which also turns out to be the problem with pure coherentism.[79] Yet, as we have seen, there is in the CSBI an appeal to foundational warrant. So the CSBI is not in fact touting circular reasoning. The mutual confirmation of these authorities is a matter of spreading warrant around, not conjuring it out of nowhere. To paraphrase what Barack Obama said to Joe the plumber, when you spread the warrant around, it's good for every belief.[80] But, of course, before it can be spread around it has to *come from* somewhere, and it comes from foundational warrant, such as that imparted by the Holy Spirit's testimony for the doctrine or in the form of other evidence for the authority of Christ or Scripture such as inerrantists may provide.

Let us review these facts and tie them all together.

3.4. Inerrancy Is Not a Strong Foundationalism

Strong foundationalism is a theory on the structure of knowledge, namely that knowledge has a foundation in beliefs warranted by foundational warrant and not needing additional warrant of the

---

[75] J. I. Packer, "Problem Areas Related to Biblical Inerrancy," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 205–13.

[76] Greg Bahnsen, "Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism," *JETS* 20 (1977): 292–93.

[77] CSBI, Exposition, Authority: Christ and the Bible.

[78] CSBI, Exposition, Authority: Christ and the Bible.

[79] See the explanation in Boone, "Inferential, Coherential, and Foundational Warrant," 388–90.

[80] For a proper account of the mutual support of beliefs, I suggest McGrew, "How Foundationalists Do Crossword Puzzles," 333–50.

other varieties. Typically, such a theory is false because it ignores the fact that a belief, even a basic belief, may have not only foundational warrant but also inferential or coherential warrant, or both. If inerrancy is a strong foundationalism, then it must be the case either that it is warranted (or is said by its proponents to be warranted) by foundational warrant alone, or else that it is based (or is said by its proponents to be based) on beliefs that are. Despite what some critics allege, neither of these is the case.

We have noted a number of difficulties in treating inerrancy as a strong foundationalism. Employing Plantinga's definition, strong foundationalism only recognizes as having foundational warrant those beliefs which are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses; and yet inerrantists have often claimed that the Holy Spirit is a source of warrant for inerrancy. Another, more universal difficulty is that inerrancy is a piece of theology, and *not* a theory on the structure of knowledge.

What I regard as the most crucial difficulty is that, given strong foundationalism, a theory possessing foundational warrant cannot or at least need not possess the other varieties. However, as we have seen, notable sources on inerrancy plainly treat that doctrine as being warranted foundationally but also inferentially, coherentially, or both. Bell treats inerrancy as warranted *inferentially* and *coherentially*. Kantzer and the CSBI treat it as warranted *inferentially* and *foundationally*. Packer treats it as warranted in *all three ways*. This precludes inerrancy being a basic belief in a strongly foundationalist epistemology. Nor must inerrancy be based on beliefs warranted only foundationally. One may base inerrancy on the Messiah's testimony concerning Scripture and not even explain the basis of our knowledge of *his* authority. Thus Bell, Packer, and Kantzer, for whom beginning with the authority of Christ is enough.

Now I do not claim that *no* inerrantist has ever been a strong foundationalist. Rather, I say that nothing in the doctrine entails strong foundationalism, and that the CSBI and some of its signers do not tie inerrancy to strong foundationalism, and indeed have theology inconsistent with most strong foundationalisms.

What *would* a strongly foundationalist inerrancy look like? I can think of three forms it might take, two of which are not particularly good epistemologies.

First, the Bible might be treated as the sole foundation of knowledge, whose truth is beyond reasonable doubt and is not warranted by any external evidence. The warrant for inerrancy would be considered *purely* foundational; presumably the explanation for how this works would claim that the Holy Spirit so warrants inerrancy that on this basis alone we know it to be true with such certainty that doubting it on the basis of any conceivable evidence is about as difficult as my finding evidence that I do not exist! (Bear in mind that an inerrantist with such a strong view of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the authority of the Bible would have to think *not* that the Bible is inconsistent with human knowledge generally so much as that such consistency is not *important*.) I cannot confirm whether any inerrantist has held this view, although at least one source is suggestive of such a theory.[81]

Second, the inerrantist might claim that the authority of the Bible rests solely on the authority of Christ (not at all on the testimony of the Holy Spirit); that Christ's authority is known from his miracles and in particular the Resurrection; that these are historical events known by the usual methods of gaining historical knowledge, and that the whole thing rests on certain common-sense beliefs, such as that testimony is a source of knowledge. The inerrantist furthermore would need to consider this whole chain of evidence to be so strong that corroboration from human knowledge generally is not only unnecessary but downright irrelevant.

---

[81] Terry Young, "The Relationship Between Biblical Inerrancy and Biblical Authority," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 391–409.

To be fair to Grenz, Franke, and others, it may well be that inerrantists have sometimes fallen into strong foundationalism or strayed near it, perhaps in this very manner. Indeed, luminaries no less than B. B. Warfield and Carl Henry may have had something like a strong foundationalist inerrancy if one scholar's reading of them is correct,[82] and, to read Bahnsen at least, it seems that Daniel Fuller and Clark Pinnock (in an early stage) may have aimed to establish the truth of inerrancy on an inductive model of strong foundationalism.[83] More generally, I do not dispute that evangelical inerrantists have been known to stray into unbiblical or unchristian modes of Enlightenment thinking, as Robert Kurka concedes.[84]

A third account merging inerrantist theology with strong foundationalism is more promising. I think McGrew's account suggests the best convergence with inerrancy. Briefly, here is how I think it might account for the testimony of the Holy Spirit as well as the Christological argument. The latter would be established in ways already suggested, but elaborated in terms of McGrew's strong foundationalism. From the certain foundation of our knowledge of our own beliefs, we reason inductively to knowledge of the world outside the mind; from there we can justify history and, from history, the whole evidence chain from miracles via Christ's authority to the authority of the Bible. As for the Holy Spirit, we could follow Plantinga in explaining his testimony as a source of foundational warrant, but with a twist fitting McGrew's epistemology. Roughly, I have certain knowledge that it seems to me that the Bible is the holy Word of God; I reason, using an argument modeled after the one in chapter 7 of McGrew's book, that this is probably a perception matching reality. The reliability of this spiritual perception would be explained by an appeal to the Holy Spirit. Thus, inerrancy is warranted by the testimony of the Holy Spirit *and* by Christ's authority, but all this warrant begins with absolutely certain beliefs about my own thoughts.[85]

So I do not claim that inerrancy has never been linked to a strong foundationalism or cannot be. Rather, I have shown that inerrancy is not by its nature a strong foundationalism, and that some notable sources in the CSBI tradition have promoted the doctrine in ways incompatible with most forms of strong foundationalism and employing the very sort of eclectic account of the sources of warrant for ignoring which strong foundationalism has often been criticized. The ongoing discussion of inerrancy and epistemology would benefit from keeping in mind the reasoning offered by these theologians and these considerations of the structure of knowledge.

---

[82] Jeffrey Steven Oldfield argues that Warfield and Henry are foundationalists in "The Word Became Text and Dwells Among Us?: An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy" (PhD thesis, The University of St. Andrews, 2008), 84–102. An evaluation of Oldfield's interpretation is well outside the scope of this paper.

[83] Bahnsen. An evaluation of this interpretation of Fuller and early Pinnock is, likewise, outside the scope of this paper.

[84] Kurka,"*Before* 'Foundationalism,'" 147–48. This included at times "A quest for unshakeable foundations;" Kurka, "*Before* 'Foundationalism,'" 148.

[85] I doubt whether this account is true to the phenomenology of belief. I tend to follow Plantinga in thinking that the basic beliefs from which we reason concern extra-mental reality, not our perceptions of it; even so, Mc-Grew's account may succeed in describing a possible, and valuable, source of warrant in absolutely certain beliefs.

The God Who Reveals:
A Response to J. L. Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument

— **Daniel Wiley** —

Daniel Wiley is an adjunct professor at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona, and a PhD candidate at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania.

******

Abstract: The challenge of divine hiddenness has become one of the greatest advocates for skepticism in modern philosophical debate. From this challenge, Schellenberg has developed the now acclaimed hiddenness argument. For Schellenberg, an all-loving God would be always open to personal relationships with finite creatures, and thus all nonbelief would derive from resistance to God. However, the existence of nonresistant nonbelievers, or those who have never resisted the idea of God, must prove that God does not exist, for surely an all-loving God would leave enough evidence of himself to convince finite creatures of his existence and prevent nonresistant nonbelief. In response, I argue that (1) openness to personal relationships and love are not as correlated as the hiddenness argument demands, (2) nonresistant nonbelief is not provable, and (3) Schellenberg fails to reason to God's omni-benevolence apart from Scripture.

******

In 1993, J. L. Schellenberg, currently professor of philosophy at Mount Saint Vincent University and adjunct professor in the faculty of graduate studies at Dalhousie University, published the first edition of his now acclaimed work *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*.[1] Presenting what he contended was a new argument against the existence of God, Schellenberg concluded that the existence of an all-loving and personal God is incompatible with the existence of nonresistant nonbelievers. This argument has come to be known as the "hiddenness argument." In less than three decades, the hiddenness argument joined the problem of evil as a topic of great philosophical fever, appearing as the subject of numerous articles in peer reviewed journals and engraving itself into various significant handbooks and companions on the philosophy of religion.[2] According to Dumsday, "Next to the problem of evil, the problem of divine hiddenness has become the most prominent argument for atheism in the current

---

[1] J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[2] See Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), x.

literature."[3]

In 2015, Schellenberg released a new work, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to the Belief in God*.[4] The reason for this release, according to Schellenberg, was to present "a clear and crisp statement of an argument still rightly called new."[5] Based upon the hiddenness argument's ability to withstand scrutiny, as demonstrated in Schellenberg's various rebuttals to his opponents, it is evident that the argument is, as Schellenberg candidly states, "here to stay."[6] Beyond Schellenberg's own objectives, the release of *The Hiddenness Argument* coincides comfortably with the rise and growth of secular humanism in western culture.[7] As divine hiddenness is increasingly used to justify nonbelief, it will become increasingly essential for the Church to offer rebuttal.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate and respond to the hiddenness argument.[8] This response concentrates upon its three core foundations: (1) The positive correlation between love and one's openness to personal relationships, (2) Nonresistant nonbelief, and (3) The rationality of God as an omni-benevolent being. In response to the hiddenness argument, I propose the following: (1) The correlation between love and one's openness to personal relationship is not as strong as the hiddenness argument demands, (2) Nonresistant nonbelief is an unprovable position, and (3) The hiddenness argument cannot establish the omni-benevolence of God apart from Scripture, and thus is consequently self-defeating.

1. The Hiddenness Argument Explained

Before presenting the rebuttal, it is essential to accurately present the hiddenness argument as defined by Schellenberg himself. Only an accurate representation of an argument can lead to a successful rebuttal. Furthermore, Schellenberg contests that his argumentation has been misconstrued, and this is something we do not desire to do here.[9]

---

[3] Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and the One Sheep," *IJPR* 79 (2016): 69.

[4] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015). A softcover edition of *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to the Belief in God* was released in 2017. This softcover edition will be the primary reference in this article.

[5] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), xii. Schellenberg lists several other reasons for his new release, including distinguishing the hiddenness argument from the problem of evil (see xi).

[6] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, x. As implied by the preface of *The Hiddenness Argument*, it is likely that Schellenberg desired a publication clarifying and establishing the hiddenness argument due to the numerous rebuttals launched against the hiddenness argument. For a comprehensive list of these rebuttals and Schellenberg's responses, along with other notable recent works exploring divine hiddenness, see *The Hiddenness Argument*, 133–39.

[7] Schellenberg admits as much. See *The Hiddenness Argument*, 83.

[8] Schellenberg's *The Hiddenness Argument* serves as the primary object of the paper, although Schellenberg's other works are referenced when necessary.

[9] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 105. This section of the paper presents the basics of the argument. The relevant fine-points are addressed in the following sections.

Hiddenness logic is multifaceted, and many lines of reasoning from divine hiddenness have been proposed by philosophers.[10] Furthermore, Schellenberg's own version of the argument has gone through revision since 1994.[11] Dumsday skillfully defines the basics of the hiddenness argument as follows:

> God loves us and desires our ultimate well-being. Genuine love leads the lover to seek open relationship with the beloved (since that is entailed by the nature of love), especially if the ultimate well-being of the beloved requires such relationship (as is supposedly the case with us and God). Consequently, God would ensure that each of us had a rationally secure belief in Him and that each of us could, just by willing it, enter into conscious communion with Him. But as a matter of fact, some people fail to believe in God, and that through no fault of their own; that is, we find actualized the phenomenon of 'nonresistant nonbelief', nonbelief on the part of those otherwise willing to believe. This state of affairs contradicts what theism would lead us to expect a priori, which provides good reason to think that God does not exist.[12]

The force of hiddenness logic derives from the conclusion that an all-loving God would ensure that all people could have a belief in him (and especially if nonbelief has eschatological consequences) and thus would provide all people with enough compelling evidence to conclude that He exists and, in turn, believe in him. However, nonresistant nonbelievers, those who have not resisted a relationship with God but conclude that this necessary evidence does not exist, remain in our world. Therefore, God must not exist.[13]

From Dumsday's definition of hiddenness logic, it is easy to comprehend Schellenberg's version of the argument, which he conveniently presents by way of the following syllogism in *The Hiddenness Argument* (presumably the most up-to-date version of the argument):

1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.
2. If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
3. If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).
4. Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
5. No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).
6. If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.

---

[10] Robert MacSwain, "*Sensus Divinitais* or Divine Hiddenness? Alvin Plantinga and J. L. Schellenberg on Knowledge of God," *AThR* 99 (2017): 359.

[11] See Imran Aijaz and Markus Weidler, "Some Critical Reflections on the Hiddenness Argument," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 61 (2007): 4.

[12] Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and the Opiate of the People," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 76 (2014): 194.

[13] See also J. Caleb Clanton, "Alexander Campbell on the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *SCJ* 15 (Fall 2012): 192–93.

7. God does not exist (from 5 and 6).[14]

One must not underestimate the force of this syllogism. The conclusions logically flow from the premises, and thus the argument is valid. To respond to the hiddenness argument, one must demonstrate that one or more of the premises are in error.

2. Perfect Love and Openness to Personal Relationships

The first foundational point of the hiddenness argument is the relationship between love and openness. According to Schellenberg, "The hiddenness argument's main premise, stated without analytical fretting or frills and with the aim of maximum intuitive force, is this: If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person."[15] In this context, openness "means that it will be *possible* for creatures who haven't made it impossible themselves through their own God-obscuring resistance of the divine, to participate in relationship with God; if they want to, they will be able to do so simply by *trying* to do so."[16] Thus, if God is open to relationship, then "God sees to it that nothing *God* does or fails to do puts relationship with God out of reach for finite persons at the time in question."[17] In short, if God is omni-benevolent, then he would always be open to personal relationships with finite creatures and do nothing to prevent relationships with finite creatures.

The heart of this argument is found in the correlation between love as expressed by human persons and love as expressed by God. As Schellenberg argues, if there was no possible analogy between God's love and human love, then human language could not speak about God at all.[18] This correspondence is best witnessed in a parent's love for his or her children. In normal cases, the best parents always love their children, and this love manifests itself through a parent's openness to relationship with his or her children. Now, if a parent is not open to relationship with his or her children, he or she is seen by others as a bad parent. Therefore, God, who is the perfect "parent," much always be open to relationship with his "children," lest he falls short of omni-benevolence.[19]

The force of this argument is strong, and especially because of its emotional angle. Those parents who refuse relationship with their children are seen as abnormal and less than truly loving. If that is so, then how can a perfect God avoid such scrutiny if he is not open to relationships with finite creatures? Nevertheless, the implied assumption with the above argument is that one's openness to relationship is positively correlated with one's love. To put that differently, love becomes the final arbitrator in one's openness to relationships, i.e. if one is truly loving, then one will always be open to relationships. However, this correlation is not sustainable to the degree that the hiddenness argument requires.

---

[14] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 103.

[15] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 38.

[16] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 41.

[17] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 41.

[18] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 49.

[19] See Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 41–42.

2.1. Parents and Closed Doors

One example demonstrating the failure of the hiddenness argument's openness-love correspondence is the relationship between parents and children. A good parent always loves his or her child. However, we can conceive of scenarios in which a parent's love does not determine the openness of a relationship.[20] For instance, a child could grow up and become delinquent in a way that would threaten the safety of his or her parents and family (examples include becoming a serial killer or a sex offender). A good parent will always love that child, but would a wise parent keep that relationship open considering the circumstances? It is highly unlikely (at best, there will be great restrictions upon the openness of that relationship), and this is for one very simply reason: Purpose is just as influential upon our openness to relationship as love. In this example, a good parent is loving, but a good parent also protects his or her family. Such protection could include restraining orders or even relocation to prevent contact depending upon the seriousness of the events. On the other hand, parents who do not act upon the situation could be threating the well-being of their spouses and other children. Would that be a loving thing to do? The irony of this scenario is that Schellenberg's logic demands that one be open to a dangerous relationship, but that might not be a loving thing to do in regard to one's other relationships. At the very least, this argument shows that the correlation between love and openness is more complicated that the hiddenness argument demands.

2.2. A Response to Potential Counter-Rebuttals

It is possible that Schellenberg would respond to the above example in a couple of ways. First, he could argue that God is perfectly loving, and thus his openness is never affected by the imperfections of human relationships or purposes that influence openness. Second, he could argue that God is sovereign, and thus can be open to any relationship that he wants to regardless of humanity's sin or vice.[21] Therefore, the dangers of human actions would not affect God's ability to be open to any relationship with any finite person. Third, he could argue that the deviant child already knows of the parents' existence, and thus the relationship is not truly "closed" in the sense that the child lacks awareness of their existence. To these potential counter-arguments, several points are made.

For the first counter-argument, such logic would contradict Schellenberg's own thesis. As stated above, we can speak of God's love because we understand human love. Furthermore, having proven that openness is also determined by purpose and not just love in man, it would be impossible to correlate human love with God's love if God's love is the final arbitrator in determining his openness but human love is not. Without this correlation between humankind and God regarding love, the logic behind the hiddenness argument cannot stand.

For the second counter-argument, to say that God can be open to relationship with all humanity says nothing about God's necessity to be open to all humanity. The original version of the hiddenness argument draws the correlation between perfect love and openness, not ability and openness. This

---

[20] The following scenario could be modified slightly, for example, a man closes the relationship between himself and a delinquent brother or other family member for the sake of the safety of his family.

[21] Commenting on the ability of God to be open to all relationships in contrasts to the potential limitations of man to be open to all possible relationships, Schellenberg notes, "God has the resources to accommodate the possible consequences of openness to relationship with finite persons, making them compatible with the flourishing of all concerned and of any relationship that may come to exist between them." See Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 45.

is changing the argument. Nevertheless, even if ability is included in the argument, it still does not override the fact that openness is also determined by purpose, as previously demonstrated. If human persons have various degrees of openness based upon purpose and not just love, then why can't God's openness also be dependent upon his purposes and not just his love?[22]

For the third counter-argument, such logic would run contrary to Schellenberg's own reasoning. Giving an example of a child who is enthusiastic about parents who do not have any relationship with the child, he concludes, "Their attitude towards him, whatever it is, doesn't amount to the most admirable love, since they are closed to being in a personal relationship with him."[23] At this point in the argument, openness vs. closedness is not indicative of existence vs. nonexistence, lest the above logic would make no sense (the closedness of the parents' relationship in the example says nothing about their existence—they obviously exist!). Therefore, Schellenberg would have to retract his reasoning here (reasoning that is valuable to his argument) to make the rebuttal stand.

3. Nonresistant Nonbelief

The second foundation of the hiddenness argument is the concepts of resistance and nonresistant nonbelief. According to the third conditional proposition, "If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with each finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists."[24] According to Schellenberg's logic, a perfectly loving God who is always open to a personal relationship with each finite person will make His existence knowable, for surely a God who hides evidence of Himself cannot be perfectly loving. Therefore, those who reject this necessary evidence for God must be in a state of resistance towards God.[25]

However, Schellenberg also argues that there are many people who have not resisted or currently resist the idea of God but rather remained or currently remain unconvinced of His existence. These people include: (1) Early *homo sapiens*, who had no concept of or need to consider theistic religion, (2) Former believers, those who once held to theistic religion but converted out after reflection upon the evidence, and (3) Secularists who have felt no conscious desire to pursue discussion of God.[26] Schellenberg confidently concludes, "So anyone with some acquaintance with evolutionary history and a willingness to look truth in the eye will be able to see that, in the actual world, many people in our history have failed to believe in God without resistance of God in any way coming into the explanation of their nonbelief."[27] In summary, if an all-loving God exists, then he would never close off relationships with finite creatures, and thus all nonbelief would be resistance. However, since there are some who do not resist God, then God must not exist. Unfortunately, as convincing as nonresistant nonbelief appears to be, this line of reasoning has numerous difficulties.

---

[22] At this point, we do not have to define God's purposes, but only prove that purpose affects openness.

[23] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 42.

[24] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 57.

[25] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 42.

[26] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 76–86.

[27] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 79.

3.1. An Unprovable Assumption

The first difficulty is that nonresistant nonbelief cannot be proven in a meaningful way. The reason for the unverifiability of nonresistant nonbelief is that nonresistant nonbelief is a conceptual thought of the mind. Therefore, there is no possible way for one to prove that one possesses nonresistant nonbelief beyond stating that one has nonresistant nonbelief.

A non-emotionally charged example might be helpful in proving the point. If I were to state, "I am thinking about taking my beautiful girlfriend out for a ride in my brand-new convertible," how would I go about proving that I am thinking about taking my beautiful girlfriend out for a ride in my brand-new convertible? The truth is, I cannot prove that I am thinking such a thought, for the mind cannot be observed in such a way to prove that I am thinking about taking my beautiful girlfriend out for a ride in my brand-new convertible. Theoretically, I could take my beautiful girlfriend out for a rise in my new convertible later and use my actions as "proof" for my prior thinking, but that still does not absolutely prove that I was thinking of such things at the time. I could have been lying, or perhaps I took my girlfriend out for a ride for an entirely different reason than for the fact that I was thinking about it earlier, and thus there is no true connection between my thought and later action. Ultimately, those whom I share this information with must simply take my word that I am thinking of this.

Now, let us take that idea into the debate concerning the existence of God. If a believer approaches an unbeliever and argues, "I just know God exists because God speaks to me," do you suppose that the unbeliever would accept this statement as evidence that God does exist? Hardly. What if, instead of one believer, one million believers approached this unbeliever and made the same argument. Would the unbeliever then accept that as evidence that God exists. Probably not. Instead, the unbeliever would ask for objective evidence that God exists instead relying on the subjective statement of the believer that is impossible to verify.

At this point, my rebuttal is obvious: Nonresistant nonbelief as a provable state of mind is in no different a position than my inability to prove that I am thinking about taking my beautiful girlfriend for a ride in my new convertible or the believer trying to prove that God exists because he had a "personal encounter" with God. When this point is realized, Schellenberg's proposed "evidence" simply becomes a "hand count" of all the people who claim to live or may have lived in a state of nonresistant nonbelief and not actual proof that nonresistant nonbelief exists. Even if one is truly in a state of nonresistant nonbelief and makes this claim with confidence, the fact that one cannot prove this claim makes the argument meaningless as an apologetic for atheism.

3.2. Ignorance of Resistant Nonbelief

The second difficulty is the assumption that resistance is always a conscious act. One's personal belief that one is not resisting God is, alone, not proof of nonresistant nonbelief, for one could be deceived. Ironically, Schellenberg offers evidence for this rebuttal in his attempt to establish the existence of nonresistant nonbelief! Commenting on the nonresistant nonbelief of pre-theistic *homo sapiens*, Schellenberg argues,

> Think about it. These are people who don't believe in God. So they are nonbelievers– they are not in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that God exists. And how could they be resistant? It's not even possible since resistance of God presupposes

thinking about God, and their whole picture of the world is shaped in such a way that thinking about God just wouldn't happen.[28]

The reader will notice that Schellenberg contests that "resistance of God presupposes thinking about God." However, the reader will also notice that these pre-theistic *homo sapiens* had a whole picture of the world "shaped in such a way that thinking about God just wouldn't happen." By this statement, Schellenberg admits that the thinking of these pre-theistic *homo sapiens* is so directing and controlling of the minds of these individuals that they would never think about God.

This thinking that is so directing and controlling is clearly evidence of a worldview, and understanding how worldviews work is essential in recognizing the importance of the previous point. God may have very well left evidence of Himself, but these pre-theistic *homo sapiens* developed a worldview that does not recognize God (at least in a theistic sense) and thus construe the evidence to fit their own worldview. In this scenario, the lack of reflection regarding God by these pre-theistic *homo sapiens* says nothing about his existence or demands that resistance is active in a conscious sense. This puts Schellenberg in a dilemma: As the statement stands currently, it is inconsistent with the objectivity of nonresistant nonbelief, yet if he retracts his statement, he does severe damage to his thesis.

As a final thought to this rebuttal, pre-theistic *homo sapiens* are not the only ones who could have a worldview that removes God from discussion. Is it not possible that a secular humanistic view of the world, which, by its very nature, attempts to define all life and purpose apart from God, would shape one's mind in such a way that God becomes unimportant? Might a secular humanistic culture suppress the idea of God and interpret all the evidence God left of himself thought a secular lens and thus reject the idea of God *a priori*? Secularists may be convinced that they are not resisting God, but how can they be sure of this when they have, just as the pre-theistic *homo sapiens* did, a whole picture of the world that is shaped in such a way that thinking about God just wouldn't happen?

Of course, Schellenberg might respond that an all-loving God would leave strong enough evidence of himself to override any suspicion of his existence. However, this assumes the modernistic presupposition that an individual can reason independently and objectively to the truth. As Schellenberg has already admitted, culture greatly affects an individual's thinking. Perhaps God has left enough evidence of himself, but that evidence is manipulated by worldviews.[29] If so, then is God obligated to give more evidence for his existence? Schellenberg may believe so, but he must first resolve the consequences of his own arguments regarding the role of worldviews and their effects upon one's thinking.

---

[28] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 77.

[29] Another question could be asked, "How much evidence is enough evidence?" Here, worldviews come into play. Secularists are generally convinced that they would "believe" if some "evidence" came along to prove His existence or God would reveal Himself in some miraculous way. However, according to Scripture, men reject the truth even in the face of the evidence (e.g., Matt 9:34; Luke 16:31). In a biblical worldview, submission to the Lord concerns more than simple "belief" in God.

4. *The Omni-Benevolence of God*

The final pillar of the hiddenness argument concerns God's omni-benevolence.[30] That God is all-loving is revealed in Scripture (1 John 4:8) and is an essential truth of the Christian faith.[31] God's omni-benevolence is also important for the hiddenness argument. For Schellenberg, the effectiveness of the hiddenness argument stands or falls upon the omni-benevolence of God.[32]

However, arguing for the omni-benevolence of God apart from Scripture is Schellenberg's challenge. At first, this challenge does not appear to be a challenge at all, since it is generally assumed, and especially in western culture, that God, if he exists, would be all-loving. In his article, "The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (1)," Schellenberg remarked, "We may note that there is little evidence of any inclination among philosophers to question the argument's claim that perfect love is an essential property of God (where by 'God' is meant the personal God of traditional theism). I shall therefore give little attention to that claim."[33] The question, however, is this: Why would philosophers simply assume that God, if he exists, is all-loving? There is certainly much in the world that would suggest otherwise (this is why the problem is evil is so problematic!). Furthermore, love as an attribute of God has not been universally held by the world's religions both past and present. Schellenberg admits as much and notes,

> Christians clearly teach that God is love, but it isn't—or isn't as obviously—the case for other theistic traditions. Islam emphasizes divine mercy and compassion, which may in some ways be related to love but don't amount to the same thing. And Judaism seems to get along with a God who—especially after the Holocaust—may be severely criticized and regarded as somewhat deficient in love.[34]

To add to Schellenberg's admission, popular historical viewpoints on God have been fine without omni-benevolence as necessary for God, for example, Deism.[35] Perhaps God's omni-benevolence is not so obvious after all.

Nevertheless, Schellenberg is certain that it is "reasonable" to conclude that God, if he exists, is omni-benevolent. Commenting on the qualities a perfect person must possess, he remarks, "Contrary to what some of my critics have said, such reflection—and not just Christian prejudice—is what lay behind my claim in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* that a God would be perfectly loving."[36]

---

[30] In truth, because of its importance, the omni-benevolence of God is rightly called the first pillar of the Hiddenness Argument. Nevertheless, a full discussion of the omni-benevolence of God is left for the final chapters of *The Hiddenness Argument* per Schellenberg's own wishes (see Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 89), and thus this rebuttal follows suit.

[31] Love is essential to the believer's walk and characteristic of his faith. For example, a believer is called to love both those of the faith (1 John 3:14) and his enemies (Matt 5:44). Love towards other believers and one's enemies are described as "signs" that one is a true believer.

[32] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 89.

[33] J. L. Schellenberg, "The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (1)," *RelS* 41 (2005): 201.

[34] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 89–90.

[35] In Deism, God has no relationship with finite creatures, and thus it is nonsense to speak of God as omni-benevolent. Furthermore, the decline of Deism was not its lack of emphasis upon God's love, as if deism could not be maintained because it did not include omni-benevolence as an attribute of God. Essentially, the God of Deism is closed to any meaningful personal relationship with finite creatures.

[36] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 95.

Since cultures have disagreed on the status of "love," and thus "love" is not universally recognized as a perfection, Schellenberg bears of burden of proof in arguing that love as a perfection is not simply a Western cultural perspective but a proposition that can be proven by reason apart from Scriptural revelation and cultural influence.

4.1. The Urgency of Schellenberg's Defense

One must not underestimate the urgency of God's omni-benevolence for the hiddenness argument. If Schellenberg cannot prove that God must be loving, then he must rely on Scripture to prove that God is omni-benevolent. This, however, would be the death warrant for the hiddenness argument, for to be consistent, Schellenberg would have to use all of Scripture to define God and man rather than just what is convenient for the hiddenness argument. As even the most simple-minded Bible college student knows, the Scriptures present a worldview radically different than that presented by Schellenberg, a worldview that is purely modernistic. The most significant and obvious distinction between Schellenberg's secular worldview and the biblical worldview is the nature of man. According to Scripture, man is not a morally-neutral being but is a sinner and in a natural state of rebellion against his Creator (Rom 3:9–19; Eph 2:1–3; cf. Gen 8:21; Col 2:13). Man does not reject God because there is no evidence for God, but because man twists the evidence to justify His own rebellion and hate of God (cf. Rom 1:18–23).

Of course, proponents of the hiddenness argument would hardly accept Scriptural testimony to the nature of man as a rebuttal of the hiddenness argument. For secularists, the Bible is a biased religious document and thus it is meaningless to reference Scripture to refute the hiddenness argument. Schellenberg follows the play-book well. For example, those who appeal to Scripture, the composition of which modernism has "proved" is suspect,[37] do it out of loyalty "to preconceived views instead of a burning desire to know what's true."[38] Schellenberg is not convinced regarding the biblical nature of man. In fact, he relegates this view to that of "cultish" status.[39] For Schellenberg, man is not in rebellion against God and would be believe in God if only God would remain open to relationship.[40] Clearly, the only valid reason why anyone would hold onto Scripture is because they have not been exposed to the "evidence" that secularism has given us. However, when one leaves his or her religious community and enters the city, the bastion of secular thought, and thus is exposed to other views, one can think for oneself and will likely develop doubt against the existence of God.[41]

Problems with this narrative aside,[42] the radical distinction between a biblical worldview and the hiddenness argument forces Schellenberg to argue for God's omni-benevolence apart from Scripture. If

---

[37] See Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 80.

[38] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 50.

[39] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 34. Schellenberg's charge is especially interesting considering that the depravity of man is foundational to Reformed and Evangelical theology.

[40] In conformity to modernism, Schellenberg offers no evidence that man can interpret the world correctly but simply assumes it throughout.

[41] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 86.

[42] The major issue with Schellenberg's presentation of secularism (primarily in ch. 6) is the assumption that secularism is "neutral," meaning that secularism has no control over the way people think but is a natural consequence of people thinking for themselves. This is in opposition to religion generally defined, which "controls" the way people think but something people grow out of as they become exposed to secularism. This failure to recognize the worldview of secularism and its influence upon those within its influence is clearly special pleading.

Schellenberg cannot do so, then it is obvious that he must rely on Scripture to form the idea of God as all-loving. However, if he does so, then he must also accept the rest of the biblical testimony regarding the nature of God and man.

