

# themelios

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

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**THE GOSPEL COALITION**

# themelios

## DESCRIPTION

*Themelios* is an international, evangelical, 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.

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## REVIEWS

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

EDITORIAL

# I'm so Grateful That I'm among the Elect

— D. A. Carson —

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*D. A. Carson is emeritus professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and founder and theologian-at-large of The Gospel Coalition.*

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**M**any of us, I suspect, have played the game where one person says a word, and everyone else, without a pause for reflection, responds with what immediately comes to mind.

So, without thinking about it, what springs to your mind when I say: Election? I'm writing this about forty days before November 3, so if you are an American I suspect the mental referent instantly conjured up by the word "election" is the consequential US election that takes place this year. Of course, if the people playing the game were a small group of theological students who had just heard an hour's lecture on Romans 9, expectations might well have shifted such that what would spring to mind would lie in the theological arena, not the political. To guarantee the dominance of the theological arena in our little game, we could replace "election" with "predestination," since the former appears to be a subset of the latter, and the latter does not normally call up the world of politics (though doubtless it should!). So what springs to mind when either "election" or "predestination" is introduced into our little game, with the game set in a theological arena? What word associations do these words conjure up: Reformed theology? Divine sovereignty? Theological disputation? Dort? Westminster Confession? Determinism? Mystery? Foreknowledge? Compatibilism? Barth's distinctive view of election? Free will? Grace? The goodness of God?

How about gratitude?

Forget the game. Just think back to all the occasions when you have thought about or studied election, or discussed it with others: was gratitude the overwhelming response of your heart and mind? Not for a moment should we think that all the other associations are inappropriate. It is right and good to think long and hard about election and all the themes exegetically and theologically associated with it. But why is gratitude so rarely included among them?

I was driven to meditate on this question recently when I was working on the great thanksgiving prayer of Ephesians 1:3–14. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," Paul begins, "who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (1:3). In the following verses, the apostle fleshes out the kinds of things he has in mind when he declares that he praises God for "every spiritual blessing in Christ." The very first thing he mentions is election: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (1:4–5).

We could usefully reflect on the modifiers. For example, we were chosen "in him" (i.e., in Christ); we were predestined for adoption to sonship "through Jesus Christ." What does it mean to be blessed "in the heavenly realms" in Christ? Surely it is right to reflect on the *goal* of election, namely, "to be holy

and blameless in his sight” (1:4). But what cannot be overlooked is that Paul offers thankful praise to God that he is among the elect. So important is this theme for Paul that he returns to it in vv. 11–12, using slightly different words: “In him we were also chosen [perhaps with the overtone ‘appointed as God’s inheritance’], having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” In the flow of the prayer, Paul is almost bursting with gratitude.

Those of us who understand that election is frequently presented in the Bible as unconditional understand that one of the proper functions of election is to instill gratitude. We love to sing:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my heart to seek him, seeking me.  
It was not I that found, O Savior true;  
No, I was found by thee.

And then, calling up the scene of Peter walking (or not!) on the water:

Thou didst reach forth thy hand, and mine enfold.  
I walked, and sank not, on the storm-swept sea.  
‘Twas not so much that I on thee took hold,  
As thou, dear Lord, on me.

At some level or other, we know these things. Nevertheless, I suspect that not a few readers of this editorial, when they first saw the title, were initially taken aback. “Doubtless we ought to be thankful we are among the elect,” you muttered, “but to put it like that hovers very close to arrogance, and is in danger of all the ugliest caricatures of Calvinism. Shouldn’t the language be toned down a bit?”

And then I came across a beautiful expression of gratitude for election in the life of a young Christian widow. We’ll call her Rachel, and her deceased husband, a faithful and effective pastor, we’ll call Robert. Robert died of a disease that ravaged his body and his mind. I have Rachel’s permission to share with you parts of her letter. Two or three details have been altered to mask her identity, but the words are all hers, very lightly edited to ensure coherence. At this point in her letter she is talking about singing along, with her children, the songs live-streamed from her church:

These songs are moving to me, especially “The Perfect Wisdom of Our God.” I picked it for Robert’s funeral because of the last verse:

Each strand of sorrow has a place  
Within this tapestry of grace.  
So through the trials I choose to say,  
“Your perfect will in your perfect way.”

As Robert was losing his health and his mind, I had about five big reasons why this did not seem remotely perfect. I can remember saying to Robert’s co-pastor that I was choking on the words. But at my lowest point I did reluctantly and sulkily choose to sing them. The significant thing wasn’t whether or not I was sulky. The significant thing was that I did actually sing them, declaring my faith in God and his big picture—my faith in him....

In terms of “moral goodness” (if there is such a thing), I think I’m pretty average. Or maybe I’m being generous to myself: I’m prone to being too carefree and selfish, given

to extremes and self-indulgence. But I am often able to show commitment and kindness and integrity. So yeah, average, really, on crude terms.

But I do feel *marked out*. I *am* marked out! And I'm convinced that what marks me out is where I choose to put my faith.

That's all!

I believe myself to be constantly and undeservedly blessed, disproportionately upheld and provided for, unexpectedly finding myself surrounded by joy, peace, hope, love, wonderful people and uplifting children. My life has been rescued and redeemed over and over again despite my relentless failures and flaws. I have a genuine sense of "Why me?" in a good way.

"Your perfect will in your perfect way": I know where to place my faith. That's my privilege. That's the gift given me. I have been known to meander and drift and goof up in both trivial and profound ways, but in the end I always come back to the right place, to the right person—the *only* person. Brother, Friend, Redeemer, Deliverer, King, Lord, Bridegroom, Father, Savior, Creator. I have been able to trust God with my "strands of sorrow." I am under his wings and always will be.

That's all!

In a way, it's so unfair that I should be able to recognize Jesus for who he is when so many other people whom I respect and love don't seem to either want to or be able to. I hear his voice and I just know he's the Good Shepherd. To me, it's a no-brainer. Faith is a gift, but it's a *free* gift, and there are no exams to pass or morality assessments.

Our "strands of sorrow" are only a millimeter long on the rope disappearing off into the horizon where Robert invested his life. He taught and lived and died this "perfect wisdom."

Thank you, Rachel.

STRANGE TIMES

# J. I. Packer—Fingerprints, Footprints and Reprints

— Daniel Strange —

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

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**I**n his funeral sermon for Richard Baxter in 1691, William Bates quotes the memorable line uttered by Baxter on his deathbed when a friend had sought to comfort him ‘with the remembrance of the good many had received by his preaching and writings’:

I was but a Pen in God’s hand, and what praise is due to a Pen?<sup>1</sup>

The outpouring of words by so many of our great and good following the death of Jim Packer is ample evidence of his enormous significance in the history of post-war conservative evangelicalism. Of course, given Packer’s longevity and influence, his departure to be with the Lord is a time for thousands, tens of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands of those of us still here to pause, to reflect and to reminisce, not with a rheumy eyed romanticism or hagiography, but with heartfelt thanks to God for a life well-lived and a human servant mightily-used. I’m sure Packer would approve of the above quotation from his beloved Baxter. In the same fashion, I hope Packer wouldn’t mind as a fitting description and compliment from those of us who only encountered him personally in his last two decades (and tweaking the title of one of his last works): *weakness was his way*.<sup>2</sup>

With so much already said by so many, I recognise I’m a little late to contribute, but in *Themelios*, a journal for evangelical theological students and pastors, I thought some personal and professional editorial reflections on Packer particularly from this angle might be appropriate and helpful.<sup>3</sup> Packer’s passing merits a reaffirmation of confession and continuity, a passing down and passing on that needs to be marked. From its beginning, *Themelios* has been about the ‘bed-rock foundation of the historic faith’ with Andrew Walls noting in the very first editorial in 1962 that ‘the scope of *Themelios* is the whole of Christian theology: the entire field of the Christian pastor and theologian. In this field, all the powers of the mind are called into service, ... A humble and a loving heart is also a requirement, and *Themelios* will have failed if it does nothing to stir its readers to adoration and to devotion.’<sup>4</sup> Cue a unison Packer Pavlovian response: ‘The purpose of theology, friends, is doxology.’ That *Themelios* remembers Packer

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this sermon can be found online: <https://tinyurl.com/yykrnhoo>.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *Weakness Is the Way: Life with Christ Our Strength* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> I apologise that this editorial is more on the ‘Strange’ than on the ‘Times’ side.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew F. Walls, ‘Themelios—a New Journal’, *Themelios* 1 (1962), [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ifes/1-1\\_editor\\_intro.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ifes/1-1_editor_intro.pdf).

is particularly apposite given that the very first article of the journal's relaunch in Autumn 1975 was the re-publication of Packer's article 'Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority'.<sup>5</sup>

### *1. Packer Fingerprints*

Personally, as I look back at my forty-six years, some forensic dusting down reveals Packer prints all over my Christian life. I am a Packer product and I say that in the full knowledge that I'm happily Independent (and not Anglican), I happily use the NIV (and not the ESV), and I happily continue to have serious reservations concerning the rapprochement that was (and is) Evangelical and Catholics Together.<sup>6</sup> As I close my eyes I pinpoint three formative moments with a Packer presence. The first is just after my conversion in the late 1980s. Nick Wood, a Maths teacher who also ran our Christian Union at Southend High School for Boys,<sup>7</sup> very intentionally gave me a copy of *Knowing God*. I'd never read anything like it. While I remember voraciously gulping it all down and feeling well-nourished on finishing it, there is one line I can still see on the page as I first read it: 'Were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be *adoption through propitiation*, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that.'<sup>8</sup> Back then I found such concision intriguing and it spurred me to ask more and read more theology. I'd note that even after all these years, one has to admit that Packer's claim here is a nicely provocative theological conversation starter.<sup>9</sup>

The second Packer moment is in the late 1990s as I finished my undergraduate theological studies and was about to start my doctoral studies on the inclusivism of Clark Pinnock.<sup>10</sup> Reading Packer's 'Introductory Essay' to John Owen's *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647) not only sealed the deal on the doctrine of limited atonement/particular redemption, but it also confirmed the truthfulness

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<sup>5</sup> J. I. Packer, 'Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority', *Themelios* 1 (1975): 3–12, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/issue/1-1/>. The article had originally appeared in *The Churchman* 81 (1967). As an aside I should also note that first 1975 *Themelios* included a book review from a 29 year-old Don Carson. The book in question was of minor significance: *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (NIV)! I can't resist quoting the opening sentence, 'The appearance of yet another translation of the Scriptures will doubtless arouse many a bored 'Ho-hum!'; but the present reviewer is convinced that the NIV deserves careful and respectful attention—quite unlike the attitude of one reviewer who actually lumped it together with the Living Bible!' The rest, as they say, is (contested) history.

<sup>6</sup> I would concur with the assessment of Leonardo De Chirico in his recent article, 'Why J. I. Packer Signed "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (1994) (and Why He Was Inconsistent)', *Vatican Files*, 1 August 2020, <http://vaticanfiles.org/en/2020/08/vf178/>. For a more detailed critical assessment of ECT see Leonardo De Chirico, *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Yes, like Packer, I too was a grammar school boy.

<sup>8</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), 214.

<sup>9</sup> Again as an anecdotal aside, in 2002 and when IVP was still part of UCCE, I remember being present for the retirement party of the estimable Frank Entwistle, Publishing Director of IVP, who had been in post since 1976. Frank was interviewed and asked a question, something like, 'What's your one publishing regret?' His rueful answer: 'That IVP turned down *Knowing God*'.

<sup>10</sup> Pinnock's departure from Regent College in 1977 led to the appointment of Packer in 1979.

of Calvinism and the error of Arminianism.<sup>11</sup> Reading the essay was a scorching and almost scandalous experience, the prose packing a punch right into my sola(r) plexus. It was a page-turner. Packer hits the ground running with the bold claim that Owen's thesis will help us with nothing less than 'the recovery of the gospel.'<sup>12</sup> He then responds to hypothetical interlocutors who in 'prejudice and ignorance' state that Packer just wants people to become Calvinists, 'as if Reformed theologians had no interest beyond recruiting for their party, and as if becoming a Calvinist was the last stage of theological depravity, and had nothing to do with the gospel at all.'<sup>13</sup> To this charge, Packer paints a vision of Calvinism which is much broader than the so-called 'five points.' He does this with his own five points: (1) Calvinism as whole worldview and philosophy of history concerning the sovereignty of God—theism, religion and evangelicalism, 'all in their purest and most highly developed form';<sup>14</sup> (2) Calvinism as 'essentially expository, pastoral and constructive';<sup>15</sup> (3) Calvinism's organic character and inseparability of the claim that God saves sinners; (4) Calvinism and Arminianism as having very different understandings of key soteriological terms; and finally (5) Calvinism, far from being a modification of Arminianism, 'understands the Scriptures in their natural, one would have thought, inescapable meaning.'<sup>16</sup> He concludes the introduction to his Introduction:

Now the real nature of Calvinistic soteriology becomes plain. It is no artificial oddity, nor a product of over-bold logic. Its central confession, that God saves sinners, that Christ redeemed us by His blood, is the witness both of the Bible and of the believing heart. Calvinism is what the Christian church has always held and taught when its mind has not been distracted by controversy and false traditions from attending to what Scripture actually says; that is the significance of the Patristic testimonies to the teaching of the 'five points,' which can be quoted in abundance.... So that really it is most misleading to call this soteriology 'Calvinism' at all, for it is not a peculiarity of John Calvin and the divines of Dort, but a part of the revealed truth of God and the catholic Christian faith. 'Calvinism' is one of the 'odious names' by which down the centuries prejudice has been raised against it. But the thing itself is just the biblical gospel.<sup>17</sup>

And run for cover....

My third Packer moment is in the early 2000s as I began coordinating the work for the Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship (part of UCCF), a role which included being managing editor of the pre-TGC *Themelios* with Carl Trueman as general editor. My colleague David Gibson and I attended the Proclamation Trust theological students conference in 2001, where Packer gave three plenary lectures on 'The Whole Bible for the Whole Christian.' While there was an obvious frisson of finally hearing Packer live, I have to admit that I don't recall much of the lectures apart from that they were well-

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<sup>11</sup> J. I. Packer, 'Introduction' to John Owen, *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959), 1–31.

<sup>12</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 1.

<sup>13</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 3.

<sup>14</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 5.

<sup>15</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 5.

<sup>16</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 9.

<sup>17</sup> Packer, 'Introduction,' 10.

organised, lucid, and quite long. However, there was one section towards the end of the second lecture<sup>18</sup> that has indelibly stayed with me and one statement in particular:

I, James Packer am a man under reconstruction.<sup>19</sup>

Packer had been speaking about sanctification and particularly Calvin's understanding of vivification and mortification using a quite brilliant illustration of London Heathrow airport where disruptive building work is going on all the time as old buildings are demolished, and new ones built. Of course, Packer aficionados will know that this 'parable' or 'model' comes from Packer's book *Keep in Step with the Spirit*.<sup>20</sup> As my students and church family will know, I have not found a better way in describing sanctification as us being men and women under reconstruction, and no better illustration to explain the discomfort and disruption that is the building site of our lives, the demolition of the old man, the building up of the new, the Father as architect, and Christ through the Spirit as competent clerk of works making sure it all goes to plan. Genius.

## 2. Packer Footprints

Professionally, even though Packer was long gone to Canada when I began theological student ministry, the UK conservative evangelical scene is so small that I've ended up in places where Packer served and left Wenceslas footprints in whose steps we'd be wise to follow. It was at Oak Hill College where Packer spent a very formative year teaching Greek before theological studies,<sup>21</sup> and he had a close association with Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship.<sup>22</sup> I had the privilege of meeting Packer a few times but in rather bizarre circumstances. In 2008, I was asked to speak at a conference where Packer was also speaking. Now when I say 'conference' I mean a small day gathering of local churches. And the venue? Southend-on-Sea, my home town. Jim Packer, evangelical elder statesman, author of *Knowing God*, the Introduction to *Death of Death*, and that sanctification airport illustration, in my home town! The conference organiser was Dr. Stephen Dray, a former student of Packer during his Trinity days who had subsequently lectured at Moorlands Bible College, and was now a local Baptist minister in Southend. Now Stephen will be the first to admit that apart from boasting its distinction as still having the longest pleasure pier in the world (1.34 miles, folks!), Southend-on-Sea is not a strategic town, far less a theological hotbed. However, Stephen had developed a warm friendship with Packer such that he was willing to come and speak there. This appears to be typical of Packer. Part of the conference was a final Q&A. Obviously I was feeling more confident in the presence of one of my theological heroes

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<sup>18</sup> I know it's toward the end of the second lecture, because having located the recordings of said lectures, I've spent quite a lot of time going back over them to find the precise moment. And wow, there it is(!) at one hour, nineteen minutes and twenty-eight seconds to be exact.

<sup>19</sup> These talks can be found at <https://www.proctrust.org.uk/resources/>.

<sup>20</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 116–17.

<sup>21</sup> As Leland Ryken notes, 'Perhaps other year in Packer's life surpassed this one in codifying future directions in his life. Packer discovered that he had the gift of teaching. He matured as a person while filling the public role of college teacher. He began to feel a calling to be a scholar as well as a minister. He forged important professional relationships. And he succeeded in finding support for a Puritan conference, and immediately found a niche in the intellectual world of British evangelicalism.' Leland Ryken, *J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 139.

<sup>22</sup> Where I currently serve as a Trustee.

because for some reason (and I cringe now to think about it), I thought I would go all Frost-Nixon and interrogate Packer on why he'd left the UK. Perhaps I'd get a scoop:<sup>23</sup>

*Dan Strange (serious stare):* Dr Packer, why did you leave the UK and move to Canada?

*Jim Packer (with twinkle in his eye):* Because they asked me, and I needed a job.

In 2009, Packer returned to Oak Hill to speak at the annual School of Theology. It had been sixty years since his year teaching at Oak Hill. While Packer was with us, he gave a typically edifying interview on the grounds of Oak Hill to the then Principal, the late Mike Ovey. They ranged over a number of topics: the importance and content of theological education ('church history is the story of the war of the Word in the world'), pastoral theology, and Christian ministry.<sup>24</sup> What the filming doesn't show is that about a hundred metres up the drive and just outside the college there was a protest going on. Two Northern Irish Christian brothers had contacted the college a few days earlier to inform us that they were coming over specifically to protest against Packer and our hosting of him. They had brought with them placards to wave and fold-up stools to sit on. We provided cups of tea and greetings. No property was damaged. The thought that inviting Packer would deem Oak Hill as being too ecumenical is somewhat amusing given its reputation amongst some church circles, although it brought home the strength of feeling and conviction still swirling around when it came to elements of Packer's ministry and associations.

### 3. Packer Reprints

As well as housing *Themelios* and visiting theological students up and down the UK, the Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship had a history of producing short monographs designed specifically for those studying theology and religious studies.<sup>25</sup> As I remember, during my time at RTSE, all of these were original newly commissioned works, apart from one. Both I and David Gibson believed that Packer's essay 'What did the Cross Achieve? The Logic on Penal Substitution' was a seminal text for evangelical theological students. So in 2002 we got the relevant permissions to have it reprinted and republished with a new introduction from Paul Helm, who was then the first incumbent of the J. I. Packer Chair of Theology at Regent College but who, with Peter Toon, on July 17th 1973, had also been present at the Tyndale Biblical Theological Lecture on which the essay was based.<sup>26</sup> The suitability of Packer's lecture for theological students was that it 'is as much an essay in the methodology of theology as it is about the significance of Christ's death.'<sup>27</sup> In his biography of Packer, Alistair McGrath has a whole section on the essay. He states, 'The lecture is a remarkable piece of constructive theology, showing a deep awareness of the development of Christian theology, along with a shrewd and critical awareness of

<sup>23</sup> I hadn't yet read the McGrath biography of Packer, which had come out a few years previously.

<sup>24</sup> The interviews are available online: <https://tinyurl.com/y4osvsxl>.

<sup>25</sup> Some of these appeared in three volumes edited by Philip Duce and Daniel Strange: *Keeping Your Balance: Approaching Theological and Religious Studies* (Leicester: IVP, 2001); *Getting Your Bearings: Engaging with Contemporary Theologians* (Leicester: IVP, 2003); *Encountering the Word: Beginning Biblical Studies* (Leicester: IVP, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> The lecture originally appeared in *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974) 3–45.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Helm, 'Introduction' to J. I. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve: The Logic of Penal Substitution* (Leicester: RTSE, 2002), 7.

the theological trends of the 1960s. Many regard it as one of Packer's finest essays.<sup>28</sup> The aforementioned Stephen Dray describes the occasion of the lecture, and the *modus operandi* of the lecturer:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, I took a break to gatecrash the Tyndale Lecture which [Packer] was giving that year, entitled *What Did the Cross Achieve?* I have two memories of that occasion. I had graduated in Social Anthropology and my knowledge of theology was at an embryonic stage. Much, then, that Jim shared went 'over my head'. I was in a world which was still largely mysterious to me! However, what I do recall, is the hushed tones and the tear-filled eyes with which he spoke when he recited Philip Bliss' words, 'Guilty, vile and helpless we; spotless Son of God was he, Full atonement, can it be, Hallelujah, what a Saviour!' Here was theology in its purest sense—the encounter in the heart with him who is the Truth. Those few seconds have lived with me ever since—and I suspect they have proved deeply formative, and ever more so, as my walk with Christ has progressed.<sup>29</sup>

Don Carson was also there:

The first time I met Packer I was a first-year doctoral student at Cambridge University in the early 1970s. Packer had taken the train up from Bristol to deliver the Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture. He had provided the title, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution." I sat there spellbound. The power was not in bombast, for there was none. The power was in well-chosen words and beautifully crafted sentences, in the development of ideas, in the care with which Scripture was handled, in the theological beauty of well-built arguments, in elegant and thoughtful prose, in the glory given to the Lord Jesus, in the quiet authority of the presentation and the breadth and competence of Packer's responses in the question time.

Eventually I learned that these were all trademarks of Packer's lectures, but on this occasion, my first exposure to the man, above all I was drawn to what the cross achieved. Toward the end of the evening, while tea and coffee were served, I slipped through the crowd to the podium: I wanted to see Packer's notes, which were still lying undisturbed on the podium. To my surprise, I found an outline scratched on the back of a large envelope, apparently written on the train journey up from Bristol. The notes spoke of a well-stocked and well-ordered mind that already knew its subject deeply, and needed no more than some reminders to keep the flow intact.

When the lecture appeared in print (first in the *Tyndale Bulletin*, 1973, and then as a separate 45-page pamphlet in early 1974), I devoured the printed form, and discovered (as far as my memory could recollect) the same outline and many of the same expressions and arguments, now somewhat expanded and now magnificently footnoted. Many are

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<sup>28</sup> Alistair McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Biography of James I. Packer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 205.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Dray, "Jim' Packer: A Personal Reflection' (forthcoming).

the books and essays published on the cross since then, but none has surpassed it in clear and faithful brevity.<sup>30</sup>

It's sobering to note that in 2005, only three years after we reprinted Packer's essay, the doctrine of penal substitution would once again need vigorous defending in a fierce debate on the nature of the atonement precipitated by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's book *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Packer's essay was a vital reference point and remains so.

We thank God for Packer's life and ministry.

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### *A 'Bonus Extra'*

*Given that our RTSF edition of Packer's essay only had a very limited print run and is long out of print, for all the Packer 'completists' out there Paul Helm has kindly agreed for the journal to reproduce his Introduction, which I hope will be helpful to theological students as they engage with Packer's essay.*

It is a great pleasure to be asked to front up the reprint of Jim Packer's brilliantly suggestive lecture on penal substitution. (I remember that Peter Toon [I think it was] and I went over to Cambridge from Merseyside to hear this lecture delivered in 1973, and we were not disappointed.) All Christians give a central place to the death of Christ but they differ greatly in the views of the significance that his death had, and has. It is obviously important to get our thinking as straight as we can on the issue. For not only is there the truth of the matter, Christian's understanding of the atonement has close links with all aspects of his theology, his understanding of the character of God, for example. And it links with his understanding of prayer, for the death of Christ has obvious connections with his priesthood, as it has with the nature and mission of the church. What is the church for, and what should her message be? We cannot answer these questions satisfactorily until we are clear of the significance of Christ's death. Professor Packer's lecture is as much an essay in the methodology of theology as it is about the significance of Christ's death, and so in commending what he here says to a new generation of theological students I shall say a word on each.

The relations between God and his creation are, at all their points *sui generis*, and unparalleled. This fact makes for intellectual discomfort. Intellectuals (including Christian intellectuals) like nothing better than to explain, to predict, and to prove. But Christian theology does not lend itself to much of any of this, because all God's relations with his creation are irreducibly mysterious. Not gobbledygook, but unfathomable. In more stately language we apprehend his ways, but do not and cannot comprehend them. As Packer puts it mystery is something we know to be actual (or, we might add, to be possible) without knowing how such actualities or possibilities can be so.

And this 'without knowing how' is irritating to the intellect, for we should like to know how, and often think that we can devise ways of knowing how. How then is the Christian theologian to proceed? What, if not to explain and predict, is he to do? Packer's answer is: he is to safeguard the mystery. And

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<sup>30</sup> Don Carson, 'Don Carson Pays Tribute to J. I. Packer', *The Gospel Coalition*, 17 July 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/j-i-packer-appreciation-don-carson/>.

theology does this best when, in articulating the Christian faith, it derives its thoughts from Scripture in such a way that the essential mysteriousness of revealed truth is safeguarded. So theology—all theology based upon the revealed data of Holy Scripture—is more like grammar than science, telling us how we may think upon these mysteries, rather than trying to explain them and so be in danger of explaining them away. To borrow from and to adapt Descartes, when it is properly carried out Christian theology offers us rules for the direction of the Christian mind and heart. It is important to see what this view of theology does and does not imply. It implies no diminution of the divine reality of Christ's atoning work, which is founded on the word of God and known exhaustively by him. But it does not imply creaturely reticence, and a resolve not to adopt an a priori, rationalistic attitude to the word and works of God, an attitude which dictates what God is like, and thus what he can and cannot do in sending his Son to die for us. Earlier theologians expressed this reticence by omitting elements of negative theology into their thinking and by adopting analogical theory of language about God. Packer prefers to express it in terms of the profundity of the realities themselves, the finitude and corruption of the creaturely mind, and the need therefore to approach the realities (as they are disclosed to us in the Holy Scripture) by employing models. First the models derived from Holy Scripture and then (with reserve) models of our own. According to Packer, the best model of Christ's death is that of penal substitution. What is the logic of this model? Christ's death is a substitution, and Packer interprets this notion generously, claiming that anyone who thinks that Christ did something for us—whatever this notion may turn out to be—is committed to the idea of substitution. Christ represents us. But how does he represent us? He represents us—and here is the second move in spelling out the logic of the atonement—the model of Christ as our substitute is qualified. His death is a penal substitution. 'Penal' qualifies 'substitution,' but in doing so it does not tell us anything about the 'how?' of the atonement. He took our place penally, bearing our punishment and thus procured satisfaction. This model is 'dramatic,' for it portrays God's actions for us. Our relation to God is unique, unlike our relationships to any other person, because God has both the personal and judicial relation to us. And God himself, out of love, and because of holiness and justice, took our place in Jesus, the God-man. It is inept to suggest, in criticism of the view, that since the penalty is paid by God to God he might have saved himself the trouble, and let us off. For the atonement is not mere self-inflicted penalty, it is penal substitution.

As with any good, rich, suggestive lecture, there are some loose ends, calling for further thought and research. Writing in the 1970s Packer clearly found inspiration for what he has to say about models from the work of Ian Ramsey.<sup>31</sup> Though in the intervening years Ramsey's work has been largely forgotten, what Packer says stands independently of it. Further, some may question the severity of Packer's judgement against the traditional Reformed method of interpreting the work of Christ for that method was certainly not (in my view) in thrall to naturalistic ideas of law (though Grotius was), but it was just as certainly arguing ad hominem against (inter alia) Socinianism. Frances Turretin, for example, recognised that essential mystery would be atonement every bit as much as Jim Packer does! And it is a pity that Packer was not able to devote more space to argue his position against McLeod Campbell. Perhaps more needs to be said here, contra Campbell, about the essential voluntariness of the expression of love, in contrast to the inexorable character of justice. But that's how good lectures should be; it should finish with some business and identify further business for others to finish.

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<sup>31</sup> For a Packer comment on Ian Ramsey, see 'The Adequacy of Human Language,' in *Honouring the Written Word of God: Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer, Volume One* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 37.

# The Wisdom of the Song of Songs: A Pastoral Guide for Preaching and Teaching

— Eric Ortlund —

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**Abstract:** This article explores the way in which the Song of Songs instructs its readers in wisdom with regard to romance and marriage. Although neither a straightforward narrative or a simple set of instructions, the poetry of the Song does portray God’s ideal for human love. Special attention is given to the importance of waiting (2:7, 3:5, 8:4), the climactic place of marriage and the subordinate (though still good) role of physical sexuality, the role of the woman, and the non-ultimacy of marriage. The spiritual significance of human romance as a “flame of the Lord” (8:6) is finally discussed with special reference to the sweeping changes in Western sexuality morality in recent decades, and the way in which the Bible’s narrative about love and sexuality is simultaneously more realistic and more beautiful than recent humanly-constructed alternatives. Attention is given throughout to the particular way in which the Song communicates, by adorning and beautifying its subject through poetry, rather than through direct commands.

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## *1. Introduction: The Song of Songs as Wisdom*

**A**re we supposed to learn anything from the Song of Songs? Everyone knows, of course, how beautiful the book is: from the Rabbis to the present day, every book on the Song praises the poetry and the emotions which it expresses.<sup>1</sup> What is less clear is how the Song is meant to instruct us—if, in fact, we are supposed to learn anything at all. After reading the passionate speeches of the young couple, the whirlwind of imagery and emotion, the “manic disjunctions and extraordinary imaginary flights,”<sup>2</sup> I think one could be forgiven for concluding that the Song intends only to praise

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Rabbi Akiva (50–135 AD) distinguished the Song as the “Holy of Holies” among Scripture’s holy writings (Babylonian Talmud, *Yadayim*, 73a).

<sup>2</sup> Francis Landy, “Beauty and the Enigma,” *JOT* 17 (1980): 56.

romantic love, not teach us about it.<sup>3</sup> In fact, with the exception of the famous reflection on love in 8:6–7, the book does not reflect on love as much as express what it feels like from the inside. It is always springtime in the Song of Songs: and as long as the reader lingers, it is springtime for us as well. The experience is lovely, but do we learn anything? Are we supposed to?