4.2. A Rationally Loving God?

As urgent as the matter is, Schellenberg only offers one clear non-biblical argument in proof of God's omni-benevolence in *The Hiddenness Argument*.[43] This argument proceeds as follows:

> Here's one way to think about it. Bring before your mind the concept of the greatest possible person—a person so great that none could be greater—and suppose also that this person has created a world including finite persons. Think about this person's attributes. Now either your conception already embraces perfect love towards those other persons among its attributes or it doesn't. If it does, I've made my case. If it doesn't, then ask yourself what is the result of mentally *adding* perfect love to the collection of attributes you've conceived.[44]

Schellenberg's example fails to prove that love is a perfection for two reasons. First, the argument begs the question, for it assumes that a more impressive person would be "perfectly loving" without proving that love is a perfection. Second, it bases the judgment of love as a perfection completely upon the reader, as if the reader's perception of the value of love determines whether love is a perfection. Just because Schellenberg's reader assumes that the addition of perfect love makes one a morally impressive person does not actually make that person morally impressive. If the reader concluded "no," then would love no longer a perfection? Western culture may value love (however it is defined by western culture), but western culture's admiration for something alone does not make it "good" in an objective sense, much less a perfection.

Schellenberg's failure to establish omni-benevolence as necessary to God apart from Scripture places his thesis in jeopardy. He cannot even begin to argue against the existence of God unless he can prove God's omni-benevolence, but he has not done this. As it stands, his only foreseeable option is to approach the nature of God from the Christian worldview, but, as argued above, this worldview is not compatible with the moral neutrality of humanity as asserted by the hiddenness argument, and thus an appeal to the Christian understanding of God is self-defeating.

---

[43] Schellenberg does list several counter arguments or arguments for a loveless God and his responses to those arguments (see Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 97–102). However, this list presupposes that Schellenberg has established the reasonableness of God's omni-benevolence apart from Scripture. As I argue, I am certain that he has not yet done this.

The only other possible argument for God's omni-benevolence apart from Scripture as implied by Schellenberg derives from his conception of ultimism (see Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 18–22). For Schellenberg, "Within an ultimistic frame of reference, it's all or nothing: because God must be perfect in every way, either God is loving or God is not loving at all" (97). Schellenberg is correct, but the point does not prove that God is loving, but only that He must be one or the other.

[44] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 96–97, emphasis original.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the three foundational propositions of Schellenberg's most contemporary version of the hiddenness argument. As I have argued, Schellenberg's hiddenness argument fails for three reasons:

1. It assumes a correlation between love and openness that does not reflect the way men and women establish openness to relationships.
2. It is not able to prove nonresistant nonbelief.
3. It has not established God's omni-benevolence apart from Scripture.

Although the argument is emotionally satisfying and comfortably coincides with a rising secularism in our culture, there are just too many unproven presuppositions in the hiddenness argument for it to stand scrutiny.

Nevertheless, even with its problems, the hiddenness argument is not likely to go away anytime soon. Just as the problem of evil remains in writing at the popular level in spite of its difficulties,[45] so likely will the hiddenness argument also persevere, and especially as secularism continues to grow in Western culture. Schellenberg acknowledges that the hiddenness argument "is now quite regularly explored alongside the venerable old problem of evil in philosophy classrooms and texts."[46] Therefore, pastors, educators, and students of theology cannot be ignorant of this "new" argument and its shortcomings.

---

[45] See Chad Meister, "God, Evil, and Morality," in *God Is Great, God Is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible,* ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 108.

[46] Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, x.

Book Reviews

— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

— MISSION AND CULTURE —

— OLD TESTAMENT —

Nevada L. DeLapp. *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 660. London: T&T Clark, 2018. xii + 186 pp. £28.99/$39.95.

The Pentateuch is regularly punctuated by manifestations of God. From the enigmatic figures who approach Abraham in Genesis 18 to the fiery cloud that blazes atop Mt. Sinai, divine theophanies feature prominently. Yet, many questions remain. Why does God sometimes appear as a human figure and at other times as inapproachable glory? What correlation is there between different types of theophany, if any? How do these appearances contribute to the theology of the Torah? These are important questions. Nevada Levi DeLapp provides a nuanced and comprehensive response. The result is a compelling portrait of how divine theophanies function in the text and theology of the Pentateuch.

The opening chapter poses a key question: what exactly is a biblical theophany? Although a sighting of God is essential (cf. p. 11), his appearances remain enigmatic. Narrative gaps abound. YHWH visibly appears, yet readers gain no detailed description. DeLapp suggests this is exactly the point: "The seen YHWH cannot be re-seen through narrative description…. It is as if the final form has hedged YHWH about to keep prying eyes from seeing to their own destruction" (p. 3). Nevertheless, DeLapp argues that theophanies, as textual events, display "type-scene" similarities. Moreover, with at least three distinct type-scenes evident, the book explores the effect of reading the Pentateuchal theophanies synchronically in their narrative order (p. 10).

Accordingly, chapters move systematically through the Torah. In chapter 2, DeLapp identifies a Genesis theophanic type-scene composed of three elements: (1) a setting of threat and human doubt; (2) YHWH's visible appearance; and (3) divinely restated promise (p. 16). Such theophanies occur at pivotal moments. When divine promises are seemingly jeopardized, YHWH appears to assuage doubt and restate his intentions—as, for example, with Isaac in Genesis 26:1–6. DeLapp concludes, "In a sense the Genesis stories present a future-focused God, a God intent on an eschaton where Abraham's numerous progeny will flourish in the land" (p. 42).

The Exodus type-scene is markedly different. Theophanies typically include: (1) the appearance of YHWH's כָּבוֹד ("glory"), (2) a communal setting, and (3) divine action that constitutes or preserves Israel (p. 50). Hence, the intimate encounters between God and individuals in Genesis are replaced by public appearances that demonstrate God's might and provision. Nevertheless, DeLapp suggests a connection to the former pattern: "The theophanic God who promises now becomes the theophanic God who acts on those promises" (p. 43). The resulting portrait is of a God of action. "He wraps himself in the cloak of an ancient Near Eastern storm deity and comes down from the heavens to rescue his people" (p. 76).

Both Leviticus theophanies build on the Exodus type-scene. YHWH's glory now appears in liturgical contexts where priestly action initiates the sighting (pp. 79–80). In fact, DeLapp suggests a theophanic structure to Leviticus (pp. 80–81). The vision of divine fire and glory in 9:23–24 comes as the climatic result of cultic processes. The fiery incineration of Nadab and Abihu (10:1–2), however, graphically asserts the boundaries of sacred space and necessitates the discussion of (im)purity and (un)holiness in
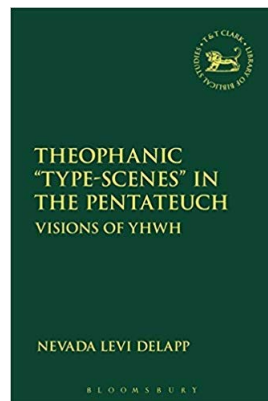
the remainder of the book. This juxtaposition of theophanic outcomes is theologically important: the priests cannot simply summon YHWH at will; rather, YHWH summons them (pp. 94–95).

In chapter 5, DeLapp argues that Numbers reiterates the type-scenes used in Genesis–Leviticus. At the same time, there is a shift in emphasis as the prime enemy to YHWH's promises increasingly becomes Israel itself (p. 128). Numbers strategically uses prior theophanic type-scenes to address this reality. For example, the Korah rebellion in Numbers 16 employs the Leviticus 10 type-scene. Once again, priestly action inaugurates a theophany with deadly consequences. Thus, the Korah episode is paralleled with Nadab and Abihu to further persuade readers that one ought not to tamper with YHWH's appointed means (p. 118).

In the chapter on Deuteronomy, the benefits of a synchronic reading of Pentateuchal theophanies are seen most clearly. DeLapp notes that divine appearances are remembered events in Deuteronomy. Thus, there is not only a canonical awareness that authorizes past narrations but an establishing of how those portrayals are to be interpreted (pp. 133–36). Accordingly, Deuteronomy closes narrative gaps. It is careful to clarify that while Israel saw YHWH, they did not see him *in se* (pp. 138–39). Hence the book is not aniconic, as often assumed; it is simply determined that readers do not misunderstand prior theophanies (p. 157).

Although DeLapp perhaps overreads in places (I remain unconvinced that Abraham saw the "firepot" in Genesis 15; see, e.g., pp. 46, 58), theophanic type-scenes remains persuasive. Time and again, careful attention to noted type-scene elements facilitates a more nuanced appraisal of the text. DeLapp is able to methodologically distinguish theophany (e.g., Gen 18) from non-theophany (e.g., Gen 19). Missing elements—like the non-mention of "land" in the Hagar-God encounter—highlight theological concerns; in this case, mitigating the threat of Ishmael with respect to the Abrahamic promises (p. 25). Throughout, readers reap the benefits of DeLapp's final-form approach. Narrative sequence trumps source-critical divisions, which opens up new possibilities for negotiating interpretive cruxes as well as allowing intertextual connections to enrich the reading of the text. The cumulative force of doing so is aptly summarized by DeLapp: "Through the technology of the text, the type-scenes encourage the reader to enter the world of YHWH's patterned sightings. The text itself has become a priest mediating between the story-world and the reader's world…. The result is that these visions of YHWH change the reader" (p. 78).

G. Geoffrey Harper
Sydney Missionary & Bible College
Croydon, New South Wales, Australia

John A. L. Lee. *The Greek of the Pentateuch: Grinfield Lectures on the Septuagint 2011–2012*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xx + 360 pp. £75.00/$99.00.

John A. L. Lee was trained in Classics and began his scholarly career writing on Septuagint lexicography at the University of Cambridge in the late 1960s. His doctoral work was decisive and groundbreaking. It quickly became a seminal guide for research in the Septuagint, as it has remained ever since (though perhaps now superseded by the book under review). Although in the intervening years he has worked in other areas—perhaps known best for his unexpectedly captivating book *A History of New Testament Lexicography* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003)—since his retirement Lee has largely returned to his original area of study. His new monograph, published nearly half a century after his doctoral work, brings decades of meticulous thinking about Koine Greek to bear upon the language of the Greek Pentateuch once more.
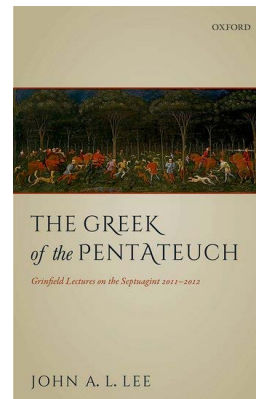
The contents of this volume were, for the most part, originally written as six lectures given for the prestigious Grinfield Lectures on the Septuagint at Oxford in 2011–2012. In its published form, Lee's work presents a coherent and data-driven set of topics that address the language of the Greek Pentateuch and help draw conclusions about the translators' methods, their knowledge of Greek, and their social context. Each chapter sets forth a wealth of information, insights, and leads for further research.

The first chapter begins where all research on the language of the Septuagint ought to begin: evidence. For Lee, the evidence of unrivaled relevance is in fact not the Hebrew text from which it was translated, but all contemporary texts in Greek. Without denying that the language of the Septuagint was influenced by the Hebrew original, Lee's focus is on the text as what it is: a text *in Greek.* In many cases, this approach demonstrates that linguistic features in the Septuagint that were once considered "Semitic" are conventional Greek after all. To get to that conclusion, however, one must join Lee as he sets sail upon a sea of primary evidence, much of which is likely to be unfamiliar or uninviting to biblical scholars in the habit of taking only quick dips on the Septuagintal shoreline. Although accessing the evidence—most importantly the papyri and inscriptions—is easier than ever through digital platforms, handling it well remains a serious challenge. Through a series of case studies in the chapters that follow, however, Lee demonstrates the potential rewards.

Chapter two discusses different forms of variation within the work of the translators, whether due to personal taste, stylistic aspirations, or social context, all of which indicate their facility in Greek. Chapter three moves into educated language in the Greek Pentateuch, looking at numerous features that demonstrate the translators' "education beyond the basics up to a higher level, at least to the end of the second stage of the ancient Greek curriculum" (p. 120). Chapter four then treats the use of fifteen features of Greek idiom with no corresponding text in the Hebrew, indicating the translators' natural competence with the written language as native speakers. Lee then considers in chapter five whether the translators of the Greek Pentateuch collaborated in their work. He shows how numerous distinctive Greek-Hebrew translation equivalents are shared among the books, to the point that it indicates a "fully worked-out *system*" of collaboration, perhaps even working with a common glossary (p. 199, emphasis original). Notably, this conclusion runs directly counter to the obviously fanciful—but long accepted— idea promulgated in the *Letter of Aristeas* that isolated translators miraculously produced identical results. Chapter six focuses on freedom of choice, where Lee explores the presumed level of control

the Hebrew source text exerted upon the translators. His basic position is that wherever they followed the Hebrew text closely in their translation—perhaps departing from conventional Greek usage in the process—they did so by choice and not due to incompetence. Historically, this view represents the minority report among Septuagint scholars, which Lee cleverly illustrates by citing a number of contrasting scholarly opinions about each case study he presents. In Lee's view, the translators of the Greek Pentateuch were satisfied with producing an intelligible "*Greek* text with a Hebraic *flavour*," which would become a style for later biblical literature (p. 257, emphasis original).

All of this material is drawn together helpfully in the concluding chapter. There, Lee reviews the main threads of his argument throughout the volume. The translators of the Greek Pentateuch had full competence in Greek, including specialized vocabulary that bespeaks their education, professional training, and social situation. As such, the Greek language is their point of departure—*not Hebrew*—as is evidenced in the areas of idiom, variation, and linguistic register, among others. On this basis Lee suggests that the Greek Pentateuch as a whole may be characterized as a kind of Jewish scholarly endeavor.

By way of critique, some might object to the minimalist role that Lee grants to the Hebrew text in his analysis of the language of the Greek Pentateuch. But there is a fair bit of Hebrew text and interaction throughout the discussion. Moreover, many of Lee's examples are so potent for advancing his argument precisely because—as he constantly points out—the linguistic features under investigation cannot have been prompted by the source text. Rather, they demonstrate unforced decisions made by the translators for how their text communicates in and as Greek, even where the linguistic product may follow the Hebrew largely word-for-word. It takes considerable skill for a translator to accomplish both feats, and Lee does a masterful job illustrating how such skill is manifested throughout the Greek Pentateuch. Perhaps a more valid critique might be directed at how Lee handles linguistic data. While tables, primary text citations, and indices abound, it is certainly not the case that Lee "shows his work" for every issue addressed in the book. Often he presents the broad strokes of the linguistic data, providing only salient examples in order to move more efficiently towards his conclusions. One might guess that Lee's counter to this critique would be to point to the relevant online databases he cites at the outset (e.g., www.papyri.info and epigraphy.packhum.org), and then cheerfully invite others to check over and build upon his work.

Lee is to be regarded as an authority on this topic. He has lectured on Greek for nearly thirty years at the University of Sydney and worked extensively in Koine Greek lexicography with widely respected scholars like G. H. R. Horsley and Trevor V. Evans. His insights are conveyed in prose that is clear and engaging, even as he handles less flashy business such as linguistic terminology or statistics. Lee manages to put onto the page his thrill of the chase through the vast and intricate evidence, and time and again he leads the reader towards conclusions that, in a number of cases, are almost humorously obvious once you arrive. As such, Lee's work generously repays careful reading, since it also serves *de facto* as a lesson in research method. Those who wish to engage in Septuagint research for themselves cannot afford to overlook this volume. For at the center of Lee's research agenda is a mindset that runs counter to that which tends to prevail, yet represents an important direction for the discipline: a hermeneutic of generosity towards the language of the Septuagint and of humility before the multifaceted reality of Koine Greek, which is still so far from being fully in hand. On that note, Lee's exhortation is worth setting forth as the last word here:

> It is too easy to assume that anything in the LXX that is not immediately recognizable as normal Greek is due to Semitic interference. Our procedure ought rather to be to assume that it *might* be normal Greek, that is, to begin with the presumption of innocence, and not decide on a verdict until the evidence on both sides has been fully investigated. (p. 22, emphasis original)

William A. Ross
Reformed Theological Seminary
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Gary A. Rendsburg. _How the Bible Is Written_. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2019. xvi + 640 pp. £47.95/$59.95.

Reading Robert Alter's _The Art of Biblical Narrative_ (New York: Basic, 1991) changed the way I read Old Testament stories. Greater appreciation for God's Word could be had by reading through a literary lens. Gary Rendsburg's magnum opus has had a similar effect on me, but on a "micro-stylistic" level. His underlying belief is that the ancient Israelite audience had a sophisticated understanding of literature. I say "audience" because Rendsburg holds that the biblical text was primarily heard rather than read silently. He envisions the situation thus: "Gathered around the campfire … or at the piazza … one can imagine groups enjoying the recital of texts, as part of their national heritage, indeed, as entertainment—with all religious overtones and implications set aside for the moment" (p. 27). I mention these two factors at the outset—an informed audience and oral-aural communication—because Rendsburg then proceeds to detail some finely nuanced literary techniques in the Hebrew text, many of which are unfortunately lost to readers of the English Bible.
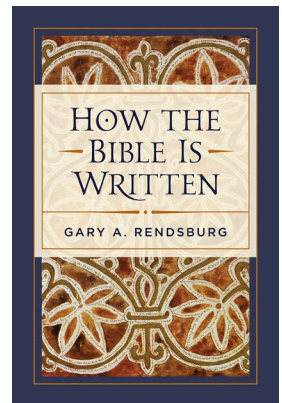
Eight of the twenty-nine chapters have published elsewhere, but they have been incorporated seamlessly. Alliteration is one of two key stylistic features, with six chapters devoted to it (in the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Micah; in prose narratives; in legal-cultic material; in poetic and prophetic texts). Diverging from general understanding in English, Rendsburg uses "alliteration" for the occurrence of the same or similar consonants (pp. 77–78), and uses "assonance" for the same or similar vowels. One well-recognized example is found in Ruth 2:10, לְהַכִּירֵנִי וְאָנֹכִי נָכְרִיָּה. The consonants of the root of the first word (*n-k-r*; Hiphil infinitive) can be heard in the subsequent two words (*n-k* and *n-k-r*, respectively) "with supreme auditory effect" (p. 208). Rendsburg also demonstrates that alliteration was heard not just in adjacent words, but also in words separated by a number of verses. He argues, convincingly in my opinion, that alliteration not only adds to the pleasure of reading the Hebrew text, but can also explain _hapax legomena_ and individual word choice.

Repetition with variation is the second key stylistic feature (also featured in six chapters, with examples from a similar range of texts as for alliteration). For instance, in the Plagues Narrative (Exod 7–10), the repeated warnings to Pharaoh could have been phrased in exactly the same way, but the biblical author has deliberately varied them slightly (pp. 42–47). When it comes to describing Pharaoh's responses, however, some of these are repeated verbatim. Why? Rendsburg suggests that this deviation

from repetition with variation is an instance of "form following content" (v. 49). The language does not change because Pharaoh remains stubborn.

Other chapters include topics such as confused language, marking closure, wordplay, the use of וְהִנֵּה ("and behold"), shorter before longer, Israelian Hebrew, style-switching, addressee-switching, form follows content, other oddities, and a final chapter that applies some of the described literary features to Genesis 29. Since I'm conservative when it comes to text-critical issues, I found the chapter on confused language especially helpful because it provides a convincing alternative to amending the MT when faced with difficulties in the Hebrew. One example is Joshua 2:4. Instead of amending וַתִּצְפְּנוֹ ("and she hid him") to a plural, the singular can be read as Rahab hurriedly hiding just one of the two spies (and the other following or finding his own hiding place; pp. 141–43). The atypical form of the word (the regular form is וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ) can similarly be read as "confused language" employed by the biblical author to reflect the excitement of the scene.

Two chapters depart from *how* the Bible was written to *when* it was written. In the first of these Rendsburg argues that Torah was composed in the tenth century BC, based on connections he identifies between the book of Genesis and Jerusalem under the reigns of David and Solomon (ch. 21, pp. 443–67). In the second chapter, Rendsburg challenges the Documentary Hypothesis by arguing that the Torah has a literary unity (ch. 22, pp. 468–90). He does this by demonstrating how a literary reading of five texts (Gen 6–8; 12–22; 25–35; Exod 7–12; 32:12–15) reveals that they are literary wholes, as opposed to texts composed of small component parts. Not all *Themelios* readers will agree with Rendsburg's conclusions on the dating of the Torah, but his arguments are cogent and worthy of consideration. Many readers will appreciate his challenge to the Documentary Hypothesis.

This book accomplishes what it sets out to do: "to reveal the manner in which language is used to produce exquisite literature" (p. 1). Rendsburg expertly describes the *how*, but on the whole, eschews further interpretation or discussion of implications based on his close literary readings. Yet I wondered: does appreciation of the literary features of a given text also help us to understand its intended meaning? For example, is alliteration only for enjoyment, or also for emphasis or to draw connections between words in separate verses? To repeat: this further analysis is beyond the stated aim of the book. But for those of us who read the biblical text for more than just enjoyment, these types of questions will arise. So perhaps we can view this book as providing the necessary tools to help us read and appreciate Bible texts from a close literary perspective, and then we need to perform the next step of drawing out the implications of our enriched readings.

Those who can read Hebrew will most appreciate this book, but transliteration throughout means that laypeople can also follow along easily. Rendsburg writes in a clear and accessible style, and his use of examples from Medieval and Modern English literature adds to the enjoyment of reading this book. I highly recommend this book for all—from laypeople to Bible students to scholars.

Peter H. W. Lau
Malaysian Theological Seminary
Seremban, Malaysia

Siegbert Riecker. *The Old Testament Basis of Christian Apologetics: A Biblical-Theological Survey*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018. xv + 124 pp. £15.00/$19.00.

The author of this small yet important book teaches the Old Testament and Systematic Theology at Bibelschule Kirchberg (Germany) and at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Leuven (Belgium). His ideas presented here were published in a shortened version ("Alttestamentliche Grundlagen der Apologetik. Ein biblisch-theologischer Entwurf," *ZThK* 138 [2016]: 1–27). The reason for this book is Riecker's astonishment that "in the realm of Christian apologetics, the Old Testament is only rarely considered when apologists look for a biblical vindication of their task" (p. xiii).

Chapter 1 (out of nine) outlines the meanings of the ἀπολογία word group in the New Testament and other Greek literature and New Testament. The chapter also outlines the modern efforts of systematic theology, particularly the theologians Schleiermacher and Barth. The spectrum between defense, attack and "dispute about the truth of what is believed on both sides" (p. 18) is broad. Chapter 2 draws consequences for biblical theology. Inspired by Koorevaar, Riecker follows the three parts of the Hebrew Canon and differentiates between narratives, prophetic and wisdom apologetics (chs. 4–6). However, he anticipates Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a special case because of its anti-Mesopotamian polemics (ch. 3). The following chapters are Citatory and Exemplary Apologetics (chs. 7–8). At times, the complex reality resists Riecker's basic scheme.

Chapter 4, "Narrative Apologetics," concentrates on the dispute with human hubris (primeval history) and the polemics against the gods of Egypt (Exod) and Canaan (Lev–2 Kgs). Riecker does not deliberate on whether Exodus 5–12 is interested much in an implicit confrontation with the gods of Egypt (explicitly only in Exod 12:12). Israelite historiography was confronted with two problems: Israel did not correspond to the ideal of obedience, and the political downfall could be interpreted differently, thus also as a failure of YHWH (p. 45). Apologetics is required here, since "theological interpretation of history transforms the identity and behavior of the individual reader as well as the believing community" (p. 46).

Chapter 5, "Prophetic Apologetics," has the interesting subtitle "YHWH as Apologist." Riecker puts the emphasis on idol apologetics, which he also finds in Deuteronomy and Psalm 82. Surprisingly, he says nothing about Israel's social misconduct, although the prophets often draw attention to this disregard of YHWH. The following chapter, "Wisdom Apologetics," also has an interesting subtitle that points to a broad subject: "Interpretation of Life and Praise of God." The third part of the biblical canon deals with the concerns of the second in a doxological-confessional and narrative way. Here, the critical engagement with atheism (more practical than theoretical) becomes clear several times (p. 68). But in view of the little-known intentions of the Wisdom Writings, it remains questionable how far we can speak with Riecker of a public debate. And when Daniel 3 tells of a public confessional attitude, an argumentative justification before Nebuchadnezzar consciously is lacking.

Chapter 7, "Citatory Apologetics as Antithetic Proclamation," describes a frequent prophetic argumentation back to the Torah (e.g., Exod 14:11–12). Such quotes can show a lack of trust in God or a false trust in God, a false satisfaction with the status quo, or a clear rejection of God's claim. The following chapter, "Exemplary Apologetics: Case Learning," presents detailed arguments (e.g., from
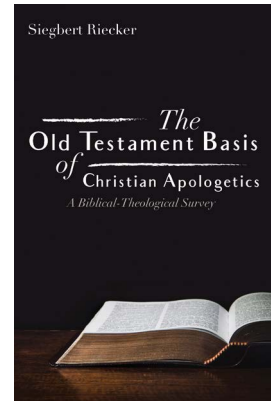
Exod 5–12 and 1 Sam 17) to reassure readers of their faith by providing arguments for the defense of their beliefs.

A short concluding chapter, *Apologetics as Challenge and Mandate*, summarizes the book's findings and deepens them with a look at modern speech-act theory (illocutionary acts). Contrary to the "terms 'polemics' and 'mockery', which have oftentimes been preferred in previous research" (p. 89), Riecker points to the fact that "the argumentation takes place on a rational level in a predominantly 'nonpolemical' and factual way. The texts persuade with logic (and are intended to objectively correct what has been wrongly alleged), pictorially illustrate, announce salvation or judgment, and demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy in life and deeds" (p. 89). The biblical texts also empower lay people to faithful attitude and conduct.

The book concludes with a detailed bibliography and indexes (authors, subjects, Scripture). Its discussion is fair, and its use of a broad range of secondary literature is impressive. The author is to be thanked for working on a previous gap in biblical theology and for making many helpful suggestions. Such considerations are also important for the missionary task of Christian congregations.

Edgar Kellenberger
Swiss Reformed Church
Oberwil, Basel-Landschaft, Switzerland

Linda M. Stargel. *The Construction of Exodus Identity in Ancient Israel: A Social Identity Approach*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018. xxi +204 pp. £21.00/$27.00.

Stargel's book is a revised version of her dissertation presented to the University of Manchester/Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK. In a time when approaches to social identity have entered biblical studies with increasing frequency, Stargel provides an easily accessible framework. Her approach, though not exhaustive or exclusive to the diverse and often complex reality of social identity approaches, is systematic and comprehensive in its scope. Stargel focuses her social identity approach on narratives of exodus identity as they appear throughout the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. With over 120 direct references to the exodus in addition to a multitude of echoes and allusions (p. xviii), clearly, the exodus was a pivotal event for the community of ancient Israel, and one that, for multifarious reasons, was called upon throughout Scripture. Stargel's book seeks to illuminate the social identity impact of these references.
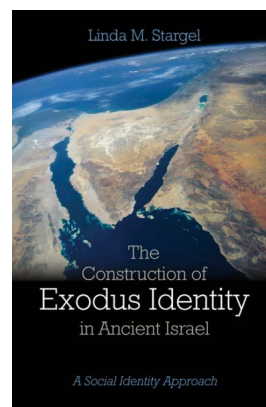
Following a brief introduction, chapter one provides an overview of Stargel's social identity approach. By primarily relying upon Henri Tajfel's work, the initiator of Social Identity Theory (SIT), Stargel engages with several prominent social identity theorists from within the social (human) sciences. This overview provides readers with an excellent introduction to some major works and scholars contributing to social identity research over the past several decades.

Chapter two continues Stargel's overview of her methodology by focusing on studies that have applied a social identity approach to textual witnesses and, specifically, the biblical text. In this, Stargel creates her methodology by blending the approach of "face-to-face" social scientists with those approaching social identity within texts. Predominantly, and rightly so, Stargel draws on Philip F. Esler's

works from the New Testament to form her methodology. Admittedly, there are far fewer social identity studies related to the Hebrew Bible, though Baker, Bosman, Finitsis, Jonker, and Lau are noted (pp. 23–28; 145–47); unfortunately, Louis Jonker's more recent study (*Defining All Israel: Multi-Levelled Identity Negotiations in Late Persian-Period Yehud*, FAT 106 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016]) was published near to when Stargel's dissertation was completed and, thus, does not appear in her bibliography here.

By creating a methodology to systematize the often diverse, and complex, realm of social identity, Stargel is able to analyze the cognitive, evaluative, emotional, behavioral, and temporal dimensions of the social identity formulations appearing in relation to the exodus narratives. Within each "dimension," Stargel appropriates the requisite social identity theories such as categorization, boundary formation, differentiation, positive distinctiveness, prototypicality, devaluation of the "other," and myths of common descent, among others. The following chapters then systematically assess the direct exodus narratives of both the "primary" exodus story (chapter three) and its eighteen other "retellings," first, as they appear in the Pentateuch (chapter four), then, as they appear in the Prophets and Writings (chapter five).

Chapter six provides a summary of findings along with the significance of Stargel's analysis and, lastly, Chapter Seven provides a conclusion with prospects for further research. Stargel also includes several appendices: "Prior Research on Identity and Memory in Text"; a list of "Direct References to Exodus in the Hebrew Bible"; "Three Translation Models for Exodus 15:13–18"; and "Methodology Worksheets" for each of the direct exodus narratives analyzed in her study.

Rightly, Stargel focuses on one of the major narrative motifs of the entire Hebrew Bible: the exodus narratives. By analyzing the "primary" exodus narrative in relation to the numerous "retellings" (at least eighteen according to Stargel), a pattern of possible exodus identity formulations begins to appear. While the cognitive and evaluative dimensions are most consistently and thoroughly analyzed, the temporal dimension of this study is perhaps the most unique to Stargel's and provides a most interesting perspective into the endurability of the exodus account to transcend generational bounds. However, it is not entirely clear whether Stargel's differentiation of cultural-ideological myths of descent is necessarily mutually exclusive with genealogical myths of descent. Certainly, Stargel is correct that a minimalist view of genealogies as strictly a biological "bloodline" is exclusivistic and does not adequately represent what it means to be included in "Israel" (p. 117), however, it remains that work on genealogies (including Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977]), has established the profound sociological nature of genealogies, especially for cultures such as ancient Israel. Indeed, genealogies such as those found in the book of Chronicles portray far more inclusion from a sociological perspective than even an exodus narrative identity is able to. In her defense, Stargel notes that "understanding when, where, and why genealogical expressions took on significance for Israel's identity formulation are important to this conversation and require further research" (p. 149). Such conversations will only strengthen our understanding of ancient Israel and the possible identity formulations of what it means to be included in "all Israel."

While Stargel admirably includes discussion and reference to other collective memory studies, engagement with other narrative studies, even in a cursory manner, seems to be absent. As a result, sometimes the strength of Stargel's study, which is tracing a major narrative motif (as opposed to limiting social identity analyses to individual books of the Hebrew Bible), is also a potential weakness: the context and significance of the exodus narrative within its particular (re)appearance cannot always be sufficiently evaluated. Finally, as Stargel limits her study to that of a "final form" as opposed to a historical-redactional study, the question as to who the "hearers" of each exodus narrative might be,

though perhaps being placed in the post-exilic era (a broad designation), is otherwise left ambiguous (though see, for example, pp. 149–51 for Stargel's caveat of the need for further research in this area).

Overall, Stargel's study is eloquently written and provides a cohesive and comprehensive social identity approach to one of the most prominent thematic narratives of the Hebrew Bible, namely, the exodus. As such, this book should be requisite reading not only for those seeking to understand social identity approaches to the biblical text, but also those seeking to understand the role of the exodus for the community of ancient Israel; indeed, for those seeking to better understand the Hebrew Bible, Stargel's work is a most welcome addition.

Brendan G. Youngberg
McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

— NEW TESTAMENT —

John Behr. *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 416 pp. £85.00/$120.00

John Behr's latest book, *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology*, is a bold and bracing—and at times perplexing—effort to read John's Gospel from start to finish as an apocalyptic account how Christ's death and resurrection manifest him as the Word-made-flesh. Behr, Dean and Professor of Patristics at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, structures his work as a "symposium" in which three groups of readers are invited to a dialogue on John: (1) early church Fathers, especially from the second and third centuries; (2) modern scriptural scholars; (3) and the late French phenomenologist Michel Henry. The book's three main parts, accordingly, approach John in first a historical, then an exegetical, then a phenomenological manner, though theological concerns reverberate throughout. Given its conceptual breadth, and the rigor with which Behr engages both John and the readers over whose shoulders he looks, this is an extraordinarily difficult book either to summarize or to evaluate in brief. Instead of attempting anything like a comprehensive engagement, in this review I will first share a few of the book's many striking exegetical insights, and then offer a few questions and critiques regarding some of the book's major claims.
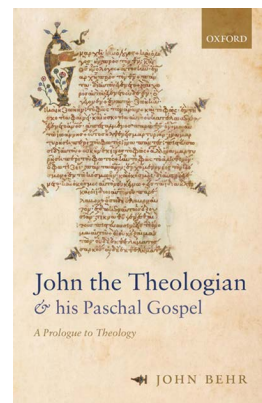
As to exegetical highlights, first, Behr compares the riddling, deliberately elusive character of John's Gospel with the explicit act of unveiling that occurs in Revelation, which he holds was written by the same author, and asks the provocative question:

> If we take the Apocalypse at its word, however, could it be that the Gospel of John in fact is the work which "veils" that which is unveiled in the Apocalypse, the Gospel veiling the ultimate victory of God in Christ in the form of a narrative of Jesus and his apparent defeat, to all worldly perception, even if that "veiling" is done in a particular

manner, distinct from the Synoptics, by sharing elements found in the "apocalyptic" literature? (p. 111)

Further, regarding one element of the relationship between John and the Synoptics, in the midst of an illuminating discussion of John 1:50–51, Behr observes, "What is affirmed at the final stages of the Synoptics, in the last Son of Man saying, when Christ says 'hereafter [ἀπ' ἄρτι] you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power', is here promised at the beginning of John's Gospel" (p. 141). As so often in John, what is glimpsed in the Synoptics is gazed at full on. Behr also skillfully traces through John's Gospel the theme of Christ's body, and ultimately his people, as the true temple. For instance, Behr argues, to my mind convincingly, that Ezekiel 47:1 and 47:9 are crucial background for Jesus's saying in John 7:37–38 (pp. 162, 165). Accordingly, the "his" in "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" refers not to Jesus, but to the individual believer, who, through the gift of the Spirit, is constituted as God's end-time dwelling (p. 166; cf. 1 Cor 6:19). Further, following Peter Leithart, Behr offers a fascinating, suggestive synopsis of John's Gospel as a tour of the "new tabernacle" that Jesus is (p. 192). Many other exegetical gems could be displayed from the book's middle section, which, in my opinion, is the book's strongest.

My critical comments will be necessarily selective, and will proceed topically in the book's own order: historical, exegetical, phenomenological. First, Behr repeats the common scholarly assertion that it is only in John's Gospel that Jesus is portrayed as being crucified on the day when the Passover lambs were slain (p. 92). This observation bears much of the weight of Behr's claim that John was the origin of an early Christian practice of observing the Passover feast (pp. 77–92). It is therefore disappointing that Behr does not engage with the extensive recent argument of Brant Pitre, in *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), in support of seeing both John and the Synoptics as placing Jesus's crucifixion on 15 Nisan.

Second, exegetically speaking, one of Behr's central, most frequently reiterated claims is that John 1:14 does not assert that the "pre-incarnate Word" became a human. Instead, the central argument of Behr's book is "that Incarnation should be understood not as a past event, but as the ongoing embodiment of God in those who follow Christ" (pp. vii–viii). This is a subtle, many-sided claim that I cannot fully unpack here. Behr is especially concerned to avoid, in Rowan Williams's phrase, treating the incarnation as "an episode in the biography of the Word," as he frequently reiterates. I am convinced that Behr has put his finger on an important problem, but I am not convinced of his solution. To elaborate his point, Behr appeals to Herbert McCabe's essay "The Involvement of God," in which McCabe writes, "The historical mission of Jesus is nothing other than the eternal mission of the Son from the Father; the historical outpouring of the Spirit in virtue of the passion, death and ascension of Jesus is nothing but the eternal outpouring of the Spirit from the Father through the Son" (cited on p. 21). The fundamental problem with McCabe's language, and Behr's appeal to it, is that "mission" only applies in time, since it implies a sending *to*. To borrow a phrase from Gilles Emery ("Theologia and Dispensatio: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas's Trinitarian Theology," *The Thomist* 74 [2010]: 527), it is true that the temporal mission bears within itself the eternal procession of the person sent. But McCabe's language occludes the crucial fact that the temporal missions *extend* the eternal processions. Missions are processions *plus*: processions plus a new mode of being present to the creature. Further, simply on exegetical grounds, I think Behr's attempt to forswear all talk of the preexistent Word runs afoul of John the Baptist's own words: "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" (John 1:15). In terms of his human, temporal existence, Jesus did not exist

before John. John's "he" is the Word-made-flesh; the "before" can only be before Christ's incarnation. If Behr were to respond, as he does in a related context, that this is not "said of the Word" (p. 246), such a response, however unintentionally, would seem to divide Christ into two ascriptive subjects. Yet John's Prologue and John the Baptist's testimony, as Behr no doubt affirms, are speaking of the same οὖτος, the same "he" (John 1:2, 15).

Finally, on the phenomenological front, I must frankly confess that I am not at all sure I understand Henry's major claims. So the critique I offer here is submitted in full awareness that it may owe simply to my ignorance and limits. That said, I wonder whether much of Henry's phenomenological reading of "flesh" in John depends on an exegetically questionable refusal to take "flesh" in 1:14 as a metonymy (see, e.g., p. 321). That is: Henry bases much of his reading of John on the word choice of "flesh" as opposed to "a human being," whereas, as most interpreters recognize, it makes best sense to see John as using the former to mean the latter.

While I do not fully agree with some of its central claims—indeed, in Behr's own words, its "central argument"—I nevertheless profited greatly from wrestling with this penetrating, creative, disciplinary boundary-bursting work. Students of John's Gospel, the early church, and Christian theology as a whole will, I trust, likewise benefit from grappling with Behr's take on John the apocalyptic theologian of the mystery of Christ's Passover sacrifice.

R. B. Jamieson
Capitol Hill Baptist Church
Washington DC, USA

Derek S. Dodson and Katherine E. Smith, eds. *Exploring Biblical Backgrounds: A Reader in Historical and Literary Contexts*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018. xii + 260 pp. £38.99/$40.00.

For many, one of the most daunting challenges in the study of the Bible is the task of ascertaining the religious, political, and cultural settings known to the biblical authors and their readers. Unfortunately, many of the ancient sources that reveal information relating to the background of the biblical writings are unknown to modern readers. While the works of Josephus, the writings of the Apocrypha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls have received considerable attention, many students of the Bible have not engaged in serious study of these writings, and fewer still are familiar with the plethora of other extant works from ancient times that illuminate our understanding of the world of the biblical authors and their readers.

This lack of familiarity with ancient sources is certainly understandable. For many, the non-canonical works of antiquity are obscure, inaccessible, confusing, or simply unknown. The sheer volume of these sources can be overwhelming and the material can be difficult to navigate. Readers often find it a significant challenge to acquire a basic knowledge of the content of even the biblical writings themselves, let alone the vast amount of extra-biblical literature from ancient times.

Despite the many challenges relating to the study of the ancient sources, the contribution that they have made to our understanding of the world of the biblical authors is difficult to overstate. As those who have engaged in a study of the background literature can attest, one's knowledge of subjects such
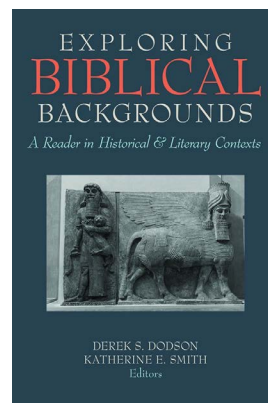
as the history of ancient Israel, the ministry and teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel, and the challenges faced by members of the early church are greatly enhanced by the study of the relevant historical sources. Unfortunately for many students and lay readers who are interested in exploring the background of the biblical authors and their readers, few resources exist that enable non-specialists to examine for themselves primary source material in an accessible format. In order to meet this need, Derek Dodson and Katherine Smith, faculty members at Baylor University, have compiled a single-volume collection of English translations of several ancient texts that are of value in the study of the background of the biblical writings. As the editors explain, "This source book intends to assist undergraduate students (and the interested reader) in comparative reading of the Bible that emphasizes its historical and literary analogs. The selections are not exhaustive, but are representative of a wide range of material encompassing the entire Bible" (p. xi).

The volume is divided into two major divisions, one which includes ancient texts relating to subjects of particular relevance to the study of the Old Testament and one which contains texts of relevance to the study of the New Testament. The sources included in the Old Testament portion are listed under one of the following categories: "Creation and Deluge," "Law and Ritual," "Legends and Folktales," "Epic Heroes," "Inscriptions and Letters," "Hymns and Prayers," "Wisdom Literature," "Love Songs," "Laments," "Apocrypha," and "Rewritten Hebrew Bible." The New Testament portion includes selections of texts placed under one of the following categories: "First-Century Jewish Groups," "First-Century Prophetic Figures," "Josephus on John the Baptist and Jesus," "Messianism," "Roman Imperial Ideology," "Birth Stories," "Parables," "Miracle Stories," "Ascension Stories," "Double Dream/Vision Report," "Early Christian Worship and Rites," "Early Christian Leadership," "Household Relations," "Persecution and Social Harassment Christians," and "Apocalyptic Literature." In all, 109 ancient sources are included, some of which are fairly lengthy or include the entire source, while other selections contain brief excerpts of a relevant portion of a larger work. The editors provide a short introduction to each of the twenty-six categories treated in the volume, each of which offers basic information about the subject's treatment and placement in the biblical canon, possible parallels between the biblical accounts and literature from ancient civilizations, and a list of additional sources for further study. Also included are short introductions to several of the primary sources, containing basic information about the content and background of the writing. At the end of each section, readers will find the bibliographical information for the particular English translation that is cited. Some translations date to the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries, though the authors do include a number of more recent translations when available. In some cases, the editors have provided an original translation.

Perhaps the closest equivalents to the present volume are Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin's *Old Testament Parallels* (New York: Paulist, 2007) and C. K. Barrett's *The New Testament Background* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995), both of which have been revised and updated over the years. Both of these volumes contain more overall material than what is included in the present volume and are limited in focus to topics contained in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. While by no means comprehensive in scope, *Exploring Biblical Backgrounds* offers non-specialists a convenient resource for the study of the historical and literary background of the biblical writings. Its accessible and user-friendly format, reliable translations, and value as a possible introduction to more advanced study makes the volume an ideal supplementary textbook for various courses in Old and New Testament

while providing a valuable resource for interested readers to expand their knowledge of the biblical world.

Benjamin Laird
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia, USA

Susan Grove Eastman. *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. 207 pp. £24.99/$30.00.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul declares, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," while in Romans 7:20 he writes, "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (ESV). The juxtaposition of these two passages introduces the Pauline puzzle of "participation and identity," which, according to Susan Eastman, suggests "a pattern of talking about persons in which the self is never on its own but always socially and cosmically constructed in relationship to external realities that operate internally as well" (p. 8). Eastman, associate research professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School who has published numerous articles and essays on Galatians and Romans, explores a "second-person perspective" on Paul's anthropology in this, her second monograph.
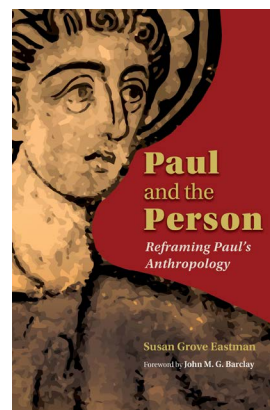
Rather than being a thorough survey of anthropological terms, Eastman approaches Paul's view of personhood by bringing him into conversation with his ancient context, represented by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, and our contemporary context, in which we are witnessing "a widespread, multipronged surge of interest in the topics of personhood, human cognition, and relatedness, fueled in part by advances in neuroscience and experimental psychology, but also by current concerns in philosophy and theology" (p. 2).

The aim in inviting readers into this "complex interchange of ideas" (p. 23) is not to impose a modern conception of the self onto Paul anachronistically, but rather to illuminate Paul's thought in new ways and, critically, to allow Paul's voice to be heard in current debates and as a "word of address" to contemporary readers. Thus, Eastman's theological project is similar to Rudolf Bultmann's: to give contemporary *expression* to Paul's thought rather than merely to parrot his language. Her work may be viewed as running parallel to that of Troels Engberg-Pedersen, who has a similar concern for the appropriation of Paul's thought, but who believes that it must be refracted through Stoic philosophy in order to be accepted within a modern, naturalistic framework. Indeed, Engberg-Pedersen serves as a foil for much of Eastman's book, as she challenges both his reading of Paul and his assumptions about the contemporary conception(s) of personhood.

The book is set forth in six chapters. After an introduction that discusses terminology, methodology, and the limitations and structure of her study, Eastman describes Epictetus's view of the person in chapter 1 via the first-person and third-person accounts of A. A. Long and Christopher Gill, respectively. Epictetus's detached individualism is then contrasted with recent studies on the self within the science of philosophy and experimental psychology, chiefly in the work of Shaun Gallagher and Vasudevi Reddy. Eastman claims, "across a spectrum of views … there is a broadly shared notion of the person

as irreducibly embodied and socially and environmentally embedded" (p. 79). The third chapter offers a survey of the Greek terms σῶμα ("body") and σάρξ ("flesh") and discusses "the corporeal reality of Pauline participation." By introducing Dale Martin's explication of ancient views of the body as well as the voices of Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann, one may wonder if at this point Eastman has allowed too many conversation partners into a crowded room.

The final three chapters weave threads from the three previous chapters into an exposition of Romans 7, Philippians 2, and Galatians 2. Second-person readings are offered of each passage, demonstrating how the self is evacuated in a toxic relational system, how "Christ's assimilation to humanity, in incarnation and ultimately in crucifixion, breaks the power of the relational matrix that Paul calls sin and the flesh" and in turn "instantiates and reconstitutes the human person" (p. 150), and finally, how the self is reconstituted in union with Christ and within a new interpersonal system, the community of faith. The ten-page conclusion masterfully draws together the strands of the book and points out further lines of inquiry.

In her goal of modeling "a new interdisciplinary approach to the topic of Paul and the person" (p. 178) and demonstrating the usefulness of "boundary-crossing conversation," Eastman's book succeeds admirably. Her vast learning and elegant writing are on full display. Nevertheless, it would have been helpful if Eastman had interacted with other works of theological anthropology such as Stanley Grenz's *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001) or David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009). Furthermore, Eastman could have addressed Paul's view of the so-called intermediate state, which sharply raises the question of whether a human person must necessarily be embodied. These *desiderata* aside, I warmly recommend this book to Pauline scholars and those interested in biblical anthropology. While Eastman laments the fact that some find Pauline scholarship to be boring or arcane (cf. p. xiii), this book deserves a broad hearing and spirited engagement.

Alexander N. Kirk
The Evangelical Theological Seminary of Indonesia
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Michael J. Gorman. *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John*. The Didsbury Lecture Series. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016. xviii + 238 pp. £24.00/$31.00.

The Gospel of John envisions believers in Jesus as those who abide in an intimate unity with the Father and the Son and also as those whose lives are marked by the commission to represent Jesus and bear witness to the Father. Michael Gorman calls this vision of the Christian life "missional theosis." It is missional because the life of the believer participates in the Father's commission to the Son (see, e.g., John 20:21). It is theotic because it presupposes "transformative participation in the life of the Triune God" (p. xvii).

Gorman's argument unfolds across seven chapters. In Chapter 1, "Reading John Missionally and Theotically," Gorman proposes that John presents the life of faith as one that is both centripetal (drawing inward) and centrifugal (sending outward), and he gives much of the chapter to a defense of the concept
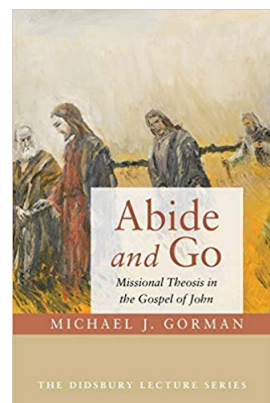
of "missional theosis." Here, Gorman's robustly theological and ecumenical approach to interpretation is on display. Readers familiar with Gorman's earlier works will recognize that he finds in John what he has previously described in Paul: a Christologically concrete spirituality.

Chapters 2 through 5 present the exegetical argument of the book. In Chapter 2, Gorman presents an outline of the entire Gospel that demonstrates the unity of John's narrative as an explication of the Father's mission. Gorman presents the public ministry of Jesus and the initial descriptions of discipleship as realities that are informed by the life-giving commission of the Father.

In Chapter 3, Gorman treats John 13–16. He reflects on the importance of *abiding* and *doing.* To speak of the Son being "in" the Father is to describe a relationship and its resulting behavior. The same is true for the disciples, who are called both to abide in Jesus and to act. Gorman illustrates this with close attention to John 13 and 15, noting the specifically cruciform witness of abiding in Jesus.

Chapter 4 offers an illuminating study of John 17. In the frame of Gorman's thesis, the structure and themes of Jesus's prayer hold together nicely: Jesus prays for the conclusion of his own mission, for the mission of his immediate disciples, and for his future disciples. The life to which the disciples are consecrated is one of "*other worldly, this worldly holiness*" (p. 119)—that is, the disciples are set apart precisely for the purpose of bearing witness to the glory of God through lives patterned after God's Son, who himself was glorified in self-emptying love.

Chapter 5 considers John 20–21. Gorman demonstrates the many textual links that run between chapters 14–17 and 20–21, including Jesus's promise to be with the disciples, his pronouncement of peace, and giving of the Holy Spirit. When the crucified-and-risen Jesus declares, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (20:22), he calls the disciples into a distinctly cruciform life of mission and participation in him. John 21 illustrates this summons.

The final chapters of Gorman's book reflect on the implications of his study. Chapter 6 argues convincingly that John's narrative implies an ethic of nonviolent love for one's enemies. Chapter 7 summarizes the argument and its implications, locates it among a handful of current studies that take up mission and spirituality in John, and offers five examples of Christian communities that exemplify a commitment to abide in Jesus and to reach out to the world in self-giving love.

A major strength of this book lies in its ability to draw together Johannine studies, Pauline theology, missional theology and hermeneutics, and a broad spectrum of the Christian theological tradition, for the purpose of stating what the Gospel of John is about and what it means to read it as Christian Scripture. This book will be a helpful companion to those planning a sermon series or Bible study on John, and it will be an important conversation partner for seminarians working on the Gospel.

Convincing and helpful as it is, Gorman's study leaves some work for its readers: First, one of the remarkable features of this study of John is how little it refers to the Old Testament. This is *not* a charge of Marcionism: for example, Ezekiel 34 is basic to Gorman's robust understanding of "eternal life" (e.g., pp. 52–54). But it does raise a question: *How would further attention to the Old Testament inform the life of missional theosis to which John calls its readers?* When seen in light of the Old Testament, for example, two images that John associates with the disciples—as shepherds and fishers—are associated with nurturing a common life among God's people marked by justice (Ezek 34) and by confrontation of those who exploit God's people and lead them into idolatry (Jer 16:16–18). Gorman has set us up to ask this question, but it is one that readers will need to pursue as they hold his thesis in their minds.

Second, *what are we to make of the fact that the majority of the communities that Gorman describes as examples of missional theosis are not churches and that none of them are held forth for their verbal*

witness? What is the place of verbal witness in the missional theosis that Gorman sketches? I would suggest this: In his five examples, Gorman describes institutions and movements that enact missional theosis in their ways of life. Verbal proclamation accompanies and complements these embodied forms of witness and transformation (cf. pp. 122–23). In John's presentation, as Gorman sees it, verbal witness is not the primary expression of mission or participation in Christ. Ecclesial practice is primary (cf. Gorman's interaction with the work of Andreas Köstenberger, pp. 34–36, 67). What might be the takeaway here? Gorman's reading of John and his five examples should press readers to consider afresh the connections that unite the struggle for a God-honoring justice, hospitality as a form of self-giving love, and Christian witness, including verbal witness. The modern dilemma—*either* an embodied, social witness that is just and welcoming *or* a vigorous verbal witness to eternal life through faith in Jesus— divides what John holds together. Thus, setting justice and hospitality within one's understanding of mission ought not entail a retreat from verbal witness. But it will entail a greater precision—a riskier precision—for those who would articulate and live out what it means to invite a hostile world into the eternal life that the Father offers to those who believe in the Son.

Chris Blumhofer
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California, USA

Dana M. Harris. <u>*Hebrews*</u>. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019. xlii + 452 pp. £21.99/$34.99.

Dana M. Harris is an associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. She received her PhD from TEDS, and her dissertation was on "The Eternal Inheritance in Hebrews: The Appropriation of the Old Testament Inheritance Theme by the Author of Hebrews." She has been the editor of *Trinity Journal* since 2010.

This volume on Hebrews is the tenth volume in the EGGNT series. The volume begins with a brief overview of introductory matters related to the epistle. Harris rejects Pauline authorship but believes that the unknown author was close to or known by Paul. She explains that the author was a second-generation Christian, the style and vocabulary used are at variance with Paul, and the theological motifs of Hebrews are different from those of Pauline epistles. Apollos is a possible candidate; however, there is no direct evidence indicating he was the author. Harris posits that the author could be a Hellenistic Jew who was familiar with the Septuagint and cared about his audience. Yet we do not know who wrote the epistle.

The audience could be second-generation Christians who possibly lived in Rome and who persevered in the face of persecution in the past. These believers were about to go through another persecution; hence, the author wrote his "message of exhortation" (13:22) to encourage them to persevere and be faithful. Harris states that the audience is likely to have been Jewish Christians who were tempted to return to Judaism. She also believes that the epistle was composed before the destruction of the temple.

Harris surmises that the exordium (1:1–4) encapsulates what the epistle is all about. Thus, the readers are alerted to the forthcoming themes of the letter. The adjective κρείττων reveals that the
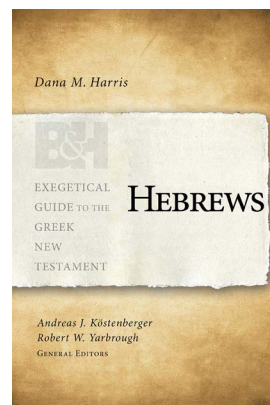
Son is superior to the OT revelation, angels, Moses, the Levitical order, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Levitical rituals. Since Jesus is better, believers should persevere and remain faithful to him.

The use of the OT in the epistle abounds. Harris notes that the author employs quotations, allusions, and typology to indicate that the OT adumbrates that Jesus is the fulfiller of the promise. The structure of the epistle lacks scholarly consensus, and Harris finds the bifurcation between exposition and exhortation to be unclear (see George Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, NovTSup 73 [Leiden: Brill, 1994]; and recently Jared Compton, *Psalm 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, LNTS 537 [London: T&T Clark, 2015], which depends on Guthrie's work). In concluding the introduction section, Harris recommends six major commentaries, as well as a handful of articles and books, on a general introduction and the theology of Hebrews.

Harris's outline divides the epistle into eight major headings. Each pericope begins with a structural analysis of the respective passages followed by a diagram of the passage, a verse-by-verse explanation of the Greek text, and a bibliography for further study on some pertinent themes, ending with a homiletical suggestion to enable preachers and teachers to utilize the book in their ministry.

The syntactical analysis of the Greek text is comprised of the parsing of finite verbs, participles, subjunctives, infinitives, and imperatives. Nouns and adjectives are also declined selectively. Harris consults BDAG (mainly), BDF, and Wallace in identifying functions of the Greek terms. The select six commentaries (Attridge, Bruce, Cockerill, Ellingworth, Koester, and Lane) are also consulted for their exegetical and theological insights.

Harris identifies several debated texts throughout this volume and provides proposed interpretive options and notes her preferred option. The age-old controversial passage in Hebrews 2:11, ὅ τε γὰρ ἁγιάζων καὶ οἱ ἁγιαζόμενοι ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντες is one example. What does ἐξ ἑνός ("from one") refer to? Is the gender of ἑνός neuter or masculine? Harris lists four options put forth by scholars: one humanity, one origin (Adam), one ancestor (Abraham) and one source (God). Harris opts for a masculine gender to refer to God.

Concerning textual criticism, Harris treats at varying length some of the variant readings in Hebrews. Of the main ten variant readings Attridge identifies in his commentary (1:8; 2:9; 4:2; 9:2–3; 10:1; 11:4, 37; 12:7, 11), Harris comments only on 2:9; 4:2; 11:37. Since she uses the UBS[5] edition of the *Greek New Testament* instead of NA[28], some notable variant readings are understandably not be in her purview. Nevertheless, she does address other variant readings not identified by Attridge.

Subsequent to each unit's exegetical discussion, Harris provides a wealth of bibliographic information for further study on select themes. She has 106 topics with a varying number of bibliographic entries under each one. However, the majority of the suggested readings are published in or before 2012. Also, more consistency in using syntactical terms would have been helpful. For instance, Harris uses "constative aorist" and "global aorist" interchangeably throughout this book to describe an action which occurred in the past which is concerned with the action in its entirety (see pp. 16, 28, 55, 56; 30, 47, 48, 49).

Regardless, this volume is an invaluable resource for anyone who wants to study the Greek text of Hebrews. The exegetical insights, the bibliographic information provided under each identified theme, and the homiletical suggestions are ideal for scholarly research as well as sermon preparation. The

volume requires intermediate or advanced knowledge of Greek grammar and thus may be inaccessible for beginning Greek grammar students.

Abeneazer G. Urga
Columbia International University
Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Jonathan T. Pennington. _The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary_. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. £19.99/$29.99.

Pennington presents his expository work on the Sermon on the Mount in three segments. He provides an orientation where he engages both the Sermon's structure and crucial terminology and concepts. Two expressions consume the bulk of the orientation: μακάριος (usually translates as "blessed") and τέλειος (ordinarily translated as "perfect"). Seven other significant terms also receive Pennington's careful attention: righteousness, hypocrisy, heart, Gentiles, the Father in heaven, the kingdom, and reward. Here is where the author also argues for a view that distinguishes his volume, namely that the Sermon needs to be read against the large backdrop of the wisdom tradition framed by the Hebrew Scriptures and the tradition of Greco-Roman virtue ethics. Pennington devotes a slightly larger segment of the book to a commentary on the entire Sermon. Here he treats six divisions of the Sermon, portion by portion. The book concludes with a section devoted to theological reflection, in which the author offers a brief twenty-one-page conclusion that summarizes the book's argument in the form of six theses.
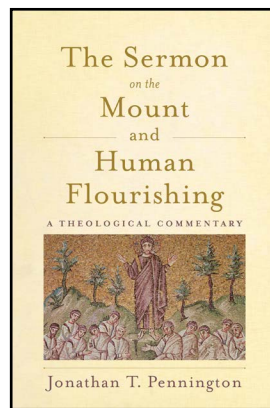
Inclusion of _Human Flourishing_ in the book's title connects the Sermon on the Mount with a concept and expression that are commonplace in contemporary culture, perhaps more so among theologians (partly due to the "God and Human Flourishing" project at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture). The book's initial paragraph signals the thesis, linked to what Pennington contends is the universal human quest: to demonstrate that the Sermon is situated within the contexts of Jewish wisdom literature and the Greco-Roman virtue tradition, both of which feature what he identifies as "the great theological and existential question of human flourishing" (p. 1).

To this end, Pennington argues that the Sermon has a "cultural encyclopedia context" (derived from Umberto Eco). He reasons that the Sermon's encyclopedic context includes both Jewish wisdom literature and Greco-Roman virtue ethics. In his next two chapters (ch. 2: _Makarios_ and ch. 3: _Teleios_) he argues for a Jewish context to understand the use of μακάριος as "flourishing," reflecting the Hebrew אַשְׁרֵי rather than בְּרָכָה/ברך (often translated with εὐλογέω/εὐλογητός), and τέλειος as "wholeness." This is more persuasive than his appeal to Greco-Roman literature as a secondary backdrop.

The author avoids English translation predispositions by coining various terms to help readers retain the various distinctions for which he argues: aretegenic (from ἀρετή), asheristic (from אַשְׁרֵי), makarios-ness and macarism (from μακάριος), teleios-ity (from τέλειος), etc. Crucial is his effort to render μακάριος in English as "flourishing" rather than "blessed" because the latter, the characteristic English translation, "indicates active, divine favor" while "flourishing" "is a macarism, a declared observation about a way of being in the world," a distinction Pennington makes that seems to lack a

sharp difference (p. 43). He appeals to the Septuagint's use of μακάριος to translate אַשְׁרֵי as he features Psalms 1 and 2 as paradigmatic for the NT's uses of the word in Matthew's account of the Sermon, which sustains the vision cast by the Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah "for what true well-being looks like in God's coming kingdom" (p. 47). He distinguishes uses of אַשְׁרֵי/μακάριος from בְּרָכָה/ברך and its usual LXX gloss, εὐλογέω/εὐλογητός, used of God's formal pronouncements of blessings set over against his curses. Thus, Pennington insists that "there is a basic and significant distinction maintained between the (verb) 'blessing,' which is an active word and whose subject is typically God, and the state of those who receive this blessing or flourishing, described as the *'aŝre* person" (pp. 48–49). Thus, μακάριος (אַשְׁרֵי) and εὐλογέω/εὐλογητός (בְּרָכָה/ברך) are not synonyms. The former accents "a state of happiness" while the latter, "though not excluding such a state … speaks more of being empowered or favored as the recipient of blessing from the Lord" (p. 49). Thus, when Jesus announces, "Μακάριοι are the poor in spirit," he pronounces a value judgment on such people characterized as "poor in spirit." According to Pennington, the Bible's macarisms entail "an implied hortatory function" with the implication that "if one wishes to join the ranks of the happy, one should emulate their virtuous conduct or attitudes" (p. 49). The crucial point of distinction is that μακάριος describes people who are in a *state of flourishing* which must not be confused with *God's act of blessing*, his causing humans to flourish. μακάριος characterizes wisdom literature; εὐλογητός is covenantal language (p. 49). Yet, even as the author attempts to distinguish these terms, he acknowledges that they are tightly bound together, inseparable. No one flourishes apart from "covenantal relationship with the creator God" (p. 50).

Yet, while Pennington acknowledges this "close relationship," it seems that he pushes separation not just distinction when he states, "Blessings (and the corresponding negative curses) are divine, effectual speech. Macarisms (and the corresponding negative, woes) are human, descriptive speech. Even though in a covenantal and theological context these are related, it is important to recognize the distinction. It is problematic if we treat macarisms and woes as promises and prohibitions, as blessings and curses, because this is not how they function in the divine economy. Macarisms and woes are invitations to living based on sapiential reflections, not divine speech of reward and cursing" (p. 53). If I am reading correctly, Pennington identifies "covenantal blessings and curses" as *divine performative speech-acts* while he regards "macarisms and woes" as *human descriptive speech-acts* derived from wisdom. Though one may concede the author's distinction between "blessings and curses" as *performative speech-acts* and "macarisms and woes" as *descriptive speech-acts*, it seems that Pennington overstates his case by adding the adjectives "divine" to the former and "human" to the latter. If correct, the claim needs some mitigation because the macarisms and the woes announced in the Sermon on the Mount are not Matthew's *human speech-acts*. Rather, they are *divine speech-acts* uttered by Messiah Jesus, no less divinely uttered than the divinely spoken covenantal blessings and curses. Hence, is it not evident that the author's characterization of "macarisms and woes" as human, descriptive speech and "blessings and curses" as divine speech requires extenuation?

At this juncture consideration of the relationships of Jesus with Moses and of the Sermon on the Mount with the giving of the law covenant on Mount Sinai seems necessary but not forthcoming. When the author does engage these relationships in chapter 5, while considering the structure and setting of the Sermon, he does not carefully distinguish between *the law as covenant* and *the Law as Scripture*. This is because he reads ὁ νόμος in Jesus's category, "the Law and the Prophets" (τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας; Matt 5:17), as a reference to the Mosaic law covenant rather than understanding the pairing of "the Law and the Prophets" as designating the Scriptures (pp. 120–21). Certainly, ὁ νόμος as Scripture and ὁ νόμος as the Mosaic covenant are inseparable because the law as covenant is contained within

the Law as Scripture. But failure to observe the crucial distinction between them introduces confusion concerning Jesus's various sayings within the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus speaks of the Scriptures, as he does in Matthew 7:12.

These caveats concern important aspects on which the whole book is grounded. With these qualifications in mind, the book is still a treasure trove that one can read with great profit.

Ardel B. Caneday
University of Northwestern, St. Paul
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

Brian S. Rosner, Andrew S. Malone, and Trevor J. Burke, eds. _Paul as Pastor_. London: T&T Clark, 2018. xii + 226 pp. £28.99/$39.95.

Paul as Pastor is a companion volume to the earlier _Paul as Missionary_, edited by Rosner and Burke (London: T&T Clark, 2011), and does exactly what the title says. The essays work through the Pauline issues and texts, with the last three focusing on the appropriation of the memory of Paul as pastor at different points in the church's history. The papers originated in what must have been a very stimulating conference in Melbourne, Australia in 2014, which presumably explains the primarily Australian provenance of the authors (eleven such; one contributor each is based in the UK, New Zealand, and Indonesia, and two are in the US). The authors are also writing self-consciously as evangelicals, as comments in the various essays bear witness, and the large majority are Anglicans. A number have written much more extensively on the texts or themes which they present here, and that understanding and knowledge gives depth to their chapters (notably Rosner, Kruse, Barnett, Burke, and Yarbrough). Very disappointingly, there is only one woman among fifteen authors, Sarah Harris.
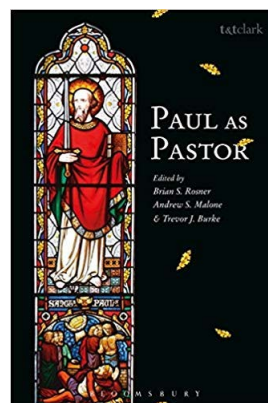
Brian Rosner sets the scene with an overview of Paul's use of household language as signalling his pastoral intent, notably the use of father, mother, and sibling terms. The point is well made, although I missed a clear definition of "pastor" to guide me in reading the essays in the book. Reading the whole book, a rather loose definition of "pastor" seems to be assumed without argument, namely of a leader who cares and provides for a church or group of churches—the "shepherd" image is often invoked, even where Paul does not use it.