If we answer this question in the negative, an odd result follows in which the Song appears at odds within its genre of OT wisdom literature. Wisdom literature as whole is meant to instruct God's people in the complexities of creation so that we can live under God's blessing in his world. God has structured created reality such that obeying his commands is one necessary part of realizing his full purpose for human beings, but not enough in itself; God's people must complement obedience to Torah with skillful engagement with the subtleties of God's creation in order to fully enjoy God's blessing. With regard to romance and marriage, for example, not committing adultery (Exod 20:14) is a crucial part of a successful relationship. But there are couples who obey this rule without managing to stay together. Because obedience to commands is not enough—because God has put created life together such that living fruitfully and successfully is a more subtle affair than simply applying rule number 38 to a particular situation—God joins together the imperatives of Torah with wise instruction in how to live skillfully in his world. For example, Proverbs appeals to the son to trust God more than his own instincts about how life works (3:5–8) so that he can find favor with God and man (3:4) in every area of his life, from marriage (ch. 5) to money (3:9–10) to work (10:4–5). The book of Job enlightens readers to God's larger purpose in allowing suffering for what looks like no reason (1:9, 21), encourages us that God will draw near to us in unique ways in inexplicable suffering (42:6), and promises that such ordeals are always the exception to his good treatment of his children (1:1–3, 42:12–17). Ecclesiastes helps us engage with lives which are over so quickly (12:1–7) and mostly out of our control while we are alive (e.g., 9:11), enabling us to enjoy fully God's good gift of life (9:7–10) without ignoring the fact that, from an “under the sun,” non-eschatological, this-worldly perspective, our lives are full of futility (1:2–3).

From this perspective, it is natural to expect that the Song, as a piece of OT wisdom, instructs its readers in some way. This essay tries to tease out what instruction the beautiful but confusing poetry of the book has for us—the way in which this inspired book complements Scripture's crucial imperatives about marriage in the Pentateuch and Proverbs with wise instruction in negotiating the subtleties and complexities of romance, the tumult of emotion, the pain of separation, and so on. In order to hear its teaching, however, we will have to consider briefly the way in which the book communicates.

### 2. *The Hermeneutics of the Song*

Francis Landy makes the astute observation that the Song is very difficult to understand if one tries to analyze the text intellectually, but easy to connect with if one engages with the poetry on an emotional level.<sup>4</sup> This is in part due to the way in which the Song parachutes us into the subjectivities of the lovers, so that we see the world through their eyes: “we learn about love through what lovers

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Davis not unfairly compares the images of the Song to “one of those pictures whose content shifts before your eyes: is it a vase or two faces, an old woman or a young one?” (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 269). However confusing it might be, the effect is deliberate, for reasons explored below.

<sup>4</sup> Landy, “Beauty and the Enigma,” 59.

say about it.”<sup>5</sup> Narrative clarity is sacrificed for immediacy and intensity; emotional connections are continually made instead of logical ones.<sup>6</sup> The young couple is not aware of us, and we listen in on their romance with “an intimacy ... which is delightful and embarrassing.”<sup>7</sup> The entire world flowers in perpetual blossom for the young couple—and as we read, it does for us as well.

A moment’s reflection will suggest why the book is written in this way. It is crucial that we obey the rules God has set for marriage, but it would be naive to think that negotiating so beautiful and sometimes overwhelming an experience as being in love (“I am sick with love!” [Song 2:5]) is only a matter of applying rules. Because of this, the Song complements Scripture’s imperatives by showing us a romance from the inside in order to help those who have not yet fallen in love prepare for this heady and confusing experience, as well as guiding those already married when our marriages may not reflect God’s ideal as portrayed in the Song. The total effect of the poetry is to simulate within the reader the experience of being in love, letting us experience, through the poetry, an ideal relationship, and thus making us wiser in our own. It is in this way that the Song instructs: not by delivering imperatives, but letting us listen to the music so that we can sing in tune.<sup>8</sup>

In a section on the hermeneutics of Song of Songs, the reader probably expects a discussion of allegorical readings of the Song; after all, no other book in the Bible has been allegorized so extensively as this one. While I do believe the Song hints that human romance symbolizes a greater spiritual reality, I will leave this to a later section. It seems more obvious to me that the Song intends to make us wise about the exquisite and tumultuous human experience known as “being in love,” and that the larger spiritual reality behind marriage is only discernible if we attend to the book at this literal level.

So what wisdom does the Song have to teach us about sex, romance, and marriage?

### 3. *Do Not Rush Romance*

It is very striking that, in a book which adorns romantic love so beautifully, the one repeated refrain tells us in no uncertain terms not to arouse or awaken love until it desires—that we should let love wake up on its own (Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4). In fact, the kaleidoscopic effect of the poetry causes this repeated refrain to linger in the mind in a way which a string of imperatives would not. And it is crucial that this wisdom should linger with us. After all, without this refrain, it would be natural for young readers to conclude that they should try to fall in love as quickly as possible and enjoy this unspeakably beautiful experience for themselves. But without any way diminishing how wonderful love is, a major element

<sup>5</sup> Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1. Exum points out the exclusive use of direct speech in the book; there is no narration (p. 3).

<sup>6</sup> Iain Duguid, *Song of Songs*, TOTC 19 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015): 72. Duguid has written two commentaries on the Song, one for the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series and one for Reformed Expositional Commentaries; I distinguish the two in these notes by date (2015 for the former and 2016 for the latter).

<sup>7</sup> Barry Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, NSBT 10 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes practical expositions of the Song miss this point. For example, Tommy Nelson derives the following rules for dating from the early stages of the relationship portrayed Song of Songs 1:9–17: a couple dating should take their time and let the relationship grow, have a “no strings attached” policy in which both members are (at this stage) free to date other people, and demonstrate mutual respect (*The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says about Love, Sex, and Intimacy* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 22–27). Regardless of the quality of this advice, it misunderstands the way in which we are supposed to engage the Song. Nelson’s hermeneutic would fit better with Proverbs.

of the wisdom of the Song of Songs instructs us in cautious patience: we should not arouse or awaken love until *it* desires. Part of the reason for this is that the feelings in romance are so strong that falling in love before one can act on those feelings puts one in a dangerous and painful position. But beyond this pragmatic consideration, our Creator is instructing us in how to wisely engage with this aspect of our existence. We should let the experience happen on its own or not at all.

This repeated refrain (2:7, 3:5, 8:4) is helpful in another way, because it clues us into the intended audience of the book. While married couples can of course turn to the book just as much experienced sages can glean new insights from Proverbs (see Prov 1:5), married couples don't need to be told to let love wake up on its own. Unmarried people do. This suggests that just as Proverbs 1–9 addresses the son just about to enter adult maturity and responsibility, so the Song should be read before you have the experience it describes, not to hasten it, but to enter it wisely.

#### 4. *The Beauty of Love*

The Song of Songs teaches us that love and one's beloved are almost indescribably beautiful. Even when the imagery jars modern readers (such as the neck like a tower in 4:4<sup>9</sup>), who can resist the young woman's eyes like doves behind her veil (4:1), her lips like a scarlet thread (v. 3), her breasts like fawns (v. 5)? The young man happily confesses that he's completely captivated (v. 9), and we are, too.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, the couple speaks of each other in royal terms: she sees him as a king (1:4), even though he's a lowly shepherd (1:8); he distinguishes her above queens and concubines (6:8), fearsome as an army with banners (6:10). Love royalizes an ordinary couple.

Readers may be rolling their eyes at this point. Surely we already know love is beautiful? Do we really need a revelation from on high to instruct us on this point? Well, in a word, yes, and any couple who has been married for any amount of time knows why. It doesn't take long in marriage for the early ardours of the relationship to settle into more comfortable patterns. That is doubtless a good thing—who could live at that pitch of intensity for long? But most couples know that familiarity in marriage breeds not contempt but (what is almost worse) invisibility. The delightful echo of mutual beholding in 1:15–16—“Behold, you're beautiful, my darling!” “Behold, you're beautiful, my love!”—fades into the past until not even an echo remains. The sharp, fascinating freshness of just looking into her face ... we don't see it anymore.

The Song is not teaching us to try to stay in the early stages of romance forever. As we'll see below, the Song depicts a maturing relationship in which the partners marry, begin a new life together, and grow in their relationship. But the Song does instruct us that those early ardours need not be lost, and that God's ideal for married couples is never to lose that captivation with each other (4:9). In so doing, the Song confronts one of the sadder mistakes of our own culture: the idea that the early stages

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<sup>9</sup> Even here, a little imagination will help the image do its work; the man is praising the strength and confidence of the woman, and a comparison to a tower is a fine way to communicate this (Duguid, *Song of Songs* [2015], 112).

<sup>10</sup> The use of the Piel of לָבַב in this verse is a fine touch. A denominative Piel (i.e., a verb derived from a noun) either shows “being occupied with the object expressed by the noun” or depriving or injuring that object (GKC 52h). Either would fit the young man's statement here: his very core (his “heart”) is electrified by his love, or he is “deprived of heart” in the sense of being out of his mind when she's around—or both at the same time. Isn't that just how love feels?

of romance are the best and that marriage inevitably dulls a relationship. (Almost all of our romantic comedies focus on the early chapters in a love story and end at a marriage, if they reach that point at all; the coverage of the Song is instructively different.<sup>11</sup>) The wild emotion of the poetry, and the way in which the book makes us immediately present to the lovers, continually urges us to makes the Song's poetry our own. The intent is not to discourage us by exposing the sometimes-depressing distance between the ecstasies of the couple in the text and our boredom in marriage, but to encourage each couple that they can, genuinely if imperfectly, embody God's ideal for human romance in their own marriage. Just as the woman, after a break with her husband (5:2–8), eventually finds him in the garden which is both hers and his (6:2–3), so married couples can find each other again after reading this book of wisdom, and with a surprise sweetened with the years, repeat to each other, "Behold, my darling! You're so beautiful!"<sup>12</sup>

### 5. Romance Transcends Sex

For all the unabashed emotion of this book, for all their almost embarrassing love talk, there is a noticeable reticence to the book when it comes to sex itself. This is a relationship which is obviously miles away from being Platonic. But sex never actually happens in the text itself: the couple is either wishing they could be together (as in 2:8–3:5), or just about to consummate the relationship (as in 4:16–5:1). There is no direct description of physical intercourse; none of the normal verbs in Hebrew for intercourse are used (such as "lie with" [שָׁכַב], "know" [יָדַע], or "uncover nakedness" [גִּלַּע עֶרְוָה]).<sup>13</sup> The way in which the couple describes each other to each other shows a similar restraint: they are clearly deeply in love, but they describe the whole body, never each other's genitals. During the couple's wedding in 3:6–5:1 (see below for my interpretation of this passage), the man's praise moves from the woman's eyes to her breasts (4:1–5), but does not go any lower.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the woman's description in 5:10–16 moves from his head (v. 11) to face (vv. 12–13) to arms (v. 14) to legs (v. 15) to his mouth (v. 16); the man's speech in 7:1–9 is similar. The Song has no parallel to Juliet wondering about hand or foot or

<sup>11</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 48.

<sup>12</sup> In Michael Fox's lovely expression, romantic love in the Song is "a confluence of souls ... in which lovers look at each other with an intensely concentrated vision that broadens to elicit a world of its own" (*The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* [Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985], 330). It is a world married couple need not leave.

<sup>13</sup> Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs*, WBC 23B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 205. Richard Hess also points out how the repeated image of a garden for the woman's sexuality is very different from Samson's crass comparison to ploughing a field in Judges 14:18 (*Song of Songs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 28).

<sup>14</sup> See Duguid, *Song of Songs*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 116. The description of the woman's breasts (in 4:5 and 7:3) is not an exception to the modesty of the Song in sexual matters, both because the lovely comparison to fawns and gazelles is very different from a crass reference to (say) their size, and also because breasts are much more commonly associated in the OT with nursing and God's blessing of fruitfulness as opposed to female sexuality (see, e.g., Gen 49:25; Job 3:12, 24:9; Pss 22:9, 131:2; exceptions to this are found in Song 8:1; Ezek 16:7, 23:3). While the young man is not yet thinking about his new wife as a mother, the OT as whole suggests that a woman's breasts were not sexualized in ancient Israel to the extent that they are in our culture, and so the references to the woman's breasts in the Song do not carry the same charge which they might in our context. Even if an erotic element is not absent, the poetry here is very different from

arm or face or “any other part belonging to man”<sup>15</sup>; it’s not difficult to guess which part of Romeo she’s thinking of. In contrast, physical sexuality is submerged and suffused throughout the whole of the Song, and the springtime gardens we walk through. It never explicitly appears, even in the form of innuendo.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the wise instruction of the Song is to show us that physical sexuality and its expression are beautiful and good, but they are both private and non-ultimate. Sex is private because, despite the intense immediacy of the Song, the reader is never invited into that part of their relationship. It is non-ultimate because the lovers’ awareness of each other’s bodies and delight in them transcends genital intercourse. They are entirely beautiful to each other, as whole bodies and whole persons. In other words, their love for each other is expressed sexually but not reducible to sex.<sup>17</sup> The ways in which this aspect of the Song confronts and corrects mistakes current in our culture are obvious.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, for all the descriptions of the young couple’s bodies, we finish the book without having the slightest idea what they look like. The descriptions and continual comparisons are not intended to help us picture the book’s couple, but suggest what feelings the other evokes in them. Nothing is said about what the two might have looked in real life because it is not important—all that matters is how they look to each other. Similarly, nothing is said about sexual technique; what matters is the feelings which the lover and beloved share. In light of the obsessive attention given to physical beauty in our context, this aspect of the Song is both counter-cultural and freeing. By the same token, of course, sexual love is presented in the Song as a good in itself. No other aspect of created existence is invoked to justify it, such as having children (this is a point we’ll return to below).

All this is to say that the Song shows us a mixture of uninhibited emotional expression and marked modesty about the physical aspects of love, even though the latter is clearly present and presented as

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how a woman’s figure is usually portrayed in our love stories. As above, words like “restraint” and “modesty” seem appropriate. This is part of the wisdom of the Song.

It is interesting to note a painting of women making bread from the tomb of Senet in ancient Egypt (around 1950 BC) dressed in skirts only, with chests exposed. It probably made it easier to work in the heat that way, and I doubt anyone thought of those women as being inappropriate for doing so.

<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare, “The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet,” in *Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), act 2, scene 2, lines 40–42.

<sup>16</sup> Some commentators do find multiple innuendos throughout the Song, e.g., the mountains of 2:17 as a double entendre for the woman’s breasts, or her navel (7:2) as a way of referring to her vagina, or the man putting his hand in the keyhole (5:4) as a masked reference to intercourse. I’ve never found this convincing; it seems more influenced by Freudian assumptions than anything in the text itself. As Cheryl Exum points out, once you start looking for innuendo in the Song, you can find it anywhere: “like beauty, double entendre is in the eye of the beholder” (*Song of Songs*, 10). Michael Fox rightly argues that “interpreting too many things as penises and vaginas imposes upon the poems a genital focus that is foreign to the Egyptian love songs and certainly to the Song of Songs” and that “[m]any things happen in love besides sexual intercourse” (*The Song of Songs*, 299). Instead of innuendo, the Song’s eroticism “is diffused throughout the body—and projected onto the world beyond” (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 328).

<sup>17</sup> In this way, the Song clearly distinguishes itself from pornography; as Ellen Davis writes, “Pornography sees the body, and nothing else” (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 263). Lover and beloved in the Song see so much more.

<sup>18</sup> And other cultures as well: for instance, the woman is not seen merely as a vehicle for offspring, or a way to seal a political agreement.

an unambiguously good thing. The relationship is neither ascetic nor only sexual.<sup>19</sup> This is an important part of the wisdom of the book.

### 6. *Marriage as the Telos of Romance*

Marriage is presented in the Song as the ultimate goal and full realization of romance in two ways. The first is seen in 3:11, the only verse in the book to explicitly mention marriage (הַתְּקִינִי), and the only verse to use the word “joy” (הֵמֶשֶׁת׃). Joy is associated with marriage, not sexual intercourse; it’s not sex that brings joy, but marriage.<sup>20</sup> Part of the wisdom of the book is to teach young people what becomes obvious to most of us as we get older: sex won’t make you happy, and people who devote their lives to it can lead the emptiest of existences. Only marriage gives that kind of deep happiness. Again, this is counter-cultural for modern Western readers and an important part of the book’s wise instruction.

Marriage is presented as the *telos* of romance in a second way which is just as important but harder to discern and which requires a longer discussion. Although it is not obvious, I think the Song shows the couple moving from courtship to marriage and only then consummating their relationship. Without denying that the Song is not narrative poetry in any straightforward sense, one can trace the outline of an unfolding story in which the young couple begin the book in love but apart (1:2–3:5), marry and consummate their relationship (3:6–5:1), begin their new life together in the same home and negotiate their first conflict (5:2–6:3), grow in their relationship (6:4–8:4), and finally integrate with their larger family (8:5–14). Although I don’t want to overstate the narrative development of the song—the intent of the book is to communicate the emotions and experience of love from the inside, not tell a story<sup>21</sup>—the outline of a narrative is both present and important for the way in which this part of Scripture makes us wise about this aspect of our existence as God’s creations. God’s ideal is that couples reserve sex for marriage. Furthermore, God’s good plan for romance is one in which sexual intimacy is not the pinnacle of the relationship; marriage is.

Unfortunately, this claim is controversial. Some important commentators read the Song non-sequentially, as only an anthology of love poetry.<sup>22</sup> Others read the Song as completely disassociating marriage and sex;<sup>23</sup> one scholar went so far as to speak of the Song as a “polemical celebration of ‘free

<sup>19</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 83.

<sup>20</sup> Hess, *Song of Songs*, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Kenton Sparks rightly remarks that the Song “constantly invites the reader into a narrative-like context that never quite takes shape” (“The Song of Songs: Wisdom for Young Jewish Women,” *CBQ* 70 [2008]: 277).

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Marcia Falk, *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs*, BAL 4 (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 68–70; Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1954), 23–24; Othmar Keel *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Frederick Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 17; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 35, 47, Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 95–96.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 287, 297, 313. Fox takes the reference to marriage at 3:11 as a “playful and fantastic description” of the garden bower where the lovers rendezvous and the man’s hailing of the young woman as his bride in 4:8–12 as affectionate and anticipatory, not a statement of the relationship (*The Song of Songs*, 135, 213). Cheryl Exum makes the same argument (*Song of Songs*, 169–70). This seems unlikely to me: who refers to their girlfriend as a wife when they’re not married?

love.”<sup>24</sup> Some Christian commentators respond by saying marriage can be assumed in the Song even if it is not explicitly recorded.<sup>25</sup> This is sometimes combined with a reading of the book as an anthology, according to which some poems can be taken to refer to the couple’s courtship and some to a time after they are married, even if they are not sequentially arranged.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to this, however, a good argument can be made that the Song shows the outline of the narrative in which the lovers do not sleep with each other until after marriage.

In what follows, I am relying on (and altering somewhat) the outline of the book given by Hess.<sup>27</sup> This is not because it is the only possible structure discernible in the text; many commentators point out how the shifting patterns of the poetry can be divided up in different ways. The lack of obvious structure or well-defined boundaries is not a weakness in the poetry; the poetry is meant to be ever-shifting, easy to enjoy but difficult to grasp, just like the poetry’s subject.<sup>28</sup> But I find Hess’s outline a more or less useful guide to following the text itself:

- A) Prologue: desire unfulfilled (1:2–2:7)
- B) “Come away with me!” (2:8–17)
- C) A dream of searching and finding (3:1–5)
- D) Love and marriage at the heart of the Song (3:6–5:1)
- C’) A dream of searching and not finding; eventual reconnection (5:2–6:3)
- B’) “Come away with me!” (6:4–8:4)
- A’) Epilogue: recognizing the relationship; desire unfulfilled (8:5–14)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> André LaCocque, “I Am Black and Beautiful,” in *Scrolls of Love: Reading Ruth and the Song of Songs*, ed. Peter Hawkins and Lesleigh Stahlberg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 162.

<sup>25</sup> Hess, *Song of Songs*, 35, 237.

<sup>26</sup> Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 54–56, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Hess, *Song of Songs*, 35–36.

<sup>28</sup> Exum points out how scholars who see the Song as an anthology of poems cannot agree on how many poems the books contains, or exactly where they begin and ends (see her summary of different outlines in *Song of Songs*, 33–39). As stated above, the proper response to this is not try harder to find *the* structure of the poem, but to surrender to the poetry. Although there is a general shape to the poem, it is meant to impressionistic and difficult to capture precisely. The above is only a general guide.

<sup>29</sup> A number of features in the poetry suggest this outline. The division into seven sections is suggested in the following ways: the first (A), third (C), and second-to-last sections (B’) all end on the adjuration against untimely arousal of love (2:7, 3:5, 8:4); the second section (B) begins and ends with a gazelle bounding over the hills (2:8–9, 17); the third (C) and fifth (C’) begin with the woman dreaming (3:1, 5:2); and the climactic midpoint (D) and final section (A’) both begin with the same question about the woman coming up from the wilderness (3:6, 8:5). A chiasmic relation among these sections is suggested by the dream passages (C and C’) which surround the marriage (3:1, 5:2; see also the very similar 3:1/5:6 and 3:3/5:7), as well as the call to run away together, which occurs in the second and sixth passages (B and B’), the first frustrated (2:10, 17) and the second fulfilled (7:11). Finally, the prologue and epilogue (A and A’) both reference the woman’s family (1:6, 8:8–9), mention the vineyard which is the woman’s (1:6, 8:11–12), and end and begin with the apple tree (2:3, 8:5; for some further examples within a different outline of the book, see Andrew Hwang, “The New Structure of the Song of Songs and Its Implications for Interpretation,” *WTJ* 65 [2003]: 105–11).

The Song does not present a perfect chiasm and does not intend to; other echoes across passages not chiastically parallel create a shifting, prismatic effect which is appropriate to the beautifully confusing experience of being in love. Examples of this include going to the mountains at dawn in the young man’s initial suit (2:17), at their wedding (4:6), and in the book’s final verse (8:14), as well as the left hand/right hand embrace at the end of the

Let's follow the story.

As the book opens, the relationship is already flourishing emotionally (1:2–3, 8–10, 15–16). The only problem is that they are apart physically: she wants to get away with him (v. 4), but they are both are stuck at work (vv. 6–8). She chafes at having to work outside where she develops a deep tan (v. 6) instead of attending to her own beauty (the “vineyard” of v. 6).<sup>30</sup> Even though the young man feels just as strongly about her as she does him (v. 9), any expression of their relationship seems to exist mostly in her mind at this point. You can see this in v. 4: no sooner does she express her desire to run away with him than her “king” has brought her into his bedroom (the perfect of **בוא** should be taken as a past tense). The leap from desire to realization in v. 4 is a clue that the young woman is fantasizing, as does the fact that her “king” is a commoner who works as a shepherd (v. 8).<sup>31</sup>

A similar contrast between the woman's wishes and reality obtains in 1:7–2:6. After the tentative, shy conversation about the sheepfolds where he'll be working (vv. 7–8), we are transported to the king on his couch (v. 12) in a beautiful house (v. 17) where they spend the night together (v. 13; the verb **לָיַן** means not just “lie” but “spend the night”). The disjunction between the two scenes suggests that desire is realized in the first part of the Song mostly in the young woman's imagination. However strongly they feel about each other, circumstances conspire against them. The Song knows how difficult it is to wait!

The next scene in 2:8–17 begins early in the morning (see v. 17) as the young man comes to the woman's house and speaks to her through the window (vv. 8–9), begging her to come away with him (vv. 10–13). The woman appears to hesitate, saying nothing (v. 14). She then teases him (not ungently) that he's posing a danger to their relationship (v. 15): since the vineyard is a symbol throughout the book redolent of (but not reducible to) the young woman's sexuality, the “foxes” that need to be caught before they spoil the vineyard are young men who might spoil a relationship.<sup>32</sup> Implicitly, the young man is putting himself in the category of one of these “foxes” with his request.<sup>33</sup> She tells him to leave (v. 17),<sup>34</sup> but just as in 1:8–9, she is not toying with his feelings or playing “hard to get.” Before turning him down,

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first section (2:6) and at the end of the penultimate section (8:3); see also the echoes in 2:16, 6:3, 7:10 (“my beloved is mine and I am his”), in 1:8, 5:9, 6:1 (“most beautiful of women”), and in 2:16, 4:5, 6:2–3 (“pasturing among the lilies”; more echoes could be listed). The prismatic quality of the poetry endures even as the shape of the whole comes into focus.

<sup>30</sup> “Like many a girl before and after her, she saw herself ripe for romance before her family did” (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 100).

<sup>31</sup> Roland Murphy points out that in Egyptian love songs, the young man in question will be portrayed in royal terms even though he is never a king himself: “the guise of royalty for the male lover is indirectly represented” by, e.g., calling him “the king's steed” (*The Song of Songs*, Herm [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 47; see also Sparks, “Song of Songs,” 283).

<sup>32</sup> The plural imperative beginning v. 15 is either addressed to the woman's family or the chorus, who support the relationship by celebrating (1:4) and adorning it (1:11). The presence of the chorus throughout the book suggests that even though falling in love is an intensely personal experience, it is not absolutely private.

<sup>33</sup> Othmar Keel reports that, in Egyptian love songs, “foxes” appear as womanizers; as a result, they must be caught for the woman's protection (*The Song of Songs*, 110). Even if the woman is not quite calling her love a womanizer—she refers to him as only a “little fox”—the parallel is instructive.

<sup>34</sup> Hess argues that the “mountains of Bether” (**הַרֵי בֵּתֵר**), although possibly to be translated as “mountains of spice” or “ravines,” should be taken as a place name, mentioned by Bar Kochba as Beitar and in the LXX of Josh 15:59 (*Song of Songs*, 100; according to Hess, gazelles are found there to this day). He plausibly connects these mountains to those of v. 8, understanding the young woman to be sending the man back the way he came.

she pledges herself to him (v. 16). She belongs to him—but now is not the time to start their new lives together.

Before the next use of the repeated refrain in 3:5, a second poem in 3:1–5 complements the first in 2:8–17 in mirror fashion, showing the young woman seeking the man (instead of him her) at night (instead of at morning) and finding him (instead of being sent away, as he was). Since she couldn't literally search for him on her bed (3:1), this is either a dream or a fantasy. The repeated "I sought the one my soul loves" shows her insistent, unyielding desire; it also shows that when she sent her love away in 2:17, it was not for lack of feeling. She asks the city guards if they've seen him (v. 3)—and then, without warning, there he is (v. 4). Without another word, she brings him to "the chamber of her who conceived me" (v. 4); in the modesty of the Song, her intent is clear but not stated outright. But the consummation of their relationship happens (so far) only in a dream.

The next section of the book (3:6–5:1) shows another dizzying imaginative leap as an otherwise unidentified feminine subject comes up from the wilderness (v. 6) on Solomon's royal palanquin (v. 7a), surrounded by soldiers (vv. 7–8). Only at the end of the chapter do we realize she is traveling from afar to get married (v. 11).<sup>35</sup> Finally, the time of waiting is over! But even on the day of their wedding, the imaginative opulence of the Song continues: instead of two rural peasants, the groom sees his bride like an exotic princess, while the bride sees her groom as no less glorious than Solomon himself.<sup>36</sup> The woman's references to her "king" in 1:4, 12 have prepared the reader for this imaginative leap. This means that the question in 3:6 is asked by the young man not for information, but in awe as (to use modern terms) the woman he's seen so many times walks down the aisle toward him in her wedding dress. (Doesn't every man feel that way at his wedding?) The whole scene is redolent of opulence, splendor, drama: the bride's long train of attendants create clouds of dust which plume like smoke; the soldiers stand impressively nearby; the silver, gold, and royal purple of the palanquin only serve to make the bride even more beautiful; everything is scented with myrrh and incense. Their love elevates what may have been a very humble wedding into a royal one.

The man proceeds to praise his wife (4:1–15), referring to her for the first time in the book as his bride (כְּלֵהָ, vv. 8–12). Part of his praise of her is that she is a locked garden, a sealed spring (v. 12). She hasn't slept with anyone, not even him, and this makes her even more beautiful in his eyes. The young bride responds by calling the young man to enter the garden—but for the first time, in addition to

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<sup>35</sup> See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 132, for pictures of actual palanquins from the ancient Middle East.

<sup>36</sup> Reading the royal references in this way seems simpler than seeing a three-way romance in which Solomon and a rural shepherd compete for the hand of the same woman (as argued by, e.g., S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* [Cleveland: Meridian, 1956], 436–46, or C. D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Coheleth* [New York: Ktav, 1970], 4–11; Iain Provan revives this interpretation [but implausibly] in *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 298–305). A three-way romance is a possible way to read the book (e.g., in 1:4, the woman might be begging her real love to take her away from King Solomon), but it has the strange result of making the Bible's ideal love story a competitive love triangle, in which a woman yearns for a man to whom she's not married. This interpretation is rightly rejected by most modern commentators (e.g., Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 208; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 78).

Iain Duguid, in his excellent commentary on the Song, presents something of a variation on this reading by interpreting the royal procession of 3:6–11 as a second wedding which the main characters watch from afar on the day of their own marriage. Duguid sees a contrast between the two relationships, such that Solomon enjoys wealth and luxury on the day of his wedding, but misses the true love which the unnamed couple enjoy (*Song of Song* [2016], 70–71, 73). My sense is that it's simpler to read the royal language only as communicating the great value which bride and groom see in each other.

describing it as her own, she calls it his (4:16). The bride voluntarily gives herself to her new husband, even calling on the winds to blow on her garden so that it might be even more enticing to him. Only then does the man enter the garden that is now his (5:1), again referring to his love as his bride. The wedding party celebrates with them (5:1). The garden which has been locked and sealed for the woman's entire life is now open, but only to him, and only with the woman's permission. God's ideal for marriage is that the relationship remain chaste until marriage, that the woman would voluntarily give herself to her husband (instead of being forced or traded like property). God's ideal is also that the couple would leave restraint behind after marriage: nothing in the "garden" is to be refused (note the wide variety of what the man will "eat" in 5:1). In fact, the word which the woman uses for the awakening of the wind in 4:16 is the same as that used in 2:6 and 3:5 for not awakening love before its time.<sup>37</sup> A loss of control within the context of marriage is actually encouraged.<sup>38</sup> The couple is supposed to get drunk (5:1).

(I am forced to write somewhat analytically in order to trace the narrative of the developing relationship in chs. 1–5 of the Song; but this approach obscures as much as it reveals. I hope the above paragraph does not cloud for the reader the rich reverence of this scene, the hushed wonder, as, for the first time, the man enters his garden.)

Now that the couple is married, we can move more quickly through the Song's last four chapters. The next section of the book (5:2–6:3) narrates a dream (v. 2) in which the woman loses her husband but eventually finds him again (6:1–3). It is similar to her night-time search of 3:1–5, but unlike that earlier passage, the married couple is now living in the same house. The break ends with the man returning to his garden (6:2): disruptions, arguments, failed connections will not destroy the deeper emotional and sexual bond the couple enjoys. He will always find his way back to her.

Having reunited, the couple spends the next section of the book enjoying each other (6:4–8:4). Most of this section shows the man praising his wife (6:4–10, 7:1–9); the repetition of some of the phrases and images from 4:1–15 shows that marriage has dulled none of his feelings for her (compare 4:1–3 with 6:5b–7). This passage ends with the couple getting away together, not to consummate their relationship (as in 4:8), but to enjoy their blossoming garden (7:12–14). As the young bride echoes her husband's earlier (and unfulfilled) requests in get away (2:10, 13), we get the pleasing sense of a relationship that is maturing; familiar scenes are revisited, but the couple grown since we last visited them. The only problem is external, and mentioned only in passing: the woman can't show affection for her husband in public the way she wants (8:1).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2016), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Hess, *Song of Songs*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> The poem of 6:4–8:4 contains the Song's most enigmatic passage in 6:11–13. Iain Duguid helpfully interprets it as an intentional mixed metaphor which communicates the health and vitality of the relationship in a way which happily surprises the woman: when the woman goes to see if the "garden" is in bloom (v. 11), she suddenly finds herself in a chariot next to a prince (v. 12)—implicitly, her prince. Her fears from 5:2–8 that she has lost her love are happily proved false (*Song of Songs* [2015], 140–41; this involves the minor emendation of MT's מִיָּמִי ["my people"] to מִיָּמִי ["with"]). The woman is so caught up with her prince charming that the others call for her to come back (6:13), but her husband mildly rebukes them; it is time for the couple to focus on each other. The "dance between two camps" at the end of 6:13 can be a public and not immodest dance, as in Exod 15:20, Judg 11:34, 1 Sam 18:6–7; the point is not that the woman is actually dancing, on that the joy of the couple's reunion is compared to it (Duguid, *Song of Songs* [2015], 143; see a basically similar interpretation in Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 156; Hess, *Song of Songs*, 195, 208–10).

The Song's last passage (8:5–14) shows the couple returning from their getaway (compare 8:5 with 7:11). The same awestruck question which was first asked on the woman's wedding day (3:6) is now repeated, with the difference that the woman is fully united to her husband. (Marriage dulls none of the woman's glory!) Verse 5 may suggest the woman is starting to think about a family; but if so, children remain in the future. The beautiful reflection in vv. 6–7 will be discussed in its own section below; for now, we should notice the strange way in which the woman's family receives her (vv. 8–9). Curiously, her brothers seem completely to misunderstand her position: they pledge to protect their sister's virtue and adorn her for whenever she might be ready for marriage in the future, on the day when she is "spoken for."<sup>40</sup> However well-intentioned this might be, one wonders how the brothers have missed the obvious fact that this young woman is both physically and emotionally ready for marriage, and has been since the Song's first chapter, when her brothers were first mentioned (1:6).<sup>41</sup> As a result, their relationship is legitimate and should be supported. Because she didn't give herself away before marriage, their marriage will be full of *shalom*, wholeness (v. 10). Is there a hint to young couples that their relationship might not always be recognized as quickly as it should?

Regardless, a contrastive comparison with Solomon in vv. 11–12 follows which shows the woman happy with her more humble "vineyard," irrespective of Solomon's expensive one. This implies that the couple has internalized the lesson of v. 7. The poem then ends where it began, with desire still "out there," waiting to be fulfilled (vv. 13–14).

This has been a long discussion, but it is necessary to show that the outline of an unfolding narrative is discernible in the eight chapters of the Song of Songs in which sex is saved for marriage. There is, of course, only an outline of a narrative. The Song's main purpose is not to tell a clear story with well-defined characters and storyline, but to prepare young people for falling in love by communicating what the experience is like from the inside. This explains why the marriage of the young couple is not easier to see: despite how important marriage is, getting married doesn't much change how you feel about the other person, and it is the emotional dimension of marriage on which the book focuses. But part of the wisdom of the book is to show us that God's plan for human

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<sup>40</sup> Some wonder whether the "wall" and "door" to which the brothers compare their sister have opposite meaning, i.e., the brothers will make her an attractive bride regardless of whether or not she's been chaste (cf. 4:12). If this is the case, it makes the brothers seem even more callous; but one would expect פתח ("entrance, doorway") for this, not דלת ("door;" see Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 278–79; Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 260). In other words, both "wall" and "door" mean the same thing; the brothers assume their sister's virginity because of (what they perceive to be) her physical immaturity (GKC 150h lists other places where double questions introduced with וְאִם need not be mutually exclusive).

<sup>41</sup> Duguid points out the jarring contrast between the vision of married love in 8:6–7 and the more commercial model of the brothers in vv. 8–9, in which the young woman is not even consulted, but spoken for (*Song of Songs* [2015], 156); he speaks of the brothers treating their sister like "a marketable commodity" (*Song of Songs* [2016], 157). Elle Assis judges the brothers even more harshly, understanding them to imply that she cannot attract a mate on her own and "only their intervention can 'save her'" (*Flashes of Fire: A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs*, LHOTS 503 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 247). Alternately, some understand the description of the woman as not physically ready for marriage in vv. 8–9 as either a tease or to express the brothers' genuine concern to protect their little sister, i.e., they take her seriously enough to provide for her marriage "on the day she is spoken for," but tease her that she's just a kid, knowing that it's not exactly true (e.g., Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 171–72). This is possible, but the contrast between 8:6–7, 8–9, and then the woman's speech in v. 10 makes it (to my mind) less likely.

romance reserves marriage as the context within which a sexual relationship flourishes.<sup>42</sup> Marriage is the larger reality and *telos* of love; the physical expression of love is subordinated and secondary to this.

### 7. *The Role of the Woman*

The above summary of the book may already have brought to the reader's attention the active role which the woman plays in the relationship. I say "active" and not "independent"; she is not some modern feminist who reduces marriage to a kind of contract in which she retains some measure of independence and freedom. Both partners in this ideal marriage give themselves to each other unreservedly and without qualification; as Duguid points out, the poem's motto is very much not, "My beloved is mine and I am my own" (see 2:16, 6:3, 7:10).<sup>43</sup> But neither is the woman entirely passive. This is seen in multiple ways.

Notice first how the woman initiates the conversation with her beloved in 1:7–8—not in order to "ask him out," but only to ask where he might be.<sup>44</sup> This is nuanced by 1:4, which shows that the woman wants the man to take her away, i.e., she wants him to take the initiative ("draw me after you!").<sup>45</sup> She is not competing with him, but happy to follow his lead into a new life together.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, it is the woman who, even while pledging herself to the man, sends him away in 2:17, gently warning him that his entreaties are actually endangering the relationship. She takes the initiative to guard their relationship in this way. Furthermore, as emphasized above, it is the woman who allows the man to enter in marriage the garden which is otherwise locked (4:12, 16). She gives herself willingly instead of being bartered or forced. (Are we to see here a contrast with her brothers' imagined scenario in which their little sister is "spoken for" in 8:8?) And is it an accident that the woman is given more speaking lines in the poem than the man? Or that it is she who speaks the most memorable and theologically profound lines of the Song in 8:6–7?<sup>47</sup>

I don't want to make too much of this; it's hardly a major emphasis of the poem, and discussions of gender have become so tortured and histrionic in our context that it's difficult to say anything about the

<sup>42</sup> Garrett marshals an impressive body of evidence to show that sexual activity within the bounds of monogamous, heterosexual marriage was the norm in the OT, second temple Judaism, and in early Christianity (*Song of Songs*, 164–68). In this way, the Song is reflecting and buttressing the teaching of the entire Bible.

<sup>43</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 129.

<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting that Ruth takes the same strategy with Boaz in Ruth 3:6–9, not actually proposing marriage to him, but tacitly raising the subject within the framework of the kinsman-redeemer relationship. Ruth takes the initiative without supplanting Boaz's role.

<sup>45</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 82.

<sup>46</sup> Somewhat as an aside, it's worth pointing out how the woman is neither hyperconfident and overassertive, nor completely insecure and utterly dependent on the man's approval: she knows she is beautiful (1:5), but is also bothered by her deep tan (1:5) and needs affirmation (2:1–2). As elsewhere, the Song is hinting at the wisest way to enter a relationship through the words it gives to its characters.

<sup>47</sup> It would be a mistake to read too much into the small details and silences of the text, but one notices that the young woman's brothers play only unhelpful roles in the book (1:6, 8:8–9), that her mother is mentioned without appearing in the text (3:4, 8:5), and that the young woman's father is not mentioned at all (Duguid, *Song of Songs* [2016], 14). Has this woman had a bit of a rough start in life? If so, the maturity which she enters into this relationship is even more admirable.

subject without being misunderstood. But just because modern Western cultures are so confused about these areas of created existence, the Song can speak to us in especially helpful ways. God's wisdom rebalances the distortions and extremes of both our culture and cultures very different from ours. Some cultures subjugate and oppress women; in contrast, modern Western culture turns to unfettered self-determination and independence as a strategy for fulfilment. In (perhaps understandable) reaction, Christians occasionally articulate male headship in a way which seems to give women hardly any room beyond cooking and cleaning. None of these represent God's ideal, but the woman in the Song of Songs does in a way both beautiful and balanced.

### 8. *There Is No "Happy Ever After"*

The major emphasis of the Song is obviously to communicate how unspeakably precious one's beloved is. But part of the wisdom of the book is to warn young readers that the experience will not always be a comfortable or easy one. At one point, the young woman feels physically sick (2:5). At another, the young man asks her to look away, so overwhelming is the effect she has on him (6:5). For him, she is "beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun," looming large as the sun and moon itself, "fearsome as an army with banners" (6:10). The word "fearsome" (יָרֵאָה) is used elsewhere to describe the kind of terror a human feels toward the Almighty (Gen 15:12, Exod 15:16, Josh 2:9, Job 9:34). In a sense, perfect (human) love does not cast out all fear.

The Song's guidance for young reader in the sometimes-painful parts of a relationship is clearest in 5:2–6:3, which narrates, in dream-like fashion, a break in the relationship which is eventually healed. It begins with the woman dreaming of her husband knocking on their door, asking to be let in (v. 2). In what is either a tease or an excuse, she says she's already comfortable and doesn't want to get up; but the mere sound of him fumbling with the lock awakens her desire and she hurries to open the door (vv. 4–5). As sometimes happens in dreams, however, he's suddenly gone (v. 6). She searches everywhere, calling out without any answer (v. 6); things turn nightmarish when the city guards beat her (v. 7). Not only has she lost her husband, the young woman is treated like an intruder or a prostitute in her own city!<sup>48</sup>

It's not clear whether the conversation with the "daughters of Jerusalem" beginning in 5:9 is part of the dream or happens the next day as she asks friends for help. What is clear is that after describing her husband in vv. 10–16, the friends are convinced to help her look (6:1)—but there is no need. She's found him already, "going down to his garden" (6:2, echoing the description of the consummation of their relationship in 4:16–5:1). The distance between the new husband and wife is resolved.

The dream-like atmosphere of 5:2–6:3 make it difficult to be sure of exactly what's happening, but it is clear that young Israelites shouldn't think of marriage as leading to placid, unbroken harmony. In fact, just because the relationship now is deeper, the breaks in the relationship may be even more painful than those from the period of courtship (5:6b simultaneously echoes and builds on 3:2 by having the woman call uselessly for her husband; the guards also do not beat her in the first dream.) Being in love makes you very vulnerable! Happily, however, the emotional and sexual bond which a married

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<sup>48</sup> Othmar Keel gathers Mesopotamian evidence of night watchmen on guard against prostitutes who would veil themselves; if any were found, they were to be unveiled and beaten (*The Song of Songs*, 195). If this is in the background of this passage, it means that part of the woman's nightmare is that she's being treated far worse than she deserves, punished like a prostitute when she only wants to find her own husband.

couple shares means that when breaks occur, they are never permanent. This is in part implied by the unrealistic nature of the description in 5:10–16: it doesn't give helpful information for finding a lost partner, but reveals how she feels about her husband in a way which heals the emotional distance between them. "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (6:3)—their exclusive commitment is not new (2:16), but takes on deeper resonance as they are bound together more intimately through the ups-and-downs of marriage.

There is a second sense in which marriage, however happy it might be, does not provide a perfect and ultimate "happy ever after." On the one hand, there are elements of ultimacy in marriage as portrayed in the Song; for example, the young woman is perfect, flawless to the young man (6:9); queens cannot compare with her (v. 8). Additionally, the marriage in ch. 4 stands at the zenith of the chiasm of the poem, perhaps suggesting that their marriage will (in some ways, at least) be the high point of their relationship. On the other hand, the poem ends on a note of unfulfilled desire (8:14)—exactly the note with which the book begins (1:2).<sup>49</sup> We are not given the final end of the matter, as in Ecclesiastes (see 12:13–14); fulfilling as marital union is, the fulfilment fades, to be sought again and again.<sup>50</sup> Part of the wisdom of the Song is to teach young people that, however important romance and marriage are, they do not give a perfect, final, unsurpassable happy ending to our lives. In a paradox, there is a kind of ultimacy to human romance—this is, after all, the *Song of Songs*—but it is never complete or final. We'll pick this up again below.

### 9. *Set Me Like a Seal on Your Heart: The Need for Commitment*

The one place where the Song pauses and explicitly reflects on romantic love expresses the need for total, exclusive commitment ("set me like a seal") and the deepest levels of our being ("on your heart," [8:6]). This is the climactic wisdom of the Song, and one instinctively listens closely to these final verses as the woman speaks not of her love, but love itself.<sup>51</sup> The reason given for the commitment which seals husband and wife together is love's power (v. 6b) and its preciousness (v. 7). What else is as unyielding as the grave? What other aspect of created existence could be compared to the grip which death has on each of us? But just because love is so overpoweringly strong, a couple in love must commit to each other in an absolute way. The central wisdom of the song is to join what we might intuitively separate: undeniable, uncontrollable desire with unbreakable commitment. If love is as strong as death, it's hopeless to try to suppress it; one must rather commit.<sup>52</sup>

The preciousness of love is a second reason calling for a completely unique commitment (v. 7). Business relationships might be formed for the sake of money; friendship might be forged out of common interests. But people naturally (and rightly) scorn those who enter into marriage for any reason less than that unquenchable desire for each other. Marrying for money is not just unwise; it falls so far short of real love that it is to be scorned. Just because love is so overwhelmingly—one might say supernaturally—powerful, it requires a unique level of commitment, surpassing friendship or even

<sup>49</sup> Philip Ryken, *The Love of Loves in the Song of Songs* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 146–47.

<sup>50</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 48.

<sup>51</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 77.

one's relationship with one's parents (Gen 2:24). Young people who seal themselves in commitment to each other because of the inexorable power of love do so wisely, and under God's smile.

### 10. An "Almighty Flame:" The Spiritual Significance of Marriage

The climactic wisdom of the Song in 8:7 calls human love a "flame of the Lord," or "an Almighty flame" (שְׁלֵהֶבֶתִּיהָ), the final syllable [yah] is a shortened form of the divine name Yahweh).<sup>53</sup> This is best taken as a genitive of source: love finds its ultimate source in God himself. An attributive or adjectival idea is, however, difficult to rule out. As it comes from the heart of God, this unquenchable flame love expresses something of God's character and love.

This is just a hint in the Song—the ending of a single word. Despite its brevity, however, the word grabs our attention, because nothing in the Song's previous seven chapters has prepared us for it; so far, the book's love story looks like a very beautiful but completely ordinary human romance. But once the ultimate source of romantic love is revealed to us, we read the Song with new eyes, noticing numerous ways that the poetry of the Song hints that something supernatural happens in human romance, and that an ordinary human marriage reflects a reality altogether extraordinary. The short passage of 8:6–7 itself reads differently. After all, is love really as strong as death? Surely there is a sense in which death is stronger?<sup>54</sup> No matter how much a married couple loves each other, one will have to bury the other eventually. Surely in a sense death is stronger than love—unless there's a more-than-natural love being hinted at here, unless a love which is not literally stronger than death reflects a love that is.<sup>55</sup> The particular word for love in these verses (אָהֶבָה) would support either reading, since it is used for both human love (Jacob and Rachel [Gen 29:20], David and Jonathan [1 Sam 18:3]) and divine (Deut 7:8, Jer 31:3, Zeph 3:17).

If we return to the beginning with this insight in mind, supernatural hints turn up everywhere. For example, the young man is described both as a shepherd (1:4) and a king (v. 8).<sup>56</sup> Who does that remind you of? Additionally, the first poem of the book uses words and images which, although found in ordinary settings elsewhere in the OT, are often used in liturgically or theologically significant contexts. For examples, kisses (1:2) in the OT are often ordinary, but they express religious allegiance in 1 Kings 19:18; similarly, the wine to which the woman refers in this verse often comes up elsewhere in the OT in an ordinary way, but wine is also used frequently in worship (Exod 29:40, Lev 23:13). Furthermore, the

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<sup>53</sup> The second translation is from Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 155. God's name can be added to adjectives to make it a superlative, suggesting the less interesting translation, "a powerful flame" (compare Ps 118:5, מְרִחֵב יָהּ, "a broad place of Yahweh," or "a very broad place," or Ps 36:6, הַרְרֵי אֱלֹהִים, "mountains of God" for "great mountains"; see further examples in Isa 28:7, Jer 2:31, and Joüon 141n). Even though this translation is possible, Duguid points out that superlatives can be communicated in other ways without invoking the divine name (*Song of Songs*, [2015], 155), suggesting the more theologically suggestive translation given above.

<sup>54</sup> "In a world in which death writes the epitaph of every human relationship, the love of a man and a woman for each other cannot be an end in itself" (Duguid, *Song of Songs* [2016], 48; see further Ryken, *The Love of Loves*, 140–41).

<sup>55</sup> Although it seems less likely, there may be a second hint in the way 8:6–7 echoes echo names and titles for gods in the pagan Semitic pantheon known from the Baal Epic: Death, Resheph ("flame"), and the sea god Yam, hailed as "prince Sea" and "judge River." Without at all lending any legitimacy to pagan mythology, the comparisons to love in these verses may hint that the love being described here is more than natural.

<sup>56</sup> Duguid points this out (*Song of Songs* [2015], 50).

“scent” of the young man (רִיחַ, 1:3) sometimes refers to ordinary smells (Gen 27:27), but very frequently describes God’s reception of a pleasing offering (Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9, 13, 17, 2:2, etc.). The oil and the young man’s name in the same verse have similar liturgical echoes: oil is used in the consecration of priests (Exod 29:2, 7, 21, 23, 40), the anointing of the sacred furniture of the tabernacle (Exod 30:24–25), and in the food offering (Lev 2:1–2, 4–7, 15–16). Not only that, God’s name is invoked in worship extremely frequently (e.g., Deut 12:5, 11; Ps 148:13). These echoes continue in the first line given to the chorus at the end of v. 4. The verbs for their joy (גִּיל and שִׂמְחָה) frequently describe worship in the Psalms (see 14:7/53:7; 16:9; 31:8; 48:12; 97:1, 8; 118:24; see the same in Isa 25:9; Joel 2:21, 23), and the verb translated as “extol” (ESV) or “praise” (NIV) also describes Israel’s worship (see the Hiphil of זָכַר in Pss 20:8, 71:16, 77:12; Isa 12:4, 26:13, 63:7; “remembering” in general is an important part of worship in Exod 3:15; Ps 22:28; 30:5, 145:7).<sup>57</sup>

None of this is to allegorize the text. I am not suggesting that these echoes portray the young woman as representing Israel or the church, or that her praise of her beloved is actually speaking about the worship of God’s people at some deeper, spiritual level.<sup>58</sup> This is not because allegory is always completely wrong (cf. Gal 4:24–26); after all, the prophets frequently portray the covenant between Yahweh and Israel as a (tragically troubled) romance (e.g., Ezek 16). I am only trying to follow the hint given in the text of 8:6–7 that romantic love is a flame of the Lord, and I am suggesting that as one reads the book from that vantage point, one can discern the poetry of the Song working on multiple levels, describing a beautiful but ordinary human romance, while continually suggesting a supernatural love and delight which overshadow human love. In other words, the literal meaning of the text portrays ordinary human romance as reflecting divine love. That the Song should communicate in this multidimensional way should not surprise us: just as the “boundaries between figure and referent, inside and outside, human body and accoutrement or natural setting, become suggestively fluid” in the poetry of the book,<sup>59</sup> so romantic love takes on multiple levels of significance.<sup>60</sup>

The hints of this deeper significance recur so frequently, in fact, that it is difficult to believe they are not intended. I offer just a few more examples. First, the woman delightedly sits (שָׁבָה) in her lover’s shadow (צֶלַל) in 2:3, just as the one who trusts the Lord dwells in the shadow of the Almighty (both words repeat in Ps 91:1) and penitent Israel returns to dwell beneath the Lord’s shadow (Hos 14:7; the idea of dwelling beneath God’s shadow is frequent in the Psalms [see 17:8, 36:8; 57:2; 63:8, etc.]). Furthermore, the young woman is described as “perfumed” with myrrh and frankincense on her wedding day in 3:6, but the verb is very frequently used for incense rising in the temple (33x in Leviticus, beginning in 1:9). Frankincense also plays a noticeable part in ritual worship (Lev 2:1–2, 15–16; cf. Isa 60:6). The wood of Lebanon which forms the material of the young woman’s carriage in 3:9 is most often mentioned

<sup>57</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 50.

<sup>58</sup> For those interested, any good commentary will summarize Jewish and Christian allegory of the Song; Duguid is a good place to start (*Song of Songs* [2016], xvi–xix). Denys Turner provides a convenient anthology of medieval readings of the Song in, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Classical Studies Series 156 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), as well as discussing the larger theological and hermeneutical framework within which allegorical readings cohered and were compelling to medieval Christians. He also demonstrates that allegorical readings were not uniform and sometimes provoked disagreement (Nicholas of Lyra and Aquinas both argued against excessive allegorizing).

<sup>59</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 2011), 248.

<sup>60</sup> Landy, “Beauty and the Enigma,” 57–58.

elsewhere for the construction materials of the tabernacle (1 Kings 5:13, 2 Chr 2:7, 15; Ezra 3:7; one exception is in Ps 104:16). One final example: the desire (תִּשְׁקָה) of the man for his wife in 7:10 uses a word found only twice elsewhere in the OT: in Gen 3:16, as part of Eve’s curse as her marriage descends into frustrating power struggles, and in Gen 4:7, describing the desire which sin has for Cain. But now, in the Song, this desire is entirely innocent and happy. It is as if the couple has somehow returned to Eden, as if something of the fall has been healed. Indeed, in the lovers’ descriptions of the each other and the world, the world seems an uncursed, Edenic paradise.<sup>61</sup> But can only ordinary human love work that miracle?<sup>62</sup>

A major part of the wisdom of Song of Song is to teach young people the incredible power and preciousness of love, and the total commitment with which they must enter marriage as a result (8:6–7). As it does so, the Song hints at a greater Love standing behind human romance and the total commitment with which he relates to us, a Love stronger than death, jealous beyond the grave, unquenchable, fierce, not to be denied. The Song is teaching us that our marriages are not ultimately about ourselves, but reflect something much better. Indeed, part of the reason why God has structured created existence so that romance and marriage is such a big part of our lives is to give us the capacity and vocabulary to appreciate this greater Love.<sup>63</sup> In light of this, the wisdom of the Song teaches us continually to look beyond the very good but non-ultimate experience of marriage to “the One toward whom all our most intense earthly desires ultimately point.”<sup>64</sup> Just as the text can be read as an entirely ordinary human romance, but continually suggests a profounder horizon against which human relationships exist, so our own marriages are (in one sense) entirely ordinary, but (in another) reflections of the divine. In Duane Garrett’s fine phrase, the woman’s experience in the book “brings out the deep structure of the human soul”; in the Song, love is not an allegory of our need for God but an expression of it.<sup>65</sup> This is the wisdom of the Song, and the way it expresses that “profound mystery” in every human marriage of which Paul speaks (Eph 5:32).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 329.

<sup>62</sup> Some commentators find another supernatural hint in the gazelles and does by which the woman adjures her friends against the untimely awakening of love (2:7, 3:5), since the words for these animals sound like titles for God (צְבָאוֹת, “gazelles,” is close to יהוה צְבָאוֹת, “the Lord of hosts,” and בְּאֵילֹת הַשָּׂדֶה, “does of the field,” is close to אֱלֹהִים שְׂדֵי, “God Almighty;” e.g., Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 152). This seems less likely to me; God is so frequently explicitly invoked in oaths the OT, I cannot think why his name would be hidden here. Gazelles and does recur so frequently in ANE love poetry that references to these animals as ordinary animals makes sense in this context (Hess, *Song of Songs*, 80 n. 90; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 92).

<sup>63</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2015), 117. Duguid points out how OT wisdom literature elsewhere links “relational and spiritual truths,” e.g., the forbidden woman is a reflection of Lady Folly (p. 117).

<sup>64</sup> Duguid, *Song of Songs* (2016), 10. Hess suggests that this is the reason why the book’s title is a superlative (the *Song of Songs*)—not because sex is the most important part of human experience, but because it reflects the divine Love (*Song of Songs*, 37–38).

<sup>65</sup> Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 107.

<sup>66</sup> This is, to me, a more satisfying and convincing way to read the Song than interpreting the young woman’s two breasts as Moses and Aaron, or the two tablets of the decalogue, or the Old and New Testament, or the two Protestant sacraments, or the beauty of the church in Christ’s eyes (for these interpretations, see Garrett, *Song of Songs*, 74). Othmar Keel justly writes that “if two allegorizers ever agree on the interpretation of a verse it is only because one has copied the other” (*The Song of Songs*, 8). Far and away the best non-allegorical study of the biblical-theological significance of marriage is my father Ray Ortlund’s *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

At this point, one could easily ask why, if the nature of human love as a reflection of divine love is so important, the theme receives only hints in the book. Why not be more explicit? One supposes that the divine author of Scripture allows for alternating hints and explicit teaching on any number of subjects in just the right proportions in his book. But in addition to this, remembering the polytheistic setting of ancient Israel can help us appreciate the particular wisdom of the Song and the subtlety with which it negotiates this theme. For all the sophistication of the ancient Middle East, their gods and goddesses were basically human beings writ large; their myths show gods eating together, sometimes fighting (and even killing each other), and sometimes being lovers (Tammuz and Ishtar from Mesopotamia are a prominent example [cf. Ezek 8:14]). There is also some evidence of sacred marriage and temple prostitution in the ancient world (e.g., Gen 38:21–22; Deut 23:18; Hos 4:14).<sup>67</sup> In a context where human sexual activity would have been crassly projected onto the gods, the Song must tread carefully not to miscommunicate to ancient Israelites who otherwise were happy to engage in idolatry (2 Kings 17).<sup>68</sup> The hints of human love as a reflection of divine love must remain hints only. The Song is teaching ancient Israelites that there is nothing specifically sexual about God; human sexuality is a good but entirely ordinary created thing. It is only a reflection of the divine, a halo flickering around that Almighty flame.<sup>69</sup>

Greater awareness of the way in which the Song spoke against its own culture makes it natural to turn to the way it is speaking against ours. After all, every culture finds ways to misunderstand and fumble God's good gifts of love and marriage. If the medieval church allegorized the Song because they could not imagine a person being simultaneously holy and sexually active,<sup>70</sup> we are in danger of swinging to the other extreme. The thought of someone being simultaneously celibate and happy is, to us, impossible! Modern Western hedonism expresses itself in a strange paradox, however: on the one hand, our culture recklessly over-values sex. We have turned personal sexual fulfillment (of whatever orientation or variety) in a human rights issue; any suggestion that some kinds of sexual activity might be out of bounds is taken as an affront to personal dignity. On the other hand, we simultaneously tend to think that sexual activity has no meaning beyond personal fulfillment and self-gratification; there are no long-term consequences to sleeping with whomever, as long as you don't hurt anybody. We have reduced and circumscribed the meaning of sexuality within the atomistically individual, self-

<sup>67</sup> See further Samuel Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

<sup>68</sup> Some nuance is required here, because the extra-biblical texts to which the Song is most similar—Egyptian and Mesopotamian love poetry—“show scarcely a trace of a mythologizing of love;” at most, Hathor is invoked as “the protector and patron of love” and prayed to as such (Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 33; Murphy similarly writes of an almost total lack of any interest in or references to religion in Ramesside era Egyptian love songs [*Song of Songs*], 45). In other words, the overlap between sex and theology in the ANE does not obtain in ancient Middle Eastern love poetry. Nevertheless, a confusion about how human romance is related to the divine is still evident in Israel's pagan surroundings.

<sup>69</sup> Murphy quotes two German commentators (Gerleman and Rudolph) who understand the Song to deliberately de-sacralize human sexuality in reaction against ancient Middle Eastern paganism (*Song of Songs*, 100–1).

<sup>70</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem wrote that the reader of the Song “must not, accepting the vulgar, superficial interpretation of the words, suppose that the Canticle is an expression of carnal, sexual love” (quoted in Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 8). Turner records how many medieval theologians were uneasy even with married couples having sex; although it is necessary in order to repopulate the human race, it remains spiritually subject (*Eros and Allegory*, 83). It is significant that the Song never justifies sex in relation to some other good (such as childbirth); it is good in itself. Indeed, in the Song, the spiritual significance of marriage is wrapped up in the pleasure of marriage, not divorced from it.

determining self; but at the same time, sexual expression is located at the very core of self-actualization and self-worth. In one way, sex means nothing to us; in another, everything.

The wisdom of the Song of Songs helpfully challenges this account of human sexuality and marriage. It simultaneously humbles our unwise elevation of sexual fulfillment to the pinnacle of human self-expression, while also breaking our restriction of romance and love within the sphere of the autonomous self. The Song teaches that human romantic love is a good but non-ultimate thing, only a reflection of something much better; but it is forever tied to that ultimate reality which it reflects. Human romance is neither one's personal property, to be used as one sees fit; but neither does it contain the essence of human fulfillment.