Alan Thompson then offers a helpful and crisp reading of Paul as pastor in Acts. The presence of this essay is encouraging, against those scholars who reject Acts as a source for studying Paul. Thompson also faces the challenge that Paul in Acts is frequently characterized as a missionary, but he argues cogently that there is good evidence—not least in the speech to the Ephesian elders (20:17–35)—of Paul's care for the growth and nurture of his converts during his travels.

Colin Kruse takes us into Romans, and argues that Paul here grounds pastoral practice and exhortation in the nature of his gospel, resisting the idea that Paul—and pastors today—is simply pragmatic in the way he handles issues among his congregations. Rather, Kruse argues, "what God has done in Christ for the salvation of humankind" (p. 42) is the springboard and fountainhead of Paul's calls to service and Christian living.

Matthew Malcolm, in parallel to Kruse, sees "gospel-minded rumination" (p. 54) on Scripture and the congregation as key to Paul's engagement with the issues in Corinth to which 1 Corinthians responds. Paul is emboldened by his reading of Scripture and the house churches of Corinth at times to be lovingly provocative in both what he says and how he says it (e.g. the imagery he uses).

Paul Barnett does a fine job of sketching the situation in Corinth by the time of 2 Corinthians (which he regards as a unity), focused on two issues: the suspicion of Paul on the part of many of the Corinthian believers, and the presence of a counter-mission which sought to draw the believers away from Paul. He then studies how Paul responds as pastor to these two issues, doing some fine detailed exegetical work along the way.

Michael Bird and John Anthony Dunne write together on Galatians—perhaps the hardest Pauline letter to regard as "pastoral"! The maternal imagery bespeaks, they argue, a pastoral concern seen in Paul's desire for the Galatians' growth in Christ, and Paul is here acting pastorally as "heresiologist," identifying and warning of errors, and pointing the true way to go.

Peter Orr offers a detailed look at Ephesians 4:11–12 and the roles of pastors and teachers. This essay is thus not about Paul as pastor, but Paul's thinking about pastoring. Orr argues that the terms should be seen as a hendiadys meaning "teaching pastors"—that is, that they represent one role. I was a little concerned when he comments, "this sense dominates the construction in the New Testament" (p. 87), for this bespeaks a common (erroneous) approach in parts of this book—treating the NT as an island within hellenistic Greek, and not considering wider Greek use of terms and constructions. That said, the conclusions are mainstream and unsurprising.

Sarah Harris offers a fine discussion of Philippians with the provocative sub-title, "When Staff Teams Disagree." She argues that Euodia and Syntyche, Paul's co-workers (4:2–3) are key to understanding much of the letter, and rightly criticises many readings which treat their disagreement as peripheral to Paul's letter. Harris goes on to read the letter closely to see how Paul's pastoral strategy is carried out in ways which allow him to combine gentleness and grace with clarity and focus. This is a highlight of the book.

Andrew Malone reads Colossians (which he treats as Pauline) and asks how Paul can function as "pastor" in relation to the believers there when he has never visited. He takes an inductive approach which starts with activities which take place or are described in the letter, and notes that they are true of both Epaphras (who is the "local pastor") and Paul: teaching, serving, interceding, and having shared goals for the converts.

Trevor Burke provides another highlight to the volume in his fine discussion of the Thessalonian letters, drawing on his earlier research. He organises his discussion around the family terms Paul uses, notably of Paul as mother and father (2:7–12), infant (2:7), orphan (2:17), sibling (3:1–5; 5:12–15), and this works beautifully.

Robert Yarbrough turns to the Pastoral Epistles and reads them through three modern lenses: the academic, the minister, and the student. He highlights the theme of hard work in the Pastorals in a fine (and new to me) discussion (pp. 145–53), in physical labor as well as activities such as prayer and teaching. He uses Todd Still's work effectively to critique Ron Hock's claim that Paul despised manual labour. Yarbrough concludes that (1) academics need to repent methodologically from treating Paul as a philosopher, (2) ministers need to recognise the call to necessary human effort in the pastoral role; and (3) students need to foreswear self-centeredness and self-indulgence in order to work hard.

The final three essays look at Paul through three key points in the church's history. In a fascinating essay, Tim Patrick, a fine Reformation scholar, reads the Pastorals in conversation with the Reformation Anglican Ordinals. He provocatively argues that the Pastorals present the diaconate as an apprenticeship to being an overseer—although he appears not to engage with the key arguments of R. Alastair Campbell in *The Elders* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), that "elder" is a term for those who were senior, rather than a role-title. Patrick goes on to read the sixteenth-century Ordinals within their time and to show the ways in which they engage with the Pauline material. He sees Bucer's contribution as particularly important to the changes which were made from the Roman Pontifical which the Ordinal replaced.

Andrew Bain looks at how Augustine of Hippo understands Paul as pastor, and argues that Augustine's primary focus here is on Paul's humility, which is an expression of Paul's Christ-centredness. Like Paul, Augustine desires his people to know Christ and live with Christ.

Finally, Rhys Bezzant considers George Whitefield's engagement with Paul, particularly in conversation with Whitefield's travels in American and his interactions with Jonathan Edwards. This reads like an essay about Whitefield and Edwards which has bits on Paul here and there, and really only focuses on issues arising for Paul as pastor in the last paragraph.

Overall, this is a valuable collection of essays, of which some are outstanding. It is a book which libraries, especially in theological colleges and seminaries, will want to have available. It should find a place in courses on pastoral theology and ministry, not least as a way of preventing those courses being driven purely by modern psychology and sociology. While the publisher initially released the book only in hardback (at £85), happily a more affordable paperback version is now available, which should expand the book's readership.

Steve Walton
Trinity College
Bristol, England, UK

— **HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY** —

Rhys S. Bezzant. *Edwards the Mentor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 208 pp. £47.99/ $74.00

"Mentor" is not the first word that generally comes to mind when one thinks of Jonathan Edwards. However, it is the word that Samuel Hopkins uses, in capital letters, to describe Edwards in a letter to his friend, Joseph Bellamy. *Edwards the Mentor*, written by Rhys S. Bezzant, seeks to unpack Edwards's efforts to train the next generation of clergy in faith and ministerial practices. This book stands as an important corrective to pictures that have painted Edwards simply as a Lockean philosopher, fiery revivalist, or even a biblical pastor, by providing the reader with a more nuanced picture of Edwards's ministry. Bezzant contends that Edwards should be recognized as a skilled mentor of future Christian leaders. He argues that Edwards's strategic approach to mentoring "combined eighteenth-century pedagogical insights into pastoral theology with the traditional theological themes of imitation, spiritual knowledge, and the cultivation of virtue to create a practice refreshed for a new age" (p. 152). This work seeks not
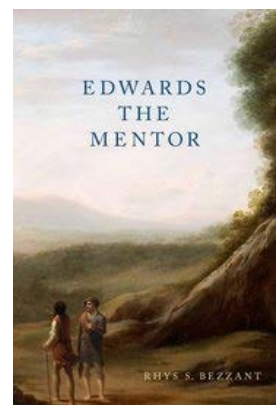
only to describe Jonathan Edwards's pastoral care ministry but also to offer recommendations for how the church today can learn from Edwards's innovative mentoring style. Bezzant is a senior lecturer in Church History at Ridley College in Melbourne and the director of the Jonathan Edwards Center Australia. He is also a priest in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne and serves as a canon and mentor at St. Paul's Cathedral. He has authored several critical works on Edwards, including *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In a brief five chapters, Bezzant situates, describes, and provides a vision for the application of Edwards's pastoral ministry of mentoring. The introduction helps lay out Bezzant's vision for the book, building off of his past published work on the topic. The following four chapters focus on singular themes of Edwards's ministry, including the self, the affections, imitation, and the inheritance of his revolutionary lens. In the first chapter, the author investigates both the classical and Protestant traditions of mentoring, laying the background for Edwards's ministerial practices. He describes his pastoral training and how Edwards echoed and deviated from it in his guidance of Christian leaders.

The second chapter focuses on the minister's practices and manner of mentoring in its various forms, including letter-writing, personal conferencing, residential living, directed reading, personal example, and his cultivation of friendships. Bezzant suggests these traditional practices take on an eighteenth-century disposition. Drawing on evidence from his relationships with mentees Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, Bezzant concludes that "Edwards's practice as a mentor was significant and sustained, drawing on a substantial tradition but modifying it as the needs of his mentees and the constraints of the eighteenth century demanded" (p. 80).

The next chapter examines the often-overlooked practices of imitation, commitment to the beatific vision, and spirituality that stand in tension with the Enlightenment principles of the pursuit of pleasure and materialistic well-being. Bezzant argues that Edwards's governing theological principles, particularly his emphasis on the beatific vision (direct revealed knowledge of God), *imago dei* (the image of God in humanity), and *imitatio christi* (the imitation of Christ), led to new directions for Christian practice and behavior. In this standout chapter, he argues,

> If the Enlightenment project modernized and naturalized the world, then in Edwards's vision a ministry of mentoring is one possible conduit to reintegrate and reenchant experience…. His project addressed the intimate and the cosmic, for it pursued an agenda to empower the renegotiation of an individual's agency but also to resist the disenchantment of the world. (p. 112)

Bezzant proposes that Edwards's mentoring approach uniquely combined an interventionist spirituality with an idealist spirituality.

The final chapter of the book explores the lasting influence that Edwards had on those that he mentored. In this section, Bezzant examines the degree to which Jonathan Edwards Jr., Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, the ministry of the New Divinity, revolutionary leaders, and Edwards's legacy at Andover Seminary represented his view, versus reflecting the cultural context. Bezzant concludes that "in his practice of mentoring Edwards allowed eighteenth-century philosophical concerns about human agency and institutional authority to find new expression within traditional strategies for faith transmission, and in so doing offered an embodied protest against Enlightenment fragmentation and rationalization" (p. 132). Edwards's mentoring created a powerful school of thought by teaching the New Divinity how to transpose the Reformed faith into the contemporary context.

The Edwards scholar ends his book with a brief practical section appealing to the need for mentoring today both in the church and in educational settings. In a world where identity is often curated through social media rather than through discipleship, he recommends Edwards's face-to-face, personal approach. Bezzant helpfully points out that just as the Enlightenment harmed the Christian faith with its appeal to autonomous individualism, so too can the age of Facebook, where in-person communication is often replaced by technology. Edwards's example of personal mentoring can help leaders today to navigate these challenges and raise the next generation of Christian believers to love and serve Christ.

Scholars interested in Jonathan Edwards and the history of mentoring should consider reading this short, well-researched work. It offers a robust historical and theological consideration of Edwards's role as a mentor during the changing landscape of the Enlightenment period. As Bezzant asserts, the eighteenth-century minister's "personal work, one to one with parishioners, has much to commend it today, for those employed in local church ministries need to remember the importance of finding time for individuals in the midst of their busy pastoral labors" (p. 2). Bezzant's work is a comprehensive account of Edwards's mentoring approach and is heavily conversant with the leading Edwards scholars such as Kyle Strobel and Oliver Crisp and essential primary source documents. His extensive footnotes, bibliography, and index are helpful resources for studying Edwards's mentoring practices. Due to its intellectual and historical tone, however, this monograph is best suited for an advanced academic audience. The author utilizes long, complex, highly academic prose such as "mimetic theory" and "maieutic approach" and dialogues frequently with scholars, making it somewhat inaccessible to a general audience or even the average pastor. While he aims to be practical, even his final section tends to be more descriptive than application-oriented. His tone, language, and historical approach would best serve Edwards scholars interested in a specific account of Edwards's place as a mentor during the Enlightenment period.

Karin Spiecker Stetina
Talbot School of Theology
La Mirada, California, USA

Gerald L. Bray. *Doing Theology with the Reformers*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. 299 pp. £19.53/$24.00.

Bray's *Doing Theology with the Reformers* is intended to serve as a companion volume to the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*. However, it deserves a wider readership than that purpose implies. Bray has produced an excellent overview of the thought-world of the Protestant Reformers, helping readers to make responsible and sympathetic use of their exegetical and theological insights.

When I was an undergraduate student studying theology, I often found that a brief conversation with a good teacher could teach me more than I could learn in several hours of reading. Rarely does this direct, conversational style come across in print, but Bray comes as close as any to achieving it. This book is a pithy, straightforward orientation to Reformed thought by an experienced theological historian and teacher. It mostly appeals to primary sources and is relatively uncluttered by footnotes.
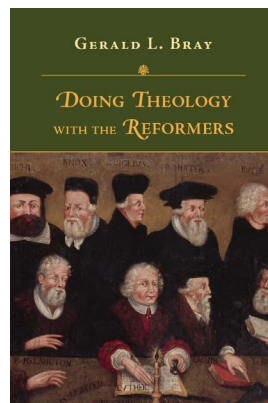
Thus, generalizations abound. It mostly focuses on a familiar cast of characters: Luther, Calvin, Bucer, Zwingli, Bullinger, Wyclif, Tyndale, and Cranmer. This is a book designed to communicate the overall contours of Reformation thought. That said, Bray's knowledge of the details is clear throughout and makes for rich descriptions of events.

Bray is sensitive to the dangers of hagiography and presents the Reformers' views and actions as they were. There is not the defensiveness that sometimes characterizes those who feel the need to defend their heroes. Bray likewise presents Roman Catholic and medieval doctrines fairly and respectfully.

The book contains six chapters, each of which introduces an aspect of Reformed thought. Chapter 1 briefly describes the political changes of the era and the revolutionary significance of the printing press, which turned manuscripts into standardized, distributable texts, and enabled new use of vernacular languages in theology. Bray's discussion of how Latin functioned in the scholarship of the period is especially important given that this is something that newcomers to the field often find perplexing about these pastorally minded Reformers. As Bray explains, they were men 'caught between two worlds', that of university academia and the uneducated masses whom they sought to evangelize (p. 6).

Chapter 2 similarly sets out the Reformers' attitude to theological authority in the context of their responses to the four medieval theological authorities: Scripture, tradition, the papacy, and church councils. This is followed by a nuanced account of what the Reformers believed about the sufficiency of Scripture in the life of the church.

Chapter 3 discusses biblical interpretation, covering issues of canon, the relationship between Old and New Testaments, the emergence of systematic theology, and the new Reformation emphasis on predestination. This chapter usefully highlights the contrasts between Reformed theology and the theological emphases that had preceded it, particularly in the shift from a philosophical focus on the being of God to a biblical focus on the acts of God, primarily understood in legal and juridical categories.

Chapter 4 discusses the work of the Holy Spirit, narrating the crucial shift from medieval emphases on the transmission of quantifiable sacramental grace to justification and personal renewal by the Spirit. This chapter also discusses the Reformers' difficulty in finding sacramental agreement among themselves, and their central emphasis on justification by faith alone.

Chapter 5 discusses the political and social context of the Reformers. So often the Reformers are quoted as though their ideas existed in a social and political vacuum, to which this chapter provides an important remedy.

Finally, chapter 6 provides an overview of Lutheran and Reformed confessional developments in the early modern period, along with a sober assessment of their emphases and how modern Christians ought to respond to the issues they raise.

This is an excellent book, but it exhibits a few shortcomings. One disappointment was the imperfections present in the list of 'Works Cited' (p. 267–70). For example, Thomas Watson is cited as an example (p. 19) but does not appear on the list. Furthermore, the list of secondary sources includes works by Aquinas, Augustine, Calvin, and others alongside genuinely secondary works.

More broadly, the book could be improved by including a list of 'further reading' at the end of each chapter. Here one of the strengths of the book—namely its terse, insightful description of complex events and ideas—simultaneously becomes a weakness. Bray's prose is mostly free of footnotes and tangents, which aids readability but gives the interested student little direction on how to further investigate the issues raised.

Occasionally this becomes a frustration when the reader finds themselves disagreeing with Bray's descriptions. For example, Bray erroneously portrays supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism as concerned with the proper *temporal*, rather than logical, relationship of God's decrees, and thus as expressing complementary truths rather than competing predestinarian schemes (p. 256). Hypothetical universalism is mischaracterized as a view that suggests that human beings can thwart God's will and is quickly dismissed (p. 134–35). At such points the lack of appeal to secondary sources or footnoted justifications for these assertions becomes a genuine shortcoming of the book. One could also quibble about what ought to have been included at various points of Bray's narratives. I would have liked to have seen Cranmer's attempt to call an international Reformed church council discussed in the section on conciliar authority, for example (p. 73–79).

These shortcomings notwithstanding, this is an excellent book that deserves a wide readership. It is clearly written and effectively orientates readers to sympathetic engagement with the thought of the Protestant Reformation. Teachers of Reformation history and theology should strongly consider adding it to their course reading list. Likewise, pastors ought to consider reading it as a refresher on Reformation theology, or else to grow in appreciation of those who went before them.

Matthew N. Payne
University of Sydney
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Craig A. Carter. *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 304 pp. £18.99/$27.99.

A great chasm has been dug within biblical studies, separating premodernity from the insights of modern scholarship. Bridges have been erected to usher students of the Bible across this chasm to the supposed firmer ground of modern exegesis. Upon their arrival, many students (both within mainline as well as evangelical institutions) have been trained in the latest exegetical procedures reared within the bosom of historical-grammatical methods and modern philosophical assumptions. Thinking they have crossed the bridge to brighter horizons, such training has led them to a spiritual desert, putting the essence of the gospel at risk and robbed the church of understanding the supernatural text which lays on their laps and lecterns. So argues Craig Carter, professor of theology at Tyndale College and Seminary, in *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*. In this work, Carter enacts a daring rescue mission to recover the premodern interpretation of Scripture and help readers understand the spiritual vacuum that has been created by modernity.

Carter launches his discussion by describing his dilemma following seminary in seeking to understand Isaiah 53 apart from the historical-critical methods in which he was academically reared. From here, Carter orbits around premodernity and its theology of Scripture. He observes the foundation of divine inspiration as crucial for a premodern understanding, alongside a comprehensive theism that views God as both transcendent and personal. This was seen in the person and work of Jesus and the Trinitarian economy of salvation and communication via Scripture. The apostolic message and interpretation of the Old Testament was the key that unlocked ongoing interpretive procedures within
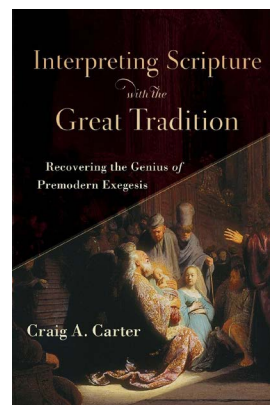
the early Church. Added to this was the Christian acquisition of Platonism. This was no haphazard exercise but was seen as the "philosophical expression and the framework of the world-picture in terms of which the proclamation of revealed truths was made" (p. 66). Augustine of Hippo represents the mature reflection of this tradition which continued mostly unabated for one thousand years. Thus, modernity represents "an astonishing reversion to the pre-Christian naturalism of the ancient world" (p. 85). Premodern Christians would not abide, nor comprehend, the extreme bifurcation of natural and supernatural that has dominated the modern era.

Moving on, Carter begins to deconstruct the modern project of biblical interpretation. The Enlightenment, according to Carter, led to a "complete rejection of biblical authority" (p. 115). Enlightenment thinkers consciously sought to raze the premodern worldview and replace it with naturalistic presuppositions and a metaphysic devoid of transcendence. This worldview, in turn, led to the liberalism which took hold in Protestant Christianity in the 19th century, leading to the ongoing demise of mainline denominations. Though it has been more evident within the mainline, the infection of modernity still exists and continues to threaten the gospel ministry of evangelical churches. Thus, Carter puts forth the antidote of *ressourcement* and the recovery of premodern exegesis for the flourishing of Christian faith in the 21st century.

Part 2 elucidates Carter's antidote to the modern ailment. He aims to recover the unity of Scripture centered on Jesus Christ (ch. 5). In premodernity, Scripture reading was a spiritual exercise, arising from a Holy Spirit-induced interpretative humility, guided by the hermeneutical bumpers of the *regula fidei* and the entire canon of Scripture. The booster shot of this antidote is the proper recovery of the literal sense (ch. 6). The literal sense as we know it today was transformed by the "philosophical naturalism" smuggled in by modern interpreters (p. 166). Thus, Carter does an excellent job towards rescuing and commending the premodern understanding of the literal sense. The literal, or plain sense of Scripture was highly valued and understood as crucial for proper interpretation according to Christ in light of the Great Tradition. The spiritual sense grows out of the literal sense, represented in the exegetical practices of Augustine. Essential to the antidote is seeing and hearing Christ in the Old Testament (chapter 7). This includes grasping the concept of prosopological exegesis which seeks to identify various writings of Scripture as spoken from the divine *prosopa,* or specific members of the Trinity. This exegetical practice is seen among the prophets, the apostles, as well as the writer to the Hebrews. Early interpreters carried forth this mode of reading Scripture, understanding the trinitarian nature of inscripturation. This can only be accomplished with a firm belief in the unity of Scripture centered on Christ. Concluding this section, Carter asserts that this recovery plan is vital to "the growing and flourishing of healthy churches and the powerful, biblical preaching of the gospel" (p. 223).

Carter's goal is simple yet profound: rescue the gospel from the grips of non-Christian biblical interpretation. For those already steeped in this discussion, Carter weaves together discussions in a cogent and applicable way. For those unfamiliar with premodernity and its interpretative priorities, reading Carter might be like drinking from the proverbial fire hydrant—too much too fast. Carter does well to assert that modernity is "a dagger in the heart of our faith" (p. 111), but for some readers it might take more convincing and perhaps a gentler approach for the dagger to be revealed. That said, his rhetoric is fiery but not foolhardy. Carter brings together a camaraderie of biblical scholars, historical and systematic theologians, and others to bring to light those things that have been debated in the corner rooms of the academy. He leans upon the accomplished work of others and humbly points to their expertise while demonstrating his own. His points are well taken, but some readers may need to sit

with Carter and slowly digest his antidote before perceiving its curative effects. As a final note, Carter does well to add to the definition of the "Great Tradition" by including the interpretation of Reformers (particularly John Calvin) who sought to rescue the church while not dismantling its time-tested exegetical practices. This reader was already convinced of Carter's thesis, yet he added much needed buttressing to the appreciation of the "genius" of premodern exegesis. For others less familiar with the main arguments, reading Carter presents a strong case in need of careful consideration. Therefore, it is a welcome entry into discussions of *ressourcement* from an evangelical perspective.

Coleman M. Ford
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Oliver D. Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel. *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018. xi + 232 pp. £23.99/$28.00.

Crisp and Strobel have collaborated to introduce readers to the puzzle and originality of Edwards. This book is not an introduction to the vast corpus of Edwards's writings. For such an introduction, readers should consult Finn and Kimble's recent work, *A Reader's Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Rather, Crisp and Strobel assist the reader's navigation of the most challenging aspects of Edwards's thought—much is found in Edwards's early notebooks, miscellanies, and philosophical treatises. These works become the primary source foundation that the authors use. The authors enlist many recognized Edwards interpreters in a handy Further Reading section. If a lacuna exists, it is that the authors seem unfamiliar with Miklós Vetö's work, *La Pensée de Jonathan Edwards* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), what some interpreters esteem as one of the most significant contributions on Edwards's thought. Thankfully, an English translation of this work is near completion.
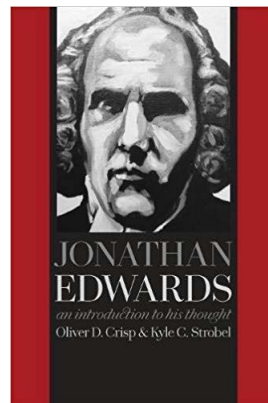
Crisp and Strobel sympathetically recognize how readers might be niggled by some of Edwards's conclusions, for reading Edwards correctly requires finessing his thought in light of his retrieval of an eclectic mix of natural philosophy and theology across history and located within his Enlightenment context. Making a coherent interpretation for non-specialists is an arduous task. Nonetheless, the authors accomplish just that. The authors selected the material of Edwards's thought to engage according to their scholarly expertise and past contributions on Edwards. This review sorts Crisp and Strobel's work according to each author's contribution.

Crisp's contributions are concentrated in chapter 3, "God and Idealism"; chapter 4, "God and Creation"; and chapter 5, "Atonement." The book's introduction orients readers to two schools of Edwards's thought: 1) the dispositional (American) and 2) the classical essentialist (British) school. The authors fall into the latter category, but they insist that the label, British, inadvertently excludes those not educated in the British system, an exclusion the authors wish to eliminate. It is vital to stress that these two schools' divergent interpretations have implications for understanding Edwards's thought on idealism and creation. Sang Lee's dispositional school provisioned a defense from the consequences of Edwards's thought as being occasionalist and thus pantheist or panentheist. Lee located Edwards's

thought in its Newtonian mechanized context, where being is associated with movement, whether potential or actual. Thus, Lee denies that Edwards ascribed to a classical essentialist ontology.

However, Crisp locates Edwards's ontology within the philosophical forms of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-platonic context. He then layers Malbranche's idealism and occasionalism, likely mediated through Berkeley, on top of the classical essentialist foundation of being. Edwards is then read as a proto-pantheist/panentheist. Anyone who has read Crisp's interpretation is aware of this. This is why it is crucial to know into which school of thought the authors fall. Indeed, this is where Crisp leads readers, and he uses the predictable moves to do so. Crisp's clear and accessible presentation is a difficult feat to accomplish, considering how he is explicating complex ideas of metaphysics. If correct, Crisp's careful read of Edwards complicates matters for the dispositional understanding of Edwards's thought.

Crisp turns to the atonement in chapter 5. For Crisp, Edwards saw the whole life of Christ as atoning, perhaps in the Irenaean recapitulatory sense. Atonement can be read from the duality of atoning love and wisdom. "The divine wisdom is the form by which the divine love is victorious" (p. 142). Another distinctive is Edwards's emphasis on God's rectoral justice, for God's honor must be protected. Furthermore, Edwards's view of penal substitution is both a payment to God for sin and a purchase of heaven for the elect's happiness. Throughout this chapter, Crisp directs readers to S. Mark Hamilton's important contribution to Edwards's view of atonement.

Strobel's contributions primarily fall within chapter 2, "God of Beauty and Glory"; chapter 6, "Salvation as Participation"; and chapter 7, "Becoming Beautiful." These chapters treat Edwards's lexical techniques for explaining the Trinity, soteriology, and theological anthropology. Strobel demonstrates that Edwards's language of light and intellect (idea, knowledge, wisdom) apply to Christ's immanent and economic role in the Trinity. Christ is the perfect idea of the Father and the light that shines from the Father, who is the sun and source of light. The human intellect and eyes comprehend and observe the light of Christ in the work of salvation. Likewise, the Holy Spirit's immanent and economic role is understood through Edwards's language of aesthetics. The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and Son. This love is expressed by the mutual beatific gaze between the Father and Son. The human affections are stirred to have a spiritual sense through the power of the Holy Spirit, whose heat is felt when the intellect sees the light of Christ. The elect are welcomed into the intra-Trinitarian love through Christ's mediation. The elect gaze upon Christ, who gazes upon the Father. Thus, Strobel brings attention to Edwards's employment of the beatific vision and appropriation of a reformed understanding of theosis. Furthermore, Strobel introduces readers to Robert Caldwell's noteworthy research on Edwards's Spirit Christology.

Pastors and scholars who patiently follow Crisp and Strobel's approachable interpretation of Edwards will profit intellectually and affectionally by Edwards's erudition. The authors provide a lucid portrayal of Edwards while welcoming readers into a churchly reading of Edwards. Avid Edwards readers will be profoundly shaped by this interpretation of Edwards's thought. One might say that readers will be illuminated to Edwards's sneaky genius, which bubbles to the surface throughout his popular treatises and sermons.

Joseph T. Cochran
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois, USA

Bart Ehrman. *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018. xiv + 335 pp. £20.00/$28.00.

"The ancient triumph of Christianity proved to be the single greatest cultural transformation our world has ever seen" (p. 4), writes Bart Ehrman, the well-known author of numerous works on the New Testament and early Christianity. In this thought-provoking volume, Ehrman seeks to ascertain how "a small handful of the followers of Jesus come to convert an unwilling empire" (p. 7). As Ehrman explains, the rise of Christianity would have hardly been expected during the first century, given the rather unflattering perception that many people had regarding its beliefs and practices. "For a pagan in the early empire," he observes, "it would have been virtually impossible to imagine that these Christians would eventually destroy the other religions of Rome" (p. 104). For Ehrman, the unexpected advance of Christianity cannot be explained simply by affirming God's providence or the power of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate triumph of Christianity must be attributed, he presumes, to various sociological developments, compelling features of the religion, or to historical events that proved to be advantageous to its growth.
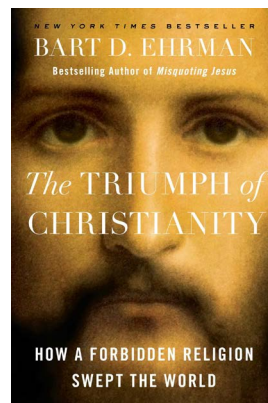
Among the numerous factors that may have played a role in Christianity's improbable success, Ehrman concludes that it was, contrary to what one may assume, the exclusive nature of the faith that ultimately proved decisive. The transition from polytheism to monotheism, however, did not occur immediately for many ancients. In a world dominated by polytheism, Ehrman suggests that a growing number of pagans became henotheists who recognized the existence of many gods while acknowledging the supremacy of one particular god. As he explains, "The growing popularity of henotheism in the empire paved the way for the Christian declaration that there is in fact only one god and he alone should be worshiped" (p. 111). Additional factors that also played a consequential role in the unexpected rise of Christianity included the retention of the more favorable aspects of Judaism (p. 112), its emphasis on evangelism (pp. 116–20), and the widespread belief that the Christian God was responsible for a number of miraculous acts (pp. 142–59).

Although many readers will undoubtedly find the work to be an intriguing and insightful treatment of the advancement of Christianity, it should be noted that some of his observations are oversimplified or overstated. Concerning the apostle Paul, for example, Ehrman emphatically states that "Paul was not simply the most significant convert of the first few years of Christianity, or of the first century, or of the early church. He was the most significant Christian convert of all time. One can argue that, without Paul, Christian history as we know it would not have happened" (pp. 71–72). Few would deny the significant influence and importance of Paul. To attribute the rise of a certain form of Christianity to a single individual, however, overlooks the contribution of the other apostles as well as the large number of unknown Christians who took part in proclaiming the Gospel and establishing local churches in new locations.

Secondly, Ehrman at times overstates Constantine's ignorance of Christian doctrine in the years following his conversion as well as his degree of theological acumen later in life. Regarding Constantine's refusal to accept baptism and his apparent conflation of Sol Invictus with the Christian God, Ehrman observes that, like many new to the faith, Constantine possessed only a rudimentary understanding of Christian doctrine. Among other things, he may have been unaware of the importance of baptism, that

Christians refused to worship other gods, or that there were various ethical requirements associated with the Christian life (p. 30). However, if Constantine were as committed to the Christian faith as Ehrman suggests, it would be difficult to account for his unfamiliarity with such basic beliefs and practices. As Ehrman contends, Constantine's ignorance of Christian doctrine and practices in the years after his conversion later gave way to an impressive knowledge of Christianity. By the Council of Nicaea, Constantine is described as playing an active role "debating the philosophical meaning of words of Scripture with Christian bishops" (p. 36).

Finally, it would seem that Ehrman overstates the degree to which the triumph of Christianity suppressed theological dissent. He rightly concludes that Theodosius I and his successors were faithful adherents to the doctrines affirmed by the council of Nicaea and that they made little allowance for theological dissent (p. 285). However, while Nicaea was certainly no boon for the advancement of Arian theology, it is widely known that for many years after the death of Theodosius, much of Western Europe and Northern Africa was ruled by several Gothic and Vandal rulers who ascribed to one form or another of Arianism. It would seem, therefore, that in his effort to portray Christianity as inherently intolerant of opposing viewpoints, Ehrman has overlooked the significant theological disputes that lingered into the fifth and sixth centuries. For those who are familiar with Ehrman's prior works, this is all very ironic. In several of his volumes, he has contended that Christianity during the first three centuries was remarkably diverse. As he writes elsewhere, "during the first three Christian centuries, the practices and beliefs found among people who called themselves Christian were so varied that the differences between Roman Catholics, Primitive Baptists, and Seventh-Day Adventists pale by comparison (*Lost Christianities: The Batle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 1). From a historical perspective, Ehrman overstates both the diversity present in early Christianity and the uniformity of Christianity in late antiquity.

In sum, readers will undoubtedly disagree with some of Ehrman's conclusions regarding the character of early Christianity and the factors that eventually led to its triumph over paganism. Nevertheless, the volume as a whole provides a helpful treatment of the religious and political environment in which early Christianity unexpectedly advanced. While readers from a more conservative background will be quick to recognize that it was the Lord who continuously added to the number of those in the church (cf. Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:7; 16:5), Ehrman's historical investigation of the environment in which this growth occurred is of great value.