At the same time, it is crucial to attend to the way in which the Song instructs us differently from Deuteronomy and Proverbs. The blunt imperatives of those other books are good and very needed; the sometimes-strident warnings about the strange woman in Proverbs 5–7 are especially necessary for male teenagers who would otherwise easily blunder into serious sin. But the Song does not command; it adorns. The Song instructs us by opening for us a profound vision of romance as a flame of the Lord, and the poetry beautifies its subject for the purpose of attracting us to God's good wisdom for human romance. As we attend to the words on the page and let the poetry do its work, we are to be ever more smitten with the spouse God has given us—and ever more aware of the supernatural context within which our ordinary romances play out.

This is an urgent matter in our context. Some churches respond to the recent sweeping changes in common sexual morality in the West by emphasizing only the imperatives of Scripture. Some continue to hold to a traditional view of marriage, but do so without reference to the deeper theological significance of this institution, commending marriage in a way which sounds suspiciously similar to our cultural context (i.e., marriage is an answer to those deep longings and loneliness within). Although marriage is wonderfully fulfilling at a personal level, only speaking of marriage in the context of personal fulfillment, without reference to that “Almighty flame,” runs the risk of simply perpetuating our radical individualism with a Christian veneer and also setting young people up for doctrinal compromise later in life. After all, if marriage is only a matter of personal fulfillment, why can't two men or two women get married? But if marriage is both instituted by God and a reflection of God himself, a gender disparity in marriage is crucial to the way marriage speaks beyond itself of God's love for us. Same-gender marriage obscures this mystery.<sup>71</sup> (Polygamy obscures marriage as a reflection of God's love in a similar way; God does not parse himself out among multiple partners, but gives himself to the believer fully, exclusively, without limit.)

Scripture both warns and woos. God commands us, but also and entices and allures. In his word, imperative and metaphor mix to reveal a vision for human romance which is both more beautiful than our culture's and more realistic. After all, if sexual fulfillment is worshipped as the apex of human fulfillment and self-realization, it is bound to become disappointing. Is it an accident that the recent sea-change on marriage and sexuality in our culture has been accompanied by a swell of self-righteousness and angry, factious polemics? Our culture seems more hateful and frustrated than ever. From this perspective, the ordinariness of the Song is a breath of fresh air. But the Song of Songs and the Scripture of which it is a part does more than topple our culture's favorite idols; it reveals something more beautiful than

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<sup>71</sup> This is not in the slightest to imply that men are somehow more important than women, or necessarily better reflections of God; both genders equally image God (Gen 1:27–28). The Bible's teaching about gender and distinction of gender roles is never predicated on male superiority.

our best idol. The Song's instruction of human romance as an "Almighty flame" is a more beautiful and stirring account of sexuality and marriage than anything our culture has come up with. Our culture is pressing the church very hard on this point, and it is easy to feel like a reactionary or a Luddite for believing what Christians have always believed. It is just exactly the beauty of the Song which can deepen and enhance our witness at the present moment. We can speak winsomely and not stridently about a romantic beauty which our non-Christian friends hardly suspect.

In this way, the practical and immediate wisdom of the Song turns out to have consequences far beyond mere relationship advice. But I hope that, for the reader, the emotional and imaginative aspect of the Song is what lingers. Although not directly related to the Song, a quotation from George MacDonald's *Phantastes* so beautifully evokes the reflection of divine love in human love that it is a suitable way to close this study:

Soon I fell asleep, overcome with fatigue and delight. In dreams of unspeakable joy—of restored friendships; of revived embraces; of love which said it had never died; of faces that had vanished long ago, yet said with smiling lips that they knew nothing of the grave; of pardons implored, and granted with such bursting floods of love, that I was almost glad I had sinned—thus I passed through this wondrous twilight. I awoke with the feeling that I had been kissed and loved to my heart's content; and found that my boat was floating motionless by the grassy shore of a little island.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> George MacDonald, *Phantases* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858), 223. I'm deeply grateful to my mother, Jani Ortlund, who read and commented on this article and encouraged me in it.

# The King’s Fear of the Lord as a Theme in the Books of Samuel

— David M. Cook —

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**Abstract:** Evangelicals have long sought to understand the core difference between David and Saul. The answer exposes a theme touched on elsewhere in the Bible: the role of the fear of the Lord in leadership. As Samuel crowns Saul king, he points readers back to Deuteronomy 17:18–20. There readers will see the importance of a God-fearing king and find four qualities he will bear: obedience to the Lord, good treatment of others, a long rule, and a long dynasty. The writer of 1–2 Samuel then carefully documents Saul failing at all four and David fulfilling all four. Finally, David’s dying words reinforce the virtues of God-fearing leadership, leaving leaders with a profound appeal to learn the fear of the Lord.

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Beneath the memorable stories of Saul and David rests a theme that carries great meaning for leaders.<sup>1</sup> Most Evangelical sermons and scholarly works on 1 and 2 Samuel<sup>2</sup> present David as the hero and Saul as the villain. Despite this widespread agreement on their outward behaviors, scholars and preachers have yet to reach a consensus on the inward difference between the two kings. What made Saul bad and David good?

To answer, readers must look back to Deuteronomy. As Saul is coronated king, Samuel gives a speech that points readers back to Deuteronomy 17:18–20, in which Moses commands rising kings to learn to fear the Lord. As readers look back to those verses, they find four ways the fear of the Lord would affect a king: his obedience, his treatment of others, his reign, and his dynasty. As readers then move through the Books of Samuel, they watch Saul fail at all four and David fulfill all four. Finally, they read David’s dying words extolling the virtues of one who rules “in the fear of God” (2 Sam 23:3).<sup>3</sup> In this way, the books of Samuel present the fear of the Lord as the core difference between Saul and David.

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<sup>1</sup> This material is adapted from portions of David M. Cook, “The Fear of the Lord: The Forgotten Foundation of Flourishing Leadership” (DEdMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The books of Samuel were originally written as one unit that was separated into two scrolls when it was translated into Greek. For this reason, they are best treated as a whole and analyzed together. This is explained in Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2019), 2:164 and in Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations from the ESV.

## 1. *The Haunting Question*

Readers often close the books of Samuel desiring to avoid the fate Saul suffered and find the favor David enjoyed. Saul died trembling on his own sword after a descent into madness, rage, and witchcraft, leaving his kingdom to his rival instead of his son. David found God's favor at an early age and died full of days, with an eternal dynasty to rule after him. Seeing the two kings as moral examples is appropriate, for "these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:11–12). With such a motivating narrative, there is good reason to search the story for key differences between the two characters, for key flaws in Saul or key virtues in David. Two perspectives on this difference stand out.

Paul Borgman, appreciating how the patterns in the books of Samuel tell readers "why David instead of Saul," concludes the answer is mysterious because "God ... can see what humankind cannot."<sup>4</sup> The difference is not evident at first. Readers must wait patiently to see the difference: David delights in God.<sup>5</sup> Borgman is right, though David's delight rests on a deeper theme woven through the books of Samuel. David delights in God because he fears God.

Robert Alter, with his treasured eye for literary nuance, finds their difference in knowledge. Saul is "deprived of the knowledge he desperately seeks," while David is "peculiarly favored with knowledge." Like Borgman, Alter sheds light on the difference. Indeed, David's knowledge contrasts with Saul's lack of it; but David has more than knowledge. He has "the beginning of knowledge," found in "the fear of the Lord" (Prov 1:7).<sup>6</sup>

## 2. *Samuel References the Law's Requirement that Kings Fear the Lord*

To uncover the key difference between David and Saul, one must consider the role of Hebrew prophets like Samuel: enforcing the book of Deuteronomy. Peter Gentry states it most plainly early in his work on the Prophets, writing that "*Everything* in the prophets" is "based upon the book of Deuteronomy, an expansion and renewal of the covenant made at Sinai."<sup>7</sup> Prophetic books like 1 and 2 Samuel were not written to predict the future but to apply a covenant made in the past to the present. This foundation in Deuteronomy helps explain why references to Deuteronomy abound in the Prophets and helps readers see the difference between David and Saul in the Books of Samuel.

If prophets applied Deuteronomy to present situations, one might expect Samuel to point to Deuteronomy's instructions for rising kings before crowning Israel's first king. Indeed, he does. Before crowning Saul he gives his longest speech,<sup>8</sup> enforcing Deuteronomy 17:18–20 by urging,

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Borgman, *David, Saul, and God*, 244.

<sup>6</sup> Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 2:172.

<sup>7</sup> Peter John Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 15, emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> Bergen 1, 2 *Samuel*, 140.

And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. *If you will fear the LORD* and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if *both you and the king who reigns over you* will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. (1 Sam 12:13–14, emphasis mine)

These words call to mind Deuteronomy 17:18–20, which gives the same instruction to rising kings.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, *that he may learn to fear the LORD his God* by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (Deut 17:18–20, emphasis mine)

With this reference, the writer of 1–2 Samuel invites readers to evaluate Israel's kings by their fear of the Lord. Kings must learn to fear the Lord; readers must watch to see if the king learns to fear the Lord.

The king must learn to fear the Lord by reading from the Law all the days of his life. He must produce a standard copy in the presence of the Levitical priests, an act of reverence that pointed to his submission to the higher king.<sup>9</sup> Like the vassal of an ancient Near East suzerain-vassal treaty, the king would keep his copy of the covenant with him and read it regularly.<sup>10</sup> The king's fear must then become evident in two ways: his obedience to all the Lord's ways and his refusal to lift his heart above his brothers.<sup>11</sup> If he does learn to fear the Lord, the king will reign long and his sons will reign long after him.

Readers, then, should watch for (1) how completely Saul and David follow God's commands, (2) how they treat their fellow Israelites, (3) whether the Lord gives them long reigns, and (4) whether their sons reign long after them. Readers who look for these signs will be rewarded, as 1–2 Samuel carefully catalogues Saul failing and David succeeding in all four of them.

### ***3. The Books of Samuel Catalogue Saul's Failure to Fear the Lord***

The writer of 1 Samuel, after pointing the reader back to the promise of Deuteronomy 17:18–20, takes care to detail Saul's miscarriage of it. 1 Samuel observes Saul turning "aside from the commandment," his heart being "lifted above his brothers," and his fear of man. The writer then chronicles how Saul "and his children" do not "continue long in his kingdom" (Deut 17:20). These pointed details outline a picture of a king who never learned to fear the Lord.

#### **3.1. Saul Turned Aside from God's Commands**

The king who feared the Lord would "not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left" (Deut 17:20). By keeping the Lord's words completely, the king would show that

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 419–20.

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 226–27.

<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 257.

he fears the Lord. Elsewhere in Deuteronomy, the one who fears the Lord walks in all of his ways (Deut 8:6, 10:12, 13:14). I have listed this sign first above. But not only does Saul turn aside from God's commandments, he also loses his dynasty and then his kingdom for it, the fourth and third signs I noted above, respectively.

In the first instance of Saul turning aside from God's commands, Saul did not wait for Samuel to arrive before offering a sacrifice, contrary to instruction. By law, Samuel could have arrived at any point in the day. But Saul grew impatient as the people began scattering. Rather than wait, he offered the sacrifice early. Samuel arrived as soon as the sacrifice was finished, contending, "You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Sam 13:13, emphasis mine). Ironically, Saul "believed he could obtain the Lord's favor through an act of disobedience."<sup>12</sup> He actually was guilty of "violating the commandment and spoiling the chance for a long-lasting dynasty."<sup>13</sup> Thus the writer of 1 Samuel links two aspects of Deuteronomy 17:18–20: Saul lost his dynasty because he turned aside from God's commandment.

In the second instance of Saul turning aside from God's commands, God directly warns Saul to listen to him (1 Sam 15:1) before commanding him to destroy every Amalekite and all their livestock, stressing the importance of that command.<sup>14</sup> Despite the warning, Saul does not listen, sparing King Agag and the best of the livestock. Bergen notes details that stress the gravity of Saul's failure to keep the command completely: Samuel's angry sleeplessness and God's use of a term for grief used elsewhere only before the grievous flood of Genesis.<sup>15</sup> The Lord states the reason for his grief and his rejection of Saul as king: "he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments" (1 Sam 15:11). Thus, the writer of the books of Samuel grievously links two more aspects of Deuteronomy 17:18–20: Saul lost his kingship because he turned aside from God's commandment a second time. Put differently, "Saul's rejection of Yahweh's word resulted in his own rejection as king."<sup>16</sup>

The writer of the Books of Samuel thus connects Saul's failure to keep all of God's commands with his loss of his kingdom and loss of his dynasty. Saul thus failed at the first, third, and fourth signs noted above.

### 3.2. Saul Lifted His Heart above His Brothers

The heart of the king who feared the Lord would not "be lifted up above his brothers" (Deut 17:20). I have listed this sign second above. Here "lifted up" refers to exalting or exempting oneself.<sup>17</sup> The God-fearing king will not exalt himself above the rest of the nation or exempt himself from God's laws. Modern readers might say he is not above the law.

By contrast, the writer of the books of Samuel details Saul hunting David for years (1 Sam 18–31), hurling a spear at his own son in anger (1 Sam 20:33), and murdering an entire city of God's holy priests

<sup>12</sup> Bergen *1, 2 Samuel*, 150.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 128.

<sup>14</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 170–71.

<sup>16</sup> Klein, *1 Samuel*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> HALOT 1202.

(1 Sam 22:19). Saul made himself the exception to God's laws over and above his Israelite brothers. He thus failed at the second sign I listed above.

### 3.3. Saul Feared Man, Not God

Though Saul did not learn to fear the Lord, he did learn to fear the very Israelites he lifted his heart above. Biblical counseling author Ed Welch gives helpful insight on why: one fears man because one does not fear God. Every person bears God's image, an image that strikes fear in the hearts of sinners. To overcome this fear of man, one must learn to fear the Lord and love others.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the fear of the Lord "swallows up all other fears."<sup>19</sup> But Saul, a head and shoulders taller than the rest of Israel (1 Sam 9:2), is afraid of those he looks down upon. Building on Burrough's foundation and Welch's insights, readers can conclude that Saul feared his Israelite brothers because he did not learn to fear the Lord.

Readers get their first taste of Saul's fear of man at his coronation. The lot falls to Saul, the kingship along with it. But Saul is missing. Saul's absence puts Samuel's authority and the lot itself into question. "Is there a man still to come?" (1 Sam 10:22).<sup>20</sup> But is it Saul who should be embarrassed. The Lord speaks the answer: "he has hidden himself among the baggage" (1 Sam 10:22). Perhaps now readers begin to see why Saul had previously "shut out both his servant (9:27) and his uncle (10:16) from any knowledge of his destiny."<sup>21</sup> Saul's stage-fright could not be hidden any more than he could; he was afraid to be king.

The reason for Saul's fear had not yet become clear. Any wise king would be intimidated by the divine imperatives set upon a ruler and the divine accountability that follows them. Maybe Saul trembles with a true sense of reverence for the burden placed upon him. No, as 1 Samuel continues to unfold, the root of Saul's fear comes to light. Rather than a fear of God that moves him to obedience, Saul admits he disobeyed God "because I feared the people" (1 Sam 15:24). Bergen summarizes the root of Saul's disobedience well:

What had motivated Saul to move away from obedience to God's command? Fundamentally it was misdirected fear: instead of fearing the Lord as required by the Torah (cf. Lev 19:14; 25:17; Deut 6:13, 24; 10:12, 20), Saul "was afraid of the people" (cf. Mark 11:32; John 7:13). Because of that misguided fear, Saul "listened to the voice of" ("gave in to") the people instead of listening to the Lord's voice as required by the Torah (cf. Deut 27:10).<sup>22</sup>

Eventually Saul took his own life as he trembled with fear of the Philistines. The Philistines had pushed Israel back, killed Saul's three oldest sons, and overtaken Saul with archers. If this were not enough, Saul already knew his fate from a dramatic revelation the night before.<sup>23</sup> There appeared only one choice, as Saul would command his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me" (1 Sam 31:4).

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Fear, or, The Heart Trembling at the Word of God Evidences a Blessed Frame of Spirit*, ed. Don Kistler, 4th ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001), 30.

<sup>20</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, TOTC 8 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 100.

<sup>21</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 282.

To be sure, some venerable exegetes do not see Saul's suicide this way. Joyce Baldwin saw his choice as honorable. "Saul heroically fell upon his own sword rather than have the uncircumcised Philistines *make sport* of him, as they had done with Samson."<sup>24</sup> But this conclusion seems out of line with her other observations, and also with the biblical account of Samson's death. Saul's choice must be out of fear and self-interest, for the Philistines could dishonor Israel's God with the body of a dead king just as easily as they could with a live king. Baldwin affirmed this with strong imagery.

Though Saul did not live to witness the scene, the Philistines did enjoy themselves at his expense; in particular, they made capital out of their victory by congratulating their gods, and by dedicating Saul's armour to become a trophy in *the temple of Ashtaroth*, in much the same way as Goliath's sword had been treasured in Israel's sanctuary (1 Sam. 21:9). The foreign deity had triumphed, and the decapitated body of Israel's anointed king was hung, exposed, on the city wall of Bethshan, the easternmost of the line of old Canaanite fortress cities across the country from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, which the Israelites had not conquered (Josh. 17:11).<sup>25</sup>

I conclude that Saul did not have in mind the honor of Israel's God, or he would have stayed alive as long as possible to fight for it. Perhaps then God would have honored himself in Saul's humiliation as he did during Samson's humiliation (Judg 16:28–30). Saul could only have killed himself out of fear for the taunting and torture at the hands of men sure to meet him.

Interestingly, Saul's armor-bearer refused to thrust Saul through because "he feared greatly" (1 Sam 31:5). Of this Baldwin fittingly quipped, "David, who had once been Saul's armor-bearer, would have approved."<sup>26</sup>

It follows, then, that if Saul had learned to fear the Lord, he would not have feared his people or his enemies. But Saul's fear of man grew so great that it took his kingdom from him and killed him.

### 3.4. Saul Paid for His Disobedience

The promise of Deuteronomy is ultimately that the king who fears the Lord will "continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel" (Deut 17:20). I have listed these signs, a long reign and a long dynasty, third and fourth above, respectively. By contrast, God rejected Saul and anointed David two years into Saul's reign,<sup>27</sup> having already promised to take the kingdom from his sons.

If the details in Saul's transgression are heartbreaking, the details of his promised downfall are worse. Once the anointing moves from him to David, the Lord's blessing and the people's hearts go with it. The Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul and a harmful spirit begins to torment him (1 Sam 16:14). David slays the giant that gigantic Saul would not fight (1 Sam 17). The people start lauding David more highly than Saul (1 Sam 18:7). Saul's turns into a jealous madman until he kills himself (1 Sam 31:4) with no son reigning after him. Yet the framework of the narrative suggests that another, David, is gaining the

<sup>24</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 182, emphasis original.

<sup>25</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 182, emphasis original.

<sup>26</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 182.

<sup>27</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 148.

Lord's favor as Saul finally loses it completely; Saul is defeated by David's former friends (the Philistines) while David defeats the enemy near whom Saul found his rejection from God (the Amalekites).<sup>28</sup>

Saul's story paints a tragic picture of a king who never learns to fear the Lord. By forsaking God's commandments and lifting his heart above his brothers, Saul lost his kingdom and dynasty.

#### *4. The Books of Samuel Catalogue David's Rule in the Fear of the Lord*

During and after Saul's tragic failure to learn the fear of the Lord, the writer of 1–2 Samuel carefully notes David's fulfillment of Deuteronomy 17:18–20 and ends David's life with a summary that he ruled "in the fear of God" (2 Sam 23:3). Thus, after pointing readers to Deuteronomy's exhortation to fear the Lord and cataloguing Saul's failure to embrace it, the writer then casts David as a God-fearing king who ends his life exhorting others to lead in the fear of God.

##### **4.1. David Cherished God's Commands**

Despite striking blemishes in David's track record, prophets mark him with integrity and with delight in God's commands. He reminds readers that sinners can still walk in integrity. This integrity is the first sign I noted above.

David's integrity is perhaps best summarized in the song recorded at the end of his life. Why did God continue to deliver David from threat after threat?

The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness;  
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.  
For I have kept the ways of the Lord  
and have not wickedly departed from my God.  
For all his rules were before me,  
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.  
I was blameless before him,  
and I kept myself from guilt.  
And the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness,  
according to my cleanness in his sight. (2 Sam 22:21–25)

The wording, especially an inclusio of verses 21 and 25, points readers back to Deuteronomy's imperative to "keep the ways of Yahweh" (note verse 22), so much that many see it as a Deuteronomistic insertion.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the writer of 1 Samuel intentionally pointed back to Deuteronomy, painting David as the ideal fulfillment of Deuteronomy's expectation of royal integrity. Other prophets continue this trend later when they measure his descendants against him in 1 Kings, asking whether they "walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did" (1 Kgs 11:33).<sup>30</sup> In Samuel and elsewhere, the prophets cast David as the king who kept God's commands.

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<sup>28</sup> Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 39.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle McCarter summarizes this position well in *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AB 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 468.

<sup>30</sup> While these words are taken from 1 Kings 11:33, similar evaluations can be found elsewhere. 1 Kings alone includes 3:3, 3:6, 3:14, 9:4, 15:3, and 22:2.

The promise of Deuteronomy 17 states where this integrity will come from: daily reading of the Law. The writer of 1–2 Samuel notes David’s view of this Law in the same song. “This God—his way is perfect,” David sings, “The word of the LORD proves true” (2 Sam 22:31). God’s word “stands the test of fire, like precious metal.”<sup>31</sup> David’s perilous life tested it often, finding it pure and reliable. While David’s anthology of songs like Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 may best express his love for God’s word, the books of Samuel make note of it as part of his fear of the Lord. By notable contrast, the books make no mention of Saul’s love for God’s commands. The God-fearing king will regard God’s word highly and walk in all of it; David did just that.

Yet readers and interpreters must weigh such a sterling assessment against David’s great sins. Most notably, David lustfully took a married woman and conspired to kill her husband before pridefully counting God’s people contrary to the Law.

David’s affair with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 “jolt(s) the reader, who has become accustomed to the mild and generally upright David.”<sup>32</sup> Such a jolt testifies to the integrity readers expect from David; but readers must wonder how a man who fears the Lord so greatly could do such a thing. They are right to wonder, as the broader story shows the writer’s focus on David’s character over his military feats.<sup>33</sup>

Though David’s conduct is shockingly immoral, the story eventually shows that even David at his worst is different from Saul. Readers ultimately see David’s openness to prophetic rebuke, in contrast against Saul’s hardness.<sup>34</sup> Whereas Saul makes excuses before offering a questionable confession (1 Sam 15:13–25),<sup>35</sup> David immediately responds, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam 12:13). To confess this sin is to admit to a capital offense to one of his own subjects, placing himself at great political liability. Yet David confesses his sin to Nathan the prophet, showing his integrity before the Lord. Though a shocking breach of integrity, the sin and its repercussions are rightly called “the clearest indication that he was different from Saul in the most essential relationship of all, that of submission to the Lord God. For that reason he found forgiveness, whereas Saul never accepted his guilt or the rejection that followed from it.”<sup>36</sup>

The writer echoes a similar pattern later as David holds a census, inevitably violating Israel’s purification laws, resulting in a plague upon Israel.<sup>37</sup> This time without prompting, David’s heart strikes him and he confesses, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam 24:10). Baldwin saw how David’s words point to his “tender conscience.”<sup>38</sup> Again, David’s response to his sin shows the good in his character.

Despite these two great breaches, David is remembered by the Lord as one who walked before him “with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules” (1 Kgs 9:4). Thus, readers cannot take the accounts in Samuel as marks against David’s integrity but as reminders not to equate integrity with sinlessness. David, filled

<sup>31</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 309.

<sup>32</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 288.

<sup>33</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 247–48.

<sup>34</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 252.

<sup>35</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 124; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 173.

<sup>36</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 255.

<sup>37</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 512–14.

<sup>38</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 316.

with integrity, listens to the Lord even when he has sinned; Saul, who lacked integrity, failed to listen to the Lord and thus multiplied his sin. Indeed, David “learn[ed] to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them” (Deut 17:19).

#### 4.2. David Did Not Lift His Heart above His Brothers

The God-fearing king of Deuteronomy 17 would not lift up “his heart ... above his brothers” (Deut 17:20). He would not be proud or consider himself above his brothers.<sup>39</sup> In suit, Samuel portrays David's heart as knit to his brothers, even mourning for fallen brethren turned enemies and favoring his rival's house. I have listed this sign second above.

If readers would expect David to lift his heart above anyone, it would be Saul. Yet upon hearing of Saul's death, David laments in “the overwhelming agony of bereavement”<sup>40</sup> and commands that his lament be taught to the people. Even as he was lifted above Saul, his heart was not.

Similarly, when Joab's murder of Abner advantages David, David keeps his hands clean and mourns for his fellow Israelite. Unaware of Joab's actions until Abner is dead, David declares, “I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner” (2 Sam 3:28) and then insists that the people (including Joab himself) mourn for Abner in sackcloth, gives him a proper burial, weeps at his grave, and finally composes him a lament (2 Sam 3:31–34).<sup>41</sup> Bergen cites these acts as a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 17:18–19.<sup>42</sup> Participating in Abner's murder would have violated the command, but the writer is careful to distance David from the murder. David could not be confused with one who has the blood of Israelites on his hand, for he did not lift up his heart above his brothers.

Once David ascends to the throne, he asks, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?” (2 Sam 9:1). Upon learning that a son of Jonathan remained, David lifted that son up by showing great kindness to him. The story intends to stress David's loyalty to his friend. Rather than lift up his heart over Jonathan, David keeps his covenant with Jonathan.<sup>43</sup> This emphasis sits in stark contrast with the usual treatment of rival houses by kings.<sup>44</sup> David would not lift up his heart above even rival houses in Israel.

David's refusal to lift his heart above his brothers may find its peak when his own son revolts against him, takes much of the kingdom from him, and dies dishonoring him. Upon hearing of it, true to his pattern, David weeps. “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam 18:33). Anderson notes how the form of David's lament (crying Absalom's name three times and calling him as son five times) “accentuates the depth of David's grief and anguish.”<sup>45</sup> Whereas Saul erupted against his son at the thought of treachery (1 Sam 20:30–34),

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<sup>39</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Society, 2000), 310.

<sup>40</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Baldwin draws meaning from Joab's inclusion in the mandatory mourning, noting that Abner's murderer appearing in sackcloth would be noticed by the crowd and communicate David's distance from the act (*1 and 2 Samuel*, 204).

<sup>42</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 313.

<sup>43</sup> A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC 11 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 140; Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 242–43; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 260.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 140.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 226.

David keeps his heart knit to his son's despite betrayal and rebellion. He could not lift his heart above a truly rebellious son, when Saul had lifted his heart over a loyal son.

Conspicuously, David does use his sword against Uriah<sup>46</sup> to hide an affair with Uriah's wife Bathsheba, paying dearly for it with the life of his own son (2 Sam 11, 12). Readers will certainly see the exception to the pattern: David did lift his heart above Uriah. Yet the final direction of the story serves to contrast David against Saul and highlight David's fear of the Lord.

The significance of David's repentance, which "came with immediacy, without denial, and without excuse,"<sup>47</sup> is summarized in the above section. While David's repentance shows his desire to stay on the God-fearing path, the Lord's discipline showed his desire to keep David there. Upon David's repentance, he hears the Lord's judgement from Nathan, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die" (2 Sam 12:13–14). Immediately the story moves to the death of David's son, highlighting the swiftness of God's judgment.<sup>48</sup> The Lord's severe discipline can only have one motive: to restore David to right fellowship, including right treatment of his fellow Israelites. Indeed, David responds in kind, seeking the Lord on behalf of the child while it is still alive and then worshiping after it dies. As Bergen describes it:

In losing his son, David sought more than ever to gain a deeper relationship with his Heavenly Father. It is significant that David did not break his fast until after he had worshiped God; David's hunger for a right relationship with God exceeded his desire for culinary delights.<sup>49</sup>

Bergen also quotes Baldwin, who called the story a "turning point in the life of David."<sup>50</sup> So David's worst and most uncharacteristic moment finally set him more firmly on the path of God-fearing living and leadership.

Though David's sword was fierce, he hesitated to use it on his brothers. Instead, he expressed his love for even his enemies at their deaths. Having learned to fear the Lord, he would not lift his heart above his brothers.

### 4.3. David Ruled Long and Left an Eternal Dynasty

The king who learned to fear the Lord would "continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel" (Deut 17:20). If he read the Torah daily, the results would lead to a secure future.<sup>51</sup> I have listed these signs, a long reign and a long dynasty, third and fourth above, respectively.

Aiding translators on this verse, the UBS Handbook points forward to David's 424-year dynasty.<sup>52</sup> Though hardly important to translators and rare for a series that focuses little on biblical theology, the

<sup>46</sup> Though Uriah is listed as a Hittite and was perhaps born a Hittite, his name (Yahweh is my light) and distinction in Israel's army suggest he was either born in Israel or changed his name. Either way, he was certainly one of the brothers David was not to lift his heart above. See Anderson, *1, 2 Samuel*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 373.

<sup>48</sup> Bergen *1, 2 Samuel*, 374.

<sup>49</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 375.

<sup>50</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 373; Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 255.

<sup>51</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 421.

<sup>52</sup> Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, 310.

appropriate reference demonstrates the unmistakable connection between Deuteronomy's prediction of a long dynasty and David's long dynasty. This ideal, God-fearing king could be none other than David.

Though four centuries mark an impressive dynasty, the Lord promises David an even longer one.

Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom *forever*. (2 Sam 7:11–13, emphasis mine)

Anderson calls this chapter “the theological highlight of the Books of Samuel.”<sup>53</sup> Saul would have received this eternal dynasty, but he did not follow the Lord completely (1 Sam 13:13). In contrast to Saul, the favor of God rests on David so much that he receives a dynasty marked by eternity.<sup>54</sup>

In his last words, David claims a connection between this dynasty and his God-fearing rule. These last words close out the theme of God-fearing leadership in the books of Samuel, first extolling the virtues of God-fearing leadership and then grounding David's house in his own God-fearing leadership.