Benjamin Laird
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia, USA

William B. Evans. *A Companion to the Mercersburg Theology: Evangelical Catholicism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Cascade Companions 44. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019. x + 155 pp. £17.00/$21.00.

A Companion to the Mercersburg Theology is the latest book in the "Cascade Companions" series, introducing us to a school of thought which has generally been overlooked and yet has the potential to assist in many of our current theological and ecclesiastical debates. The author, William Evans, is not only an extremely competent historian and theologian, but he also has a keen eye for current relevance. He highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Mercersburg Theology and his analysis of the movement is both fair and challenging.

After setting the scene, Evans introduces us in chapter one to the key figures in the development of the Mercersburg Theology, which arose in the 19th century in the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania. The seminary of the German Reformed Church had moved to Mercersburg in 1837, and the two main professors who developed the Mercersburg Theology were John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff. In chapter two, Evans shows how that developing theology was influenced both by its origins in the German Reformed Church (including the impact of German philosophical idealism) and by its response to the culture and church life of North America, especially American Protestantism. In chapter three, we see the battle of Mercersburg against revivalism (particularly revivalism as espoused by Finney). Then chapter four discusses the Mercersburg views on union with Christ and participationism. Chapter five addresses the history and nature of the church. Chapter six focuses on ministry, worship, and liturgy. Finally, in an epilogue, Evans spells out the relevance of the Mercersburg Theology for today.

The primary focus of the Mercersburg Theology, as is clear from every chapter in the book, was the doctrine of the church. The Mercersburg scholars consciously developed their theology of the church over against American evangelicalism and revivalism, which they believed had departed significantly from the theology of the early church and even from the theology of Calvin and the Reformers. They were also willing to identify with and learn from aspects of Catholic theology. As Evans writes, "Over against a liberalism that sometimes views the church as little more than a collection of resources that may assist social improvement efforts, and an evangelicalism that views the church as a helpful but less-than-essential aid to the piety of individual Christians, Mercersburg took the church with deadly seriousness. The church is nothing less than the sphere of divine salvation on earth" (p. 129). This led Nevin and Schaff to emphasize the importance of the unity of the church in the face of the religious individualism of America which had led to a proliferation of denominations and sects.

They were also clear that the church is the place of salvation and not simply a gathering of individuals who happen to be Christian. This had two theological consequences. First, it led to a strong participationist theology, whereby union with Christ becomes the central doctrine of salvation. In this participationist understanding of salvation, they identified with some of the early fathers of the church, as well as foreshadowing the work of Karl Barth and especially T. F. Torrance. Second, this view of the church led naturally to a high view of worship and the liturgy. They argued within their denomination for a return to a more structured and theologically considered service of worship. This understanding of the church led to a high view of the sacraments. As Evans notes, for Nevin, "Baptism signifies Union with Christ and this union actually takes place; the Lord's Supper is a real communication of the incarnate
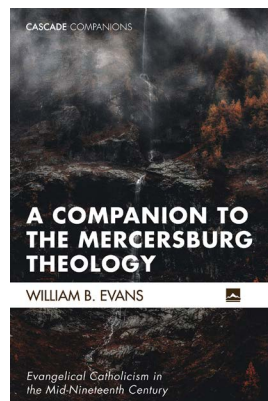
humanity of Christ to the believer" (p. 94). Indeed, Nevin argued that the sacraments had a certain priority over the Word and that we can use the term "baptismal regeneration," if carefully defined. In this sacramental emphasis many thought that the Mercersburg theology had moved very close to aspects of Roman Catholic theology.

Through the influence of scholars such as Hughes Oliphant Old, who first taught at Princeton and then was the John H. Leith Professor of Reformed Theology and Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary, many Reformed ministers have begun to rediscover the value of liturgy and a higher view of the sacraments. These trends should encourage us to re-examine the Mercersburg Theology. Among other things, it offers a corrective to the divisive and schismatic approach of many within Protestantism and forces us to take the nature and purpose of the church seriously as the instrument of God for salvation.

This book by Evans provides a short, but excellent introduction to the Mercersburg theology, together with a historical and theological analysis of the significance of the movement. Even those students of theology who have little or no interest in 19th century Presbyterianism ought to read this book, not least to help them understand that Reformed theology is a school of thought with many strands. Evans helps us to see that certain aspects of Reformed theology, which might be taken for granted in American Reformed circles, can be challenged and reviewed by other strands of the movement.

A. T. B. McGowan
University of the Highlands and Islands
Dingwall, Scotland, UK

Andrew Kloes. *The German Awakening: Protestant Renewal after the Enlightenment, 1815–1848*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xv + 328 pp. £64.00/$99.00.

The German Awakening Movement in the early nineteenth century had a profound impact in Germany, not only on religious life but also on politics and social reform. It resulted in a newfound religious zeal and the formation of organizations devoted to missions and charitable activities. Many prominent Germans participated in these revivals, including Prussian King Frederick William IV, Otto von Bismarck, aristocrats, generals, theologians, and pastors. Some of those influenced by the Awakening Movement might be familiar to an Anglo-American audience, such as Bristol preacher and orphanage director George Müller, Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, the nurse Florence Nightingale, Swiss Reformation historian Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné, and church historian Philip Schaff.

Kloes's *The German Awakening* is the first English-language work that tries to provide comprehensive coverage of the German Awakening Movement. This is a daunting task, for the movement included myriads of influential people and organizations. Kloes tries to manage the task by proceeding thematically. After his introduction, he opens with a chapter analyzing the use of the term "awaken" in German religious discourse over the centuries prior to the nineteenth century. This is followed by a chapter on the rise of Enlightenment rationalism in German Protestantism in the
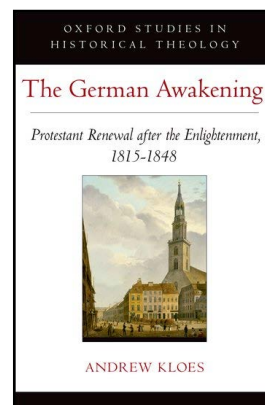
eighteenth century. After that, Kloes analyzes four main arenas of the Awakening Movement in separate chapters: preaching, theology, evangelism, and social reform.

There is much to learn about the Awakening Movement in Kloes's book. He characterizes it as an orthodox, pietistic, ecumenical, international, and modern phenomenon. By orthodox he means that it rejected Enlightenment rationalism and embraced a more traditional understanding of Christianity, including belief in original sin, salvation through Jesus's death, the reliability of scripture, and the reality of miracles. It was pietistic because it stressed the necessity of personal conversion and promoted religious activism.

The term "ecumenical" is more problematic. Kloes correctly shows that the Awakening Movement bridged different strands of Protestantism and had important connections with a Catholic Awakening. However, the Awakening Movement's ecumenism only reached so far. While the Protestant Awakening was sympathetic with the Catholic Awakening, it was not keen on seeking unity with Catholicism. Also, within the Protestant churches, the awakened churchmen engaged in polemics against rationalist theologians and pastors. Their ecumenism only embraced those who shared their opposition to rationalism and espoused their pietistic form of Christianity.

Kloes ably demonstrates the international dimension to the Awakening Movement, largely by discussing the British influences on the German movement, which were substantial. However, it would have been interesting if he had also discussed the influence of the Awakening Movement on Anglo-American theologians and pastors who studied in Germany under awakened theologians.

Kloes argues that the Awakening Movement was modern, primarily because it made liberal use of the newly emerging voluntary associations to promote missions and charitable institutions. The term "modern," however, is notoriously slippery. Since the Awakening Movement vehemently rejected Enlightenment rationalism in favor of more traditional forms of Christian belief, some would consider it inherently anti-modern. Nonetheless, Kloes correctly stresses that they used modern tactics, such as forming voluntary organizations.

Kloes's study on the German Awakening Movement is a sober, scholarly analysis providing us a wealth of information, not only about the movement but also about the relevant historiography. Kloes's research is impressive, as he uses a broad array of primary sources (though no archival sources). The extensive discussions of historiography and the frequent lists betray its origin as a doctoral dissertation. While its scholarly approach is a strength, it will not likely appeal to a general readership.

Despite its scholarly contributions, only rarely do Kloes's descriptions of people and events capture the excitement of the revivals. One telling example comes in his treatment of Ludwig Hofacker, whom he rightly claims was "arguably, the best known of all the *Erweckungsprediger* [Awakening preachers]" (p. 109). While acknowledging his prominence, Kloes only devotes to Hofacker one paragraph, which mostly details the number of editions and translations his famous book of sermons went through. Kloes says nothing about Hofacker's spiritual life, his impact on his congregations, or the content of his sermons. Nothing in this paragraph helps the reader understand why Hofacker's preaching was so exciting that his church was packed and people would walk for hours to attend. He mentions a biography about Hofacker by Albert Knapp, but it is not clear if he read it. Further, there are at least four more recent secondary works on Hofacker, but none were consulted.

Nonetheless, this is quite a scholarly achievement, filling a lacuna in the English-language scholarship. A general audience will not find much of the excitement of the revivals here, but it does

provide academic historians and church historians with a helpful overview and analysis of a remarkable time of religious revival.

Richard Weikart
California State University, Stanislaus
Turlock, California, USA

Jae-Eun Park. *Driven by God: Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification in the Soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper*. Reformed Historical Theology 46. Göttingen: V&R Academic, 2018. 264 pp. £85.99/$113.00.

With this revision of his PhD dissertation, Park offers us a monograph that moves forward the discussion on the two contested doctrines of justification and sanctification; or, more specifically, the *active* and *definite* aspects of the same, which are distinct from passive justification and progressive sanctification, respectively.

In the introductory chapter, Parker notes that, while accepted in the main "in conservative evangelical and Reformed circles" (p. 15), active justification and definite sanctification have been criticized by contemporary theologians. In light of these current criticisms, Park's purpose is to advance our understanding of these doctrinal categories both by answering the objections raised and by demonstrating that these categories are "biblically supported, theologically clarifying, and of practical help to the believer" (p. 17).

To accomplish his stated purpose, he proposes an examination of "four parallel characteristics … common to active justification and definitive sanctification" (p. 23): (1) inseparability; (2) objectivity/ decisiveness; (3) Christ-centeredness; and (4) God's sovereignty in salvation. Each of these characteristics will be explicated by examining the thought of four theologians from "the broader Dutch Reformed tradition."

The volume is divided into three main parts. Part I delves deeper into what was touched on in the introduction, namely, a definition and defense of definite sanctification (ch. 2) and active justification (ch. 3).

Regarding definite sanctification, he summarizes John Murray's (1898–1975) teaching on the subject, whom Parker accurately describes as the "chief representative of the doctrine" (p. 29). He then defends it by presenting a biblical, confessional (e.g., the Heidelberg Catechism), and theological case (by way of Francis Turretin [1623–1687]) before entering into the theological disagreements surrounding the concept. Here, he answers both J. V. Fesko's more serious charge that it confuses the forensic and renovative aspects of salvation and Michael Horton's less serious charge that it adds a distinct point to the traditional *ordo salutis* independent of progressive sanctification.

Regarding active justification, after briefly presenting the biblical foundation for the doctrine, he answers three main objections—first, that it undermines *sola fide*; second, that it leads to antinomianism; and, third, that it is equivalent to the notion of justification from eternity—three serious charges indeed!

This first part clears the way for Part II, which is the bulk of the volume and is a constructive evaluation of the four aforementioned properties of definite sanctification and active justification as they
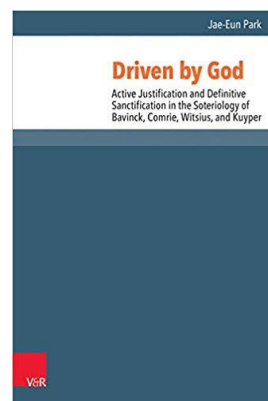
appear in four Dutch Reformed theologians, i.e., inseparability in Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) (ch. 4); objectivity and decisiveness in Alexander Comrie (1706–1774) (ch. 5); Christ-centeredness in Herman Witsius (1636–1708) (ch. 6); and God's sovereignty in salvation in Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Part III expounds on and effectively demonstrates the theological importance and practical significance of definite sanctification and active justification for the life of the believer.

By way of evaluation, there is much to commend this book. Here, we have a work of theological retrieval. Parks does not stop at a simple definition and defense of the two concepts in view. He retrieves the insights of four significant Dutch Reformed theologians to display in full the theologically soundness and beauty found in these two doctrines. At the same, his retrieval is not deaf to their distinct voices as he notes each theologian's unique approach (e.g., Bavinck's *via media*) and theological milieu, nor does it obfuscate or minimize problematic doctrines that emerge (e.g., Kuyper's leanings toward eternal justification). Moreover, Parks is attentive to the primary sources, engaging directly with the Dutch originals and offering a careful, perceptive reading of the same, and is conversant with the secondary literature surrounding these theologians. His summary of Comrie is especially valuable as virtually none of Comrie's writings have been translated into English.

In addition, he successfully demonstrates not only the theological validity but also the spiritual vitality of definite sanctification and active justification, especially by noting the discreet components of these doctrines. For example, the inseparable connection between active and passive justification and definite and progressive sanctification brings to the forefront the fact that the *definite* and *active* are each one aspect of the larger concept which is inextricably bound to the other aspect—the *progressive* and *passive*, respectively. These definite and active aspects serve as the ground and objective basis of salvation and, as such, bring into focus God's determination in salvation. With that in focus, the error of reducing salvation to one's response is avoided, whether progress in sanctification or faith leading to justification.

Despite these strengths, two minor quibbles ought to be noted. First, Parks's definition of active justification is not entirely clear until his discussion in Part II. Second, there is some unnecessary repetition between the first chapter and Part II and within the components of Part II. While such redundancy is likely unavoidable, a word regarding the substantial overlap between them would better prepare the reader.

To conclude, Parks gives us a first-rate work in theological retrieval, which is cognizant of historical nuances and careful in his reading of the primary sources. It is a superb monograph on soteriology, especially active justification and passive sanctification. This is highly recommended for anyone wishing to have a firmer grasp of the salvation we have in Christ.

Thomas Haviland-Pabst
The Grove Church
Asheville, North Carolina, USA

C. Douglas Weaver. *Baptists and the Holy Spirit: The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. xvi + 573 pp. £66.99/$69.95.

Baptists are one of the largest historically evangelical traditions in the world, with approximately 100 million believers, about a third of whom live in the USA. Much of this growth came during the twentieth century. Baptist sensibilities were so widespread in the USA that Martin Marty spoke of the "Baptistification" of American Christianity, and Baptist missionary work extended across the globe ("Baptistification Takes Over," *Christianity Today* [September 1983]: 33–36).

At the same time, Baptist growth pales in comparison to the expansion of continuationist traditions such as Pentecostals and Charismatics, which account for approximately 650 million believers worldwide. Historians and missiologists routinely note that the story of continuationist growth overlaps significantly with the story of the growth of World Christianity in the past 120 or so years, and the continuation of the so-called miraculous spiritual gifts is taken for granted in much of the Global South.

A growing number of those 100 million Baptists are also continuationists, as is the case with most Christian traditions. But plenty of Baptists also contend that some or all of the miraculous gifts are invalid for today, or they differ considerably from continuationists in how they understand those gifts. There has also been plenty of Baptist-continuationist rivalries since the first wave of Pentecostals began speaking in tongues and prophesying in the opening years of the twentieth century. The story of interchange between Baptists and continuationists is a messy one, which is one reason it has never been told before now except in bits and pieces. Doug Weaver's recent book *Baptists and the Holy Spirit: The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements* fills that void.

Weaver is a respected historian who has written widely on both Baptists and continuationists. The present volume represents the culmination of three decades of research. It is one of the most important books in Baptist studies to be written in the past decade, and it offers a model for how historians can investigate points of contact between Pentecostals, Charismatics, and older denominational traditions.

Baptists and the Holy Spirit contains three major sections. Part one is a study of how Baptists interacted with the Holiness movements that served as precursors to modern continuationist movements. Part two focuses upon Baptist responses to Pentecostalism, which emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century. The third section, which is by far the largest, is devoted to Baptist interactions with Charismatic and Third Wave movements from the mid-twentieth century onward. In making this distinction between Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Third Wave movements, Weaver is acknowledging the sometimes subtle theological and cultural differences between various continuationist groups.

Baptists and the Holy Spirit notes several recurring themes throughout the history of Baptist-continuationist interactions. One recurring theme is that some Baptists embrace miraculous gifts and begin to identify more with continuationism than their Baptist heritage. During the early Pentecostal era, many Baptists eventually left the fold and became Pentecostals. In response to Charismatic and Third Wave movements, some Baptists departed, while others remained convictional Baptists who embraced continuationism. But even the latter tended to network more closely with other continuationists—
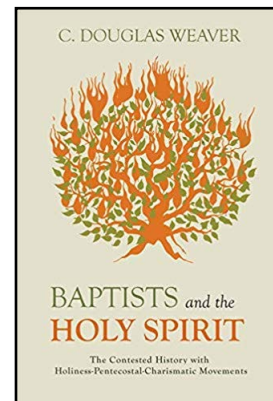
Baptist and non-Baptist—than they did their denominational kin who did not practice miraculous gifts. These "Bapticostals," as Weaver calls them, are more common today than at any point in the past.

A second recurring theme is that a majority of (especially) white Baptists rejected continuationism and the Holiness teachings that were imported into continuationist movements. The Baptist default, though not always clearly articulated, was cessationism—the belief that miraculous gifts faded away after the New Testament era. At various times, Baptist continuationists were ousted from local associations or forbidden to serve as missionaries, especially among Southern Baptists. Weaver rehearses an impressive litany of minor (and not-so-minor) Baptist controversies over miraculous gifts, many of which were related to the influence of various continuationist revival movements on Baptists.

Another recurring theme is the gender and racial egalitarianism often present among continuationists. On the whole, Pentecostals and Charismatics tended to promote racial diversity and downplay gender differences in ministry leadership, and these emphases carried over to Baptists who embraced miraculous gifts. The gender issue proved especially controversial, especially among Southern Baptists, the majority of whom were complementarian. Some Southern Baptists went so far as to condemn continuationism in part because its gender egalitarianism evidenced that the movement was unbiblical.

A fourth recurring theme is that even those Baptists who rejected continuationism were influenced by it more than they realized. A key example is in worship practices, including singing contemporary praise and worship music and the raising of hands while singing and praying, both of which were imported originally from continuationism. A renewed emphasis on spiritual gifts, including the non-miraculous ones, also arose in direct response to continuationism. Other examples could have been explored, including prayer-walking and praying for protection against demonic attack.

Even more than miraculous gifts, certain Holiness concepts proved especially influential among theologically conservative Baptists. Many Southern Baptists especially embraced a modified form of Keswick spirituality that emphasized being filled with the Holy Spirit for the sake of personal victory over sin and empowerment for ministry (especially evangelism and missions). A combination of modified Keswick spirituality, dispensationalism, and complementarianism informed the consensus beliefs of the Southern Baptist biblical inerrantists who gained control of their denomination during the latter two decades of the twentieth century.

A final recurring theme, though more suggested than fully developed, is the tendency of many modern Baptists to occupy space somewhere between a firm cessationism and an active continuationism. This position is sometimes called the "open, but cautious" view. This position has been very popular among African-American Baptists for a century. But since the Third Wave of the 1980s and 1990s, many white Baptists have also been openminded about at least some of the miraculous gifts, and have not seen them as a reason for division, even while not practicing these gifts themselves. Post-denominationalism likely contributes to this trend, as well as the greater accessibility of books and especially sermons from continuationists in the internet era. The wedding of elements of Reformed theology and continuationism among sectors of the so-called New Calvinism is another likely contributor to mediating positions among some modern Baptists. This is an area worth further research by historians in the coming years.

Baptists and the Holy Spirit is a landmark study. Weaver draws upon the best scholarship related to both continuationist history and Baptist history. He is sensitive to the nuances between different streams within each group discussed, and he demonstrates how both doctrine and social/cultural influences defined Baptist-continuationist interaction. At times, Weaver's own "moderate" sensibilities

come through, especially when writing about recent Southern Baptist history. (Weaver is a former Southern Baptist who now identifies with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.) But his bias does nothing to detract from the overall usefulness of the book, which will be required reading for scholars interested in modern American evangelicalism, as well as Baptist ministers who wish to understand why some of their church members pray in tongues or watch Pentecostal televangelists on TBN.

Nathan A. Finn
North Greenville University
Tigerville, South Carolina, USA

— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Bogdan Bucur. *Scripture Re-Envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*. Leiden: Brill, 2018. xiv + 330 pp. £131.00/$179.00.

Bogdan Bucur is a Romanian scholar working from within the Orthodox tradition. In his recent book, *Scripture Re-Envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*, Bucur seeks to help the church reflect more carefully on the presence of Christ in Scripture, especially the Old Testament. A patristic scholar, Bucur seeks to enrich the church's vision through not only exegetical but also hymnographic, iconographic, and liturgical ressourcement.

In his introduction, Bucur presents his fundamental problem with the current state of scholarship. For most thinkers, patristic exegesis of the Old Testament is divided more or less neatly into allegorical (ordinarily associated with Alexandrian theologians) and typological (centered on Antiochian thinkers) categories (p. 4). Allegorical and typological categories, however, fail to do justice to the conviction of early Christians that Jesus was personally present in the Old Testament in narrative after narrative. In order to make this case, Bucur painstakingly traces the reception history of biblical narratives in the early church from Genesis to Luke.

The cornerstone of Bucur's case comes from Christ's meeting with his disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. In this story, two disciples of the Lord are "kept from recognizing" Christ as he accompanies them on their journey (Luke 24:16). Jesus then "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets … interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (24:27), but the disciples still do not recognize his true identity. Later, the disciples finally recognize Christ's identity when He breaks bread and gives it to them (vv. 30–31). Bucur sees several facets of this text, which form the methodological guidelines for his book as a whole. He notes that the disciples must (1) have their misapprehensions of Scripture connected, (2) submit to a discipleship relationship with Jesus, (3) root their exegesis in a sacramental apprehension of Christ, and (4) enter into Scripture with a "proper medium and method of christological exegesis" (p. 9).

Bucur's perspective (vindicated by a careful examination of patristic texts) is that the early Christian church saw this story in Luke 24 as analogous to the church's reception of the Old Testament. Once blind to the presence of Christ in the Old Testament (John 3:10; Luke 16:29–31), God's people had received further revelation from Jesus and were given new eyes so that his presence is manifest. This re-

envisioning of the text is linked to the "breaking of bread" and therefore "to speak of theophanic visions and revelations is only possible from the vantage point of liturgical experience" (p. 33).
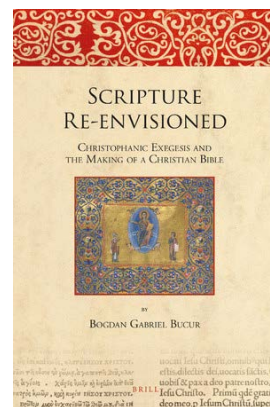
Bucur leverages this paradigm to explain the reception history of a series of Old Testament theophanies in the early church. Patristic authors discerned Christ's presence in the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses (Exod 3), Isaiah's vision of the divine throne room (Isa 6), Daniel's vision of the Son of Man (Dan 7) and numerous other Old Testament passages. His analysis of the church fathers is fair-minded and incorporates detailed analysis of data which might be in tension with his thesis. I personally found his exploration of Moses's vision of God in Exodus 33 to be particularly helpful. In this section, Bucur examines the connection between the Sinai theophany and the revelation of Christ's true glory on Mount Tabor in Matthew 17, a connection patristic theologians utilized extensively.

These reception-histories make up the bulk of Bucur's book, but the last chapter summarizes and offers a new model which he calls "re-envisioning" to describe the exegetical method of early Christians. The main blind spot he sees in modern scholarship is failure to acknowledge that early Christians saw not only a type or allegory but instead the divine Lord Himself in Old Testament narratives. The same Lord early Christians met in the liturgy was present in the Old Testament but "not as a matter of exegetical and theological convention but an epiphanic self-evidence" (p. 265). In other words, typology and allegory presume something is absent but hinted at; the universal conviction of the early church, however, was that Christ was unequivocally present in the Old Testament. Bucur does not embrace proposals to describe Christian exegesis as a "rewritten Bible." As he points out, this category better describes groups (common in the Second Temple period) who literally rewrote sacred texts in conformity with their theological agendas. As Bucur notes, however, the "rewritten" texts of patristic exegetes "do not constitute a new *text*, but offer new *readings* of the existing ones" (p. 271, italics in original). Instead, he proposes that we view the early Christian exegesis as "re-envisioning" Scripture in light of further revelation and finally perceiving the divine Lord who had always been present. Christ is, after all, "retrospectively revealed to have accompanied the disciples all along" as they journeyed to Emmaus (p. 275).

Overall, *Scripture Re-Envisioned* not only lives up to Brill's traditional high price tag but also the high standard of scholarship that readers expect from the imprint. Meticulously researched and well argued, this book will be useful to readers interested in Christian engagement with the Old Testament or patristic theology. The book's rigor, however, means it will be quite the slog for anyone without a substantial background in hermeneutics or patristic theology. Readers of this journal will also need to approach the book with eyes wide open. Bucur's Orthodox theological convictions shine through on every page. At points Bucur's eagerness to map Christian reception through the lenses of hymnography, iconography, and liturgy reflects a decentering of Scripture. For Protestants accustomed to writers who reason from the paradigm of *sola Scriptura*, this may be disorienting. Orthodox ecclesiological, sacramental, and soteriological distinctives also surface in Bucur's writing but do not shape his central insight in ways which unduly detract from its utility for Protestant theologians.

In summary, this is an excellent book. Bucur approaches the Bible with reverence, treating it as a complete, unified covenantal reality. This enables him to see deep coherence between the parts of Scripture rooted in a recognition that it is Jesus acting to save His people from Genesis to Revelation. *Scripture Re-Envisioned* should be welcomed, then, by all among God's people who delight to see the

Scriptures opened that they might perceive the presence of their Savior "in all the Scriptures" as Christ modeled for his disciples in Luke 24.

John Bush (with Hans Madueme)
Covenant College
Lookout Mountain, Georgia, USA

Kirk R. MacGregor. *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction—Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical, and Global Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 416 pp. £25.00/$34.99.

Detailing the last 200 years of theology in a single book presents no easy task, but given the proliferation of ideas over that time, having a resource that skillfully delineates them feels almost essential. Kirk MacGregor takes on this assignment in *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction—Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical, and Global Perspectives*. In his opening statement to the reader, he explains his plan to "acquaint you with the major thinkers and schools of thought in Christian theology … both inside and outside the scope of evangelical tradition" while "provid[ing] a clear and unbiased perception of the theological landscape of the past two centuries" (pp. 11–12). Both theologian and philosopher, MacGregor achieves his goal. He notes that "much of contemporary theology has appropriated various ideas and methods from modern philosophy," (p. 13) and he therefore works to keep that intellectual legacy in mind as he covers a broad array of theological topics. MacGregor's own description of the book as a potential "springboard" for "theological explorations" (p. 12) helps define the book's intended audience as students, but the value of his work extends beyond the classroom.
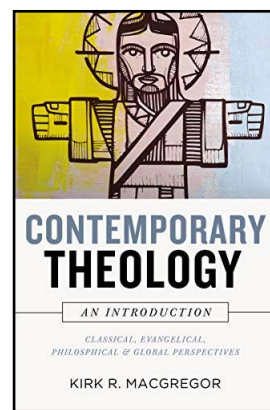
After the brief introduction, the book divides into 38 chapters, each (after the first) given to a particular theological movement or individual thinker. The first chapter focuses on Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, laying the foundation for MacGregor's general approach of finding the intersections between philosophy and theology. Taking that path means that certain thinkers, like G. W. F. Hegel and Ludwig Wittgenstein, receive more attention than we might anticipate, but MacGregor shows the relevance of these philosophers in helping to shape contemporary theology. Acknowledging a philosophical underpinning, the book nonetheless addresses the historic theological topics.

Each of those topics fits into its own discrete category, yet the book's organization allows it to feel more connected than that structure might suggest. The book follows a roughly chronological route and, while there is no pretense of pure linearity, the sequence of topics proceeds almost as a narrative. You could pick up the book and read a chapter at random, but if read within the context of the book's broader historical arc, your reading will be richer. Contemporary theology would be better mapped as a web than as a line, but within the strictures of a book, MacGregor skillfully makes both the big sequence and the various connections understandable.

Giving about ten pages to each topic, MacGregor clearly explains each subject without getting lost in the weeds. Occasionally this length feels too concise (particularly when MacGregor drifts more toward philosopher rather than elucidator), but the chapters generally serve their purpose well as introductory essays. He mostly masks his biases, only rarely raising an implicit eyebrow at heterodox theology, such

as when he points out how process theology is "condemned as heresy by most conservative theologians" (p. 214). His willingness to avoid lending support or delivering criticism enables his book to stand as a fair resource with high utility in a classroom setting.

With any encyclopedic endeavor of this sort, an author becomes necessarily selective. In *Contemporary Theology*, some of those missing topics seem to be those that least fit into the paradigm of a joint philosophical and theological venture. For example, third wave theology makes no appearance, perhaps because—despite C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber's academic ties—the movement does not readily assert itself as rigidly theological in the same way as other schools of thought. MacGregor does address Latin American Pentecostalism in a chapter that could have provided a segue into, say, the Vineyard movement, which remains energetic in the United States. Likewise, he avoids both prosperity and dominion theologies, neither of which fits neatly into one of the four categories of the book's subtitle. Addressing major lines of thought in the West, at least outside of academia, would seem wise, especially given the broad scope of the book.

Other omissions also seem strange within the book's rubric. John Milbank gets a quick mention in the chapter "Postmodern Theology" (p. 293), but giving Radical Orthodoxy only one sentence surprisingly slights a movement that makes great sense within MacGregor's framework. John Hick and Christian pluralism receive almost no attention, despite the natural tie between Hick and Kant and the relevance of examining pluralism both in our current moment and across the past two centuries.

Nonetheless these exclusions do not negate the value of MacGregor's work. His succinct and lucid writing on difficult topics (like Wittgenstein's ladder and Paul Tillich's existentialism) should help newcomers access most of the key ideas of the last couple hundred years of theological thinking. More experienced scholars will find the book to serve as a highly functional resource because of his quick delineations of main ideas and useful bibliographies. MacGregor hoped to "furnish you with a springboard for your own theological explorations" (p. 12). He has accomplished that and more.

Justin Cober-Lake
The Well of Nelson
Lovingston, Virginia, USA

Michael J. Ovey. *The Feasts of Repentance: From Luke-Acts to Systematic and Pastoral Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 49. London: Apollos, 2019. x + 173 pp. £14.99/$24.00.

Mike Ovey's name is well-known to *Themelios* readers. Mike Ovey was principal of Oak Hill College in London and served as consulting editor of *Themelios* from 2012 until his sudden death in 2017 at the age of 58. Those unfamiliar with Dr. Ovey's life and contribution should read Dan Strange's moving article, "'Just Mike': A Tribute to Mike Ovey (1958–2017)," *Themelios* 42.1 (2017): 13–15. *The Feasts of Repentance* represents a revision of Ovey's 2008 lectures at Moore College. The manuscript was nearly finished at the time of Ovey's sudden death, and Moore's principal Mark Thompson undertook the "minor editorial work" needed to bring this book to press (p. viii).

Thompson aptly writes in the Preface, "Mike was a biblical and systematic theologian with a deep pastoral concern.... He was never satisfied with an
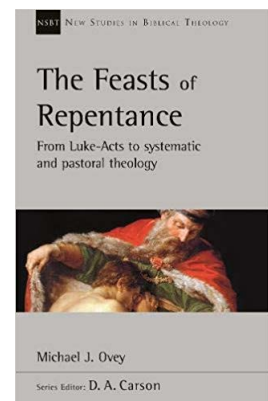
abstract theological system. Nor was he satisfied with a theology that remained detached from the context in which it is lived out and proclaimed" (p. viii). Ovey displayed a rare blend of theological excellence, pastoral sensitivity, and penetrating cultural engagement in his many *Themelios* columns. This new book offers more of the same.

Ovey declares at the outset that those in the cultural West live in "a time of repentanceless Christianity" (p. 1), a reality that forces us to examine the place of repentance in our evangelism and in our expectations for the Christian life. Ovey chooses to focus attention on Luke and Acts, though he briefly addresses the wider NT picture of repentance in the book's "Concluding Reflections" (pp. 155–56). He does not restrict his study to the usage of μετανοέω and μετάνοια, acknowledging the "substantial overlap" between the usage of "turning" and "repentance" (p. 2). Ovey throughout shows sensitivity to the narrative dynamics of Luke-Acts (with frequent citations of Robert Tannehill) and explains that the evangelist "does not so much discuss repentance, the theological locus, as people: people who are, and who are not, repentant" (p. 5). Thus, Ovey compares and contrasts the repentant and unrepentant characters in Luke's Gospel (ch. 2), then in Acts (ch. 3).

Chapter 2 reveals the rationale for the book's title, as Ovey focuses attention on feasts and meals as "type scenes" that reinforce key values for Luke's readers (p. 12). In these scenes, the "repentant" characters—typically tax collectors and sinners—demonstrate humility, remorse over sin, and acknowledgement of guilt, as well as joy, celebration, and trust in Jesus. Conversely, the Pharisees headline the "unrepentant" character group; they idolize wealth and power (just like the tax collectors) and are proud, self-reliant hypocrites who lack true love for God or neighbour and are dangerously unaware of their true condition. "In all this, repentance becomes something that locates us relationally with respect to Jesus and God and others" (p. 34). Ovey's pastoral concern is evident as he presses readers to consider with which character group they identify.

In ch. 3, Ovey turns his attention to Acts, where repentance is proclaimed for Jews and Gentiles alike. He explains that the unrepentant are characterized fundamentally as proud, self-justifying, and self-deceived. In a brief digression, Ovey urges NT scholars not to accept uncritically Judaism's self-description but to recognize that "the Judaism one may read on the page … is not the same as the belief in the heart of a first-century Jew…. [Q]uite simply, people are self-deceived" (p. 37).

In ch. 4, Ovey argues that repentance is not "moralism" but a turning from idolatry. Idolatry tells a double lie about God and self, while repentance entails a double "recognition" of God's and our true identity. Ovey offers a wide-ranging, penetrating treatment of idolatry as (1) parody, (2) lie, (3) *the* sin, (4) worldview, (5) narrative, (6) addiction, and (7) a false identity.

The next chapter considers the relationship of repentance to faith in the order of salvation. Ovey affirms John Murray's observation that penitent faith and faithful repentance belong together. He thus rejects a contemporary therapeutic, intellectual approach to repentance while also critiquing Karl Barth's view that Christ repents representatively as our head. Repentance does not merely acknowledge Christ as Lord, it also "locates" us relationally to Christ.

In the book's final chapter, Ovey turns to matters of pastoral theology. He builds on Miroslav Volf's insight that the gospel shapes repentance and leads to transformation and applies this to the Episcopal Church's notion of "inclusion" in the church that renders repentance and faith irrelevant. "The basis of inclusion in God's realm and in the forgiveness of sins is repentance and faith" (p. 138), which depend not on human merit or "rights" but on God's grace and mercy. When we grasp that our salvation depends on God's undeserved gift, this leads us to "imitate God's actions towards one another" (p. 153).

Some readers may be disappointed that Ovey chose not to engage with scholarship published after he delivered his 2008 Moore lectures, including Richard Lints's highly relevant book in the same series (*Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* [Nottingham: Apollos, 2015]) and important Acts commentaries by David Peterson, Eckhard Schnabel, Craig Keener, and Daniel Marguerat. While these omissions make Ovey's work feel a tad dated in 2019, his deep familiarity with the church fathers, the Puritans, and influential Reformed theologians from past centuries chastens us for what C. S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited" (*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* [New York: Harvest, 1955], 207). By retrieving Tertullian, Augustine, Calvin, Watson, Chesterton, Murray, Barth, and others, Ovey reminds us that newer is not necessarily truer and offers necessary correctives to the repentanceless Christianity of the present.

The Feasts of Repentance is a unique contribution to the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, as Ovey does not stay in the lane of biblical theology but veers deliberately into systematic and pastoral theology (in this way, his work has affinities to Mark Thompson's *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, NSBT 21 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006]). Ovey here offers theology students and pastors an exemplary model of careful exegesis that leads to faithful doctrinal synthesis and penetrating application. His signature contributions include his stress on the joy and feasting that characterizes repentant people, the close linkage of repentance to idolatry and identity, and his explanation of repentance as relocation. This rich book reminds me of how much we miss Mike Ovey and how grateful I am for his life and scholarship.

Brian J. Tabb
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019. xxviii + 259 pp. £15.88/$19.99.

In *Hearers and Doers* Kevin Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, casts a vision for pastoral ministry as discipleship through doctrine (p. 237). In contrast to contemporary conceptions of health and wellness, Vanhoozer envisions the church as a "fitness culture" known for exposing cultural idols, prizing the theological reading of Scripture, and imaging Jesus Christ to the glory of God (pp. xiv–xv, 245). In other words, pastoral teaching is an exercise program that trains disciples to live according to the gospel, instead of being captivated by prevailing ideologies (p. xxv).

Hearers and Doers divides into two sections, "Warming Up: Why Discipleship Matters" and "Working Out: How Discipleship Happens." In the first two chapters Vanhoozer introduces Charles Taylor's category of *social imaginary*—"the metaphors and stories by which we live" (p. 9)—and evaluates three in North American culture: medicine and health care, diet and nutrition, and exercise and training. This critique illustrates that discipleship requires "deprogramming ... powerful cultural myths" before "reprogramming" in gospel truth (p. 15).
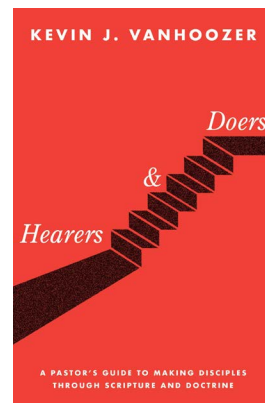
Chapters three and four present the theological alternative. Doctrine is direction for those God has awakened to "walk the Way of Jesus Christ" (p. 60). Christian fitness requires *doing* the Word, not simply *hearing* it, just like physical fitness requires actual reps and laps. Therefore, "fit" disciples develop the skills of reading Scripture theologically as the Triune God's redemptive story and making choices shaped by this "evangelical imaginary" (p. 60).

The "workout" section of *Hearers and Doers* first considers the role of pastor (ch. 5) and church (ch. 6). Pastors must visualize ministry not in terms of contemporary leadership metaphors but in biblical images (e.g., shepherd) while maintaining an eschatological viewpoint, "to look at a sinner and see a saint" (p. 124). The church is the "company of the gospel" who improvise the Script contextually, especially through corporate liturgy. Practicing baptism and the Lord's Supper "forms disciples to conform to reality" (p. 153).

Chapter seven extols the virtue of catholicity in contradistinction to autonomy. *Sola Scriptura* does not abolish tradition but subordinates it. "Scripture alone authorizes, but the Scripture that authorizes is not alone" (p. 176). Also, the accompanying doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is not "popehood," a license for self-governing interpretation (p. 177). Rather, the Spirit has guided the church corporate to rightly interpret Scripture, as patterned at the Jerusalem Council and expressed in the ancient creeds (p. 180). Varying interpretations are not cause for dismay but opportunities to learn from fellow participants in a "mere Protestant Christianity" that reads Scripture in Trinitarian, global, and humble ways (p. 186).

The goal toward which doctrinal discipleship heads is Christlikeness. Chapter eight reiterates the importance of practicing the truth. By "core exercises" such as preaching Christ from the Old Testament and shaping a Christian outlook on death, pastor-teachers serve as "engines who convert the hearing of God's word (the power of truth) into the doing of God's word (walking in truth)" (p. 242).

It is easy to sympathize with this volume's vision for pastoral vocation. Paul wrote to Titus "to further the faith of God's chosen ones and the knowledge of the truth that is in keeping with godliness" (1:1 NET). Knowledge unapplied is an empty grasp of truth. As an aside, one key connection between pastoral vocation and doctrine left unexplored in *Hearers and Doers* is the pastor's role as evangelical exemplar. The Pastoral Epistles underscore the minister's personal need to correlate confession and practice (e.g., 1 Tim 4:12, 15).

Furthermore, Vanhoozer practices what he pictures, embodying the imagination that he commends in *Hearers and Doers*. Witty turns-of-phrase abound (e.g., "Wittenberg, we have a problem," p. 169), though at times theodramatic language itself seems to take center stage (e.g., the six-fold portrayal of the church as theater, pp. 140–42). But his depictive comparison of popular social imaginaries and evangelical fitness is compelling, not just visually but biblically. After all, spiritual discipline requires being "nourished on the words of the faith and of the [healthy] doctrine which you have been following" (1 Tim 4:6 NASB).

Two weaknesses also merit remark. First, Vanhoozer conveys how "overcom[ing] the theory/ practice dichotomy characteristic of so many seminaries" has animated his theological model (p. 145). But this laudable motivation runs the risk of conflating belief and practice. He writes, for example, "The doctrines of creation, incarnation, Trinity, and atonement are not theoretical abstractions—things primarily to be thought—but meaningful patterns that provide orientation for everyday existence, and hence things primarily to be *lived*" (p. 134, original emphasis). To *live* the Trinity or atonement is a confusing direction at best. Theological indicatives ground imperatives but are not their equivalent.

Second, while *Hearers and Doers* helpfully relates the "ministerial" role of doctrine to the magisterial authority of Scripture (p. 184), its commendation of Protestant catholicity raises questions about its limits. If the ancient creeds are "the context in which an individual's reading of the biblical text makes sense … and exercises its authority" (p. 180), how should that individual interpret Scriptural teaching that gave rise to Protestantism? Should confessions play a more significant role in the doctrinal fitness program? The conversation and "corporate submission" of congregations in sixteenth-century Geneva serve as a worthy prototype only if the interlocutors agree on essential doctrines such as *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*.

Perceived flaws notwithstanding, *Hearers and Doers* casts an engaging vision through insightful cultural critique, theological synthesis, and artful prose. Its countercultural call for pastors to demythologize dominant cultural stories and disciple through doctrine deserves consideration by those concerned to see Christ formed in their flock.

Eric Newton
Bob Jones University
Greenville, South Carolina, USA

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Herman Bavinck. *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*. Volume 1. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 564 pp. £39.99/$59.99.

Every ethical system has a central goal. The most anemic ethics begin with a very specific goal and then construct a framework that will support that desired end. This is just as true for Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) as it is for eco-centric ethics like those proposed by Willis Jenkins in *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013). This rather narrow approach to ethics is very effective at motivating specific action intended to solve perceived needs in the culture at that moment. However, when the central goal of ethics is based solely on crisis points of the contemporary culture, the usefulness of that ethical system is limited to the time and context in which it was invented. In contrast, the most enduringly potent ethics are grounded in an unchanging goal.

The first volume of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* provides an example of an ethical system with its roots in an unchanging greatest good. Although the contents of the volume are more than a century old, they appear to have aged very little; indeed, this initial volume of Bavinck's ethics is remarkably fresh and invigorating. This is because, for Bavinck, ethics is about loving God by living rightly through the power of the Holy Spirit. More than that, the center of Christian ethics is the character of God. As such, Bavinck's ethics are explicitly theological in the deepest meaning of the term. That is, right living must begin by understanding who God is.

Because of their desire to address contemporary problems, many Christian ethics books focus on topics and issues that are present concerns. This is likely enhanced by the number of ethics texts that
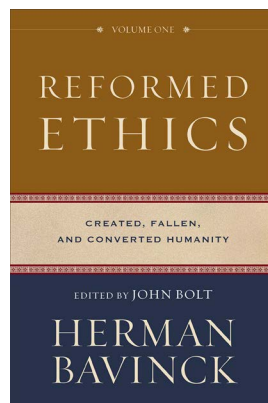
are written by experts in other fields seeking to apply their knowledge to moral reasoning. In contrast, Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* is really a discipleship manual, because the purpose is not simply to figure out whether a particular reproductive technology is acceptable, but to determine whether a Christian with a proper vision of God can be the sort of individual who would use that technology.

After an engaging preface and introduction by some of the editors, which gives the history of the manuscript and the setting in which it was likely written, the volume begins with an introduction by Bavinck, which is then followed by two books. The introduction lays the groundwork for the discipline of Christian ethics, the first book consists of six chapters dealing with humans prior to conversion, and the second book contains a further six chapters that explore ethics for converted humans.

Bavinck's introduction alone is worth the price of the entire volume. First, he gives a concise overview of the history of Christian ethics. Then he carefully explains his terms. The chapter concludes with an explanation of Bavinck's ethical methodology, which is to do moral theology rather than moral philosophy.

Book one begins with the doctrine of human nature, which those familiar with Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* or Reformed theology in general will recognize. The second chapter deals with the effects of sin on human nature and offers a set of categories to describe sin. Chapter three delves into the damage selfishness does in human relations. The fourth chapter explores how sin has distorted the image of God in humans. In the fifth and sixth chapters respectively, Bavinck deals with the issue of conscience and the relationship between sinners and the moral law. This portion of the book is about universal ethics, without regard of a person's status in Christ.

Book two focuses on the spiritual life of Christians. Chapter seven is a primer on life in the Spirit. The eighth chapter provides a history of mystical and pietistic movements in church history. Chapter nine contains a meditation on the sanctification, particularly on imitating Christ and spiritual growth. In the tenth chapter, Bavinck offers comfort to those failing in the Christian life through the doctrine of perseverance. Chapter Eleven outlines various failures within the Christian life. The book concludes with Chapter Twelve, which is all about spiritual disciplines that can help restore Christians from spiritual failure and assist us on the way toward sanctification.

Reformed Ethics is an example of what Christian ethics ought to be—or, at least, where it ought to begin. Instead of offering technical details about the moral issues of his day, Bavinck lays out Christian theology in a way that helps the reader understand holiness. The contents of this initial volume offer a vision of Reformed theology applied to the Christian life and are a foretaste of what promises to be an excellent trilogy. The translation is smooth and readable throughout, with helpful annotations to explain references that would otherwise be obscure to English speakers unfamiliar with the Dutch culture of Bavinck's day.

For those interested in the Reformed tradition, this volume provides an entry into the canon of important literature. Christian ethicists of all theological interests will benefit from reading this volume because it lays out a vision for the pursuit of holiness that should be central to any proper approach to moral thinking. Pastors and educated laity will also likely benefit from reading Bavinck's manual on holy living. In short, this book is a classic of Christian thought that is just now seeing the light of day, thanks to the diligent work of the translators and editors.

Andrew J. Spencer
CrossPointe Church
Monroe, Michigan, USA

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, with Katie Casselberry. *Helping Without Hurting in Church Benevolence*. Chicago: Moody, 2015. 154 pp. £12.27/$14.99.

When publishers release spin-offs of a highly successful book, it's usually cause to raise an eyebrow. The cynic wonders if it's another attempt to milk the literary cow for all she's worth. Thus, when Corbett and Fikkert's influential work *When Helping Hurts* (Chicago: Moody, 2009) spawned three additional works, including *Helping Without Hurting in Church Benevolence* (2015), there was reason to question the value of each ensuing publication.

Helping Without Hurting in Church Benevolence, however, is no mere money-grab. Instead, Corbett and Fikkert—along with Katie Casselberry— have once again provided a needed tool for the church. At 154 pages, they've written a user-friendly manual designed for church benevolence teams to use in formulating wise and compassionate practices. The book's purpose is to "help your church successfully steward the opportunity that arises when [asked] for financial assistance to pay for things such as electric bills, rent, gas, or food" (p. 7). Using the principles of *When Helping Hurts* and numerous real-life scenarios, the book serves as a consultant to church benevolence ministries looking for direction and wisdom.

The book is divided into two sections, with chapters 1–2 devoted to "A Foundation for Effective Benevolence" and chapters 3–6 aimed at the nuts and bolts of "Designing and Implementing an Effective Benevolence Ministry." In the first chapter, poverty is defined as a fractured relationship between mankind and self, others, creation, and God. With this definition of poverty, all people, not just the materially poor, are impoverished in some form. Without this framework, a purely materialistic view of poverty often prevails and "many of us think the best way to alleviate poverty is to simply give material things to low-income people: money to pay the electric bill, turkeys and toys and Christmas, warm clothing during the winter" (p. 18). A holistic view of poverty not only leads to better care for the materially poor but also confronts the pride of the materially non-poor and forms a "context that Christ can use to bring healing to the ongoing brokenness in *both* of our lives" (p. 23, emphasis mine). Chapter 2 acknowledges the complexity of poverty and encourages those helping low-income individuals to be slow to draw linear conclusions about the cause of poverty. Trauma, oppressive systems, racial discrimination, and demonic forces are briefly explored as potential contributing factors to be considered when seeking to understand an individual's plight.

In part two, one finds a step-by-step process for creating or tweaking a church's benevolence practices, complete with sample forms and action steps. Chapter 3 is based on a list of nineteen questions designed to help form and assess benevolence philosophy and policies. Each question is followed by a few paragraphs of practical considerations and lessons learned. With an exhortation to "operate out of a gospel-centered humility, reminding ourselves that we too are broken and need Christ's ongoing work in our own lives" (p. 78), chapter 4 is aimed at the ongoing nature of alleviating poverty. Specifically, the benevolence "ally" and the one in need work together to form an action plan which provides ongoing care while requiring personal initiative. Chapter 5 provides some insight into how to enlist the church in benevolence work as well as how to work alongside existing organizations. The book concludes in chapter 6 with eight case-studies designed to test-drive the philosophy articulated within the book.
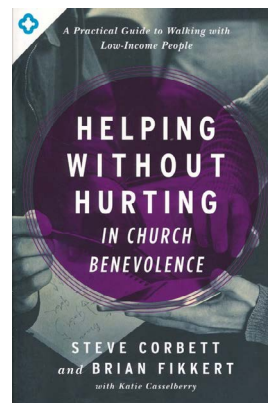
Each case-study includes group discussion questions and a response from the authors to the sample scenarios.

The strength of *Helping Without Hurting in Local Benevolence* is its practicality. The chapters are concise; the authors first articulate a condensed version of the *When Helping Hurts* philosophy, and then offer a series of checkpoints for implementation. Clear, boldface "Task to Complete" headings function as a to-do list throughout part two. As a result, the book can serve as a ready-made benevolence kit for churches to develop a benevolence ministry from scratch, a training tool for those who are joining established benevolence ministries, or a guide for functioning benevolence ministries to evaluate their current practices.

The authors also demonstrate noticeable discernment throughout the book. Often after suggesting a policy or best-practice, they remind the reader to be flexible. Their intake process, for instance, is "not meant to be a one-size-fits-all formula to mechanically follow" (p. 77). After advocating that recipients of benevolence also contribute toward some portion of their bills, they add that "each situation is different, and there is no absolute rule" (p. 103). This posture of flexibility also appears in the introduction where they state that "poverty alleviation is not simply about applying a recipe" but about reliance on "the Holy Spirit, prayer, wisdom, and discernment" (p. 10). Corbett, Fikkert, and Casselberry have discerned the peril of policy, which can be cold-hearted inaction. Learning from the unintended fruit of their first book, that "some churches became paralyzed and were afraid to help low-income people at all, lest they hurt them in the process of trying to help" (p. 10), they regularly plea for action. They counsel to "err on the side of giving rather than withholding material assistance (p. 11) and conclude their policy chapter with a call to "get moving, refusing to let perfectionism get in the way" (p. 76).

One of the most helpful contributions of the book is the distinction between relief and development. The goal of benevolence work is development, but many churches are stuck in relief mode (i.e., giving handouts). "One of the most common and detrimental mistakes that North American churches make in their benevolence work," they contend, "is using a relief approach in situations that call for development" (p. 61). The distinction between relief and development gives benevolence teams useful categories to determine what kind of assistance is truly most helpful to a person in need.

The lone criticism I have of the book is minor. Three categories of poverty alleviation are introduced—relief, rehabilitation, and development—but only two sentences are spent distinguishing rehabilitation from development. Doubtless, rehabilitation is a legitimate poverty alleviation category, but because it is neither well-defined nor well-illustrated, it may needlessly complicate an otherwise very helpful paradigm. In my view, it would have been better to omit it for the purposes of this short book and to encourage benevolence teams to think in terms of either relief or development. Whatever the case, the authors wisely advise that when faced with a decision about how best to help someone, the question to ask is not what category do they belong to, but, "*If I take this action, will I be contributing [to] or detracting from the long-term goal of empowering this person to live in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation?*" (p. 29, emphasis original).

In addition to the practicality and discernment of their work, the authors' approach to poverty alleviation is consistently anchored into the hope of the gospel. Their philosophy is not merely good charity practices painted with Bible verses. No, they repeatedly convey their belief that the answer to poverty alleviation is the power of God through the gospel of Christ, the one who is "reconciling *all things*, transforming whole people, both bodies and souls" (p. 24, emphasis original). It is Christ's power

alone which can "fix all that is broken in the low-income person, in you, and in the world in which you both live" (p. 10).

Helping Without Hurting in Local Benevolence does exactly what the authors set out to do: it provides a tool for churches to better steward God-given benevolence opportunities. It will become required reading for the benevolence team in our church, and—I hope—in many other churches too.

Andy Huette
Christ Community Church
Gridley, Illinois, USA

Justin Whitmel Earley. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. 204 pp. £14.60/$18.00.

Without a proper structure, buildings crumble. So also with human lives, argues Justin Earley. In his book *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose in an Age of Distraction*, Earley exhorts his readers to consider the habits that structure their lives to discern whether or not they will enable them to withstand the pressures of our rapidly changing world. Earley knows firsthand the pressures that can cause a poorly-structured life to crumble. As a former missionary to China, he experienced the struggle of seeking to do the work of God while mastering a language and culture not his own, and few would argue that his current profession as a mergers and acquisition lawyer comes without heavy demands. In fact, it was his own experience that led Earley to write *The Common Rule* because he came to a place in his pursuit of what he knew to be right and biblical where his bad habits began to undermine his ability to function properly as a Christian. He explains, "while the house of my life was decorated with Christian content, the architecture of my habits was just like everyone else's. And that life had been working for me—until it collapsed" (p. 4).
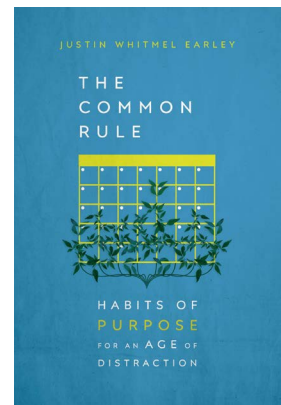
So, how can Christians keep their lives from coming to the brink of collapse even as they seek to dedicate their lives to pursuing what is good. Earley's answer is that we must push back against the pressures of the world through cultivating proper habits. And these habits must not only help us resist worldly pressures; they must also aid us in embracing our God and the calling he has given us to love our neighbors.

The Common Rule is divided into two parts. In part one Earley explains what he means by rule, which he defines as "a set of habits you commit to in order to grow your love of God and neighbor" (p. 21). He also gives an overview of the eight habits that he has developed in his own life in order to resist evil and embrace love of God and love of neighbor. These habits are broken up into four daily habits and four weekly habits. The four daily habits are as follows: (1) kneeling prayer at morning, midday, and bedtime; (2) one meal with others; (3) one hour with phone off; and (4) Scripture before phone. The four weekly habits are these: (1) one hour of conversation with a friend; (2) curate media to four hours; (3) fast from something for twenty-four hours; and (4) sabbath. Part two makes up the bulk of the book in which Earley discusses the benefits of each of these habits and how they can be practically implemented.

Each chapter in part two is devoted to one of the habits, and Earley explains how each habit relates to resistance, embrace, love of God, and love of neighbor. The daily habit of prayer reminds us of our finitude and helps us to cast ourselves upon the mercy of our infinite God, thereby cultivating our love for him. Having a daily meal with others helps us to cultivate love of neighbor as we embrace the communal nature with which God has created us. The habits of turning off our phone for an hour a day and reading Scripture before we turn to our phones in the morning are both habits of resistance. The first helps us to love our neighbors through turning our attention away from technology and toward people, and the second helps us to turn our attention away from technology and toward God. With regard to the weekly habits, eating with a friend and curating media both cultivate love for neighbor, and fasting and observing sabbath draw us to God as we recognize our dependence upon him.

With any attempt at helping people to structure their lives for spiritual growth writers always run the risk either of setting the bar so high that it seems unattainable or of fostering a sort of works-based righteousness that leads people to trust in their own effort rather than God. However, by connecting these eight habits to love of God and love of neighbor, Earley has written something that is not only immensely practical but also rightly directed toward the end for which all humans were created. Furthermore, with the summaries and charts at the end of each chapter and the resources at the end of the book, IVP and Earley have produced a book that is highly usable and aesthetically beautiful.

The Common Rule is gospel-centered in that Earley makes a number of connections to Christ's work on the cross. For example, in his chapter on the Sabbath he explains the significance of the completed work of Christ enabling his people to rest in him (p. 148). What is missing, however, is a fuller portrayal of the "bad news" of the gospel. *From what* has God in Christ saved us? Earley certainly mentions sin, but it is not just our sin from which we need to be saved but the just punishment for our sin. It is through recognizing that Christ saves us from God's wrath that we come to the fullest understanding of his love. When we begin to embrace his love in this light, we can better point our neighbors to that love. Such an understanding seems to be implied in Earley's work, but a more explicit presentation of the significance of the work of Christ would only serve to strengthen Earley's point that, without structuring our lives to embrace the love of God and neighbor, we will inevitably crumble.

Colin R. McCulloch
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim, eds. *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 192 pp. $21.99.

Preachers ought to be conscious of the ideas and principles that shape them each time they herald the Word and address their people. Beneath every approach to preaching, there is a particular hermeneutic at work. As such, this work edited by Scott Gibson and Matthew Kim is a helpful window into the ways in which that phenomenon takes place. Preachers must be aware of overarching theological assumptions and interpretive patterns that will inevitably make their way into the pulpit, and they must test these things by the tenets of Scripture to ensure that they are preaching sound doctrine.

Four contributors speak to these matters, all of whom are seasoned preachers. Bryan Chapell is former president of Covenant Seminary and presently pastors Grace Presbyterian Church. Abraham Kuruvilla is senior research professor of preaching and pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. Kenneth Langley is senior pastor of Christ Community Church and adjunct professor of preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Paul Wilson is professor of homiletics at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto. Each has published various books and articles in the area of preaching.

Homiletics and Hermeneutics is structured like many other multi-view books. It begins and ends with brief forays by the editors. The introduction sets up the overall topic, and the conclusion offers critical analysis of compelling elements and matters of potential consideration for each of positions held by the four contributors. The main body of the book contains four chapters with each of the main contributors offering their perspective in a full chapter, followed by brief responses from the other authors, marking areas of agreement, but mostly highlighting differences in the various views.

The first chapter, written by Bryan Chapell, speaks of the "Redemptive-Historic View." Delineating key passages of Scripture (e.g., Luke 24:27; 24:44; John 5:39, 46), Chapell argues that "Jesus related all portions of Scripture to his own ministry," and thus in our preaching we should do the same (p. 9). He continues, "This does not mean that every phrase, punctuation mark, or verse directly reveals Christ, but rather that all passages in their context serve our understanding of his nature and/or necessity" (p. 9). Preaching, Chappell believes, should always look to the fallen condition of man and the redemptive work of God in Christ.

This chapter is followed by Abe Kuruvilla's viewpoint, which he identifies as "Christiconic preaching." Noting that Scripture was "primarily intended to be used for application," assessing what biblical authors are doing with what they are saying, and how to discern the "world in front of the text," Kuruvilla maintains that the heart of preaching is "to recognize the function of Scripture and to bring to bear, periscope by periscope, divine guidelines for life from the Word of God upon the people of God, to align them to the will of God by the power of the Spirit of God, into the image of the Son of God for the glory of God" (p. 69). As such, Christiconic preaching seeks to do justice to the immediate context of the passage being expounded and most often will be "Christ-centered" in the way it points the hearer to Christ's character and ongoingly conforms us to his image (2 Cor 3:18).

Kenneth Langley proposes the "Theocentric View": "Preaching should be God-centered because God is God-centered and wants us to be God-centered in everything we do" (p. 81). Contrary to Chapell's view, Langley agrees that all parts of the Scripture point to Jesus, but not in every single verse.
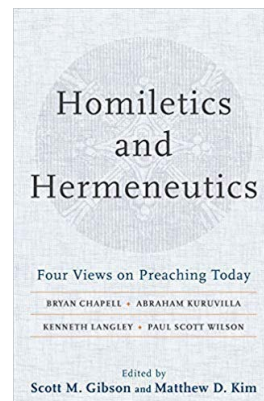
He argues that the Bible more prominently emphasizes God the Father, for not only did Jesus come to do the will of the Father but every tongue will ultimately confess that he is Lord to the Father's glory (Phil 2:11). With this in mind, there should be no shying away from privileging the immediate context of each passage and applying it to the people in a way that showcases the greatness of God.

Finally, Paul Wilson advocates the "Law-Gospel View," a framework that is typical of Lutheran theology (though he is also fond of citing Calvin). In this carefully nuanced chapter, law and gospel (also termed "trouble and grace") are highlighted as appropriate hermeneutical lenses for understanding all of Scripture. As such, he advocates that preaching should have four essential elements: (1) trouble in the biblical text, (2) trouble in our world, (3) grace in the biblical text, and (4) grace in our world (pp. 132–34). This type of structure, Wilson argues, will ensure that both the reality of sin and the saving nature of the gospel are present in each sermon.

Certainly, in a work of this nature, one can note considerable overlap and agreement amongst the various authors, while also acknowledging differing emphases and approaches. Each gladly affirms the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, the need for the gospel to be exalted in our preaching, and the call for robust, specific application to be made for our people. Chapell's chapter was a carefully nuanced rendition of redemptive-historic preaching, but many will still wonder and debate how Christ is proclaimed in every area of Scripture, and even if he always should be in the same kind of way. Kuruvilla is right to point the reader to the pragmatic reality of texts, focusing on what the author is doing with what he is saying. However, his use of Ricoeur is largely uncritical, and, while his examples are helpful, a more detailed methodology for such preaching would strengthen his case (to be fair, one can look to other books by Kuruvilla for such examples). Langley helpfully points people to the fact that God is the main character of the Bible, but should not God be thought of in triune terms? If he was willing to do this there would be greater opportunity for getting to the heart of various biblical texts. Finally, Wilson offers a clear methodology for both interpretation and preaching (law/gospel), however, this structure may become a straightjacket if that is not what the text is intending to convey.

In many ways, these questions come down to one's view of the relationship between exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. While the contributors do well to avoid extremes, certain views can tend toward atomistic approaches to focusing exclusively on the immediate context of a passage (more likely in Kuruvilla and Langley), or to the other end of the spectrum that highlights big-picture continuities seen at a whole-Bible level (more likely in Chapell and Wilson). One must be careful to continually ask what a particular passage is all about, what that particular book is all about, and what the whole Bible is all about (all the while keeping the application of a text in mind!). As we discipline ourselves to continually ask these three questions, we can avoid unhelpful tendencies toward either side of the spectrum wherein we may miss the point at either a passage-level or the canonical-level. It seems as well that more work needs to be done to draw attention to book-level meaning (i.e., the canonical books of Scripture) when considering both hermeneutics and homiletics.

Professors within the field of homiletics will be helped by this work in terms of updating them on key approaches to the field that are currently being taken. Pastors and seminary students will also benefit, but, as with all multi-view books, readers must be disciplined to read, decide which view is most compelling (or perhaps form a different view entirely), and provide warrant for their conclusion. In the end, readers will be reminded that preaching cannot be disconnected from one's hermeneutic, and thus

we must give ourselves to the study of God's Word and to conveying it with exultation for the glory of God and the good of his people.

Jeremy Kimble
Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio, USA

Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger. *Equipping for Life: A Guide for New, Aspiring and Struggling Parents*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2018. 288 pp. £9.99/$14.99.

Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger are uniquely qualified to write a book on parenting that is deeply anchored in biblical theology and yet full of practical wisdom.

As many readers will be aware, the Köstenbergers are both on the faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: Andreas is Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, and Margaret is Associate Professor of Theology and Women's Ministry. They have written numerous theological books, both separately—e.g., Andreas's *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010)—and together—e.g., *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).
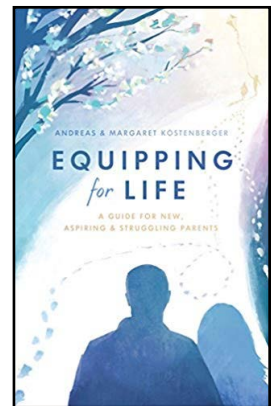
The Köstenbergers have also raised and home-schooled four children. It is this fact that forms the background for *Equipping for Life*. Throughout, the authors talk of their personal experiences of parenting with great honesty and humility. The book successfully brings out the voices of both a father and a mother: they share one heart and mind but speak from different perspectives.

Equipping for Life also draws on the Köstenbergers' academic research, explaining and applying it for lay Christians. It aims to equip parents with a biblical framework for parenting with purpose and perspective. In three parts, the book explains why parenting should be *realistic* (rather than overly idealistic), *relational* (rather than task-oriented), and *responsible* (rather than permissive).

In the introduction, the authors set out a brief biblical theology of parenthood: having children is part of bearing God's image, is grounded in the fatherhood of God, has been marred by the Fall, and can be restored in Christ. The concluding chapter reiterates much of this material in explaining how raising children fits into God's mission in the world. The intervening chapters are also rich with biblical references and illustrations.

Each chapter opens with a short study of some relevant Bible passages and finishes with some questions for personal application. Readers who want to explore the ideas further are well-served by extensive footnotes and a list of recommended resources at the back of the book.