The oracle begins with nine lines of introduction, serving to underscore the importance of these words and their centrality to the book's message.<sup>55</sup> One line says these words are David's last, four reinforce the importance of their human author,<sup>56</sup> and four more add to that the claim that the words come as an oracle from God. Readers have been given every reason to perk their ears to David's prophecy.

When one rules justly over men,  
ruling in the fear of God,  
he dawns on them like the morning light,  
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,  
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth. (2 Sam 23:3–4)

After such a grandiose introduction David gives readers a simple prophetic image. As sunshine after rain invigorates the grass to flourish from the earth, so does just, God-fearing leadership invigorate those under it to flourish.<sup>57</sup> “A righteous king guided by the fear of the Lord ... brings life and blessing to his nation.”<sup>58</sup>

Though David says these words as king, he does not limit them to kings. Not only kings, but all those in authority can see those they lead flourish if they will learn the fear of the Lord. Bergen also says this quotably: “for well-watered seedlings to fulfill their potential, they must have bright sunlight; similarly, strong, righteous leaders help create an environment in which the people under their care can fulfill their potential.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 112.

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122.

<sup>55</sup> David's oracle is “clearly one of the highlighted passages in 2 Samuel,” according to Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 464.

<sup>56</sup> Baldwin poetically refers to these four lines as a “fourfold portrait of the writer” (*1 and 2 Samuel*, 311).

<sup>57</sup> Roger Omanson and John Ellington recommend rendering verse 4 as the sunshine coming after the rain (*A Handbook on the First and Second Books of Samuel*, UBS Handbook Series [New York: United Bible Society, 2001], 1154).

<sup>58</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 464.

<sup>59</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 466.

David then moves on to claim that his own God-fearing leadership is the reason his house will stand, the reason he received an everlasting covenant.

For does not my house stand so with God?  
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things and secure.  
For will he not cause to prosper  
all my help and my desire? (2 Sam 23:5)

As Baldwin notes, the standing of David's house depends on both the word of the Lord and upon David's desire to rule in the fear of God, without contradiction.<sup>60</sup> This dual dependence must be at least in part because the word of the Lord already promised a long dynasty to God-fearing kings in Deuteronomy 17:20. Bergen summarizes plainly that these last words of David present "the ideal of a righteous king guided by the fear of the Lord."<sup>61</sup> The theme has been woven and is now tied off at the end. The Lord wants leaders to fear him.

## *5. Conclusion*

By pointing back to the promise of Deuteronomy 17:18–20 in Samuel's farewell speech and then measuring Saul and David's lives against it, the writer of the books of Samuel shows readers the difference between a leader who learns to fear the Lord and a leader who does not. This theme through the books of Samuel leaves readers with a vivid contrast of God-fearing leadership and foolish leadership while reinforcing the way in which the fear of the Lord grounds flourishing leadership.

The theme may lead readers to close the book and ask with urgency how they can learn to fear the Lord. They should turn back to Deuteronomy 17:18–20 to complete the picture. One learns to fear the Lord by keeping a copy of his words on hand and reading from them every day. A leader can also watch for outward expressions of his or her fear of the Lord: dedicated obedience to God's commands and unselfish treatment of others. While the covenant blessings promised to an Israelite king (long reign and long dynasty) are not guaranteed to today's Christian leaders, the broader biblical message—that the fear of the Lord grounds flourishing leadership—remains.

The value of God-fearing leadership is a message not exclusive to Deuteronomy 17:18–20 and 1–2 Samuel; it is part of a broader biblical theme. When looking for judges, Jethro counseled Moses to look for "men who fear God" (Exod 18:21). Similarly, Jehoshaphat later appointed judges and commanded them to rule "in the fear of the Lord" (2 Chron 19:8–11). Nehemiah, unlike the leaders before him, treated his people fairly "because of the fear of God," and rebuked the unjust leaders, saying, "Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God?" (Neh 5:9). Solomon, training his sons to rule the kingdom after him, wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). Jesus's parable of the persistent widow presented the judge as wicked by noting that he "neither feared God nor respected men" (Luke 18:2). This broader theme is meant to leave readers longing for a coming king, Jesus Christ, whose "delight shall be in the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:3).

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<sup>60</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 311.

<sup>61</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 464.

## The King's Fear of the Lord as a Theme in the Books of Samuel

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The difference between David and Saul becomes a parable that generations of leaders cannot afford to miss. Bringing to life through story a teaching given throughout the Bible, the books of Samuel leave pastors, fathers, and others leaders with the strongest of exhortations: learn to fear the Lord.

# Reconceiving a Biblical Theology of Mission: *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* Revisited

— Andreas J. Köstenberger —

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**Abstract:** Scholarship on the biblical theme of mission has made significant strides in the couple decades since the original publication of my work *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (co-authored with Peter T. O’Brien) in 2001. The present essay discusses changes made to *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* in the second edition (published in 2020) in which T. Desmond Alexander wrote the chapter on mission in the Old Testament. The adjusted flow tracks the development of mission within the framework of the story of Israel, Jesus, and the early Christians, enhancing both the historical and the narrative dimensions of mission. The presentation integrates the Gospels with related New Testament writers—in particular, embedding the Pauline mission within Luke–Acts—resulting in greater cohesiveness and appreciation for the organic interconnections among New Testament voices and leaders of the early Christian mission. It also discusses Paul’s letters in chronological order of writing and considers the contribution of all of his letters to a biblical theology of mission rather than focusing on Paul individually and selecting one book (such as Romans) as the primary focus. Finally, material on mission in the Second Temple period remains in the background (in an appendix) rather than interrupting the biblical-theological flow and canonical connection between the Testaments. In all these ways, readers can gain a sharper vision and more accurate picture of the biblical theology of mission.

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The mission theme is a significant part of the biblical storyline in conjunction with other themes such as covenant, redemption, and the gospel. While in the Old Testament, Israel was called primarily to serve as a “priestly kingdom” and “holy nation” in order to witness to the surrounding nations about Yahweh, in the New Testament, the church was called to go and disciple the nations, proclaiming the gospel of the crucified, buried, and risen Lord Jesus Christ. While of great practical import, however, the mission theme, with some notable exceptions, has by and large been neglected by biblical scholars and theologians, in part because of a historical-critical bias and at times, one surmises,

because many working in academia may not themselves be believers or believe in the legitimacy of Christian mission.

Against this backdrop of neglect, there has been a groundswell of voices that have drawn attention to the missionary nature of the New Testament writings and of Paul's letters in particular. I. Howard Marshall has called the New Testament texts "documents of a mission."<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright has noted that Paul, as a herald (Greek κήρυξ), made first-time proclamation of the gospel before passing on the task of caring for the churches he established to apostolic delegates.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Thomas Schreiner, have likewise stressed Paul's role as a missionary in relation to his role as a theologian.<sup>3</sup> My purpose in the present paper is to discuss how my own thinking has developed in the last couple decades regarding the biblical theology of mission. It is my hope that these reflections will serve both as a modest contribution to a better understanding of the Bible's mission theology and as a case study of how a theologian's thinking may develop over the course of one's academic career and personal journey.

In 2001, IVP-UK, and subsequently IVP-US, published my co-authored work *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* in the New Studies in Biblical Theology (NSBT) series edited by D. A. Carson.<sup>4</sup> Almost twenty years later, I was given the opportunity to prepare a second edition of this work, along with T. Desmond Alexander, who wrote the chapter on mission in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> Since the original publication of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, a number of significant works have appeared, including Eckhard Schnabel's two-volume *Early Christian Mission*, Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God*, and John Dickson's *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities*, not to mention numerous works on the "New Perspective on Paul" with implications for our understanding of the early church's mission.<sup>6</sup>

The present article sets out to canvass developments in the literature on the biblical theology of mission in the last two decades and to summarize the most significant changes in the presentation of the biblical theology of mission in the second edition of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*. These changes include, among others: (1) moving from a literary-canonical to a more thoroughly grounded historical presentation; (2) connecting each of the so-called General (or Catholic) Epistles to a Gospel witness (e.g., 1–2 Peter with Mark); (3) consolidating the chapters on Luke–Acts and Paul into a single chapter; and (4) moving the chapter on mission in the Second Temple period to an appendix. The

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<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 34–35.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, "Paul's Western Missionary Project: Jerusalem, Rome, Spain in Historical and Theological Perspectives," in *The Last Years of Paul: Essays from the Tarragona Conference, June 2013*, ed. Armand Puig i Tàrrach, John M. G. Barclay, and Jörg Frey, WUNT 352 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 49–66.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger with T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed., NSBT 53 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities*, WUNT 2/159 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

present article will present a rationale for these changes and argue that they significantly improve the presentation of a biblical theology of mission.

### 1. *Changed Landscape*

At the very outset, to facilitate comparison, it may be helpful to present the basic table of contents of both editions side by side:

<i>First Edition</i>	<i>Second Edition</i>
1 Introduction	1 Introduction
2 Old Testament	<i>Part 1: Story of Israel</i>
3 Second-temple period	2 Old Testament
4 Mark	<i>Part 2: Story of Jesus, Early Christians</i>
5 Matthew	3 Matthew, James, Hebrews
6 Luke–Acts	4 Mark, Peter, Jude
7 Paul	5 Luke–Acts, Paul
8 John	6 John (Gospel, letters, Apocalypse)
9 General Epistles and Revelation	7 Conclusion
10 Synthesis	<i>Appendix: Second-temple period</i>

When writing the first edition, my collaborator, Peter O’Brien, and I simply divvied up the chapters based on previous work on the subject: he graciously volunteered to produce the chapters on the Old Testament, Luke–Acts, and Paul—three chapters with massive importance for a biblical theology of mission—while I covered the rest of the material: Matthew, Mark, John, the General Epistles and Revelation, and, last but not least, the Second Temple period. However, while this *modus operandi* proved eminently workable—especially since we wrote the book on two different continents with email and the internet still in their early stages—we worked largely in isolation (though we did read each other’s material and made suggestions for improvement).

By contrast, for the second edition, my new collaborator, T. Desmond Alexander, wrote a fresh chapter on mission in the Old Testament while I tackled the challenge of covering the entire New Testament. While a massive task, this had the advantage of me being able to take a more thoroughgoing historical and (meta-)narrative approach, which, I believe, strengthened the cohesiveness of the material. Important influences here were Christopher Wright and his seminal work *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* and N. T. Wright’s opus, including the inaugural volume of the Christian Origins and the Question of God series, *The New Testament and the People of God*.<sup>7</sup> While Christopher Wright’s book is very heavy on the Old and rather light on the New Testament—no doubt reflecting his own primary area of expertise—it is to his great merit that he demonstrated the significance of the mission motif for the Bible’s metanarrative as a whole.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

The other Wright—N. T.—placed an emphasis on a “story” hermeneutic grounded in critical realism, stressing the importance of worldview in forging one’s identity in relation to God.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, we chose to present the Bible’s mission theology from the vantage point of “Israel’s story,” “the story of Jesus,” and “the story of the (early) church.” Within this framework, we followed a narrative framework for both Testaments, the Old and New Testament respectively, both within themselves as Testaments and in relation to each other. This, I believe, makes for a more coherent and cohesive presentation, especially with regard to the mission motif in the New Testament, which in the first edition was configured more along canonical lines. In fact, most chapters followed a book-by-book approach where the mission theme was considered in a given book or corpus.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Greater Cohesiveness

Books on a major biblical-theological theme are at times hampered by a multi-author approach. While there are advantages to such an approach in that it capitalizes on people’s individual areas of research expertise, such volumes end up being invariably uneven.<sup>10</sup> Thus, having a single author covering the entire New Testament enabled me to be consistent methodologically and to balance canonical, historical, and literary considerations in a way that would have been more difficult in a multi-author format.

### 2.1. Integrating the Gospels and Related New Testament Writers

In the first edition, the New Testament portion started with Mark—based on the tentative assumption of Markan priority—and then proceeded to Matthew (with an emphasis on the Great Commission), Luke–Acts (with Acts as the major highlight), Paul, then John, and finally the General Epistles and Revelation. In the second edition, I decided to follow the canonical order of the fourfold Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Also, rather than treating the General Epistles in a discrete chapter, I grouped each of them with one of the Gospels:

- James and Hebrews with Matthew
- 1–2 Peter and Jude with Mark
- Paul’s letters with Luke–Acts; and
- 1–3 John, as well as Revelation, with John.

Thus, the fourfold Gospel canon became the center of gravity for the entire New Testament’s mission theology, and the amorphous “General Epistles” category was broken up and related more organically to the respective Gospels, which, I believe, lent greater unity and cohesion to the presentation. The underlying rationale for divvying up the General Epistles to a given Gospel was as follows:

- James and Hebrews, like Matthew, are representatives of early Jewish Christianity.
- Peter most likely was a major source for Mark’s Gospel, as Mark and Peter were integrally connected in ministry (cf. 1 Pet 5:13).

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<sup>8</sup> Or, in N. T. Wright’s case, “god”; somewhat idiosyncratically, he does not capitalize “god.”

<sup>9</sup> On the spectrum of approaches to Biblical Theology, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Present and Future of Biblical Theology,” *Themelios* 37 (2012): 445–64.

<sup>10</sup> One recent example is the generally excellent volume, Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington, eds., *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

- In addition, Peter, in his second epistle, likely adapted portions of Jude's letter.
- Luke, for his part, was integrally involved in the Pauline mission.
- The Johannine corpus is now united—Gospel, letters, and Revelation.

To be sure, this clustering of materials lengthened individual chapters, in particular the chapter on Luke–Acts and Paul. At the same time, however, I believe this approach provided for better integration, both literarily and in keeping with the way in which the mission of the early church unfolded historically.

## 2.2. Integrating Luke–Acts and Paul

With regard to Luke–Acts and Paul, Acts was given its proper, central place in the New Testament's mission theology, both in conjunction with Luke's Gospel and with Paul's letters, providing the cohesive glue that holds all these writings together. Essentially, the tack was taken to use Luke–Acts as the framework and to cover Paul's various epistles in conjunction with the various churches Paul planted—or, in a few cases, did not plant, such as Romans or Colossians. This meant that Galatians was covered in conjunction with the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15;<sup>11</sup> Philippians in conjunction with Acts 16; 1–2 Thessalonians in conjunction with Acts 17; 1–2 Corinthians in conjunction with Acts 18; and Ephesians in conjunction with Acts 19.

The remaining material was discussed following Acts 28: Colossians and Philemon, Romans, and the letters to Titus and Timothy. In this way, the relationship Paul sustained with the various churches he planted—or even those he did not plant but corresponded with—emerged more clearly. In addition, Paul was treated, not in isolation from his church-planting endeavors, but rather his theology was reconceived in conjunction with his missionary and pastoral concerns for the various churches under his care.

The treatment of Romans, in particular, makes a significant contribution to a better understanding of the letter as it emerges more clearly as a missionary document and its theology can be understood more fully as missionally driven.<sup>12</sup> This includes Paul's pastoral concern for Jewish-Gentile unity in the Roman church exemplified by his collection for the Jerusalem church, his own missionary strategy using Rome as a stopping point on his way to Spain, and various other networking and strategic concerns. Thus (systematic) theology and (abstract) doctrine are dethroned as controlling elements and replaced by various factors that arose from Paul's, and the early church's, mission-related concerns.

## 2.3. Greater Balance among Paul's Letters

Also, the coverage of Paul's letters exhibits more balance and even-handedness. In the first edition, Romans essentially served as a template for a presentation of the Pauline gospel, with other subunits covering the spiritual warfare passage in Ephesians 6 in relation to the question of whether Paul encouraged his churches to evangelize. In the second edition, I discuss the contribution of all thirteen letters to a biblical theology of mission, including that of the letters to Timothy and Titus, which remained unmentioned in the original version.

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<sup>11</sup> While it is likely that Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem Council, most likely in the aftermath of the famine visit in Acts 11:28–30, there is an implicit connection between Galatians and the Jerusalem Council in that Galatians deals with the same issues that are subsequently taken up by the Council (cf. Gal. 2:1–10). See the detailed discussion in Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 492–94.

<sup>12</sup> See the important essay by N. T. Wright, "Paul's Western Missionary Project."

In this way, I was able to incorporate some of my recent work stemming from a commentary I wrote on these letters in which I highlight the mission theology and embeddedness of 1–2 Timothy and Titus and argue that the mission motif provides a significant plank in the defense of the Pauline authorship of these letters.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, I show that the letters to Titus and Timothy are most plausibly accommodated within Paul's apostolic mission and share several significant points of connectivity. In Titus 1:5, Titus is told to appoint elders in every city on the island of Crete. In Acts 14:23, we see Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in every church in the province of Galatia. Acts mentions Paul and his coworkers briefly passing by Crete on their way to Rome (Acts 27:7–8, 12–13, 21), which provides a foundation for the later outreach to Crete. Titus is mentioned significantly in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:12–13; 7:5–7, 13–15), not to mention Galatians (2:3).

These are just some of the ways in which the letters to Timothy and Titus are integrally related to the Pauline mission, most likely subsequent to the mission narrated in Acts.<sup>14</sup> I have recently published an article advocating this thesis in the *Bulletin of Biblical Research*.<sup>15</sup> I believe all those changes enhance the presentation of the biblical theology of mission both in capturing its historical unfolding and its literary, textual representation in the Scriptures.

### 3. Other Adjustments

In addition to these significant changes, I made several other strategic choices to achieve greater balance and accuracy in the presentation of a biblical theology of mission. This included moving the material on the Second Temple period to an appendix, focusing on the main leaders in the early Christian mission, and redressing the balance between history and literary matters.

#### 3.1. Second Temple Period

The original edition featured a chapter on mission in the Second Temple period between the chapters on the Old and the New Testament (starting with Mark). However, upon further reflection, since this is supposed to be a *biblical* theology of mission, it seemed best to move the material in this chapter to an appendix rather than interrupting the flow from the Old to the New Testament. In this way, intercanonical connections are better demonstrated, while the historical background of mission between the Testaments is still treated in an appendix. This also avoids putting Second Temple sources on par with Scripture and moves this material into the background where it belongs. This is not to say that there may not be interesting implications to be drawn from Second Temple material. To the contrary, I continue to believe that the (relative) lack of Jewish missionary outreach is both consistent with a similar lack of intentional outreach attested in the Old Testament (Jonah being a partial exception) and even the New Testament Gospels (Matt 23:15 possibly referring to Jewish sectarian proselytization efforts rather than a literal, geographical missionary movement).

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<sup>13</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, Exegetical Biblical Theological Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 361–85.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of Pauline chronology in Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, 24–32.

<sup>15</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, "An Investigation of the Mission Motif in the Letters to Timothy and Titus with Implications for the Pauline Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles," *BBR* 29 (2019): 49–64.

### 3.2. Greater Personal Focus

In general, there is in the new edition, especially in the New Testament chapters, a greater focus on persons and how they were interconnected with other individuals in the early church's mission rather than merely on texts (though, of course, those persons wrote texts, so the two are integrally related). An example of the benefit of this procedure is that it leads to more naturally grouping John's writings together rather than covering those in three separate chapters (Gospel, letters under General Epistles, and Revelation). It also, as mentioned, connects Peter with Mark, and Luke with Paul, who were demonstrably connected in ministry according to New Testament and patristic evidence.

This is also in keeping with recent work that points out that Acts was considered by some in the early centuries to provide the template for the New Testament letters, so that the references to James, Peter, and John, for example, were seen to provide the framework for the presence of letters written by those individuals gathered together in the later New Testament. In fact, the recent Greek New Testament Tyndale House edition follows this format, featuring the General Epistles immediately following Acts but prior to the Pauline epistles.<sup>16</sup>

I have also been influenced by the Swiss-German scholar Adolf Schlatter, whose two-volume New Testament Theology I have translated, and who also focuses significantly on the individual authors of the New Testament writings in light of their demonstrable historical interconnections.<sup>17</sup> More recently, Michael Thompson has stressed the interconnectedness of the early Christians, calling them "the holy internet."<sup>18</sup> In all these ways, the second edition displays a greater focus on the persons who jointly led the early Christian mission, which constitutes an improvement over the earlier, more canonical approach that was otherwise not as well interconnected.

### 3.3. Balance between History and Literature/Text/Canon

At the same time, while seeking to improve the historical dimension of my presentation, I continued to be concerned with preserving certain canonical and literary boundaries. In this way, the literary integrity of individual New Testament writings is respected and observed in gauging the mission theology of a given text in its proper original discourse context, whether 1 Peter or the Gospel of Mark. In this way, my approach differs, for example, from that of Eckhard Schnabel, who in his magisterial two-volume work *Early Christian Mission* proceeds more topically within an overall chronological historical framework. Nevertheless, I greatly appreciate Schnabel's assiduous attention to geographical details, which is reflected in the addition of several maps in the new edition of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* and in general more specific discussion of the geographical dimension of the early Christian mission, particularly in the chapter on Luke–Acts and Paul.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology*, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in Richard J. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 49–70.

#### 4. Conclusion

On the whole, in the two decades that passed since the publication of the original edition, much significant work has been done on the mission theme in the biblical writings. This, as mentioned, includes the seminal works by Christopher Wright, N. T. Wright, and Eckhard Schnabel, to mention but a few. This alone called for a serious upgrade and update of the original edition of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*. In addition, much work has been done on literary and metanarrative approaches, which suggested that the new edition pay close attention to the larger biblical storyline of which the mission theme is a part.

Having T. Desmond Alexander contribute the chapter on mission in the Old Testament was in line with this desire to strengthen the “story” dimension of the new edition, as Alexander has produced significant biblical-theological work along those lines, not only his well-known work *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* but also in his recent contribution to Crossway’s Short Studies in Biblical Theology series entitled *The City of God and the Goal of Creation*.<sup>19</sup> In addition, having one author cover the entire New Testament has aided a more concerted focus on the cohesive nature of the biblical metanarrative with regard to mission.

It remains to be seen how reviewers will assess the contribution of the second edition of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*. No doubt further improvements will be suggested, or perhaps some will think that what I consider improvements are actually steps backwards or moving in the wrong direction. In any case, my purpose for writing this essay was primarily to articulate some of these changes and to provide a brief rationale for them in order to facilitate further discussion. This, I hope, will help to continue to improve and refine a better understanding of the dynamic that undergirds the *missio Dei* as presented in Scripture.

Mission is a topic of great relevance for the church today. Yet for this mission to be carried out with maximum effectiveness and divine blessing, it is critical that the church’s missionary practice is grounded in a biblical theology of mission. In this regard, it is vital that believers today place the mission of the contemporary church within the framework of, and in continuity with, the story of Israel, Jesus, and the early Christians. Just as Jesus’s followers continued his mission, so the church today is called to continue in the footsteps of the early Christians and true believers over the centuries of the church.

In this vein, it is essential to develop a holistic understanding of the biblical—in particular, the New Testament—teaching on mission. This calls for integration between the Gospels and related New Testament writers, especially an appreciation of the way in which the Pauline mission is embedded within Luke–Acts. Paul did not embark on mission alone; rather, he and others—the Pauline circle—went about God’s mission in a strategic and coordinated way that reflected collaboration and teamwork among the various New Testament voices and leaders of the early Christian movement.

In tracing the emergence of early Christianity, it is also helpful to study Paul’s letters in chronological order of writing and to consider the contribution of all of his letters to a biblical theology of mission. Rather than focusing on Paul individually, and selecting one book (such as Romans) as the primary focus, such a chronological approach does greater justice to the historical unfolding of the early Christian mission. In these and other ways, we can attain a more accurate and balanced apprehension of the

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<sup>19</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005); *The City of God and the Goal of Creation*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

biblical theology of mission, so that the way in which the church engages in mission today can be more effective, organic, and honoring to God.

# The Earthquakes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

— Daryn Graham —

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the effects of the earthquakes of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, including possible damage done to the temple, the darkness that accompanied the crucifixion, the splitting of rocks, the opening of tombs and the resurrection of saints, and the responses by the centurion and his accompanying guards. By far the most prevalent method used throughout is that of sociohistorical analysis. In order to draw conclusions about the factual nature of the Gospel of Matthew, this article does not present a discussion of biblical usage of earthquakes generally, but rather tests Matthew's precise evidence for these two particular seismic events against their contemporaneous geological, archaeological, and historical contexts in an historical manner. By contextualizing the Matthew passage within its wider cultural and historical world in this way, this article finds that this Gospel's factual basis is strongly supported by extra-biblical data.

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## *1. Biblical Texts as History*

Some critics have questioned whether biblical texts such as Matthew should be usable for historical purposes, and they draw distinction between ancient meaning of biblical texts on the one hand and modern experiences relating to them on the other. These critics view history as a tradition that is “of the world,” while contemporary revelation is more “of the spirit.” However, as Craig Keener points out, by learning the ancient meaning of a biblical text, our modern realizations and revelations drawn from it can be better informed and come closer to its original intention.<sup>1</sup> This article seeks to find a realistic interpretation of its original intention, at least amongst its immediate audience.

On a more theoretical level, other critics warn that by transposing the biblical text into its ancient historical context one automatically foists one's own value-laden and limited socio-historical knowledge of the ancient world onto them, making them rather less authentic as well as less appealing to modern

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 119, 134, 143.

minds who do not possess such values and knowledge when it comes to the past.<sup>2</sup> It is further argued that although biblical texts like Matthew use traditional, historical references, and utilize language contemporary to their writing, their limited use of such devices means that the written text in itself does not contain God in his entirety, but is rather one singular instrument among many the ever-living God uses over many ages of humanity.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, so it is argued, biblical texts have no fixed meaning but have many potential meanings according to their readers and the socio-historical and cultural worldviews they bring to each text.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, just as it is natural to interpret biblical texts differently depending upon one's contemporary society, culture, historical period, and individual worldview, so too, Ulrich Luz encourages, multiplicities of interpretation must be created and promoted universally.<sup>5</sup>

However, as Luz observes, in order to interpret a biblical text like Matthew better, one should understand something of its historical and cultural context, while acknowledging one's own cultural biases and individual juxtapositions towards the "other," especially when approaching texts written centuries ago.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Luz points out, biblical texts such as Matthew should be contextualized historically to interpret it factually; and biblical texts like Matthew can be used as a means to contextualize secular historical documents.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, this article does not exhaust all potential interpretations one can draw from these passages. However, it should provide a useful basis for one wishing to better understand the world in which Jesus, and Matthew, lived.

## 2. *The Physical Setting*

According to Matthew's Gospel, immediately after Jesus committed his spirit to his Father and died on the cross just outside Jerusalem's outer western wall, the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom. Matthew then lists a number of other events associated with Jesus's death, some of which took place during the crucifixion, others later. Matthew 27:51–53 describes these in the following words:

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (London: SCM, 1955), 236–40; G. E. Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. H. Chadwick (London: A. C. Black, 1956), 53; Jürgen Moltmann, *Perspectiven der Theologie* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1968), 115; Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weisenheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 270; Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. S. Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 104–7, 270; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 7–14, 17–19.

<sup>3</sup> P. Ricoeur, "La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation," in *Exegesis: Problèmes de méthode et exercices de lecture*, eds. F. Bovon, G. Rouiller (Paris: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1975), 203–7; J. S. Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. R. Barr (London: Orbis, 1987); Luz, *Matthew in History*, 18–19.

<sup>4</sup> H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1970), 183; A. Schindler, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Kirchengeschichte für das Verständnis der Bibel heute," in *Reformatio* 30 (1981): 265; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275; Luz, *Matthew in History*, 19–20.

<sup>5</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 28, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 28, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 28–30.

of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city [i.e. Jerusalem] and appeared to many. (ESV)

Matthew's testimony that this earthquake occurred in this time and place is historically convincing as it is striking, and sits well with what we know about earthquakes produced by tectonic plate shifts that characterize the geology of the Judea. Throughout the first and second centuries AD, both large- and small-scale earthquakes occurred there on a fairly regular basis. Produced by the tectonic Dead Sea Rift Valley, statistics drawn from the ancient evidence shows that approximately one hundred large scale earthquakes have taken place over the last twenty-two centuries, occurring on average at least once every sixty years. Of these, seventy-one took place in the Judea-Samaria region.<sup>8</sup>

Small-scale, localized tremors in the region that occurred there practically on an annual basis.<sup>9</sup> Large-scale ones could produce much damage. Byzantine chronographer, John Malalas recorded that in 65 BC, a series of earthquakes hit Syrian Antioch, causing much damage to civic buildings there.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish historian Josephus also recorded that on 1 September 31 BC, Judea was hit by an earthquake so destructive, it killed thousands of people.<sup>11</sup> The next recorded earthquake to hit the region was that which the *Gospel of Matthew* states occurred during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ dated to AD 30–33, and another at his resurrection days later.<sup>12</sup> The next, John Malalas recorded hit Antioch on 9 April AD 37, after which the emperor Gaius (Caligula) rebuilt that city in a monumental fashion. Archaeologists have even found signs of this earthquake at satellite sites Defneh and Al-Quds.<sup>13</sup> According to Malalas, another major earthquake hit Antioch in AD 47, and according to the Roman historian Tacitus yet another hit that city in AD 53.<sup>14</sup> Archaeology has also revealed evidence of other earthquakes in the area. Coins found by archaeologists beneath collapsed debris at Petra in Nabataea, were minted under the Nabataean king Rabbel II (reigned AD 71–106), suggesting that an earthquake occurred there either

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<sup>8</sup> E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 75–76; Kenneth W. Russell, "An Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2nd through the Mid-8th Century AD," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 40.

<sup>9</sup> Amos Salamon, "Patterns of Seismic Sequences in the Levant—Interpretation of Historical Seismicity," *Journal of Seismology* 14 (2010): 343, 353; Motti Zohar, Amos Salamon, Rehav Rubin, "Reappraised List of Historical Earthquakes that Affected Israel and Its Close Surroundings," *Journal of Seismology* 20 (2016): 975, 982–83.

<sup>10</sup> John Malalas, 8.30, in *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott (Melbourne: Australian Association of Byzantine Studies, 1986), 111.

<sup>11</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 1.370–90; *Ant.* 15.121–22.

<sup>12</sup> Matt 27:51–53; 28:1–4.

<sup>13</sup> John Malalas, 243.16–20; A. Sieberg, "Untersuchungen über erdbeben und bruchscholenbau in Östlichen mittelmeeergebiet," *Denkschriften der Medizinisch-Naturwissenschaft Gesellschaft zu Jena* 18 (1932): 161–273; E. Guidoboni, A. Comastri, and G. Traina, eds., *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10th Century* (Rome: ING, 1994); M. R. Sbeinati, R. Darawcheh, and M. Monty, "The Historical Earthquakes of Syria: An Analysis of Large and Moderate Earthquakes from 1365 B.C. to 1900 A.D.," *Annals of Geophysics* 48 (2005): 383–407.

<sup>14</sup> For the earthquake in AD 47, see John Malalas, 246.9.19; E. Guidoboni, Comastri, Traina, *Catalogue*, 383–407. For the earthquake in AD 53, see Tacitus *Ann.* 12.58; J. Poier and M. Taher, "Historical Seismicity in the Near and Middle East, North Africa, and Spain from Arabic Documents (VII–XVIII Century)," *Bulletin of the Seismology Society of America* (1980): 2185–2201. For both earthquakes, see also Sbeinati, Darawcheh, and Monty, "The Historical Earthquakes of Syria," 383–407.

during, or soon after, Rabbel II's reign.<sup>15</sup> At the ancient stronghold of Herod the Great at Masada as well, which was the famous site of the Jews' last stand against the Romans in the First Jewish War (AD 66–70), coins from the “potter's workshop” dating to Trajan's principate found beneath collapsed debris there point to another earthquake there, too, between AD 98 and 117, or shortly thereafter. Coins minted in AD 110/111 found by archaeologists underneath collapsed debris in building VII at Masada, indicates that another earthquake occurred there in that year or soon after. It is possible but unclear whether these two last seismic events belong to the same earthquake or not.<sup>16</sup> And then there is the vast earthquake that which hit Syrian Antioch in AD 115, destroying much of that city,<sup>17</sup> and the AD 129–132 earthquake that also hit Syrian Antioch.<sup>18</sup>

The most destructive earthquake to hit Judea in the Roman period took place on the night before the Battle of Actium which took place on 2 September 31 BC between Octavian (the future Augustus) and Marc Antony, off the west coast of Greece. Its epicenter was close to Jerusalem. According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus, although the Judean armies escaped injury since they were encamped in open fields west of the Jordan River, many of Judea's ordinary civilians were caught fast asleep and unawares in their houses when the earthquake hit, resulting in terrible loss of life and damage to property. In his *Jewish War*, Josephus provides a round mortality figure of 30,000 human dead. But even if roughly ten years later he downsized that number to 10,000 dead in his *Jewish Antiquities*, these numbers are still extremely high, and total confusion and mayhem must have reigned—which was probably Josephus's aim to get across by using exaggerated mortality figures in the *Jewish War*. But that was only the start of trouble. When the Nabatean army, which was camped just to the east of the Jordan River, heard of this catastrophe for the Jews, they invaded Jewish territory, killing more people. But from this fire of hardship a new Jewish nation was forged, for Herod, who was encamped with his unharmed army in the Judean fields, marched his men, and crossed the Jordan to meet the invaders, near Philadelphia, where the Jewish and Nabatean armies met. In this battle the Jews were resoundingly victorious, taking over 4,000 prisoners, while an astonishing 7,000 Nabateans lay dead on the battlefield. So comprehensive was this victory that the Nabateans submitted to Herod's terms and Herod was proclaimed Protector of the Arabs. The Nabateans tried to conquer the Jews. Instead, it would be they who were reduced to the Jews' terms, bringing peace to Judea. The remnants of the Nabatean army then withdrew to their homeland with its capital at Petra.<sup>19</sup>

The earthquake of 31 BC thus was viewed by many Jews to usher in a new era in Judea's history, and though the Jews had won a major battle themselves, they soon heard that Octavian had proven victorious in the Battle of Actium, and that the Mediterranean world, including Judea, now found itself

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<sup>15</sup> For earthquakes in Nabatea in the early second century AD, see A. Negev, *The Nabatean Potter's Workshop at Oboda*, *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautorum, Acta Supplemente*, Vol 1 (Bonn: Rudolf-Habelt, 1974); Russell, “An Earthquake Chronology,” 40–41.

<sup>16</sup> For earthquakes at Masada at the outset of the second century AD, see Y. Yadin, “The Excavation of Masada—1963/64: Preliminary Report,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 15 (1965): 118–19; Y. Yadin, “Masada and the Limes,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967): 43–45; Russell, “An Earthquake Chronology,” 40–41.

<sup>17</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.24.1–25.6.

<sup>18</sup> For the earthquake felt throughout the Levant during the 227th Olympiad (AD 129–132), see Jerome, *Chronicle* 227; A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire: 324–1453*, vol 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1958), 119.

<sup>19</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 1.370–90; *Ant.* 15.121–22.

under the control of a new Roman master. During the Roman period, Jewish Apocalyptic literature paired occurrences of earthquakes with the eschatological battle between God and the devil, and both earthquakes and darkness accompany the final battle between good and evil, as can be seen in the *Assumption of Moses*.<sup>20</sup>

However, it was not the 31 BC earthquake that would be remembered by later Christians as the pivotal point in world history, but that which took place at Jesus's crucifixion. Various dates, AD 30, 31, or 33, the search for physical evidence of this earthquake has resulted in various wild headline-grabbing claims, the most notable being in 1998, when geologist Lavvas informed the world's media that he had found a visible crack in the earth's surface beneath the floor of the Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which stands over the traditional site of Golgotha, that was caused by the earthquake at Christ's crucifixion. This fissure measures 12 cm wide and extends east-west.<sup>21</sup> But, very quickly, other geologists proved that this fissure was actually caused by water erosion weathering away the soft limestone surface.<sup>22</sup>

Actual real, tangible, scientific proof outside the Bible that this earthquake actually took place came to light in 2011 when a trio of geologists Williams, Schwab, and Brauer took core samples of earth near Ein Gedi, just to the west of the Dead Sea, and found evidence not only of the 31 BC earthquake described by Josephus, but also another that clearly had deformed the sediments in the core samples in the year AD 31—plus or minus a narrow window of five years, on each side of this date, easily overlapping with the crucifixion of Jesus. According to these geologists, this earthquake was not a terribly intense one, but nevertheless it was still energetic enough to disrupt the sediment and rocks in the Ein Gedi area. That this earthquake affected mainly what was exposed sediment at the time, this may point to its epicenter being close to the ground surface. These three geologists concluded that this sedimentary disturbance in their core samples clear scientific proof of the earthquake in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

### *3. The Temple and the Torn Curtain: Earthquake Damage or Act of God?*

According to Matthew, the curtain was torn from utmost top to lowest bottom. Actually, this is not the only time an event like this occurred in the ancient Roman world. According to the philosopher and statesman Seneca, writing the mid-first century, there were a number of well-known cases of top-down tearing and cracking of buildings and other structures as a result of earthquakes throughout the Roman world. In the following passage, Seneca cites a case of a certain bronze statue he surveyed which split in half from top to bottom during an earthquake:

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<sup>20</sup> *As. Mos.* 10:4–5; T. Levi 4.1.

<sup>21</sup> G. Lavvas, "The Rock of Calvary: Uncovering Christ's Crucifixion Site," *Jewish Art* 24 (1998): 147–50; G. Lavvas, "The Holy Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem: The First Construction Phase During Constantine the Great," *Corpus* 60 (2004): 30–47.

<sup>22</sup> A. Israeli, *Geotechnical Map of Jerusalem and Surroundings: Report MM/12/77* (Geological Survey of Israel, 1977); D. Gil, "The Geology of the City of David and its Subterranean Waterworks," in *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985*, eds. D. T. Ariel and A. De Groot (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996); Nicholas Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity Up to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109–10.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferson B. Williams, Markus J. Schwab, and A. Brauer, "An Early First-Century Earthquake in the Dead Sea," in *International Geology Review* 54 (2012): 1219–28.

I am not surprised that a statue was split apart [from top to bottom] in an earthquake since I have described how mountains were separated from mountains and the ground itself was disrupted all the way from its depths.... But if an earthquake cracks whole walls and entire homes and splits the sides of great towers, however solid they might be, and scatters pilings that support great structures, what reason is there that anyone should think it worth noting that a statue has been cut equally in two from top to bottom?<sup>24</sup>

However, the Jewish temple was more prone to this kind of earthquake damage than other buildings in the Roman world. Josephus states that the colonnades of the upper heights of the temple were always damaged, and often partly toppled, during earthquakes. This was due to subsidence within the foundations of the Herodian temple itself, which was caused by Herod's enlargement of the temple Mount. This enlargement meant that the ground below often sank under its heavy weight, and this sinking often resulted in the toppling over of parts of the temple's upper heights during earthquakes. Josephus states that Herod attempted to redesign and rebuild these foundations to correct this fault, however, this was only partly successful and the upper levels of the temple colonnades still remained unstable and susceptible to earthquake damage.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is certain that the earthquake of the crucifixion caused some damage, at least to the upper reaches, to the temple. In AD 41, King Agrippa also made plans to repair this aspect of the temple, probably owing partly to the damage to the temple by the crucifixion earthquake among other local earth tremors, but these plans remained unrealized at his death in AD 44.<sup>26</sup> During Nero's reign the Jewish ruling bodies finally resolved to fix all structural weaknesses once and for all, meaning that all damage in the temple done to it by the crucifixion earthquake and other earthquakes in the area still remained unrepaired up until then, but the outbreak of the First Jewish War (AD 66–70) halted work for good.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the structural subsidence of the temple, and the damage done to it by the crucifixion earthquake, were never entirely fixed.

However, even if the temple sustained some damage at this earthquake in its upper reaches, there is no evidence that the temple curtain's tearing from top to lowest bottom occurred as a result of the earthquake of Christ's crucifixion. Based on Josephus's testimony, one might argue that if the upper regions of the temple were susceptible to earthquake damage, so too were the upper parts of the curtain. However, no earthquake could tear this curtain all the way from its top down to its bottom levels. Indeed, given this earthquake was of a localized sort, this earthquake lacked the power to tear the thick temple curtain from top to bottom on its own.<sup>28</sup>

When analyzing this tearing asunder of the temple curtain, it is worthwhile exploring which curtain this was, because the Herodian temple actually had two curtains. The average Bible reader will be familiar with the temple of Solomon in the Old Testament, which had just one curtain, and with the various references to "the temple" in the New Testament, and so when thinking about the torn curtain, most of us can conjure mental pictures of the same inner veil of the Old Testament temple being torn in two in the temple in the Gospels. However, Solomon's temple and the temple of the Gospels were not

<sup>24</sup> Seneca, *Nat.* 6.30.1, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 15.391.

<sup>26</sup> Josephus *J.W.* 5.36–37.

<sup>27</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 15.391.

<sup>28</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212; W. D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, ICC (Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2004), 628–32.

identical, and did not follow the same design. Solomon's temple was destroyed and rebuilt over many centuries since the tenth century BC, until Herod expanded the existing temple structure in his own time. It is true that the Solomonic temple of the Old Testament, according to its descriptions 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, had one curtain of red, blue and purple material that divided the Most Holy Place (or "Holy of Holies") from the Holy Place.<sup>29</sup> However, the Herodian temple featured two temple curtains, which made it resemble the Mosaic tabernacle over the Solomonic temple, since the tabernacle had two dividing curtains just as the Herodian temple did.<sup>30</sup> According to Josephus, the curtain that divided the Most Holy Place (or "Holy of Holies") from the Holy Place in the Herodian temple was viewable only to Jews in the Holy Place in the Sanctuary itself. Situated at the back of the inner Sanctuary and placed atop a raised platform, any view of this curtain was cut off to all Gentiles in the open-air Gentile court areas.<sup>31</sup> Josephus cautiously provided no description of this curtain, deeming it too sacred even for the mind's eye of his Gentile readers. He simply notes,

The entire house [inner Sanctuary] was divided into two parts within, it was only the first part of it that was open to our view.... But the inmost part of the temple of all was of twenty cubits. This was also separated from the outer part by a veil. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies.<sup>32</sup>

However, the second dividing curtain at the front of the Sanctuary facing east between the Holy Place from the Court of the Priests, was visible to all Gentiles wishing to see it through two large open gates, which, extending east from the Sanctuary, included the gate that divided the Court of the Israelites and the Court of Women, and the gate that divided the Court of Women and the Outer Gentile Courts. This curtain was considered throughout the Roman Empire to be a wonder of weavers' skill, and it attracted many Gentiles to the temple, who came just to catch a glimpse of its beauty. Josephus describes this second curtain in the following glowing terms:

There were golden doors 82 ½ feet high and 24 wide. In front of these was a curtain of the same length. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the heavens; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea. In the two cases the resemblance was one of color; in the linen and purple it was a question of origin, as the first comes from the earth, the second from the sea. Worked in the tapestry was the whole vista of the heavens except for the signs of the Zodiac.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Kgs 6:1–38; 2 Chr 3:1–17.

<sup>30</sup> For a description of the tabernacle, see Exod 26:1–37.

<sup>31</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 5.188–212; J. H. Iliffe, "The Thanatos Inscription from Herod's Temple," *QDAT* 6 (1938): 1–3; Dan Bahat, "The Herodian Temple," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Vol 3: The Early Roman Period*, ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45, 52, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 5.209, 219.

<sup>33</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212–14.

Some interpreters such as Gurtner and Keener argue that the curtain Matthew refers to must be the inner curtain, rather than this second curtain, on the grounds that the inner curtain receives more prominence and attention in the Old Testament and in Hebrews.<sup>34</sup> However, as the above passages in Josephus make clear, it was actually the second curtain that was most prominent among visitors to the temple in Jesus's time. Furthermore, Matthew states that when this Roman centurion with his Roman guard entourage "saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matt 27:54 ESV).

There is some debate among commentators as to what took place that the centurion and the guards actually saw—Gurtner and Keener argue that what they saw were those immediately visible events from the foot of the cross.<sup>35</sup> Ulrich Luz, on the other hand, argues that what they saw included all that of which is included in verses 51–53.<sup>36</sup> To determine which of these arguments is more likely to be historical, it is worthwhile returning to Matthew's text:

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs were also opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city [i.e., Jerusalem] and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt 27:51–54 ESV)

Gurtner argues that these events formed a revelatory vision given to the centurion by God, for he could not have seen the torn second curtain from Golgotha.<sup>37</sup> However, given that this passage covers a period several days until the raising of the saints after Jesus' resurrection, it is more than likely the centurion and his guard inspected the torn curtain sometime over that period. If the centurion and the guard did see all these events in this passage, this discredits the argument that the first curtain was the one torn, for as we've seen Josephus states Gentiles like this centurion and his guard were not allowed to lay eyes upon it. However, the second curtain—the one that was so beautifully embroidered to attract the eyes and look like the heavens, was available to wide Gentile perusal. Therefore, on the basis of this evidence we can conclude that the second curtain described by Josephus that Matthew refers to being torn from top to bottom.<sup>38</sup>

Looking towards other New Testament passages, in the mid-1960s F. F. Bruce advocated that Matthew's torn curtain is a veiled reference to damage sustained to the 4 ½ feet high balustrade wall that separated the Jewish precincts from the outer Gentile courtyards in the temple during the quake.

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil," *NovT* 47 (2005): 344–47; Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42–46, 70–71; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 686 n. 243.

<sup>35</sup> Gurtner, "LXX Syntax," 352; Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 5; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 687–88.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, Herm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 561.

<sup>37</sup> Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil (Matt 21:51a Par): A Look Back and a Way Forward," *Themelios* 29 (2004): 7; Gurtner, "LXX Syntax," 352.

<sup>38</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 630–31.

Although this balustrade was clearly much lower than the temple's upper heights, meaning that it probably never sustained earthquake damage, Bruce's view has a neat following. Bruce and other commentators point to passages in Paul's letter to the Ephesians which contains several references to this balustrade.<sup>39</sup> However, a simple reading of these passages undercuts those claims. Paul simply comments,

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph 2:11–16 NIV)<sup>40</sup>

R. T. France also argues that it was the damage done to this balustrade that prompted the centurion and his accompanying guard to exhibit their sense of universalism at the crucifixion, and to boldly announce that Jesus was the Son of God.<sup>41</sup>

By the late 1960s, F. F. Bruce changed his view, advocating that the passages Hebrews 6:9, 9:12, and 10:19 indicate that it was the first curtain—not the balustrade—that separated the "Most Holy Place" from the "Holy Place," allowing Jesus, and us through him, to physically access the "Most Holy Place." This line of argument is still popular and is followed by Gurtner and Keener - Gurtner proposes a twofold argument. Firstly, he soberly argues that the inner curtain was torn on account of its prominence in the Old Testament, and that Matthew presumed his readers would understand he meant the inner curtain on account of that prominence.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, Gurtner creatively advocates that the tearing of the inner curtain took place in a revelatory sense seen by the centurion as an unveiling for the vision of the earthquake, split rocks, and opening of the tombs and raising of saints that is to follow.<sup>43</sup> Keener, following de Jonge, argues the same case on account of the inner curtain's prominence in Hebrews.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse by Verse Exposition* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1961), 297–98; William Hendrickson, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 133; C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 105–6; James E. Howard, "The Wall Broken: An Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22," in *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practices. Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis*, ed. F. F. Kearley, E. P. Myers, and T. D. Hadley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 303; C. McMahon, "The Wall is Gone!," *RevExp* 93 (1996): 262; M. Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 244; M. Y. MacDonald, "The Politics of Identity in Ephesians," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 434; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 684.

<sup>40</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 421.

<sup>41</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 232.

<sup>42</sup> Gurtner, "LXX Syntax," 352; Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 42–46, 70–71.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil," 7; Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Veil of the Temple in History and Legend," *JETS* 49 (2006): 112.

<sup>44</sup> Marinus de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 (1986), 67–79; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 686.

Edersheim and Keener also observe that since Jesus's death occurred just before dusk, the tearing of the inner curtain must have been obvious to the temple priests attending the evening sacrifice that day.<sup>45</sup> However, Keener argues it was kept a secret by these priests—hence its omission by Josephus, and thereby Tacitus who used him as his source. But insider knowledge of this event was leaked to the Christian group in Jerusalem, which the letter to the Hebrews utilized.<sup>46</sup>

Keener's is a brilliant argument, and Hooker endorses it, observing that the classical Greek word "temple" (ναός) that Matthew uses can mean the inner sanctuary of a temple rather than its precincts.<sup>47</sup> Witherington likewise assures us that the tearing of the inner curtain had more potential to unleash God into the world than the second curtain could have had.<sup>48</sup> However, these arguments fail on three counts. First, the word ναός ("temple") occurs nine times in eight verses in his Gospel and consistently denotes the temple Sanctuary building, consisting of both the Holy Place and the Holy of holies.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Matthew's use of the word in 27:51 (ναοῦ) is genitive, meaning that a more accurate translation is "the curtain of the temple" (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ) rather than "the curtain in the temple"; and the curtain of the temple most recognized by visitors to the temple was the curtain of the temple described so beautifully by Josephus, i.e., the second curtain. Indeed, as Gurtner astutely notes, whilst καταπέτασμα is the default translation of "inner veil" in the Septuagint, which Gurtner argues may be evidence of Matthew's intention to relate the inner veil was torn, the genitive can mean other curtains of the temple.<sup>50</sup> Second, as we have seen already, the inner curtain was not viewable to Gentiles, including the centurion and his guard, but Matthew states clearly that they saw the things that happened—which, it may be argued, included the torn curtain, which implies the second curtain given they were not Jews. Thirdly, as for Hebrews itself, nowhere does it state that the inner curtain was rent.<sup>51</sup> That letter simply assures readers/hearers that Jesus, the perfect High Priest, now assumes spiritual access to the Father on our behalf continually as an eternal high priest would the "Most Holy Place" on a constant basis.<sup>52</sup> As Hebrews 10:19–21 itself states,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (NIV)

Although the writer of Hebrews correlates the death of Jesus with the conceptual opening up of the temple's inner curtain for access by Jesus and his followers through him into the "Most Holy Place,"

<sup>45</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, reprint ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 614; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 686.

<sup>46</sup> Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 687.

<sup>47</sup> Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 378.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 521.

<sup>49</sup> Matt 23:16–17; 23:21; 23:35; 26:61; 27:5; 27:40; 27:51.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "LXX Syntax," 352.

<sup>51</sup> Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Herm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 286.

<sup>52</sup> See T. Benj. 9.3; Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 25.16; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 246; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 630–31.

otherwise called the “Holy of Holies,” as Attridge points out, nowhere does this passage actually indicate that the inner curtain of the Herodian temple was torn asunder, at all.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the main focus of Hebrews is not even the temple of Herod, but the much older tent of the tabernacle, the cloth forerunner of the temple, which had been out of use for centuries.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the “Most Holy Place” that Hebrews refers to is most certainly not that of the Herodian temple, nor even that of the Solomonic temple, but of the far more ancient and idyllic tent of the tabernacle.<sup>55</sup> Hebrews’s use of language is figurative and metaphorical, and surrounds the tent of the tabernacle and is not intended to be regarded as literal description of the temple. In any case, as deSilva, Koester, and other commentators now agree, this epistle’s author hoped its immediate audience would appreciate that every believer in Jesus Christ, whether Jewish or Gentile, is now given equal access to a spiritual holiness by God, and that this spiritual holiness, is given by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect High Priest, not just for Jews, but for Jews and Gentiles alike—a new situation complimented by the divine tearing asunder of the second curtain, echoed and greatly reinforced by the “Great Commission.”<sup>56</sup>

Primary sources also seem to turn us away from both of Bruce’s positions. According to Josephus and Tacitus, in just less than forty years before the destruction of the temple by Titus in AD 70—a period that overlaps with the crucifixion of Christ—the same gold temple doors that hung immediately behind the second curtain opened entirely of their own accord, without any human agency, nor with any outside help. Blomberg argues that this may be a garbled reference to the tearing asunder of the curtain that hung just outside those very same doors as recorded by Matthew.<sup>57</sup> Josephus, writing in the 70s, recorded that all those present in Jerusalem at the time regarded this event as “the best of omens,” believing that it signified that God was opening to the very “gate of happiness” to the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike.<sup>58</sup> Tacitus, following Josephus, also recorded that “few people placed a sinister interpretation of this” and that many people in Jerusalem believed it to be a clear sign that God was establishing his kingdom on earth—one that it would include all peoples.<sup>59</sup> It may very well have been that this same omen of happiness caused by the tearing of the curtain created this atmosphere of inclusiveness that encouraged the centurion and his guards to embrace Jesus and the Jewish God after they laid eyes on the torn curtain. For Matthew, these soldiers represented the Gentile world that was, with the death of Jesus, welcomed into the people of God in a new chapter in salvation history ushered in by the torn curtain.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 286.

<sup>54</sup> Heb 3:1–6; 9:1–10, 11–18.

<sup>55</sup> Heb 9:1–28.

<sup>56</sup> See Heb 6:9; 9; 10; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 284–87; John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSup 49 (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1991), 201; David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 336–37; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 443–44; Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 562–63.

<sup>57</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

<sup>58</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 6.290–301.

<sup>59</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13.

<sup>60</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 6.290–301; Stephen Motyer, “The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?,” *NTS* 33 (1987), 155–57; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

However, cultural divisions would eventually return, and the curtain was soon to be replaced by a new curtain woven in Babylon. After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Josephus, Tacitus, and the writers of the Talmud, would go on to claim only that all portents that took place during that forty year period were in fact signifying the temple's impending destruction at the hands of Gentiles.<sup>61</sup> Such was the dominating presence of the temple authorities in Jerusalem after the crucifixion.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, this is the view still held by Bible commentators, Davies and Allison, although for them the rending of the curtain was more a sign of God's judgment upon the temple priesthood for their role in Jesus's execution rather than condemnation of the temple buildings, for Jesus had days earlier announced in respect to them that they were meant to be used for a house of prayer, and not the den of thieves that the priesthood had turned it into.<sup>63</sup> Nineham, Borg, and Keener identify in these words that God's judgment was specifically against the use of the temple priesthood for the secular purposes they pursued there and the flouting of sacred ground with mercantilism.<sup>64</sup> However, Bammel and Keener note, Jesus's actions in the temple were more a prophetic spiritual declaration rather than the political call-cry challenge of a zealot.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, as Gurtner and Witherington point out, by the time of Jesus's death, the temple priesthood had become redundant, with the legitimacy of both the high priest and the sacrificial system being assumed by Jesus.<sup>66</sup> Whether one chooses to look at these events from an historical or theological vantage-point, Davies and Allison are most certainly correct that no seismic event, however violent, could have torn a curtain of its thickness and size into two parts from utmost top to lowest bottom. For it was only the upper reaches of the temple that were affected by earthquakes, and not the lower ones—lower ones we would expect needed also to be affected by the crucifixion earthquake if the tearing of the curtain was to be completed from top to bottom, but were not. The origins of the torn curtain must be found beyond the natural realm.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. *The Earthquake and the Darkness*

There are four main positions held by commentators on the nature of the earthquake, the splitting of rocks, and the raising of many saints after the resurrection. First, Gurtner claims that these events were not historical, but formed an apocalyptic vision that was experienced by the centurion guarding Jesus at his crucifixion.<sup>68</sup> According to Gurtner's brilliant arguments, the torn curtain is a literary device used by Matthew to indicate to readers an unveiling revelatory vision experienced by the centurion is

<sup>61</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 6.293–96; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; *b. Yoma* 39b; *y. Yoma* 6 43c; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 630.

<sup>62</sup> Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Duckworth, 2003), 22.

<sup>63</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 134, 631, 632

<sup>64</sup> See *m. Ber.* 9:5; D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (London: SCM, 1977), 304; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Mellen, 1984), 171–72; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 174–76; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 499.

<sup>65</sup> E. Bammel, "The Poor and the Zealots," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 124–26; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 497–98.

<sup>66</sup> Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 100; Witherington, *Matthew*, 521.

<sup>67</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 630.

<sup>68</sup> Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 138–198.

to follow—in this case the earthquake, split rocks, opened tombs and raised saints—to inform readers that the Messiah had come and that Ezekiel 37 was being fulfilled in Christ’s death.<sup>69</sup> Second, Davies and Allison, and Michael Licona have put forward independent hypotheses that, once again, these events were not historical, but nor were they part of the centurion’s vision, and were rather included by Matthew in his text to highlight the profound meaning of Jesus’ death.<sup>70</sup> Third, Raymond Johnson argues that Matthew included these events as a deliberate literary device to echo Ezekiel 37:1–14 and also to fill out the content of his otherwise heavily Markan reliant narrative.<sup>71</sup> Fourthly, R. T. France and N. T. Wright argue that these events are historical, and that Matthew knew stories of strange goings-on around the time of the crucifixion, but because their content did not all occur at the same time Matthew struggled to retell them with biblical allusions and strict historical narrative in the one place. Still, Matthew places them together in his Gospel to emphasize that they were all associated with Jesus’s death.<sup>72</sup> This article argues this fourth view to be the most convincing—we have already seen that the earthquake is indeed historical. Of course, that is not to say that the first three arguments are less worthy of thoughtful consideration than this article is. However, as Gurtner points out, his and others’ arguments on these issues are not the final word, but have been written to serve as stimulus to further discussion, including that contained in this article.<sup>73</sup> Now we will turn to the darkness, the splitting of rocks and the opening of tombs, as well as the centurion and his guard’s response, and demonstrate these too are historical, and although not all occurring at precisely the same time, were brought together by Matthew to show their connectedness and association with Jesus’s death on the cross. This examination of the evidence will confirm that Matthew’s Gospel, far from being fanciful, actually holds up to close historical scrutiny.

Darkness held an ominous position in Jewish thought as a sign of God’s judgment, and of the eschatological battle of good and evil.<sup>74</sup> Among later generations of Jews with the gift of hindsight, earthquakes and darkness were believed to herald the immanent destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. Josephus, in line with Roman propaganda, states that during one night at the Pentecost festival held in the year immediately preceding the Jewish War, an earthquake and a rumbling roar occurred in the dark of night, then a sound that seemed like the words “let us remove from here.” According to Josephus, this signified that at the crucial point of the escalation into eschatological war, God had switched sides from the Jews to the Romans, on account of the decline of Jewish morals among Jerusalem’s leaders and their lack of repentance.<sup>75</sup> Tacitus recorded in more Roman tones that

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<sup>69</sup> Gurtner, “The Veil of the Temple,” 112; Gurtner, “The Rending of the Veil,” 7; Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 178–79.

<sup>70</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632; Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 185, 552–53.

<sup>71</sup> Raymond Johnson, *The Function of the Resurrection of the Saints in Matthew 27:51–54*, Reformed Academic Dissertations (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 6–7, 81–92.

<sup>72</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1081–83; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 632–35.

<sup>73</sup> Gurtner, *The Torn Veil*, 201.

<sup>74</sup> On judgment, see Exod 10:21–23; Wis 17; Sib. Or. 4:56–58; 11:45; 2 Enoch 7:1–2; Gen. Rab. 28:1. On eschatological importance, see 4 Ezra 5:4–5; 7:38–42; LAB 3:10; Sib. Or. 3:800–4; T. Mos. 10:5; Pesiq. Rab Kah. 9:1; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 685.

<sup>75</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 6.299–300.

this “voice” was a declaration by the Roman gods that they were departing from the temple.<sup>76</sup> Both Josephus and Tacitus believed that these events indicated that Jerusalem’s fate was sealed in accordance with the God’s wishes.<sup>77</sup> However, what Matthew does by recording the earthquake and darkness of the crucifixion, is point audiences to Jesus’s sacrificial death as the moment of God’s victory over evil by which He masterfully atoned for all sins of believers on the cross, including those of the Jewish believers, as well. Whilst most Jews would never have accepted that God’s victory over evil would happen with his Messiah on a cross—Matthew, however, suggests that it did.

The traditional view held by Keener that the darkness at the time of the crucifixion was caused by heavy cloud cover is still a popular one.<sup>78</sup> However, other scholars have fashioned a new argument that deserves attention. They posit that the darkness that befell Jerusalem during the crucifixion could have, in fact, been caused by the crucifixion earthquake. They suggest that the earthquake might have produced a dust storm that caused the darkness. Actually, this is not an uncommon feature of earthquakes, to project dust into the air if accompanied by winds, the most famous examples being observed during the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 and 1812.<sup>79</sup> This scenario is highly likely, and certainly more likely to have caused the darkness than a solar eclipse could, for NASA records show that although solar eclipses did occur on 19 March AD 33 and 9 March AD 34, the moon’s shadow passed over the southern hemisphere only, and so therefore could not have passed over Jerusalem.<sup>80</sup>

This might appear, at first glance, to undermine the biblical chronology, given Matthew states the darkness began at noon but only mentions the earthquake with Christ’s death at 3 p. m. But this is actually, not so. The language of Matthew’s narrative at this point is symbolically apocalyptic.<sup>81</sup> Flowing in quick succession with one event after another, this passage is not unlike Jesus’s use of apocalyptic language in the temple in Matthew 24:7: “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (ESV).