Part one (chs. 1–3) examines how Christians can parent in a way that is *realistic*. This includes a thorough discussion of biblical discipline, which is more than just responding to misbehavior. It is "setting a child on a straight path, equipping them in moral formation and shaping of their character, so they will be 'complete, equipped for every good work'" (p. 60). Discipline should be consistent, age-appropriate, fair, child-specific, administered in love, future-oriented, and relational.

Parents also need to be realistic about their limitations. The Köstenbergers observe,

> Often the problem … is not lack of parenting skills, or even lack of spiritual maturity … but somewhat trivial factors at the intersection of fallenness and finitude, like stress, busyness, or fatigue. To cope with the pressures of life and parenting, parents need regular rest and refreshment. They need encouragement in relationships, instruction and mentoring, prayer, and community support" (p. 72).

This chapter also gives wise advice regarding the complex issues of sex, money, and parents-in-law.

Part Two (chs. 4–6) emphasizes the importance of *relational* parenting. First of all, parents should prioritize their children's relationship with God: "the Great Commission given by Jesus to make disciples starts at home" (p. 113).

Next, parents should cultivate strong relationships with their children. "Parenting is certainly more than a defined task to be accomplished whereby parenting goals are clearly identified, achieved, and measured.… Rather, parenting is in large part a growing, intimate, and trusting relationship with your child of supporting and equipping them for life" (pp. 121–22). The authors underscore the importance of parental presence for both fathers and mothers.

This section finishes with a chapter addresses how to be a peacemaker at home, which entails resolving disagreements and conflicts maturely, managing anger, and practicing forgiveness.

Part three (chs. 7–9) outlines how to parent *responsibly*. This begins with prioritizing your children's growth in character above their comfort or academic achievements.

Next, parents must take responsibility for their children's education. Here, the Köstenbergers make a strong case for homeschooling: it strengthens family bonds, can be tailored to children's interests, allows greater control over the curriculum, and is more flexible. Education covers more than academics: it involves preparing children for "life, faith, marriage, family and career" (p. 221).

The final chapter of Part three shows how parents can help their children to find their place in God's mission. This involves helping them to discern their vocation and to identify their natural and spiritual gifts. The Köstenbergers finish with a lengthy discussion of how to prepare children for marriage.

Equipping for Life will prove a helpful resource for all Christian parents. However, the authors' strong views about mothers and work may challenge some readers.

From the outset, the Köstenbergers make a case for distinct roles for fathers and mothers in the home.

> Throughout Scripture, the man is shown as called to work and provide for his family, and to lead his family.… The woman is shown to be called to a primary role in relation to her husband and children, one which involves devotion to making the home a nurturing and supportive environment for her family. In all of this, the man and the woman together partner in "exercising dominion," that is, taking care of God's good creation, in large part, in and through the God-given family structure. (p. 39)

This is a helpful statement. Yet, in terms of practical advice, the Köstenbergers' vision seems to involve fathers and mothers exercising dominion in separate spheres: the man at work and the woman at home. The authors sometimes present motherhood and work as mutually exclusive, suggesting, for example, that even a few hours' work a week amounts to a failure to "trust God and live out the biblical design—to stay at home" (pp. 130–31).

The authors explain the structure and function of ancient households with regard to the education of children. But it is important to recognize that ancient households were also economic units: the home

was a place of work. Consequently, some mothers *did* work alongside (or as well as) their husbands; only they did not usually have to leave home or put their children into childcare to do so.

Given that the Bible does not present us with an either-or here (e.g., Prov 31:10–31), the book could perhaps better serve parents not only by emphasizing the distinct roles of mothers and fathers, but also by encouraging a greater integration of the spheres of home and work so that both parents can contribute to education and discipline of their children *and* to their family's work or "dominion" in the world.

Notwithstanding this criticism, *Equipping for Life* is a valuable resource for parents, providing a broad, biblical perspective along with practical examples and advice. The Köstenbergers conclude, "Parenting takes place at the intersection of three missions that encompass the parents, the child, and ultimately God. The mission of parenting … involves equipping children for their particular mission in life and takes place within the larger scope of the mission of God: raising up a people who love and serve Him for His glory!" (p. 229).

Harriet Connor
Lakes Anglican Church
Kanwal, New South Wales, Australia

Kathleen Nielson. *Women and God: Hard Questions, Beautiful Truth*. London: The Good Book Company, 2018. 175 pp. £8.99/$16.99.

Kathleen Nielson is no stranger to writing about women and God. She has authored several books and Bible studies, and edited volumes on the topics of women and women's ministries. So what does her latest book add to this already comprehensive library?

While at first glance this is a book about women, it is also, if not primarily, a book about God. It is, as the title suggests, a book about women and our relationship with God. In her introduction, Nielson poses a question, which becomes the lens through which the book is written: "Is God is sexist?" (p. 11). That is, does God have a bias against women, even though they, like men, are his images bearers? It's not a new question, of course. But in the era of #MeToo, rejection of (often sinful) patriarchal models and practices, along with ongoing disputes about how women should serve in the church, genuine questions about the goodness of God toward women find fertile ground. The aim of Nielson's book, therefore, "is to ask how the God Christians believe in views women, and to address fears that he may not view them entirely positively" (p. 11). To fulfill this aim, she traces how God has related to his female image bearers throughout the Bible.

So does Nielson present a compelling case that God isn't in fact sexist? I won't be spoiling anything by revealing that she does indeed conclude that God positively affirms the equality and dignity of women with men as his image bearers. From an overview of the biblical material, Nielson contends that passages which may appear at first glance to show God discriminating, marginalizing or relegating women, actually reveal his protection, affirmation and love for them. She seeks to challenge views which lead some to conclude from Scripture that God doesn't value women. In fact, by highlighting and unpacking some interesting and often little examined texts of Scripture, she demonstrates that

the opposite is true. As a result, Nielson's efforts help us to have a right understanding of God's view of women.

In chapters 1–3, Nielson examines the early chapters of Genesis, particularly the relationship between men and women and their joint-rule over God's creation, while her final chapters (9–11) examine marriage and the principles and practices governing women serving in the local church. While these chapters contain interesting comments and conclusions about the distinctiveness of women, it is the middle section of the book (chs. 4–7) which is most likely to grab the reader's attention. Here Nielson unpacks some of the more difficult, and often avoided, passages of the Old Testament. The reader is thus brought into the mess of community life in Israel and how the complex and intricate details of the law reflects God's care and protection of women. Chapters 4–6 deal with divorce, sexual immorality, abuse, and uncleanness, and chapter 7 contains a thought-provoking exploration on the nature of the female body.

Throughout the book Nielson exercises a strong and sensitive pastoral tone. She recognizes the genuine struggle that some people, especially women, bring with them to the Scriptures and the difficulties caused by the issues mentioned above. She doesn't dismiss these struggles in any way but carefully and gently seeks to show how God's word reveals his loving, just and gracious character. In each chapter she helpfully directs us to Christ, where our ultimate identity is found.

And yet, if I had any frustration with the book it was with these important middle chapters. Here I often felt that more depth and detail was needed. In chapter 7, for instance, as Nielson engaged with the issue of exploitation of female bodies and the "deep pain" wrought by this "deep perversion of God's good creation of human bodies, especially female ones" (p. 117), I wanted her to continue to explore the issues of slavery, exploitation, and infertility. Nevertheless, as the book unfolded, I was left with a deep appreciation of Nielson's willingness to recognize these injustices and how they affect women today. I was also impressed by the way she reorients us back to God and his plan for and goodness towards women from creation, through salvation in Christ and into the new creation.

Overall, I believe Nielson has given us an excellent companion to other works in this field. One mistake to avoid is to think this as a book for only for women. We all need have our hearts and minds informed by the Bible, especially when it comes to how God views his image bearers. Too often, when a book is written discussing the nature and service of women, it doesn't make its way past the women's Bible study group. Yet it is just as important for men to read this book as they seek to encourage their Christian sisters in finding confidence in God's love of them.

Kara Hartley
Anglican Diocese of Sydney
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

John Piper. *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 328 pp. £23.99/$29.99.

John Piper is the founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and the chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. He previously served for thirty-four years as the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is the author of more than fifty books. This volume is the third in a trilogy of books (including *A Peculiar Glory* [2016] and *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* [2017]). This volume is written for pastors and those training for the pastorate.

The book, in accordance with its title, seeks to demonstrate that "preaching itself is worship and is appointed by God to awaken and intensify worship" (p. 51). This doxological orientation is explained and justified biblically and theologically. As is to be expected of Piper's writing, his familiar thesis that *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him* is applied to the task of preaching. The topic is addressed in seven parts, each demonstrating a careful line of argument that flows into the parts that follow.
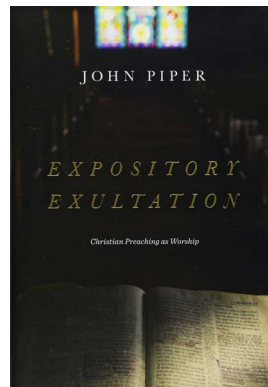
In the first part, "A Setting for Preaching," Piper gives a theological explanation of worship and justification for considering church as a "corporate worship." In the second part, he explains his description of preaching as "expository exultation" through an exploration of the biblical language used for preaching, and the "fittingness" for preaching to the church context. With the lexical study, Piper includes a sampling of preaching in biblical history, as well as a theological depiction of the appropriateness of preaching in correlation to the nature of God. His chapter on the Trinity (ch. 5) draws heavily on Jonathan Edward's essay on the Trinity.

In the third and fourth parts, Piper considers in turn both the supernatural work of preaching, and the natural powers employed in that work. The contrast and balance of these two sections is handled very well, cautioning that rhetoric won't achieve spiritual change, but also that preachers should make every effort to expend their natural powers in the cause of preaching. Piper contends for a compatibilism that does not set God's illumination and human effort at odds with each other. Integral to this argument is an exploration of "eloquence" in the Corinthian context. In these sections, there are two practical sections serving the respective topics of the supernatural (pp. 109–19) and natural in preaching (pp. 149–55).

In the final three parts of the book, Piper provides an examination of how the preacher ought to handle and proclaim the text. In section five, the focus is on the need for preachers to show their hearers the text of Scripture. In section six, Piper moves to demonstrate that textual constraint is necessary but not adequate in the pulpit, as there are often bigger theological issues impinging on the near context of Scripture. He sets forth three dominant themes that frame "reality" (a constant focus for the last three sections). These themes correspond to the persons of the Godhead: God's glory as the ultimate focus of the Bible (goal), Christ's crucifixion as the guarantor of every promise in Scripture (ground), and the Holy Spirit as the enabler of the transformed life leading to salvation (means). Each theme is defined clearly and demonstrated scripturally. Along with this descriptive work, there is an imperative for the preacher to maintain an emphasis on each of these three themes in each sermon. In section seven, a defense is given for each of the three themes being emphasized in preaching the Old Testament.

The book represents a rich balance of disciplined study of the Bible, theological synthesis, and occasional practical advice. The aim of Piper's book is to provide a theological account of preaching,

over-against a "how-to" manual. Though the text is not primarily practical, the theory bears great practical payload.

It is impressive how much ground Piper covers in one volume. However, the text is long (more than 300 pages). This length is not simply owing to thoroughness, but also to repetition. Piper's method is meticulous and obvious—appropriately so, as he contends for the necessity of preachers using sound logic (pp. 123–38)—but at points his transitions are cumbersome as he constantly restates ground already covered in order to continue building his argument.

The most intriguing, although potentially puzzling, aspect of Piper's book is his repeated stress on "the reality factor in the task of exposition" (p. 161). It is not immediately clear what Piper means by this notion, especially early in the work. The theme becomes frequent from part five on. Here Piper explains that "the content of preaching, in its essence, is not the biblical text (which, nevertheless, remains indispensable in all its details), but *the reality that the text is communicating*" (p. 160, emphasis original). However, in order to access this "reality," the preacher needs to know "not only the immediate intentions [the author] makes clear in the text, but also the all-encompassing vision of reality that governs the way [he] thinks about everything" (p. 190). Piper contends that all Scripture orients readers to worship (glory), through the work of Christ, as we are led by the Spirit. This reality must frame both our reading and our preaching of the Scriptures. While this is a helpful corrective to preaching that fails to expound particular texts within their larger authorial or canonical contexts, I still found Piper's concept somewhat vague, especially when it seemed at times to refer to something beyond the text—a "something" that is not always clear. Nevertheless, he is right to say that reality is perceived through the text, as he is to argue that preachers must give "rigorous attention to the very words of the biblical text and radical penetration into the reality the text aims to communicate" (p. 162).

The central thesis of Piper's book—that preaching is worship—prohibits pastors taking a perfunctory approach in the pulpit. This caution is not sounded lightly or predictably, but with *gravitas* appropriate to the task and the God whom the preacher serves. Piper writes, "The message of the preacher, the herald, is not merely a body of facts to be understood. It is a constellation of glories to be treasured" (p. 66). And later, "The preacher must aim at worship and act worship" (p. 86). Amen.

Further to this thesis, Piper upholds an appropriately theocentric focus for the preaching task. He won't allow preachers to settle for pandering to their listeners' itching ears. The sermon must not be about the audience. Instead, it must be a rich demonstration of the truth about God so that listeners' lives might be appropriately aligned. Only in focusing on God, and delighting in him, will the truest needs of the congregation be met.

In one of the more confronting parts of the book, Piper rebukes preachers, "You dare not pull rank…. You dare not tell your people 'Here's my view,' and then proceed as if it were true only because you say so" (p. 173). He is adamant that preachers must not simply speak of the truths of the text, but that listeners must see where the truths come from, and how they are presented to us (or developed) in the text. Thus, preachers must *show* their listeners the passage. One struggles to think of a message for pastors that is more necessary or urgent to hear.

The refreshing nature of this volume as a theological treatise on preaching will no doubt make it a book that will endure in both significance and influence. The work is to be commended to both pastors and students training for the pastorate.

Chase R. Kuhn
Moore Theological College
Newtown, New South Wales, Australia

Leland Ryken, ed. _The Soul in Paraphrase: A Treasure of Classic Devotional Poems_. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. 262 pp. £28.39/$35.00.


I have always longed to be better versed, so to speak, in poetry. My mother had the advantage of being taught poetry at school—taught how to read it, to recognize the forms, and best of all to memorize large amounts of it. I believe there is a great value in this—not only in understanding better the nuances of language and how to express thoughts well, but also in appreciating that there are some ideas and feelings that are best expressed through poetry. My own more science-based education had rejected the ineffable as fairly worthless, or at best harmless entertainment; if it can't be said in propositional prose, or better yet formal logic, it's probably not really worth saying.

I unthinkingly carried this through into my theology. Paul's letters, that's what we most need; why isn't the whole Bible like Romans? I am glad that a more mature view, indebted to wise teachers, has shown me the paucity of this approach to the Lord and his Word. The book of poetry under review has taken this a little further.

As Ryken points out in his introduction, this is not "inspirational verse." Such greeting-card and sunrise-poster fare is, he says, "versified prose. The content is thin and confined producing … 'bits and pieces' poetry" (p. 13). In contrast, Ryken has edited a volume of "substantial" poems. The poems selected are devotional, in that the subject matter is to do with the religious aspects of life. They also generally have a devotional _purpose_, to prompt the reader to consider more deeply God and spiritual truth, to awaken "a greater love of God and desire to be like him" (p. 14). They are what Ryken calls "lyric"—that is, poems that are either "meditative and reflective," or "emotional and affective" (p. 15). They express both thoughts and feelings. John Milton was so persuaded of poetry's importance that he was willing to spend his life as a poet when ministry in the Church of England was closed to him. Indeed, many forms of literature—poetry, novels, visual media—have such a massive effect on emotions and therefore hearts, that we neglect a major part of effective communication if we concentrate all our witness to God only in (nonetheless essential) logical prose.

Consider, for example, this expression of the way in which discontent and running after worldly things keeps us from real riches:

> Ten thousand absent things
> Did vex my poor and wanting mind,
> Which, till I be no longer blind,
> Let me not see the King of Kings. (Thomas Traherne, _Poverty_, p. 140).
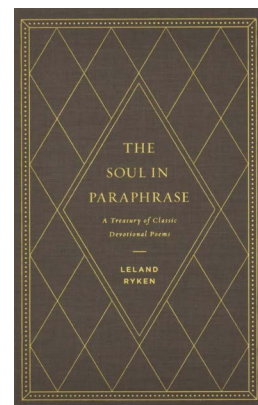
My sentence summary above has nothing of the emotive power of the poetic expression. Another poem similarly comments on the experience of the author's house being destroyed by fire:

> Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
> And did thy wealth on earth abide,
> Didst fix thy hope on moldering dust,
> The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
> Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
> That dunghill mists away may fly.
> Thou hast a house on high erect,
> Framed by that mighty Architect,
> With glory richly furnished
> Stands permanent, though this be fled.
> It's purchased and paid for too
> By him who hath enough to do.
> A price so vast as is unknown,
> Yet by his gift is made thine own.
> There's wealth enough; I need no more.
> Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store.
> The world no longer let me love;
> My hope and treasure lies above. (Anne Bradstreet, *Verses upon the Burning of Our House*, p. 136)

It is one thing to know the doctrinal truth that because we have treasure in heaven, we need not fear loss of earthly goods; it is another to feel it as absolutely true in the heart. Poetry can help take our hearts there.

On another topic, consider some lines of George Herbert on why God make humans so restless:

> "For if I should," said he,
> "Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
> He would adore my gifts instead of me,
> And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
> So both should losers be." (George Herbert, *The Pulley*, p. 92).

Had God given humans rest now, the poem expresses, we would not worship God, but idolize his gift. Here also is an echo of Augustine's dictum: "our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Conf.* 1.1). The truth of this, and God's mercy in making us so, is brought alive in Herbert's work.

No doubt there is far more that a more expert reader than I could bring out to demonstrate the way in which the gift of poetry adds so much to minds and hearts in response to God. It is something previous generations understood very well, and too few do now; perhaps this is the reason for what I see as the one weakness of this volume, that the selection is all historical (the most recent poet is T. S. Eliot).

Why do we not read more poetry? Ryken points to one reason, perhaps, when he comments that "a poem that requires more pondering and analysis from us than a poem that requires less is a poem that yields more" (p. 16). The most moving and rich poetry is hard to read. It takes concentration and effort; I would also suggest that it takes more education in such kinds of reading than is offered in many modern educational systems. For this reason, it is valuable that Ryken provides a commentary and notes

on particular words for each poem. I am very grateful for this help; my reading of the poems has been much more rewarding as a result.

What we also need is more exposure to poetry. The more we are moved by a poem the more likely we are to try another one; it's as simple as that.

How might we achieve that? Amidst all the other things we wish our congregations to take up, dare we add an appreciation of poetry? That depends on context; but the occasional poem as part of a Sunday service, or before a Bible study, might not go astray. I can imagine sermons usefully quoting a few judiciously chosen lines of poetry here and there. It would have to be worth quoting; Ryken here has done the work of selection for us. Talented people might even set them to music; many classic hymns have developed that way.

As it is, I fear that poetry is generally confined to, and has a reputation of being for, the effete and learned, or cutting-edge trendy subculture. That is a shame, especially given our long Christian tradition of devotional poetry, as demonstrated in Ryken's collection (his first poem is from the seventh-century farmhand-turned-monk, Caedmon). It is also a shame given what is often lamented in rigorous Bible-believing congregations, that we do not have enough emotional depth of Christian life. Poetry helps provides that depth. Let us take advantage of it.

Kirsten Birkett
St Paul's Church, Hadley Wood
London, England, UK

Jemar Tisby. _The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism_. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. ix + 306 pp. £14.99/$21.99.

I was eager to find in this book a resource for teaching history and waking others to the painful legacies of racism in the United States in general, and among professing Christians in particular. Though I'm not that familiar with "The Witness" or "Pass The Mic," nor am I a regular reader of Tisby's blog, I am aware of his perspective and project regarding racial justice. I share his biblical convictions that sin and injustice, just like things good and right, are always expressed corporately in cultural and institutional, not merely personal or individualistic, ways. Some call this "structural evil." (That's simply good biblical anthropology which includes an accurate theology of fallen creation and culture[s].) And these unjust social norms are usually perpetrated unknowingly by those who benefit from them. The church is called to do, and be, better in Christ. On the last few pages of the first chapter, Tisby notes the following Scriptures as among those that reveal "the imperative for immediate action" against racial injustice: 2 Corinthians 7:9–10, Revelation 7:9, Matthew 6:10, Ephesians 2:14, and John 19:30. "The church needs the Carpenter from Nazareth to deconstruct the house that racism built and remake it into a house for all nations," Tisby prophetically invokes. Whereas _complicit_ Christianity "forfeits its moral authority by devaluing the image of God in people of color," _courageous_ Christianity "embraces racial and ethnic diversity" (p. 24; cf. p. 215). Racism in the church and in broader society inhibits the kind of mutually
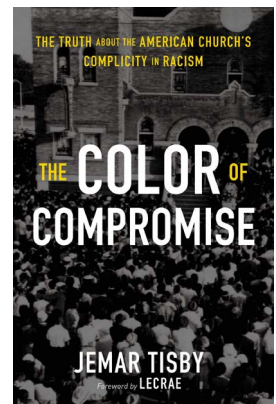
edifying diversity that God intends by disadvantaging persons of color and thus fueling the division of black and white Christians.

For Tisby, one way to define racism is "*prejudice plus power*" (p. 16, emphasis original). In fact, this differentiation between racism and mere prejudice is fundamental to his perspective and argument. Even someone who would deny being prejudiced can nonetheless participate in a power dynamic that benefits them and harms others. They may, therefore, need to deal with racism in their life, prejudice aside. Likewise, a person who has recognized and confessed prejudice on their part might realize the need to pursue justice in ways beyond the purely relational to repent fully from racism. "In the United States," says Tisby, "power runs along color lines, and white people have the most influence" (p. 17). His thesis is that "Christians participated in this system of white supremacy—a concept that identifies white people and white culture as normal and superior—even if they claim people of color as their brothers and sisters in Christ" (p. 16). Again, "Historically speaking, when faced with the choice between racism and equality, the American church has tended to practice a complicit Christianity rather than a courageous Christianity. They chose comfort over constructive conflict and in so doing created and maintained a status quo of injustice" (p. 17). Tisby clearly aims to motivate certain specific responses on the part of his readers today.

When I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, "white supremacy" meant the ideology that was explicitly espoused by neo-Nazi skinheads. Because of that baggage, it's been hard for me to accept the usefulness of the term in today's discussion about race, politics, and culture(s) in the US (as Tisby employs it: pp. 16, 18, 22, 24, 57, 75, 86, 111, 118, 129, 190 and 201). A careful reading of Tisby's narrative, though, has helped me empathize with his perspective that "white supremacy" is an accurate way of naming and framing the harmful social *and ecclesial* outcomes of functioning as if white culture is "normal and superior" (p. 16).

Tisby adds an important caveat: "The goal of this book is not guilt … not to show white believers how bad they are" (p. 22). That said, he explicitly notes the delimitation of his study and its (appropriate) historiographic agenda:

> The focus is mainly on racist acts and actors. This emphasis is purposeful. American Christians have never had trouble celebrating their victories, but honestly recognizing their failures and inconsistencies, especially when it comes to racism, remains an issue.… *The Color of Compromise* undoes the tendency to skip the hard parts of history and directs the reader's attention to the realities that have been under examined because they challenge the triumphalist view of American Christianity. (p. 20)

The book moves through American history with respective chapters on the colonial era, the age of revolution, the antebellum period, the Civil War, Jim Crow, the civil rights movement, the end of the twentieth century, and the current cultural moment.

The story Tisby tells that disturbed me most was that of the gang rape of a young black woman, Recy Taylor, by six white young men in Abbeville, Alabama in 1944. The men stopped their car to harass, humiliate, and assault Ms. Taylor while she walked home from an evening worship service of Rock Hill Holiness Church (p. 104). The black church has shockingly embodied in many ways and many eras the experience of a persecuted church, something that more missions-minded believers and "world Christianity" focused scholars like myself usually associate with the church in some majority world countries. The accounts of torture, rape, and unjust policies during Southern slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow reminded me of the horrendous legacy of racialized discrimination and even massive

amounts of white-on-black terrorism that has been a major part of the history of the United States. The book exposes the uninitiated to the fact that racism was pervasive in areas of the North as well, with sundown laws in many towns (p. 103) and numerous lynchings (pp. 106–7).

Tisby has done a service to the church in the US by pulling together into one volume so much significant national backstory too often neglected. That includes not only white supremacy but the commendable lives of many black scholars, pastors, civil rights activists, and other figures, both male and female. It was so helpful to be reminded by *The Color of Compromise* of such significant components, dignifying and traumatic, of the historical memory and felt identity of many African Americans, including my brothers and sisters in Christ. By rehearsing this history, white social and political conservatives might start to understand why the majority of their black brothers and sisters don't share their same political priorities and party. Certain systems that most US citizens can trust actually can make others, however, feel "trapped" (p. 142). Tisby provides a Christian perspective on the Religious Right and Black Lives Matter movements, one that is probably unfamiliar to many white evangelical political conservatives but one that needs to be humbly considered for a better understanding of both phenomena. The foreword by Lecrae exposes white readers to how he, Tisby, and many other believers feel that the church histories and theologies produced by white Christians usually disregard the image of God as it is "on magnificent display" in brothers and sisters of color by ignoring their contributions to the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church (pp. 10–11). White evangelical academics need to hear that perspective, and we need to modify our curricula accordingly (p. 204).

The book is not purely any particular genre, employing historical survey and interpretation with ideological pronouncements and proposals for certain actions in the face of current injustices. That makes it difficult to categorize and, frankly, uncomfortable to critique. My best summary of the book's method is this: first, present plenty of gut wrenching evidence of explicit racism by whites against blacks in various eras of US history, beginning in the colonial era; then, note the simultaneous presence of white Christians and assert absence (for the most part) of objections or lack of opposition to racism; finally, assume (rather than reason for) the axiom, "The refusal to act in the midst of injustice is itself an act of injustice" (p. 15). Tisby works from the premise that because systemic racial injustice "has always" been present in the US, taking different shapes at different times, then it must still be present today, even though there is no "smoking gun" (p. 160). History matters, and patterns are critically important to consider in exegeting the present, but Tisby's historical survey can only be a partial argument for "what is" now.

Tisby's stated goal is to write a history of Christian inaction and often silent complicity. That is admittedly difficult to document. This reviewer was hoping for more primary source material exposing the racism of Christian institutions. Yet Tisby admits that his book is "not an academic history text" (p. 220, n. 13). Rather, his narrative is broad and selective in order to serve as an introduction to the topic and its scholarship (pp. 17–18). He thus engages in a "top down" reliance on secondary sources and avoids historiographic discussion in the main body of the text (p. 219, n. 13). Perhaps that's why I didn't feel I ever directly encountered the prominent "chorus of [Christian] complicity" in white supremacy that he rightly notes "drowned out" the few faithful Christian voices (p. 69).

I was already familiar with much of the history covered by *The Color of Compromise*. But it motivated me to pick up and read James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011). That book is more detailed historically (with the greater amount of primary source material I wanted from Tisby), and more lyrical. It wrecked me for days as I solemnly worked through it. More than 4,000

African American men, women, and boys were lynched between 1880 and 1940 in both the North and South. (In 1901, Mark Twain called the nation, "The United States of Lyncherdom" [*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, p. 95].) Cone exposes how lynchings were often public—and publicized beforehand—displays of white supremacy around which entire towns might come together, grotesquely, with picnic lunches and eyes ready to gawk. I now better grasp the utterly evil reality of this part of my country's history. Cone's book is also more theological in that it articulates, often in their own words, how black Christians in the US found in lynching a way to poignantly understand the suffering and shame of the cross of Christ, which Gwendolyn Brooks called in 1957, "the loveliest lynchee" (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, pp. 97–98). Cone remarks it was "unthinkingly perilous" to openly fight white supremacy in the deep South during the 1950s and 1960s (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, p. 77). Yet he also shows how black Christians found in Jesus's "redemptive suffering," resurrection, "divine presence," friendship, solidarity, and promises hope to hold onto, write poetry about, and even sing out together in the midst of terror and marginalization. Regrettably, Cone explicitly distances himself—and Martin Luther King, Jr.—from "various classical theories" of the atonement in "the history of Western theology" (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, pp. 84–85, 150).

In the concluding chapter of *The Color of Compromise*, titled "The Fierce Urgency of Now" (drawn from King's "I Have a Dream" speech), Tisby uses the mnemonic "ARC" to propose applications (probably from King's "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice"): Awareness, Relationships, Commitment. For greater awareness, Tisby suggests watching documentaries and diversifying one's social media feed. For more diversity in one's relationship network, he suggests pursuing friendships via new hangouts and activities. (I'd add we ought also to pray for friends different from us and from whom we can learn other ways of seeing things and following Christ.) Tisby has much more to suggest for the third major response to racism in the US ("commitment"): create something that speaks to the issue of racial justice, such as a book or Sunday School class; support civic and ecclesiastical reparations (arguing from Scripture and the proposals of PCA pastor Duke Kwon); take down Confederate monuments; learn from the black church how to lament and rejoice in the midst of trial; start a new seminary with a diverse faculty, staff, and board (which is easier to do than change an existing seminary, he says); host "freedom schools" on the history of injustice and conduct pilgrimages for experiential learning; make Juneteenth (June 19th) a national holiday; participate in "the modern day civil rights movement" by pursuing criminal justice reform, etc.; publicly denounce racism; and start a civil rights movement toward certain Christian institutions via sit-ins and boycotts. Here is Tisby the activist in his element.

I found the specter of the pre-civil rights legislation "moderate Christian" (those to whom King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was addressed)—not openly prejudiced, but not yet ready for "the fierce urgency of now"—haunting the book's pages. For instance, while Tisby notes that Jonathan Edwards Jr. was an abolitionist, the point is to emphasize his father's "moderate" posture towards slave holding (pp. 50–51). Whereas Charles Finney (pp. 68–69) and Abraham Lincoln (p. 74) are noted as abolitionist(s), Tisby points out (rightly) that neither man perceived or promoted the full equality of blacks with whites in the US. In Chapter 5, Billy Graham is posed simply as a moderate who at times resisted segregation but who also affirmed the "law and order" rhetoric of the 1960s that was heard by African Americans as implicitly racist. (For a more in-depth study of Billy Graham's ministry, including his complicated relationship with the civil rights movement, see Grant Wacker's *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2014].) On the other hand, several times Tisby cites Mark Noll's *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006), which I recommend for a well-parsed study of the complex relationship between the abolitionist movement and bible

believing Christians. Tisby also draws attention to Olaudah Equiano's classic calling-out of merely "nominal" Christianity among colonial whites of the eighteenth century (pp. 30–31). Thomas Kidd's new book, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), is a sustained and nuanced treatment of the multi-form white American evangelical movement's variegated relationship with race, politics, and social action. I think Kidd, like Equiano, signals the significant theological, pastoral, and apologetic reality that not all who claim evangelical identity may actually be born again. Tisby, however, doesn't dwell on this factor.

Racism was for too long treated in US pop culture and the public schools as merely a historical (and Southern) phenomenon, as a wrong that others had perpetrated. That mythology removed ordinary contemporary majority culture people, especially Northerners, from the stain of it. I agree with Tisby and others that our society has failed to adequately deal with the history of slavery and segregation in a way that would lead to greater understanding, compassion, mutual trust, and justice. Something like a truth and reconciliation commission would be helpful. Making Juneteenth a national holiday to commemorate Emancipation in 1865 seems obvious to me. The assumption/assertion that whites who are not engaged in the remedies that Tisby proposes are in fact complicit in racism today is, of course, the most controversial aspect of the book. Indeed, it's a foundational axiom upon which he builds his case for action. Each of his (ARC) prescribed responses should be considered, perhaps debated, on its own merit(s). To fairly weigh those merits, we must turn with humble and courageous urgency to other sources.

Travis L. Myers
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Christopher Watkin. *Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017. xviii + 169 pp. £14.50/$17.99.