Whereas Jesus’s apocalyptic language regard future events, those events are not necessarily in order, but are brought together as they are because of their association with the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. The earthquake and other events that Matthew associates with the death of Jesus are likewise not necessarily in order, but are brought together as partial fulfilments of Jesus’s prophecy. Thus, what we have is a story within a story—a discourse used to illustrate and expand on the crucial event of Matthew’s narrative—that of Christ’s death. Matthew uses a “sandwich technique,” moving from the cross to other spaces in and around Jerusalem experiencing the torn curtain, the earthquake, the rocks splitting, and the resurrection of many saints, and then back to the cross. In this way, Matthew reminds the reader/hearer of the “deeper reality” of the death of Jesus and the cosmic atmosphere accompanying it.<sup>82</sup> In other words, Matthew brings these cosmic events together in their place in the Gospel narrative

<sup>76</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13.

<sup>77</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13.

<sup>78</sup> Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 685.

<sup>79</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632.

<sup>80</sup> Eric Adler, “Was Jesus Crucified During a Solar Eclipse?,” *Miami Herald*, 7 August 2017, [www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article165900752.html](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article165900752.html).

<sup>81</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 420–21.

<sup>82</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 562–63; Timothy J. Harris, “Distinctive Features of the Gospels,” in *The Content and Setting of the Gospel Tradition*, ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 309.

to emphasize the greatness of Jesus and the greatness of his death, which heralded the beginning of the new age in which forgiveness and atonement are to be found not in the temple or sacrifices, but in the death of Jesus, and just as the resurrection of many saints occurred on Resurrection Sunday, so too the resurrection of these and of any believer is reliant on the atoning sacrificial power of Christ's death on the cross.<sup>83</sup> For Matthew, it was imperative to notify Jews that Jesus's sacrificial death was the victorious move on God's part for the salvation of believers. Later generations of early Christians would develop these concepts further, circulating the belief that whilst this earthquake was a sign of God's judgment on humanity's accumulated wickedness and blindness in crucifying Jesus, it also highlights the unique all-conquering salvation that is to be found in the same Jesus.<sup>84</sup>

### 5. *The Splitting of Rocks and the Resurrection of Many Saints*

In the next breath of his narrative, Matthew states that the rocks around Jerusalem split and that a number of saints buried nearby were resurrected and entered the city. According to Raymond Johnson, Matthew deliberately included these details to parallel Jesus' resurrection and show their lesser importance to Jesus' greater resurrection, highlighting his Divine Sonship. However, Johnson concludes, these details are ahistorical, used by Matthew with similar language to Ezekiel 37:1–14, to instruct readers that the final resurrection is to be found in Jesus, and that disobedience to him can be changed to reconciliation to God through him.<sup>85</sup> Others also see a fulfillment in the common Pharisaic tradition that the Messiah would come to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and that the hill would split open and the dead arise—a tradition still held by ultra-orthodox Jews who desire to be buried near its summit so they may be among those first raised. This Pharisaic tradition may very well have stretched back into Jesus's lifetime, meaning that Matthew may have included the splitting of rocks and the resurrection of these saints to indicate a divine fulfilment of these Pharisaic prophetic beliefs.<sup>86</sup> From Matthew's use of language makes it clear that these saints' tombs were opened after Jesus's resurrection, and that the "saints" were resurrected and walked into Jerusalem shortly thereafter.<sup>87</sup> We do not know exactly who these "saints" were. Our earliest source in identifying them is Ignatius's *Letter to the Magnesians*, which states that certain "prophets of old" were visited by Jesus after his death, who then "raised them from the dead" with himself on resurrection morning.<sup>88</sup> Although Eusebius claimed that this letter was written while Trajan was emperor (AD 98–117),<sup>89</sup> commentators and historians now believe a date for

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<sup>83</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 189; R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 400; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 684; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632.

<sup>84</sup> Origen, *Cels.* 3.15; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 9.7.8–9.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, *I See Dead People*, 3–7, 81–92.

<sup>86</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33B (Nashville: Nelson, 1995), 850–52; Witherington, *Matthew*, 522.

<sup>87</sup> Donald Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 312–29; J. W. Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?," *JTS* 32 (1981): 150–52; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

<sup>88</sup> Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.

<sup>89</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.36.

the letter in the late 130s or early 140s is more accurate.<sup>90</sup> Thus, this evidence in Ignatius's letter comes down to us more than a century after the events themselves. Later Christian sources also mention Adam, Moses, Job, and Simeon and his sons as among those who were resurrected.<sup>91</sup> However, we don't know what these resurrected saints did after they appeared in Jerusalem, or what they did for the duration of the rest of their lives. All Matthew tells us is that their tombs were opened and they appeared in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, not during the crucifixion, which means that their tombs were most probably opened by the more violent earthquake of resurrection morning, rather than during the milder earthquake of the crucifixion. In fact, the only event in Matthew's collection of signs that Matthew seems to emphasize took place at the moment of Jesus's death is the tearing of the temple curtain.<sup>92</sup>

Based on the geological evidence we can say that if this earthquake did produce dust clouds which caused the darkness recorded by Matthew, then this seismic shock must have occurred shortly before noon, when the darkness appeared, producing dust clouds that blocked out the Sun producing dark skies that lasted until roughly 3 p.m. when Jesus died. If so, then this noontime earthquake also caused the rocks to split. What Lavvas missed is that Matthew never claims that the earth's crust was cracked. Rather, Matthew actually states that rocks on the earth's surface near Jerusalem split, and splits and fissures in rocks caused by earthquakes in the ancient past can be seen all around Jerusalem.<sup>93</sup> These split rocks help us to determine the intensity of the crucifixion and resurrection earthquakes, for of the eight main limestone types known collectively as "Jerusalem Stones" found around Jerusalem, six are hard and do not normally split during seismic events in the area, but two others do, including the Nari variety and the Kakuleh. The Kakuleh is a soft and malleable limestone variety found mostly around the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem that was often worked by Jewish potters in Roman times to create ossuary boxes, vessels, and tombs. Indeed, many of the tombs built to the east of Jerusalem were actually caves excavated into the soft Kakuleh rock in the western side of the Mount of Olives, directly outside the ancient eastern side of Jerusalem. Thus, one may argue that the crucifixion earthquake split rocks made of this Kakuleh limestone rock. However, there is another seismic candidate, a far more powerful earthquake that may have split even some of the harder "Jerusalem Stone" limestone rocks, and opened the tombs of the "saints"—the resurrection earthquake. According to Matthew 28:2, at dawn on resurrection morning, a more intense, "violent earthquake" also took place. Matthew 28:1–4 reads as follows:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. (NIV)

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<sup>90</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, "The Date of Ignatius," *ExpTim* 120 (2008): 119–30; Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 134–35.

<sup>91</sup> Adam: LAE 42.2; Gk. Apoc. Ezra 7.1–2; Eastern Orthodox icons of the resurrection (which also feature Eve). Moses: *Armenian History of Moses*. Job: T. Job subscript, ms. V (contrast Job 42.17a LXX). Simeon and his sons (Luke 2): Acts of Pilate 17.1; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 633.

<sup>92</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632.

<sup>93</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632 n. 120.

Matthew’s emphasis that this tremor was “violent”, or more accurately “great” (μέγας), a term missing in his description of the crucifixion earthquake, tells us that the resurrection earthquake was far more powerful than that which had occurred only days earlier at Christ’s crucifixion. Not only does this mean that the temple sustained further damage and more rocks split as a result of this earthquake, it also stands as a more likely candidate to have been the earthquake that opened the tombs at Jesus’s resurrection—precisely when Matthew states the “many saints” emerged from those same tombs and appeared in Jerusalem shortly afterwards. It also means that the disrupted sediment found at Ein Gedi 41 kilometers southeast of Jerusalem was caused by this second earthquake as well.<sup>94</sup>

**Table 1. Revised Timeline Presented in This Article**

**Crucifixion Friday**

<b>Before 12:00pm</b>	Earthquake Rocks Split, Damage to Temple
<b>12:00pm Noon</b>	Darkness (Dust Storm?)
<b>3:00pm</b>	Death of Jesus Christ Temple Curtain Torn, Exclamations by Centurion (Mark, Luke)

**Resurrection Sunday**

<b>Dawn</b>	Second Earthquake (Aftershock?) Tombs Open, Holy Men resurrected and appear in Jerusalem
<b>After Dawn</b>	Exclamation by Centurion and His Roman Guard (Matt)

This resurrection earthquake can rightly be categorized scientifically as an earthquake after-shock. Aftershocks were common throughout the Levant after an initial tremor like that which took place at the crucifixion. As Roman historian Cassius Dio states, after the AD 115 earthquake in Syrian Antioch, for “several days,” “Heaven” sent many “shocks.”<sup>95</sup> However, although earthquakes and after-shocks were not unknown to the region, the timing of the earthquake of the crucifixion and resurrection indicate that God had used the geology of the region to produce both.

### ***6. The Roman Centurion and His Guards’ Response***

Next Matthew’s text records that when an unnamed, but presumably important, pagan Roman centurion with his pagan Roman guard entourage: “saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said “Truly this was the Son of God!” (ESV). In Matthew’s Gospel, this exclamation appears to have taken place after the resurrection. For, among “what took place” that prompted this response, Matthew infers were the opening of tombs and the collective resurrection of “many saints” who went into the holy city [Jerusalem] and appeared to many people, which Matthew states occurred after Jesus’s resurrection. Thus, it could have taken the best part of Easter Saturday for these particular Roman soldiers to survey the torn temple curtain and the split rocks by the Mount of Olives, as well as

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<sup>94</sup> Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 25.

<sup>95</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.25.1, 2, 5.

Easter Sunday for them to catch glimpses of the resurrected saints, before their collective agreement that, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Intriguingly, Matthew states that the guards that had guarded the tomb approached the temple priests, and after telling them all that happened, were bribed to spread the rumor that Jesus’s body was stolen by his disciples. Thus, they could not to have been the same guard to have watched over Christ’s crucifixion, for an exclamation so soon after the resurrection that Jesus was the Son of God hardly corroborates with a story of a stolen body (Matt 28:11–15).

This exclamation by the centurion and his guards ought to be differentiated with the Gospel of Mark’s inclusion of the saying of the centurion alone at Jesus’s death, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). Of course, had the centurion and the guard in Matthew’s Gospel simply been responding to “what took place” at the foot of the cross, it’s quite possible Matthew and Mark were recording the same statement. However, in Mark’s account of this declaration was by the centurion alone. Davies and Allison suggest that Matthew was correcting Mark’s Gospel.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, given their differences and the span of time under our examination, it is more probable that Mark’s lone centurion’s statement took place on Friday at the foot of the cross, while Matthew’s centurion and guards’ collective exclamation occurred after the resurrection. In other words, Matthew and Mark shift emphasis of two different historical moments, and as time progressed after the crucifixion, more and more people came to assert Christ’s divinity, and just as at the crucifixion the centurion asserted it, by resurrection morning so too were his accompanying Roman guard.<sup>97</sup>

### 7. *The Earthquake as a Prodigium in Matthew’s Gospel*

Whilst Matthew certainly knew well the prevailing Jewish beliefs of his day, it is also clear that Matthew appealed to those who belonged to the Roman belief system while writing his Gospel, and assigns this earthquake and the darkness *prodigia*-like status—as signifiers of the breakdown in humanity’s relationship with the Divine—hence the importance of the centurion and his guard’s reconciliatory belief in Jesus days after they had crucified him. This Roman flavor confirms Matthew’s reputation among biblical scholars of a “Gentile bias” to meet an immediate audience comprised of Gentiles, as well as Jews.<sup>98</sup> That shouldn’t surprise us—Matthew lived and wrote in a Roman world. However, there are some important differences between typical Roman views of *prodigia* and Matthew’s. For Matthew, this earthquake and darkness provided a foretaste of the divine judgment for those who rejected Jesus, and were warnings sent by YHWH, not a Roman deity.<sup>99</sup> In addition, since religion was a tool for Roman state-craft and rule, the Roman Empire exclusively addressed *prodigia* using state-endorsed, traditional, religious rituals. This meant that to deny the emperor’s religious importance was to deny an important source of his state-endorsed temporal power-base.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 635–36.

<sup>97</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 26.

<sup>98</sup> Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 378; France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 102–8; Rick Melick, “Why There Are Four Gospels,” in *Harmony of the Gospels*, ed. Steven L. Cox and Kendell H. Easley (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 10–11.

<sup>99</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 562–63.

<sup>100</sup> Barbara Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London: Routledge, 1976), 102.

We have looked at Matthew and touched on Mark, now we shall look at Luke's Gospel. Luke also captures the *prodigia*-like status of the earthquake and the darkness of Jesus's crucifixion among people at the time. In Luke 23:47, the timing of this earthquake and the darkness during the death of Jesus prompted the centurion to also state "Surely this was a righteous man." In both Jewish and Roman cultures, signs were often said to accompany the death of a righteous or great man.<sup>101</sup> The Roman poet Virgil celebrates in his *Georgics* that an earthquake shook the Alps at the time of Julius Caesar's death.<sup>102</sup> Added to this, Plutarch records that for the whole of the year following Caesar's funeral, "the sun's orb rose dull and pale; the heat which came down from it was feeble and ineffective."<sup>103</sup> Julius Caesar was remembered among Romans as a brilliant general and speaker who not only exercised total power over Roman religion as *pontifex maximus* but also claimed descent from the goddess Venus. When the centurion saw the same signs accompanying Jesus's death that had accompanied Caesar's own, naturally he judged Jesus "a righteous man," perhaps equating Jesus with a sanctified greatness comparable to Julius Caesar himself, descent from God. This confirms Matthew's and Mark's accounts that the centurion called Jesus "Son of God." Although Matthew recorded different words uttered by the centurion and the guards to Luke, days had transpired between Jesus's death and his resurrection allowing much time for the centurion to say many things to be emphasized differently by Matthew and Luke due to their different interests.<sup>104</sup>

By exemplifying this centurion and his guards, Luke, like Matthew, also encourages his audience—an audience that included Romans—to put their own faith in Jesus. Incredibly, of such importance is this faith that the Synoptic Gospels forefront the confession of this Roman centurion and the guards, even over the fact that they had just been involved in Jesus's crucifixion. For Matthew and the other evangelists, whatever one's past sins, a personal response to God arising from earthquakes such as this is a true response, irrespective of a given state's policies.<sup>105</sup>

### *8. The Centurion and the Guards' Affirmation in Its Political Context*

If the soldiers' open and public announcements that Jesus is the Son of God and a righteous man in tones comparable to Julius Caesar was typical in the sense that they were renewing a relationship of peace with the Divine, their verbal content was most certainly atypical. Indeed, they flew in the face of traditional Roman religion with its own pantheon of traditional Roman gods and lesser gods and goddesses, members of whom had also had several offspring to both divine and human beings. Moreover, they indicate a degree of individual rebellion against the politico-religious foundations of the emperor Tiberius's own claims to divinity. Tiberius styled himself *a* living son of *a* god, Augustus,

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<sup>101</sup> Among the Jews, see *m. Sota* 9:15; p. 'Abod. Zar. 3:1, 2; Pesiq. Rab Kah. 27:1; Gen. Rab. 49:4; 62:4; Gustaf Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 200. Among the Romans, see Cicero, *De Re Publ.* 6.22; Virgil, *Georg.* 1.472–90; Ovid, *Fast.* 2.493; *Metam.* 11.44–47; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 2.30.97; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.309; Plutarch, *Rom.* 27; *Caes.* 69; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.17.4–5; 60.30.1; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1114.

<sup>102</sup> Virgil, *Georg.* 1.472–90.

<sup>103</sup> Plutarch, *Caes.* 69.

<sup>104</sup> Morris, *Luke*, 26.

<sup>105</sup> Matt 3:2; 5:47; 28:16–20.

his adoptive father. Interestingly, the centurion and the guard announced Jesus was Son not just of any god of the Roman pantheon, but of God - Jupiter, king of the Roman gods - a far more powerful Deity than the human-god Augustus. Given the geographical context they were in, these Romans syncretized Jupiter with the Jewish God, YHWH. It may be argued that these Gentile individuals accepted the torn second curtain's invitation to open up this God's worship to Gentiles, and after encountering the *prodigia* of earthquakes that signaled a breach in the *pax deorum* from their Roman standpoint, they decided to act on God's opening up to the Gentiles and repair their relationships with God. By all accounts the centurion and his guard exhibited faith in Jesus at a religious level, and in doing so made deliberate statement of the extent of their political loyalties.<sup>106</sup> They were clearly stunned by what they had witnessed over the course of several days from the crucifixion to the appearance of the saints in Jerusalem.<sup>107</sup> However, their response to Jesus's righteousness and divinity also follows the typical Roman protocol to deify great human heroes only after they had died.<sup>108</sup>

It was a dangerous move for a group of Romans to make at that time, for Tiberius had already begun to repeatedly buttress his right to exercise total power at the cost of the bloodshed of any person he suspected of attempting, or even considering to attempt, subversion of his politico-religious position as sole ruler. In AD 31 Tiberius's one-time closest confidant turned betrayer Sejanus was executed by the emperor,<sup>109</sup> then in AD 32 Publius Vitellius was forced to suicide for sedition, while all of Sejanus's children were killed on the emperor's orders. In this climate of political cleansing by Tiberius, it quickly became very apparent, very quickly, that the only safe way to defend oneself against condemnation from the emperor was diversion of his suspicions away from oneself and onto other individuals through informants. As Tacitus states, "In the Forum, at a dinner-party, a remark on any subject might mean prosecution. Everyone competed for priority in marking down the victims. Sometimes this was self-defense, but mostly it was a sort of contagion, like an epidemic."<sup>110</sup>

Through informant methods and tactics, Roman senators like Sextius Paconianus and Decimus Haterius were able to escape their own execution for previous alliances with Sejanus while previously close to Tiberius, informing on other more unfortunate members of the senate promptly executed in their stead, as the senator Lucianus Latiaris was.<sup>111</sup>

More bloodshed was to quickly follow. In AD 33, Tiberius had the senator Considius Proculus, and three equites, Geminius, Celsus and Pompeius, charged with treason as conspirators, and summarily executed.<sup>112</sup> From that point every person, senatorial or otherwise, who had ever been complicit with Sejanus, Tiberius had purged.<sup>113</sup> This volatile political climate may go some distance to explain why during these times Pontius Pilate, despite his initial hesitation to execute Jesus who he believed had committed no crime, eventually handed him over to be crucified. For, when the chief priests of the temple cried and

<sup>106</sup> Harris, "Distinctive Features of the Gospels," 305.

<sup>107</sup> Ivor H. Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth, 2003), 169.

<sup>108</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Commentary According to St. Luke*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 539; Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 330; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 422.

<sup>109</sup> See Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 58.5.1–11.7.

<sup>110</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.6–8.

<sup>111</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.1–7.

<sup>112</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.13–19.

<sup>113</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.18–19.

declared in full voice in front of teeming crowds before him, “If you let this man [Jesus] go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.... We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:12, 15) Pilate realized the mortal danger he would find himself in if this talk continued, and so Jesus had to be crucified immediately.

These historical events highlight the potential danger in the centurion’s and the guards’ simple and plain admissions that they happened to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and comparable in standing to the founder of the Julio-Claudian imperial line, Julius Caesar. Their public declaration of their personal belief in Jesus’s divine sonship and nature, were something entirely new and unfamiliar to all other Roman citizens, who had never even heard of Jesus, and who stood quite opposed to each one of Judaism’s beliefs and practices. Furthermore, these soldiers expressed these new, non-traditional, non-Roman, foreign, subversive beliefs, with seemingly carefree attitudes that may have appeared to other Romans in the vicinity not only irresponsible and foolish, but even partly rebellious, being as they were in diametric opposition to the prevailing mood of self-survival at the time, as evidenced in Pilate’s words and actions. Perhaps to protect their identity, Matthew and Luke did not record these Roman soldiers’ names.

### *9. Conclusion*

This article highlights the historical evidence for the earthquake that took place at Jesus’s death, together with the after-shock of Resurrection Sunday. I accept that the approach here may be unusual to some, and that the use of the Bible as a historical source is still somewhat controversial. However, it does lead to a number of important findings that support the biblical account. The earthquakes of the crucifixion and resurrection sit well in the geological nature of the region. The tearing of the curtain was of an unnatural or supernatural origin. The rocks splitting is in keeping with the general activity of limestone rocks around Jerusalem during earthquakes. The opening of tombs which led to the resurrection of many saints could have occurred on account of the more violent aftershock of Resurrection Sunday. The darkness due to a dust storm may have taken place during the crucifixion. The verbal responses by the centurion and his guard are grounded in contemporary Roman cultural practices to make reparation with the Divine and declare a man a Son of God.

These conclusions confirm the factual basis of Matthew’s Gospel. It may very well be that through personal belief, many readers never questioned that factual basis. But, given Hebrews 11:1 defines faith in terms of conviction and assurance, the examination of historical facts behind the biblical accounts of Jesus’ life in this article can be used to help strengthen one’s conviction and assurance, and by doing so strengthen one’s faith as well. With that in mind, it is hoped that this article will stimulate further discussion about its contents.

# Hermeneutics and Historicity in the Matthean Crucifixion Narrative: A Response to Daryn Graham

— Daniel M. Gurtner —

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**Abstract:** This short piece takes up some challenges to Daryn Graham's article, "The Earthquakes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ." While the present author agrees with Graham on the historicity of the events in question (Matt 27:51–54), the author exposes some hermeneutical challenges in Graham's treatment of the material. In his attempt to answer the question, "What happened?," Graham risks misunderstanding distinctive hermeneutical nuances pertinent to the answer the question, "What does it mean?"

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For readers of the Gospels who hold to their historical reliability and aim to take seriously their message(s) to the church, it is important to listen carefully to what a text is doing. This is to ground any interpretation in the author's intent. Any serious attempt to place the narrative of the text within the setting of the first century is a commendable task. Daryn Graham endeavors to do that very thing in his treatment of Matthew 27:51–54, a text that furnishes readers with some formidable challenges. In "The Earthquakes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Graham analyses the effects of the earthquakes at the crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel in relation to (1) their potential damage to the temple, (2) the darkness, (3) the splitting of the stones, opening of tombs, and resurrected saints, and finally (4) the response by the centurion and his companions.<sup>1</sup> His concern throughout pertains to the "factual" nature of the Gospel of Matthew, utilizing "contemporaneous geographical, archaeological, and historical contexts in an historical manner." This "extra-biblical data," he contends, strongly supports the First Gospel's "factual basis." I share this view with Graham, affirming entirely the historicity of the entire account. At the same time, I find problems with some of his herme-

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<sup>1</sup> Daryn Graham, "The Earthquakes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 45 (2020): 537–57.

neutical frameworks related to Gospels scholarship in general and his interaction with my own published work on the subject in particular. My purpose here is to address the former in light of the latter.

### *1. Historicity in the Gospels*

The objective to affirm the factual basis of the account is a commendable endeavor, particularly when it is carefully aligned with the intent of the author. For example, today interpreters intuitively and rightly know that statements like “the sun went down” (Judg 14:18; 19:14; Jer 15:9; Dan 6:14) are not *intended* by the author to claim that the sun revolves around the earth, but merely acknowledge that from an earthly perspective the sun descends to the western horizon until it is no longer visible. Similarly, we intuitively understand that “the Lord is my rock” (2 Sam 22:2; Ps 18:2; cf. Pss 18:46; 19:14; 28:1; 31:3; 42:9; etc.) is not a geological statement, but a theological one for which a literal understanding would distort the intent of the author. The point is that our notion of “facts” must not be imposed on, and so potentially distort, the meaning of the author. At least we need to be open to the possibility that, though our questions are not irrelevant, they may not be the same as those of the original author. A responsible hermeneutic must always endeavor to first determine the author’s original intent to the original readers,<sup>2</sup> though Matthew 27:51–54 has caused trouble for interpreters. A Gospel narrative may be entirely historical without the author *intending to argue* for its historicity any more than other biblical texts intend to argue for the earth revolving around the sun. This is not to deny their historicity in any respect, but rather to focus on the intent and burden of the author, which may or may not be intent to *argue* for their historicity.

An example that comes to mind is in the book of Galatians, where Paul goes to great pains to articulate the essential tenets of justification by faith. Yet he does not argue for the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Christ *in Galatians*, as he does elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor 15); he only mentions it (Gal 1:1). It is clearly the case that he believed in the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Christ, but in Galatians at least it does not seem he felt the burden to *argue for it* in his letter to the Galatian Christians. In other words, these are by no means *irrelevant questions* but they may sometimes not be the *author’s primary concerns* in his particular context.

I share the view of the evangelist that, I think, plainly *takes it for granted without argument that the entire pericope* (Matt 26:51–54) *is all historical*. What is less clear, and the subject of much speculation,<sup>3</sup> is the *author’s meaning to his original readers by what he has written and how he has written it*. In this respect, Graham and I are asking related but different questions. His question is “did it happen?” and my question is “what does it mean?” While I do not doubt that it happened, I have made no attempt to argue for its historicity. Other scholars, including Graham, have undertaken to answer the historical questions. Nevertheless, Graham makes claims about my work on this passage that I do not intend; at the same time his claims expose some hermeneutical challenges as surveyed above. These are evident in two instances in which Graham’s explicit engagement with my own work displays problems.

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<sup>2</sup> Here I find the “Chicago Statements on Biblical Hermeneutics” to be instructive, especially Article XX. See also the collection of essays in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel M. Gurtner, “The Rending of the Veil (Matt. 27:51a *par*): A Look Back and a Way Forward.” *Themelios* 29 (2004): 4–14.

## 2. *The Veil and the Centurion*

The first issue in Graham's treatment of my work pertains to the rending of the temple veil (Matt 27:51). Though he is correct that I argue that the inner curtain of the temple is likely in view, he is mistaken when he claims that I base that claim "on the grounds that the inner curtain receives more prominence and attention in the Old Testament and in Hebrews." Though the inner veil is more prevalent in the Hebrew Bible, that fact does not ground my rationale. My work begins with exhaustive lexical analysis that favors this identification, augmented in a complete diagram of the veil and curtain language in the structure of the tabernacle.<sup>4</sup> I also offer an exhaustive account of veil language in the Old Testament in the LXX, MT, Peshitta, and Vulgate,<sup>5</sup> a detailed comparison of the veil language in the two tabernacle accounts,<sup>6</sup> and a thorough analysis of the use of καταπέτασμα and פֶּרֶקֶת in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> But more weight can be placed on the Greek syntax in Septuagint contexts than simply on word usage. The very thesis and burden of my published treatment on this matter,<sup>8</sup> which Graham cites only in part, is that there are various syntactical features evident in the LXX that help identify when the καταπέτασμα—which can be used for a number of hangings in the LXX—is to be identified with the inner veil (פֶּרֶקֶת) and when it may be identified with another of the temple or tabernacle curtains (מִסְכָּה). This may be further augmented by the etymology of the word καταπέτασμα.<sup>9</sup> I do not regard "prominence and attention" as sufficient grounds for identifying Matthew's veil.

This misunderstanding leads to other problems in Graham's discussion of the torn veil, where he asks whether the tearing of temple curtain was the result of earthquake damage or, in his words, an "act of God." The fundamental flaw at the outset is the dichotomy between the two from a biblical perspective. For example, the account of the exodus reads as follows:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (Exod 14:21–22 ESV)

The Exodus narrative makes clear that it is a "strong east wind" that drives back the waters (Exod 14:21), and yet elsewhere the movement of the waters of the Red Sea are explicitly attributed to God (Deut 11:4; Josh 2:10; Ps 106:9). The point is that the manner in which the question is posed necessarily creates a false dichotomy that does not seem to be embraced by the biblical authors. Whether an earthquake so damaged the temple so as to rend the veil or whether it was a unique and supernatural work whereby the veil was torn without natural cause, God caused it to be torn. This example exposes a false dichotomy in Graham's hermeneutic that becomes more problematic elsewhere.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 203–4.

<sup>5</sup> Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 205–8 (Appendix 1).

<sup>6</sup> Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 209–11 (Appendix 2).

<sup>7</sup> Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 213–15 (Appendix 3).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil," *NovT* 47 (2005): 344–53.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "Καταπέτασμα: Lexicographical and Etymological Considerations on the Biblical 'Veil,'" *AUSS* 42 (2004): 105–11.

My reading of just what the centurion saw is less important for my reading of the passage, but Graham's treatment of my reading exposes more methodological issues. I argue that what the centurion saw was the earthquake and the things that follow for two reasons: First, Matthew explicitly says that they saw "the earthquake and what took place" (ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα), and since Matthew says first that the veil was torn, "and the earth shook, and the rocks split," it seems natural that the evangelist is referencing the earthquake and what follows. In my opinion this interpretation is merely suggested but not decisive, though it is widely held. The second reason I argue that the centurion and company saw the earthquake, etc., and not the veil is that from any of the proposed sites of Golgotha the veil of the temple would not have been visible. Whether Jew or Gentile, the topography renders it impossible. The Herodian temple faced east, with the doors and curtains facing that direction, toward the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives. Golgotha likely lay to the west, some distance from the temple, outside the Second Wall of Jerusalem and, though traditionally at the top of a hill, was surely too low an elevation to see the temple proper atop Mount Zion. Graham speculates that "it is more than likely the centurion and his guard inspected the torn curtain sometime over that period." This reading argues that the centurion's profession (Matt 27:54) occurs after Jesus' resurrection (see Graham's "Table 1"), whereas the more natural reading has the soldiers with Jesus at least from the governor's headquarters (Matt 27:27) through the crucifixion and subsequent profession (Matt 27:54). In the end, this theory must remain speculation without any evidence. Moreover, it ignores the important work of K. L. Waters, who demonstrates the temporal-spatial collapse evident here and characteristic of apocalyptic literature elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> This leads me to a more substantial concern.