This review is unusual for two reasons. First, the book's title—*Thinking Through Creation*—suggests that it belongs in the Systematic Theology review section, whereas the subtitle—*Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique*—pushes it toward either the Old Testament or the Missions and Culture sections. And yet, here it is in Ethics and Pastoralia! Why so? As we'll see, the book's concerns are sufficiently diverse that it could legitimately appear in any of these sections. Its presence here is bound up with the second reason this review is unusual. And that is that it's a joint-review—written by me, Rob Smith, with my ministry colleague, Steve Frederick. My primary interest in *Thinking Through Creation* is as a teacher of Christian ethics; Steve's is as a pastor and, in particular, with the book's usefulness for ministry to university students. In the review that follows, therefore, we want to highlight the book's relevance to both of these areas of interest. But first let me introduce Christopher Watkin and then outline the purpose, shape and substance of the book.
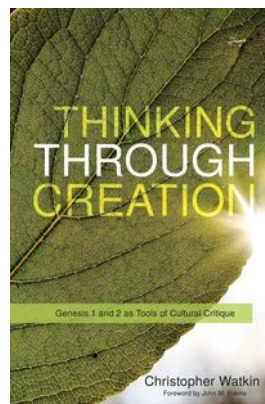
Watkin, a Reformed evangelical philosopher-theologian, is senior lecturer in French studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Over the last decade, he has written numerous books, including: *From Plato to Postmodernism: The Story of Western Culture through Philosophy, Literature*

and Art (2011); *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Badiou, Meillassoux and Nancy* (2011); *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human in Badiou, Meillassoux, Malabou, Serres and Latour* (2016); *Jacques Derrida* (2017); *Michel Foucault* (2018) and *Michel Serres: Figures of Thought* (forthcoming). *Thinking Through Creation* is also the first in a series of books working through the meaning and implications of the various acts of the biblical drama—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Those familiar with Reformed presuppositional apologetics will appreciate immediately what Watkin is seeking to do in *Thinking Through Creation*. For, as John Frame notes in the forward, the book is built on the conviction that "Scripture presents not only a way of salvation but a distinctive worldview—a philosophy in which God is Creator-Lord and the world is his creature-servant" (p. ix). For Watkin, this puts Christians in a position to "not only explain the Bible to our culture, but also explain our culture through the Bible" (p. xiii). Such an explanation takes us beyond apologetics to (what Alvin Plantinga calls) "Christian philosophical criticism" and "Positive Christian philosophy" (p. 5). This, in turn, commits us to (what Watkin helpfully labels) *biblical theory*—"a way of addressing all the facets of contemporary culture and society with a particular set of [biblically derived] convictions, concerns, values, questions, and ideals" (p. 6).

In developing such a "theory," Watkin is concerned to explore both sides of the Creator-creature distinction. Consequently, the book is as much about the implications of the doctrine of God as it is about the meaning of creation. In chapter 2, therefore, he invites us to think about our culture through the Trinity, arguing that "the Trinity provides Christians with a way of understanding and living in the world that is both more sophisticated and more beautiful than extrabiblical alternatives" (p. xiv). In the process, readers are introduced to Watkin's preferred tool for cultural analysis: *diagonalization*—a term that conveys a blend of 'both-and' plus 'neither-nor,' and functions as "a way of navigating the false dichotomies that litter contemporary culture and thought that neither straightforwardly refuses nor simply embraces them" (p. xiv). The chapter concludes with an important discussion of the way in which biblical Trinitarianism places a "will to charity (*agape*)" rather than "the *libido dominandi* ('will to power') at the heart of reality" (p. 38).

In chapter 3, Watkin opens up Genesis 1–2 in order to draw out the intellectual and social implications of the biblical account of the creation. Here he shows how the Bible diagonalizes both the contemporary fact-value dichotomy and the current debates about the relationship between language and reality. In addition to this, he elaborates a distinctively Christian understanding of beauty, suggesting that "both a mania for rabid efficiency and a sterile or indulgent aestheticism are reductions of the richer biblical truth that God's creation marries beauty and functionality" (p. 66).

In chapter 4, Watkin turns more specifically to what Genesis 1–2 teach us about human beings. Here he shows how the biblical account of humanity's creation in God's image not only contrasts with various cultural alternatives but is "liable to resonate more deeply with our values and intuitions than do competing accounts" (p. xv). He illustrates this by paying particular attention to the questions of human dignity and equality. He then shows how the creation mandate provides "a foundation and catalyst for incisive and sophisticated interventions into the areas of ecology and environmentalism and also an imperative for Christians to be involved in cultural production in all spheres of society" (p. xv). He concludes the chapter with an exploration of the cultural significance of the Sabbath.

The book's conclusion not only unpacks Watkin's aim in writing but expounds at greater length the need for the kind of "kategorics" (i.e., scrutinizing other systems of thought through a biblical lens) he

has sought to demonstrate throughout. Importantly, he stresses that the kind of biblical theory he is advocating "will not just critique contemporary culture and society, but provide a vision for its future flourishing" (p. 142).

There is much more that could be said—like the fact that each chapter of the book concludes with lists of "Cultural Patterns," "Biblical Patterns" and "Key Terms and Names," followed by questions "For Further Study" and suggestions "For Further Reading"—but it's time to hear from Steve.

Even before I (Steve) turned the final page of *Thinking Through Creation*, I was already making a mental list of various university students with whom I might re-read it. The book, of course, has plenty to offer readers beyond the confines of the campus (preachers and schoolteachers, for example). But it is unique in the way it wonderfully models the kind of conversations that are possible between the Christian faith and contemporary secular thought; conversations that are often assumed to be both impossible and unwelcome at university.

The fields of politics, anthropology, philosophy, and science have at times drawn their own battle-lines of disagreement with each other. What they often agree about is that theology has little to contribute to the conversation. Watkin, however, not only illustrates how well theology addresses the intractable dichotomies that bedevil current philosophical and moral debates, but he does so by diving wholeheartedly into one of the most culturally despised parts of Scripture: Genesis 1–2.

Throughout the book, Watkin poses the kind of questions that new university students inevitably find themselves grappling with—the Euthyphro dilemma; the diversity versus unity debate; objective versus subjective perspectives on the nature of language; the tension between functional and aesthetic definitions of "the good"; the fact/value dichotomy; nature versus nurture.

Discipling university students has led me into a myriad of these conversations. Unfortunately, the discussions have often petered out before we were really able to establish how Scripture ought to shape our thinking. This is where Watkin's book excels as a tool for schooling us in both the reading of Scripture and the reading of everything else through it. Time and again, he models how careful attention to the text can open up whole new ways of discussing important questions. In other words, Watkin does far more than simply suggest Christian answers to secular debates. Rather he shows how to approach the world's questions via Scripture's own way of viewing the cosmos.

So, with my little posse of students fresh from their literature, philosophy, and religious studies classes, I dove into the book for a second time. What happened? First, we were greatly helped by the fact that each chapter introduced us to a key point of contention in modern secularist thought, often summarized with a simple diagram. (These diagrams also proved useful as a way of getting all the students on the same page, especially if some hadn't read the whole chapter in advance.) Watkin then introduced us to a key text from Genesis 1–2, supplied a number of salient exegetical and theological insights, and showed how biblical truth compares with other worldviews. Finally, he skillfully reframed the initial question or controversy in a way that was genuinely insightful, personally challenging and unashamedly biblical. The discussions generated not only discipled us in our knowledge of God but tutored us in the distinctive shape love will take when it flows from God's own nature into the lives of his creatures.

We have nothing but praise for this book, highly commend its pedagogical utility and greatly look forward to subsequent volumes in the series.

Robert S. Smith
Sydney Missionary and Bible College
Croydon, New South Wales, Australia

Steve Frederick
St Andrew's Cathedral
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Paul Bowers, ed. *Christian Reflection in Africa: Review and Engagement*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2018. xvi + 784 pp. £49.99/$79.99.

"Honey, we're going to Africa!" This is the message my wife received from me in 1979 when as a newly minted seminary graduate, I signed on to help start a theological seminary in Africa. *Honey, We're Going to Africa!* is also the title of the autobiography of a pioneering missionary in southern Sudan in the years 1948 to 1976. It is one of 1,200 books reviewed in this remarkable and engaging volume *Christian Reflection in Africa* (henceforth *CRA*), which deals with a large and diverse sampling of books about Africa and African Christianity published between 1986 and 2016. Sub-Saharan Africa is the primary focus, and topics run the gamut from the pastoral and the practical to the academic and the theological to the secular and the political. The purpose of this collection, as the editor explains in the preface, is "to facilitate informed Christian reflection and engagement in Africa through thoughtful encounter with the published intellectual life of the continent" (p. xi). This is one resource that I wish above all others could have been in my luggage as I set out years ago on my twenty-eight-month sojourn in Africa.
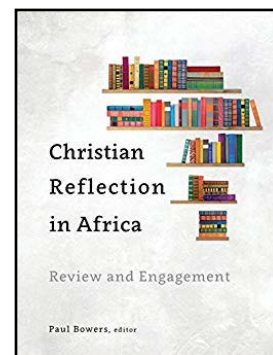
The reviews assembled here originally appeared in the African based journal *BookNotes for Africa* from its inception in 1996 until 2016. Reviews average about 300 words in length and are written from a broadly evangelical perspective. Over 100 reviewers took part in the project. All are from Africa or served in Africa over a long period. Most have been involved in theological education there, and nearly all have earned doctorates. The entire project beginning in 1996 was carried out under the able leadership of Paul Bowers. Bowers grew up in Liberia, the son of missionaries, earned a PhD in biblical studies from the University of Cambridge, and has dedicated his career to the advancement of theological education in Africa.

The books reviewed appear in alphabetical order by author. Subject, title and author indexes are supplied to assist in navigation. The topics addressed fall broadly into three categories: (1) books about Africa in general, including its history and culture; (2) books specifically about African Christianity; and more specific still (3) books about African Christianity's quest for an authentically African Christian theology.

Books in the first category provide an essential foundation for anyone seeking to understand the African church today in its historical and cultural context. Numerous works of African history are reviewed, from single volume treatments of the continent to more narrowly focused accounts such as the history of Islam in Africa, the coming of colonial rule, the abolition of slavery, South African apartheid, and the civil war in Liberia. Other studies examine the political dynamics of modern Africa and the underlying causes of its persistent poverty. Others deal with such contemporary issues as tribalism, polygamy, radical Islam, and women's rights. Finally, a social dimension of great concern is Africa's traditional religious culture.

Many more books deal specifically with African Christianity. Topics range from the history of the movement to practical ministry guides to biblical scholarship. The breadth of historical studies can be seen from such titles as *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, *The East Africa Revival*, *A History of Medical Missions in Zimbabwe*, *The Church in Angola*, and *Honey, We're Going to Africa!* Practical tools for ministry include *Evangelizing Polygamous Families*, *Biblical Preaching in Africa*, *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa*, *AIDS is Real and It's in Our Church*, and *A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa*. Finally, *CRA* reviews a number of doctoral dissertations in the field of biblical studies produced by Africans, which testifies to the advancing maturity of African scholarship.

This brings us to our third category. A significant number of reviews in *CRA* assess the writings of theologians engaged in dialogue and debate as they seek to formulate a Christian theology that is distinctively and authentically African. With the coming of independence to the African nations from Western colonial rule in the 1960s, a movement arose among African intellectuals also to gain independence from the Western theology imported by missionaries and to develop a theology that was authentically African.

For this, they looked to the pre-Christian religions of Africa's past. From these, they sought to find continuity with Africa's present: As God gave the Jews the Old Testament to prepare them for the coming of Christ, did he not also give Africans their traditional religions to the same end? This approach finds its home in the ecumenical movement of Africa. Evangelicals, on the other hand, while not denying that some insight can be gained from Africa's religious heritage, have generally found this approach misguided. See, for example, reviews 115 and 828 that consider works by Kwame Bediako and Charles Nyamiti, respectively. For them, what makes a theology both authentically African and authentically Christian is supplying biblically based solutions to the distinctive needs and issues facing the African Christian community today. These include AIDS, tribalism, poverty, corruption, marriage, divorce, witchcraft, spirit possession, curses, and others.

CRA documents the numerous contributions of evangelicals to this ongoing project. The history of Christian thought shows that theology, starting with the New Testament, has been hammered out in the midst of controversy. The present effort to formulate an African Christian theology appears to be no exception. It is to the great credit of *CRA* that it provides such extended coverage of this historic debate.

This collection of reviews is a significant achievement and will have value for years to come for all readers who wish to engage with African Christianity, whether students, teachers, librarians, church leaders, missionaries or academic researchers. Regarding its limitations, I think a newcomer to the continent might ask, "With so many books, where does the beginner begin?" For them, some "training wheels" would have been welcome, such as a list of suggested readings and perhaps a brief orientation to the ongoing quest for an authentic African theology. Speaking as a former newcomer, my only real

complaint is that such a book was not available to me years ago when I announced to my wife, "Honey, we're going to Africa!"

James O. Routt
Biblical Education by Extension
Austin, Texas, USA

Andrew T. Kaiser. *Encountering China: The Evolution of Timothy Richard's Missionary Thought (1870–1891)*. Evangelical Missiological Society Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019. xix + 261 pp. £27.00/$34.00.

Due to the stereotypes about evangelicals and their social conservatism, a friend of mine likes to introduce them by saying, Historically, evangelicals are the Christians who resisted slavery, started orphanages, embraced women in ministry, and reached out to immigrants. It appears Andrew Kaiser is another such iconoclastic friend who is determined to flip assumptions about evangelicalism on their head. He argues that Timothy Richard (1845–1919), one of the most brilliant and controversial missionaries to China, did not depart from his evangelical faith when he forsook street preaching, promoted science, dedicated himself to famine relief, or heralded Buddhist sectarian texts as repositories of truth. On the contrary, these provocative moves were but expressions of Richard's uncompromising commitment to the conversion of China's millions.
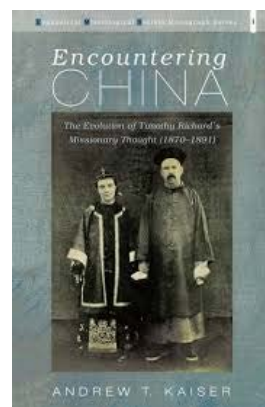
To make the case, Kaiser sorts through an extraordinary collection of diaries, letters, mission periodicals, and essays that all poured out of Richard's restless pen. His careful reading of the sources reveals Richard making momentous and sometimes startling moves in missionary practice, not because he drifted toward liberal Christianity, as some have argued, but because he was driven by three core commitments: an evangelical passion for the lost, a deep empathy for China, and an uncompromising results-oriented pragmatism (p. 230).

Once the reader grasps those intertwined motivations, nothing Richard does seems out of character. Why would a missionary stop the almost universal evangelical mission strategy of preaching on the street? Because, in Richard's words, it was "not very productive of good results," and provided "no success worth mentioning" (p. 42). Far better, Richard discovered, was preparing a poster with a few words, something clear enough to raise questions but enigmatic enough to drive the truly curious to search for answers. After hanging such a poster on a city wall, Richard would settle into an inn for a meal. Before long, he reported with satisfaction, seekers would surround him, kneel before him, and beg to be told the good news (p. 89).

Those kinds of conversations taught Richard that his listeners were unmoved by his appeals to scripture when he tried to prove the veracity of what he said. The Bible held no authority for Buddhists or members of a Chinese popular religion. He needed to address "*Chinese* difficulties" and provide "answers as would satisfy *them*" (p. 47). After a search of China's religious texts, he concluded that the weightiest evidence he could provide in China was moral evidence. Richard wrote, "If we could excel the

Chinese in charity to the sick, the poor, the suffering, and in giving education, then we should possess evidences which the Chinaman's conscience would approve and follow" (p. 86).

When famine devastated North China, it was then time to practice what he preached. Richard, and the people converted through his ministry, immediately responded by giving to the poor. When personal funds ran out, Richard appealed for help. Aid from foreigners and Chinese people alike buoyed his relief efforts in Shandong's interior, allowing his church to work with local officials to feed the poor, house the orphans, and comfort the dying. When word came that matters were somehow even worse in the province of Shanxi, a remote territory with no Protestant presence, Richard responded empathetically, and members of his church offered to accompany him to his new post (p. 118).

After enduring four years of drought that took the lives of somewhere between nine and thirteen million people, Richard campaigned for changes to prevent such a catastrophe from ever happening again. He provided scientific demonstrations to public officials, hoping to convince them of the usefulness of meteorological data. He campaigned for railways to bring in grain quickly in case of another such disaster. He pushed for modernization and political reforms. Spending so much time with Chinese leaders meant spending less time preaching, which aggravated Richard's newly arrived missionary colleagues. Yet he justified his actions by pointing to Jesus, who not only saved the soul but also fed and restored the body. His missionary work was kingdom work, if people had the eyes to see. And if they didn't, then at least they should acknowledge that he was still converting more people than the complaining upstarts combined (p. 198)!

Timothy Richard, this book insists, was a faithful evangelical. His methods may have changed over time, but his core convictions never wavered. In fact, they inspired his innovations. Richard wanted to see people saved. At least he did in the first half of his 46-year career. The author ends Richard's story at the point where the Baptist Missionary Society allowed him to direct the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese. What happened next? There are suggestions that if Richard's wife had lived longer, his "final flights of idealism would have been restrained" (p. 122). Was it only idealism, or did the publication of *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism* at the end of his career signal Richard had moved along a different theological trajectory? This book does not answer that question, but it does put that onus on others to prove any dramatic change. After all, as Kaiser effectively demonstrates, evangelicalism can be a wellspring of surprising moves in mission.

Daryl R. Ireland
Boston University School of Theology
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

W. Jay Moon. *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Encountering Mission. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 299 pp. £19.99/$30.00.

In *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, Jay Moon attempts a great challenge. He argues that disciple-making requires not more information but transformation of our worldviews. He endeavors to supply both theory and praxis to "on the ground—where we live" (p. xi). Moon even provides suggestions and activities at the end of each chapter to help apply the principles learned.

Writing for those missionary practitioners who seek to develop disciples in intercultural and multicultural contexts, he proposes that transformed lives of discipleship are first contingent upon a transformed worldview (p. 17). Moreover, Moon suggests that many do not make use of our God-given discipleship tools. Instead using "the entire toolbox" can bring transformation (p. xi).

Moon wants to help Christian disciple-makers avoid needlessly accommodating the target culture and beware of isolating their faith from the common cultural life altogether. Therefore, he builds firmly on Paul Hiebert's theory of the "excluded middle," expounding Hiebert's theory as "the intimate questions and concerns that require unseen spirit power and guidance to effect change in this world" (p. 31). He agrees with Hiebert's notion that disciples repent of sin and turn their allegiance to Christ, "moving toward Christ as the center for his or her life" (pp. 46–47). Accordingly, Moon defines intercultural discipleship as "the process of worldview transformation whereby Jesus followers center their lives on the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33) and obey Christ's commands in culture (Matt 28:19–20), utilizing culturally available genres" (p. 53).

Using these principles for worldview transformation, he specifically applies them to disciple-making in oral cultures. Discussing the process of critical contextualization that endeavors to "to instill the cultural forms with Christian meaning in order to form a Christian worldview" (p. 131), he argues for *holistic* discipleship, which "transforms worldviews by integrating the words and deeds of Jesus in the development of the community such that both are crucial for Christian witness and discipleship" (p. 209). He provides a four-step process of critical contextualization that evaluates and utilizes the use of cultural symbols, rituals, stories, proverbs, music, dance, and drama for discipleship. This process includes a phenomenological study, an ontological critique, a critical evaluation, and missiological transformation. When followed well, as Moon argues, this process produces worldview transformation.

Avoiding a predictable programmatic approach, Moon's approach is refreshingly relational and community oriented. He suggests, "Christian discipleship is a relational journey whereby learners obey the commands of Jesus, such that their worldview is transformed" (p. 66). Moon provides helpful examples from church history and other case studies to buttress his theoretical framework. However, though he highlights the benefits of critical contextualization and underscores the need to rightly interpret the target culture and Scripture within a hermeneutical community, he does not equally provide examples of those cultural elements that must be rejected in order to faithfully pledge allegiance to Christ and his kingship over fallen culture.

Moon's approach is helpful and fresh, yet since he relies heavily on Paul Hiebert's theories of the excluded middle, centered sets, and critical contextualization, his method is not without its pushback.
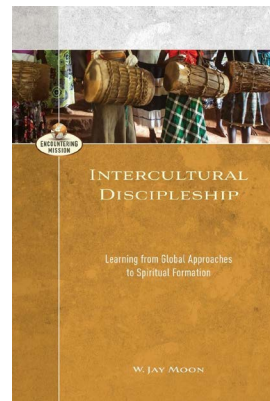
The genius of Moon's approach is that it seamlessly integrates Hiebert's commonly adopted principles and thus makes it easy to adapt for contemporary Hiebert-influenced missiology. Alternatively, it is surely not groundbreaking. For some missiologists, Hiebert's models are less than ideal to emulate.

Moon's approach, at times, seems to pragmatize and dichotomize unreasonably. For example, to show their effects on discipleship, he starkly contrasts Western and Majority-World cultural norms. The challenge is that global cultures are no longer bound to geography (in the Majority World). *Globalized* culture now dominates what once was unique to the term "Western culture." Yet, even though it might be helpful for research to categorize cultures as Western and Majority-World, is it fair to assume they are truly opposite and dissimilar? For instance, Moon oversimplifies the distinctions between values of privacy and community, individualism and collectivism, oral-based and print-based learners, guilt-based and shamed-based cultures.

Nevertheless, not all of Moon's approaches reveal rigid dichotomies. He does indeed emphasize a both/and-approach to the material/immaterial, scientific/spiritual, and cognitive/emotive worldviews, to "listen to local theologies" and enhance the biblical interpretation and application process (p. 266). Moon pursues a holistic approach that carefully emphasizes the place of prayer and spiritual warfare. Putting into motion Hiebert's critical contextualization, Moon effectively prescribes a way to contextualize discipleship across cultures.

Although some will disapprove of his applying critical contextualization, Moon demonstrates seasoned scholarship and thoughtful research. His book contributes solidly to the growing research in global missiology and spirituality. Moreover, he expounds missiological insights of intercultural discipleship for practitioners that are both reliably researched and practically accessible. Moon judiciously demonstrates that "the goal of intercultural discipleship is to transform the worldview of the disciple so that he or she stays centered on the kingdom of God" (p. 115). Jay Moon supplies missionary-practitioners and missiologists alike with a practical resource for investigating and implementing intercultural discipleship.

E. D. Burns
Western Seminary
Portland, Oregon, USA

Brian C. Stiller. *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu: A World Tour of the Spread of Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018. 220 pp. $18.00/£14.60.

Brian Stiller serves as a global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). In *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu*, he gifts readers with a celebratory survey or "world tour" of the global demographic shift in contemporary evangelicalism. "Raised in the home of a Pentecostal church leader" (p. 2), Stiller writes from a Pentecostal vantage point, which is instructive given that "in some countries Pentecostals make up more than half of Evangelicals" (p. 2). Serving over 50 years in various evangelical ministries, he evinces a large-hearted, big tent perspective. He explicitly locates Pentecostalism as a subset of evangelicalism.
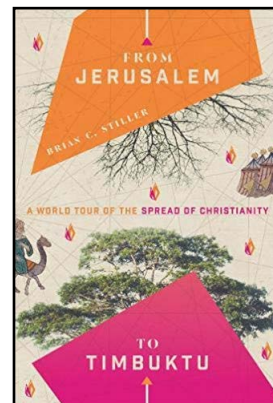
From Jerusalem to Timbuktu has a conversational tone, though it engages much missiological literature. It is a helpful introduction to the emerging academic field of "world Christianity." The endnotes and extensive bibliography bear this out. The author, subject, and Scripture indices serve readers well. The book is at times poetic. The reader stumbles upon the occasional pithy or eloquent sentence. For example, "I was born with a Bible, in my language, in my hand" (p. 18), and "The Bible text is made holy when inhabiting other tongues" (p. 71).

Young Restless Reformed types should listen humbly to Stiller in order to recognize the sovereign grace of God at work in the midst of messiness and to learn what they might before they criticize. Understanding contrary convictions or interpretations fosters greater awareness and sympathetic, mutually edifying fellowship. They should not set the book aside after sifting through the second chapter, the chapter most colored by Stiller's own theology. Besides, Stiller does not uncritically reflect on "aberrant forms" of Christian faith that exist (p. 68). He says syncretism is "a legitimate fear" (p. 85).

The author's preface and epilogue frame the "world tour" well. He suggests such an overview has relevance for the reader's faithful discipleship. Stiller's thesis is "faith is on the rise" (the title of chapter one). The first chapter is a good, succinct survey of evangelicalism on each major continent. The bulk of the book, chapters two through six, comprise focus on five "drivers" that are "growing and reshaping" the church (p. 2).

Chapter two, "The Age of the Spirit," is a brief and simplistic historical survey of pneumatology (pp. 24–28). Stiller claims that an increasingly rational approach to Scripture in the early twentieth century by evangelical scholars "added salt to the broad popular thirst for a Spirit-enabled faith" (p. 30). While painting a dire backdrop for the redemptive emergence of Pentecostalism, Stiller avoids any undue critical tone. He graciously affirms even those with whom he seriously disagrees. He notes that the Charismatic movement has been a bridge between Protestant denominations and even between Roman Catholics and evangelicals (p. 42). Charismatic and Pentecostal believers are now a "global force" fueling a "spiritual revolution" of enthusiasm and religious entrepreneurship (pp. 44–47).

In chapter three, "The Power of Bible Translation," Stiller revels in the fact that "Christianity is a translated faith, and a faith translated" (p. 53). Bible translations enable the Christian faith to fully "live in the neighborhood" of believers from every tribe and tongue (p. 55–59). It positively impacts cultures and societies by dignifying dialects, revitalizing local cultures, and equipping various peoples for navigating our post-colonial world. He integrates missions history, translation theory, theology, and statistics concerning translation needs and progress.

Chapter four, "Revolution of the Indigenous," concerns the importance of locally grown leaders and their ideas for the deep seated and serial diffusion of Christian faith across cultures. Stiller briefly contrasts the supposed "old model" of doctrine-oriented and missionary-led church planting with the "new model" of self-governing, self-funding, self-propagating, and self-theologizing (pp. 78–81). He briefly presents a theology of contextualization (pp. 84–87). He too uncritically names the insider movement among Muslims and Hindus an "exploratory" method of evangelism (p. 85). Yet, this chapter well represents the most seminal studies in world Christianity and missions history.

In Chapter five, "Re-engaging the Public Square," Stiller sketches three "major ideas" that have historically influenced evangelical perspectives on Christian engagement with the public sphere: a Christendom model, Calvinism, and Wesleyanism (p. 104). It isn't clear how these models relate or synthesize with contemporary majority world evangelicals. But he says, "Many Christians now sense the Spirit calling them to be present in public forums" (p. 104). Social engagement by evangelicals

around the world today is "inevitable" for four reasons: sheer numbers, the growth of churches and their influence, political influence as voters, and, "oddly," he says, our pursuit of self-interest (p. 108).

Chapter six, "The Power of the Whole Gospel," addresses global evangelicalism's embrace of every aspect of life in each local context. These include one's broader culture, the unseen spirit world, and the entire human experience, such as the physical and psychological. The chapter surveys evangelical relief and development organizations. Readers get a word on the contribution of Latin American missiologists who pushed North American leaders to a more fully biblical definition of missions and discipleship at Lausanne 1974.

This chapter provides a well-qualified treatment of prosperity theology. Stiller acknowledges both the legitimate longings that compel someone toward it and the "flagrant abuses," "silliness," and "enormous biblical flaws" often committed by its promoters (p. 152). Prosperity theology has "attracted a deservedly bad reputation" (p. 152). He asserts, "Like it or not, this movement has become a lathe on which Christianity, not only in Africa but much of the world, is being shaped" (p. 152). Stiller claims that "as the church grows and is revitalized, heresy is almost always a byproduct" (p. 153).

The book's concluding chapter consists of succinct primers on prayer movements, women in ministry, praise and worship, refugees and migration ("a human tidal wave"), and persecution. Stiller asserts that US women did "an end run around church policy" by using their gifts and abilities on foreign mission fields in the early twentieth century (p. 172). But he carefully notes that several organizations explicitly recruited by appealing to women's willingness to go to hard places (p. 175). Stiller presents the composition and singing of new worship songs as a kind of translation with indigeneity of style and leadership (pp. 178–79). Furthermore, Stiller argues convincingly that "migration redefines the world" (p. 195) and that the dynamics of persecution are more complicated than popularly understood.

This book was born from Stiller's search for factors in his own lifetime have driven the church's growth in the majority world. He ably documents and describes the story of global evangelicalism with scholarship, local vignettes, and personal anecdotes. Our generation of young evangelicals, he says, sees a world and a church without borders (p. 111). *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu* is a useful primer for making college and seminary students—and current pastors—more aware of God's grace at work in the world through Christian sisters and brothers about whom they have hardly considered.

Travis L. Myers
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Scott Sunquist. *Explorations in Asian Christianity: History, Theology, and Mission*. Missiological Engagements. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017. 336 pp. £36.50/$45.00.

Asian Christianity has experienced significant growth over the past century and is drawing increased attention. This makes Scott Sunquist's eclectic *Explorations in Asian Christianity* a timely introduction to this important subject. The book is primarily a work of church history and Christian theology. These two themes are woven together throughout. Sunquist's personal experience of Asian Christianity, including eight years of teaching at a seminary in Singapore, allows him to engage this topic with cultural sensitivity and nuance.

Explorations in Asian Christianity begins with a broad survey of the history of Asian Christianity from different angles. The first chapter provides an overview of Christian history in Asia, which serves as a foundation for the book as a whole. Chapter two looks at the ancient period of Asian Christianity. Sunquist then chronicles the development of ecumenical thinking among Asian churches in the modern era in Chapter three. The fourth chapter on the history of evangelicalism in Asia is the most substantial of this section. Combined with the opening chapter, it offers a basic framework for understanding the development of Christianity (especially Protestant Christianity) in Asia.

The book's second section offers theological reflections on the globalization of Christianity and the writing of Christian history, with special reference to Asia. Chapter five calls for writing Christian history from the standpoint of mission, focusing on marginalized groups, how Christianity incarnates in local cultures, and how it transforms societies. Sunquist's goal is to shift the study of church history from a preoccupation with theological debates to a focus on mission. This chapter compares Christianity to a thin red thread in history, small and vulnerable, yet paradoxically having great transformative power. Sunquist also observes that Christianity often withers where it gains political influence but re-emerges from the margins of society.

The sixth chapter looks at the famous World Missionary Conference in 1910 in Edinburgh. Delegates failed to predict the coming Christian explosion in Africa and South America, being more preoccupied with China and India. Sunquist sees this as a salutary reminder that the global advance of Christianity is ultimately a divine work, not something achieved through reliance on human technology and skill.

Chapter seven argues that the notion of linear time, which is integral to Christianity, brings hope. It challenges the dominant cyclical conception of time in mainstream Asian culture. At the same time, he warns against over-realized eschatology, where groups try to achieve the future Christian hope of a perfected world in the present, which echoes themes from chapter six. Chapter eight notes that with the rise of indigenous churches around the world, church history is no longer about the West, but rather global Christianity. By adopting a global perspective, Sunquist believes that church historians can open up space for local theologies and the address local concerns.

The third section consists of theological reflections on Christian missions, primarily centered on the historical dimension of Protestant missions in Asia. The ninth chapter looks at Protestant missionary efforts in Korea. Sunquist describes how the conservative theology of the missionaries and Korean Christians led to a surprising level of social and political engagement, which had a major impact on the development of Korea. Chapter ten constructs a "theology of place" focused on Shandong Province. The chapter demonstrates the centrality of Shandong to the development of Christianity in China. Chapter
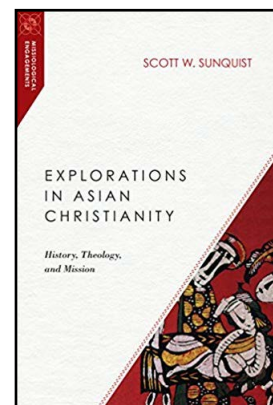
eleven further examines Christian missions in Korea and Shandong by contrasting how "three-self" ideas about missionary work were applied in Korea as compared to China. This is probably the most substantive chapter of the book. The twelfth chapter constructs a theology connecting migration and missions. Unfortunately, the subject is defined so broadly that it becomes mostly just descriptive in nature, lacking significant explanatory power.

The book's final section of the book considers the theme of education. Chapter thirteen highlights three missionaries—— Julia Mateer in China, Samuel Moffett in Korea, and Don McClure in Africa, who were involved either full-time or part-time in education. Though the individuals chosen were interesting and inspiring people, the chapter overall lacks focus.

The fourteenth chapter is particularly useful. It explores how Christian higher education in China changed from a more religious focus in the nineteenth century to a more secular focus in the twentieth century. Sunquist argues that this secularization was a result of Christian missionary educators in China both developing close links with American big business and embracing the secular ideology of social progress. The concluding chapter explores theological education in ancient Asia in order to gain insight for theological education in Asia today. Unfortunately, the subject is too broad to provide highly useful insights.

Explorations in Asian Christianity is a useful addition to the growing literature on the history of Christianity in Asia. Despite its many good insights, the book has its flaws. The most serious weakness is the disjointed nature of its chapters. Originally written as stand-alone essays, they do not cohere well as a book. The lack of a coherent structure and content makes for a fairly difficult read. Related to this, certain incidents are repeated two even three times in the book. More effort editing and finding alternate stories would have improved the book.

Furthermore, the author often speaks in negative terms about Western Christianity (e.g., a Western "captivity" of Christianity, Western Christianity as the main source of theological divisions). While these observations have historical basis, they come across as overstated and one-sided. Little mention is made of the many positive aspects of Western Christianity. Sunquist's frequent reference to the important role of Pentecostal Christianity in the growth of the global church over the past century is welcome. However, at one point (p. 157), he uses the term "spiritual Christianity" to describe such groups, which unfortunately implies that other Christian groups are not spiritual. More practically, the book's index is not very thorough.

Nevertheless, there is still much of value in Sunquist's book for those seeking to better understand Asian Christianity. Efforts to read the book will be rewarded.

John Barwick
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York, USA