### *3. Historicity and Apocalypticism*

I argue that the rending of the veil in Matthew, like that of Mark,<sup>11</sup> is a literary device used to introduce an apocalyptic vision, and that the centurion and his companions see the vision comprised of the splitting of stones, raising of holy ones, etc. It is a *historical* vision of *historical* events. Graham mistakenly claims that my reading denies the historicity of the events: "Gurtner claims that these events were not historical, but formed an apocalyptic vision that was experienced by the centurion guarding Jesus at his crucifixion."<sup>12</sup> Graham seems to presume in his statement, "not historical, but formed an apocalyptic vision," that if one affirms the latter one must deny the former. If I understand him correctly, this is a failure to recognize the nature of apocalyptic material in narratives, which I have addressed elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Here it is sufficient to indicate that the nature of apocalyptic literature in general and apocalyptic interpolations in particular is that they articulate the significance of events in "symbolic" terms. "Symbolic" may be imaginative in some apocalyptic literature, but when utilized in a narrative it must be recognize that the symbolic nature is subsumed within a narrative context, and takes on its character. Classic examples from Matthew are the baptism and the transfiguration. In the former, Jesus comes out of the water "and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit

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<sup>10</sup> K. L. Waters, "Matthew 27:52–53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 122 (2003): 489–515.

<sup>11</sup> See Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil and Markan Christology: 'Unveiling' the ὙΙΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ (Mark 15:38–39)," *BibInt* 15 (2007): 292–306.

<sup>12</sup> He cites my *The Torn Veil*, 138–98.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "Interpreting Apocalyptic Symbolism in the Gospel of Matthew," *BBR* 22 (2012): 219–40.

of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16–17 ESV). The opening of heaven and a voice speaking from heaven are historical—they happened—but also classically apocalyptic in nature. Similarly at the transfiguration Jesus was “transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him” (Matt 17:2–3). Then, Jesus “was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified” (Matt 17:5–6).

Again, the changing of appearance, brightened clothing, appearance of other figures, and the voice from heaven are all familiar from apocalyptic contexts. These the evangelist has utilized in a narrative, and so they are historical. But a dichotomy between the apocalyptic and the historical is foreign to the narrative of the first Gospel. The language “apocalyptic” and the extensive scholarship which examines it is complicated, but it is problematic that Graham takes no pains to examine the nature of apocalypticism when critiquing my apocalyptic reading as “not historical.”<sup>14</sup> Graham himself has embraced Ulrich Luz’s call for a broad understanding of the Gospels’ “historical and cultural context.” For Graham, the physical setting of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus (Matt 27:51–53) are replete with historical evidence from the physical setting, notably enumerating the accounts of earthquakes. These are important factors, but they should be balanced with others such as ancient literature that employs similar features.<sup>15</sup> Graham does this to some extent, but without serious regard to apocalyptic texts or the scholarship that has made such headway in the last four decades.

#### 4. Conclusion

There is much about which Graham and I agree in this complicated passage. We both fully affirm its historicity and try to make best sense of it in Matthew’s context. With our differing objectives we naturally approach the subject differently. My concern in this brief response is to clarify what may be ambiguous regarding my previous work and to offer a few hermeneutical nuances that attempt to take account of important but neglected factors, including topography, apocalypticism, etc., that facilitate a more holistic and broadly contextual understanding of these events.

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<sup>14</sup> The starting point for the discussion of apocalypses and apocalypticism is John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Sem* 14 (1979): 1–20; and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). No works on apocalypticism are cited in Graham’s essay.

<sup>15</sup> See Daniel M. Gurtner, “The Veil of the Temple in History and Legend,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 87–114.

# American Prophets: Federalist Clergy's Response to the Hamilton–Burr Duel of 1804

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**Abstract:** More than any event in early American history, the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr in 1804 revealed Federalist clergy to be the moral guardians of American society and exposed the moral fault lines within the Federalist party itself. In the aftermath of Hamilton's scandalous death, godly Federalists spoke prophetically to the American people, to politicians, and even to their own party. While other Federalists chose to present Hamilton as something of a political martyr, Federalist clergy broke with the party line in order to issue a nationwide clarion call against the practice of dueling, a clear violation of the sixth commandment. Their prophetic voice helped to end the menace of dueling in America.

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In America's first two-party system, Federalists were the social and fiscal conservatives of the new republic. They contended for a strong national government, a loose interpretation of the Constitution, friendly diplomatic relations with Britain, and a centralized banking system. Some, like Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, even campaigned for presidents to remain in office for life, an arrangement which smelled like monarchy to most Republicans. However, many Federalists also proved themselves to be morally and theologically conservative. For example, in New England, most Calvinists and disciples of Jonathan Edwards were Federalists.<sup>1</sup> One scholar has labeled Edwards's grandson, Timothy Dwight, the "architect of godly Federalism."<sup>2</sup> Even the Edwardsean Samuel Hopkins, one of the most outspoken abolitionists for his era, was in fact a Federalist. In South Carolina, Baptist Richard Furman cultivated friendships with Federalists such as Senator Charles Pinckney, a signer of the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conforti notes, "Although Hopkins, like so many New England clerics, became a supporter of the Federalist Party, his doctrine of disinterested benevolence, and the social and political thought that flowed from it, allowed at best only a lukewarm, skeptical endorsement of the new government" (*Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism and Reform in New England between the Great Awakenings* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008], 139).

<sup>2</sup> John R. Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752–1817* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 182.

Constitution, and Chancellor Henry W. DeSaussure, whose Phocion letters defined South Carolina Federalism.<sup>3</sup> In the North and the South, in both established and disestablished churches, the conservative politics of Federalism paired well with the conservative religion of Calvinism. Although a Jeffersonian “wall of separation” had been erected between church and state, those who sought to preserve the strengths of Puritan theology were also determined to maintain the best of their civil religion.<sup>4</sup> Federalism offered a way for many Calvinists to defend the traditional social values of the past in the early years of the American experiment.

The Calvinistic pulse that ran through much of the Federalist party has led Jonathan J. Den Hartog to identify “the Federalization of American Christianity” in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. According to Den Hartog, Federalist ministers were “innovative contributors to the public culture of the early republic who were seeking their own ends, not dupes of Federalist politicians.”<sup>5</sup> They were, if one will permit the anachronism, the nation’s first culture warriors. Federalism was by no means a theological movement, but its conservatism often overlapped with something Mark Noll has called the “Puritan canopy” in early America.<sup>6</sup> Even the Unitarian John Adams, the son of a Congregationalist deacon, never lost many of his Puritanical sensibilities.<sup>7</sup> Clinging to the Puritan idea that both church and state had a responsibility to supervise public morality, Federalist clergy became the nation’s first public theologians, actively engaged in the stewardship of their infant American culture. No event in early American history revealed Federalist clergy as the moral guardians of American society and exposed the moral fault lines within the Federalist party like the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr in 1804. In the aftermath of Hamilton’s scandalous death, Federalist clergy spoke prophetically to the American people, to politicians, and even to their own party.

The Hamilton–Burr duel was the *cause celebre* which established Federalist clergy as the self-appointed guardians of American public morality. Hamilton’s life symbolized a host of Federalist ideals, but his death became the tragic stage upon which godly Federalists played the heralds of virtue, demonstrating their moral probity in a way that many lay Federalists would not and partisan Republicans could not. Faced with the fall of a Federalist hero at the hands of a political enemy, these pastors and theologians refused to overlook the “moral turpitude” of any duelist, regardless of his party affiliation.<sup>8</sup> While other Federalists chose to present Hamilton as something of a political martyr, Federalist clergy

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<sup>3</sup> For the details of this account, see James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 39; “Letter by Charles C. Pinckney to Richard Furman, 14 Feb. 1793,” Richard Furman Papers, Special Collections and Archives, 1960–016 (box 1, folder 5), Furman University; Henry William DeSaussure worked with Furman in the South Carolina legislature, particularly regarding the right of ministers to hold seats on the legislature.

<sup>4</sup> In an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists, Thomas Jefferson used this phrase to describe the First Amendment and the freedom of religion. See Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 17, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (London: Penguin, 2017), 25–26.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Furman, “A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton,” in *Life and Works of Dr. Richard Furman, D.D.*, ed. G. William Foster Jr. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2004), 245.

broke with the party line in order to issue a nationwide clarion call against the practice of dueling, a clear violation of the sixth commandment.

Federalist clergy believed dueling to be “a great national sin” which demanded immediate personal and political action.<sup>9</sup> Their primary indictment against dueling was its lack of honor. Therefore, Federalist divines labored earnestly to show that worldly honor was defined by its concern for private interest while godly honor, in the mold of Christ, always promoted the public good. Hamilton’s death was a time to mourn and a time to teach, and no Federalist preacher lamented his passing without a strict denunciation of his sin and a call to the saving gospel. As a result, virtually every eulogy of Hamilton turned into an elegiac jeremiad to the ethical decay of American society.<sup>10</sup> The Hamilton–Burr duel was, in the words of Congregationalist Samuel Spring, an “alarming event which now impresses and agitates the public mind.”<sup>11</sup> In the wake of this national controversy, the theological descendants of Puritanism attempted to recalibrate the moral compass of America and to distance themselves from worldly partisanship. Richard Furman urgently exhorted his listeners, “Perhaps there never was a period since we became a nation, which, from a general concurrence of public sentiment, was so favorable to such a benevolent attempt, as the present.”<sup>12</sup> Federalist clergy believed that the Hamilton–Burr duel presented them with an opportunity to change the moral fiber of their young country, and they seized that opportunity with wave after rhetorical wave upon the American conscience.

### *1. A Culture of Dueling*

1804 was not simply another election year. When Americans went to the polls in November, their votes would decide something of a tie between Federalists and Republicans for the presidency. After Washington’s two terms, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson had each claimed one term for their respective parties. Therefore, Federalists had every reason to frame the July 11 duel between Major General Hamilton and Jefferson’s vice president in a politically fortuitous light.<sup>13</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, a lawyer and politician from Boston and one of the most important leaders in the Federalist party, downplayed Hamilton’s disgrace. On multiple occasions in a eulogy delivered on July 26, Otis described Hamilton’s act as an innocuous “mistake.”<sup>14</sup> He then seemed to exonerate Hamilton by depicting his decision to duel as the valorous sacrifice of a patriot:

While it is far from my intention to draw a veil over this last great error, or in the least measure justify a practice, which threatens in its progress to destroy the liberty of speech and of opinion; it is but justice to the deceased, to state the circumstances which should palliate the resentment that may be excited in some good minds towards his memory.

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<sup>9</sup> Lyman Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling: A Sermon, Delivered before the Presbytery of Long Island at the Opening of Their Session at Aquebogue, April 16, 1806* (New York: J. Seymour, 1899), 31.

<sup>10</sup> A jeremiad, which derives its name from the prophet Jeremiah in the Bible, is a mournful lamentation.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel* (Newburyport, MA: E. W. Allen, 1804), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Furman, “A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton,” 248.

<sup>13</sup> By 1804, the relationship between Jefferson and Burr was not as cozy as it had once been. Jefferson perceived Burr to be overly ambitious and something of a political rival.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, *Eulogy on General Alexander Hamilton, Pronounced at the Request of the Citizens of Boston, July 26, 1804* (New York: Isaac Collins and Son, 1804), 18.

From the last sad memorial which we possess from his hand, and in which, if our tears permit, we may trace the sad presage of the impending catastrophe, it appears that his religious principles were at variance with the practice of dueling, and that he could not reconcile his benevolent heart to shed the blood of an adversary in private combat, even in his own defense. It was then from public motives that he created this great mistake. It was for the benefit of his country that he erroneously conceived himself obliged to make the painful sacrifice of his principles, and to expose his life.<sup>15</sup>

Federalist clergy were not at all interested in Otis's feckless evaluation of the duel. In their eyes, Hamilton's death was not the result of patriotism but of pride. Despite Hamilton's ambivalent thoughts about dueling penned just before his duel with Burr, Federalist divines refused to justify such a selfish and dangerous act. Although Hamilton objected to the "expected interview with Col. Burr" on "moral and religious principles," he was a duelist nonetheless.<sup>16</sup>

Samuel Spring had a personal connection to the duel. Before serving in the Revolutionary War as chaplain, he had been classmates with Aaron Burr in Theological Studies at Princeton. Burr went on to study law and Spring became a Congregationalist minister in Newburyport, Massachusetts, eventually co-founding Andover Theological Seminary. The text and subtitle to Spring's discourse on August 5 made very clear his stance on the matter: "Thou Shalt Not Kill." As a Federalist, Spring thought very highly of Hamilton. However, he had a very different take on Hamilton's so-called objection to dueling:

No man knows that he is not in heaven. But where do we collect satisfactory evidence of his godly sorrow for accepting the challenge on his darling principle of honor? That he disapproved dueling and its consequences on the malignant, general principle, there is ample evidence. But his saying, both before and after the bloody combat, that he had no wish to injure his adversary is more like the polite duelist who claims the right of death for the sake of private honor than like Col. Gardiner, who nobly said to his challenger: "I am not afraid to sin against God."<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of a generation seeking to justify its evil practices, Federalist clergy were instead engaged in the justification of God. Even the losing end of a duel was attempted murder and prohibited by divine law. Such was the view of Yale's ninth president, Timothy Dwight. No Federalist theologian had a more personal involvement with the Hamilton–Burr duel than Dwight. As the grandson of the fabled Jonathan Edwards, Aaron Burr was Dwight's cousin. Nevertheless, for Dwight, "moral and religious principles" were altogether absent in the Hamilton–Burr duel. Neither Burr nor Hamilton nor any duelist could claim to be on the side of God by taking part in such a barbaric exercise. So urgent was the issue of dueling in Dwight's mind that he wasted no time in addressing it to his students in New Haven. On the Sunday before the Fall commencement, Dwight preached a sermon in Yale's chapel called "The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling."<sup>18</sup> Speaking of medieval knights, Dwight insisted, "God was then believed to give success invariably, to the party which had justice on its side. Modern duelists neither

<sup>15</sup> Otis, *Eulogy on General Alexander Hamilton*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Eliphalet Nott, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of General Alexander Hamilton* (Schenectady, NY: G. Y. Van Debogart, 1853), 33.

<sup>17</sup> Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Dwight, *The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805).

believe, nor wish, God to interfere in their concerns.”<sup>19</sup> Despite their love for Hamilton, clergyman could not stomach the hypocrisy of those duelists who claimed civilized religion.

Following the shameful death of the party’s chief intellectual, Federalist pastors had the delicate task of honoring the life of a beloved patriot whose demise appeared to tarnish his legacy. Wishing not to speak ill of the dead, most clergymen spent considerable time in their eulogies recounting Hamilton’s accomplishments, even while condemning his final moments. In one of his first orations as president of Union College (where Burr’s uncle Jonathan Edwards Jr. had once been president), Eliphalett Nott even compared Hamilton’s death to that of the sainted George Washington.<sup>20</sup> However, despite Hamilton’s lifetime of service, Nott and others believed that Hamilton’s death signaled a flashpoint in the life of the young nation. Now was the time to do something about the public menace of dueling. Unlike the Jeffersonian clergyman Nathaniel Howe, who believed that Federalists were modern “Pharaohs” returning the new republic to Old World bondage, Federalist clergy believed themselves to be modern Elijahs, speaking difficult truths to a freed, idolatrous people.<sup>21</sup> Nott declared, “But though justice should still slumber and retribution be delayed, we, who are the ministers of that God who will judge the judges of the world, and whose malediction rests on him who does his work unfaithfully, we will not keep silence.”<sup>22</sup> In his sermon in Albany, New York, Presbyterian pastor John M’Donald took one step further. For him, the Hamilton–Burr duel was actually ordained by God to rattle the American conscience and to awaken the soul of the country: “The recent stroke, considered in all its circumstances, I view as the awful voice of heaven incensed at our nation. We have tamely left the destructive monster to stalk among us, we have dared to give him titles of honor. God in his wrath has permitted him to cut down the fairest ornament of our nation, and the ablest champion of our rights.”<sup>23</sup> M’Donald urged, “let his blood, unjustly shed, rouse America from her slumbers, and excite her determined opposition.”<sup>24</sup> To many, Hamilton’s passing was the last straw. It was God’s judgment upon America. If laws and human decency could not break the spell of dueling, perhaps the death of an American patriot could.

In *American Honor*, Craig Bruce Smith insists that dueling never defined American honor culture.<sup>25</sup> Federalist clergymen believed similarly. Timothy Dwight affirmed, “In this country, certainly, the public voice is wholly against the practice.”<sup>26</sup> But the urgency with which Federalist clergymen attacked the practice of dueling stemmed from their belief that dueling was beginning to infect and perhaps even embody the American ethic. Federalist divines unanimously agreed that dueling had taken hold of American culture itself. As Smith demonstrates,

The biggest impact the Hamilton–Burr engagement had on dueling culture in America was more philosophical than practical. Most of society was in clear and vocal opposition

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<sup>19</sup> Dwight, *The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Nathaniel Howe, *An Oration* (Portland, Maine, 1805), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> John M’Donald, *A Sermon on the Premature and Lamented Death of General Alexander Hamilton* (Albany, NY: John Barber, 1804), 28.

<sup>24</sup> M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Craig Bruce Smith, *American Honor: The Creation of the Nation’s Ideals During the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 212–15.

<sup>26</sup> Dwight, *The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling*, 13.

to the practice. But despite all of this negative attention, dueling remained. Before 1800, there were only seventy-five duels in American history; through the nineteenth-century, the number surged to over seven hundred. As the next generation came of age, it began to embrace the romanticism of the duel.<sup>27</sup>

While most Americans denounced dueling in theory, its abiding presence in American life was beginning to erode the moral foundations of society and influence the younger generation. Future president Andrew Jackson, who just three years later became associated with Aaron Burr in a conspiracy to seize Spanish territory and create a separate nation, was the subject of criticism during his campaigns for the several duels in which he engaged. Most historians believe that Jackson unknowingly involved himself in the imbroglio because he was attempting to restore his own reputation from a previous duel!<sup>28</sup> In the eyes of Federalist clergy, what Americans opposed with their lips, they supported with their own actions. When Federalist statesman Gouverneur Morris could not bring himself to address the manner of Hamilton's death at his funeral, it represented the refusal of many founding fathers to address the evil of dueling. Morris simply said, "You all know how he perished. On this last scene, I cannot, I will not dwell."<sup>29</sup> However, many Federalist clergymen were willing to speak clearly and adamantly on the issue. In their minds, dueling was a national epidemic, no longer relegated to the periphery of American society. Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton had finally brought the issue to center stage.

In a kind of early American virtue signaling, Federalist clergymen were expressing their strong disapproval of dueling and their conviction that it was quickly impugning the values for which they had fought in the Revolution. By 1804, they were convinced that America had submitted to a toxic culture of dueling. Eliphalet Nott believed it to be a "barbarous custom" which "is undermining the foundations of civil government."<sup>30</sup> According to Episcopalian minister James Abercrombie, dueling "is rapidly gaining ground, and its advocates daily increasing among us."<sup>31</sup> These ministers were even willing to speak on behalf of Hamilton for the sake of admonishing the nation. "The voice of Hamilton's blood," New York City Reformed pastor John Mitchell Mason charged, "calls for a remedy."<sup>32</sup> Two years after the event, in front of an anti-dueling organization, famed Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher preached an oration entitled "The Remedy for Duelling."<sup>33</sup> Lyman's warning was stern: "The practice of dueling is rapidly progressing—disseminating its infection, and deadening the public sensibility. The effect is already great and alarming."<sup>34</sup> The culture of dueling was growing, and with the authority of the church, Federalist

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *American Honor*, 223.

<sup>28</sup> According to Mark R. Cheatham, "No doubt part of Jackson's motivation was his desire to use Burr's name in restoring his own reputation following the Dickinson duel a few months earlier" (*Andrew Jackson: Southerner* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013], 47).

<sup>29</sup> Gouverneur Morris, "Alexander Hamilton," in *The World's Greatest Speeches*, ed. Lewis Copeland, Lawrence W. Lamm, and Stephen J. McKenna (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 265.

<sup>30</sup> Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> James Abercrombie, *A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of Major General Alexander Hamilton, who was killed by Aaron Burr, Esq. Vice President of the United States, in a duel, July 11, 1804* (Philadelphia: H. Maxwell, 1804), 27.

<sup>32</sup> John Mitchell Mason, *An Oration, Commemorative of the late Major General Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1804), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*.

<sup>34</sup> Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*, 25.

clergy were attempting to change that culture. Their primary invective against dueling centered around its erroneous definition of honor. They believed that America needed to be re-educated.

## 2. Redefining Honor

The Hamilton–Burr duel was more than a national tragedy. For Federalist divines, it was a moral litmus test. If Alexander Hamilton’s death could not shake the American public from serial dueling, certainly nothing could. Samuel Spring even wondered, “Will it not make more duelists than it will suppress?”<sup>35</sup> The aftermath of the most infamous duel in American history was a proving ground for the American people, and Federalist clergy were reminding them of that fact. At the heart of the matter was honor. According to John M’Donald, “Dueling has become the disgrace and scourge of that portion of the Christian world that profess sacred regard to honor.”<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, every duel in early America was fought over the issue of honor. However, as Craig Bruce Smith has shown, honor was an elastic term in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary years.<sup>37</sup> In the republican sense, honor was no longer something that “descended” according to family or class, but instead became something that “ascended” with the moral fiber of the individual.

Perhaps more than any single group of Americans, Federalist clergy relentlessly emphasized the moral element in the idea of honor. Consequently, their first task was to distinguish godly honor from its sinful counterfeit, and they used a range of names in order to classify the latter. According to godly Federalists, the honor of the duelist was “imaginary honor,” “false honor,” “worldly honor,” “honor of a murderer,” “modern honor,” “specious honor,” and “honor prostituted.”<sup>38</sup> In reality, worldly honor was no honor at all. By their estimation, duelists’ honor was defined by inherent selfishness. It was found in those who “will ... abandon the public good and pursue his private interest.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, false honor has no regard for the honor of others. It drove men like Alexander Hamilton to abandon their principles and love of country in order to settle petty feuds. In his July 31 sermon, John Mitchell Mason lamented, “Ah! What avails it to a distracted nation that Hamilton was murdered for a punctilio of honor? My flesh shivers! Is this, indeed, our state of society?”<sup>40</sup> A false notion of honor had engulfed American culture and claimed one of its brightest stars.

In the South, where the concept of honor was given significant cultural weight, the dishonor of dueling was incompatible with Christian chivalry.<sup>41</sup> In his eulogy of Hamilton, Richard Furman asked, “What a spirit of resentment, and false honor, has it promoted in the community at large?”<sup>42</sup> Federalists were especially prone to equate the anarchy of dueling with the same “infidelity” of the French Revolution,

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<sup>35</sup> Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *American Honor*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Abercrombie, *Death of Major General Alexander Hamilton*, 32, 38–39, 48–49; Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel*, 15, 17; Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Mason, *An Oration*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Furman, “Death of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton,” 245.

both of which were antithetical to their sense of honor.<sup>43</sup> For Eliphalet Nott, a duelist who claimed honor for himself was claiming an empty term: “Who is it then? A man of honor! And who is this man of honor? A man, perhaps, whose honor is a name; who prates with polluted lips about the sacredness of character, when his own is stained with crimes and needs but the single shade of murder to complete the dismal and sickly picture.”<sup>44</sup>

Federalist clergy applied another set of names to what they perceived as biblical honor. In contrast with false honor, biblical honor was “true honor,” “divine honor,” “real honor,” and “virtuous honor.”<sup>45</sup> This kind of honor was defined by an abiding concern for the public good. In this sense, it was the honor of the gospel. In the case of Hamilton, John M’Donald believed that his fellow New Yorker should have simply followed the model of Christ, renounced the world’s honor, and turned the other cheek:

I see no way that remained for him but to yield to this abominable custom, and try to preserve unsullied honor in the world’s eye, or to renounce her censure and her praise when different from the approbation of God, and to have publically embraced the cross and the Savior, accounting with a very great man, all things else, when compared to the excellence of Christ, as loss! loss!<sup>46</sup>

The most honorable thing a duelist could do in the heat of a duel was to simply walk away. Ironically, the figure “whose duty it is to preserve the honor of our country” had now become an example of dishonor to the rest of the nation, his death a public offering in order to avert America’s sin and rally its people around the true definition of honor.<sup>47</sup>

Federalist clergy were calling their fellow Americans to look beyond their own private affairs and to consider the well-being of others. The evil of dueling was found in its blatant disregard not only of fellow man, but of society at large. Duelists were anarchists, essentially harming their entire community by taking up arms against a single person. Timothy Dwight believed that dueling was “wasting with its violence the public good.”<sup>48</sup> He then defined the true sense of honor: “duelists claim the character of delicate and peculiar honor. On what is this claim founded? Are they most sincere, just, kind, peaceable, generous, and reasonable than other men? These are the ingredients of an honorable character.”<sup>49</sup> Had not Hamilton’s life embodied these things? Had not America been founded on these principles? After all, the essence of honor was its disinterestedness, a republican ideal that had colored the thinking of almost every founding father, including Hamilton. According to Gordon Wood, “The virtue that classical republicanism encouraged was public virtue.... Public virtue was the sacrifice of private desires and interests for the public interest. It was devotion to the commonweal.” Wood adds, “Republicanism thus put an enormous burden on individuals. They were expected to suppress their private wants

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<sup>43</sup> M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 30–31; Furman, “Death of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton,” 242.

<sup>44</sup> Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 13–14.

<sup>45</sup> Abercrombie, *Death of Major General Alexander Hamilton*, 32; Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel*, 15, 17; Furman, “Death of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton,” 246.

<sup>46</sup> M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Dwight, *The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Dwight, *The Folly, Guilt, and Mischiefs of Duelling*, 13.

and interests and develop disinterestedness—the term that eighteenth century most often used as a synonym for civic virtue.”<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, in one sense, Federalist clergy were simply calling the nation back to its supposed moral foundation and away from the “idolatrous altar of false honor and imaginary rectitude.”<sup>51</sup> For this reason, more than one divine harkened back to the Federalist Papers, where, along with John Jay and James Madison, under the pseudonym *Publius*, Hamilton’s “genius has left a manual for the future statesmen.”<sup>52</sup> By taking part in the duel, Hamilton had engaged in self-contradictory behavior and led other Americans away from their American ideals. Eliphalet Nott echoed most Federalist clergy when he insisted,

Each lives for the benefit of all. As in the system of nature the sun shines, not to display its own brightness and answer its own convenience, but to warm, enlighten and bless the world; so in the system of animated beings, there is a dependence, a correspondence, and a relation through an infinitely extended, dying and reviving universe, *in which no man liveth unto himself and no man dieth to himself*. Friend is related to friend; the father to his family; the individual to community. To every member of which, having fixed his station and assigned his duty, the God of nature says, “Keep this trust—defend this post.” For whom? For thy friends—thy family—thy country. And having received such a charge, and for such a purpose, to desert it is rashness and temerity.<sup>53</sup>

The man of honor was a man of the people, concerned with public welfare and not his own. This was the honor of the American Revolution, not that of the French Revolution. The death of Alexander Hamilton was a reminder of the precariousness of that distinction. In typical Federalist, anti-Jacobin style, John Mitchell Mason asked, “Is fidelity honorable? That man forswears his faith, who turns against the bowels of his countrymen, weapons put into his hand for their defense. Are generosity, humanity, sympathy honorable?”<sup>54</sup> In order to redefine honor, Federalist divines were invoking the precepts of the Bible along with the very best ideals of the Revolutionary age.

### 3. *A New Jeremiad*

Federalist clergy were willing to sacrifice the stainless legacy of Andrew Hamilton upon the altar of civilized religion. In their mind, without the latter, Hamilton’s lifetime of virtuous deeds meant nothing. After all, patriots had shed their blood for “fidelity.” To John Mitchell Mason, Hamilton’s act was much more than a “mistake”; it was a depraved “error” that issued a loud warning to the American people:

Fathers, friends, countrymen! The grave of Hamilton speaks. It charges me to remind you that he fell a victim, not to disease nor accident; not to the fortune of glorious warfare; but, how shall I utter it? To a custom which has no origin but superstition, no ailment but depravity, no reason but in madness. Alas! That he should expose his precious life. This was his error. A thousand bursting hearts reiterate, this *was* his error.

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<sup>50</sup> Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 104.

<sup>51</sup> Abercrombie, *Death of Major General Alexander Hamilton*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Mason, *An Oration*, 12; M’Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Nott, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 17–18, italics in original.

<sup>54</sup> Mason, *An Oration*, 24.

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Shall I apologize? I am forbidden by his living protestations, by his dying regrets, by his wasted blood.<sup>55</sup>

Hamilton had succumbed to superstition, depravity, and madness. Where some Federalists recoiled from such harsh language, godly Federalists were unafraid to indict the malefactors of society, even if it meant sully the pristine legacy of one of Federalism's heroes. James Abercrombie even compared Hamilton's duel to suicide.<sup>56</sup> Alexander Hamilton's service to the young nation did not give him a pass nor did it protect his memory from moral scrutiny. Never before in the history of the United States had such a titanic figure received such sustained, scathing, public rebukes from members in his own party.

By highlighting the egregious crime of one of their own, and by mentioning so little of Aaron Burr, Federalist clergy were establishing themselves as the self-appointed moral guardians of American society, prophets to a new American people. Their homiletical approach can best be described as an elegiac jeremiad, a mix of paean and prophecy. With one breath, they praised Hamilton's greatest works; and with another, they scrupulously dissected his greatest sin. In doing so, they simultaneously lionized and villainized Hamilton. On one hand, John M'Donald called Hamilton a "Hero" whose services to the country "were of the most important nature."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, M'Donald unequivocally confirmed Hamilton's depravity as a fellow sinner: "Let none imagine that when we feebly attempt to do some justice to the merit of the illustrious dead, that we mean to represent him without imperfection; or that we feel not high detestation at his acceptance of the bloody call. No one inherits human nature exempted from the depravity and frailties to which it has been subjected. Hamilton had not doubt a share in both."<sup>58</sup> In the annals of history, Hamilton was a giant. But the manner of his death ensured that he would never be canonized in the mold of Washington.

In one sense, Federalist divines were simply perpetuating a Federalist tradition since the beginning of the party. Federalists had long decried societal woes in the fledgling nation. In *The American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch notes how the "Federalist jeremiads" were deployed in response to events such as the Whiskey Rebellion and the Antirent War.<sup>59</sup> According to Bercovitch, "The Federalist Jeremiahs saw their duty at once: they had to keep the Revolution on course by exorcising the demons of rebellion." He later adds, "The Federalists' lament expressed the dangers inherent in social, technological, and economic growth. Like the Jeremiahs of old, they were supporting the system by calling attention to its current dysfunctions. The republican dream, they pointed out, presupposed mutuality (not conflict) between free enterprise and the common good."<sup>60</sup> Bercovitch soundly locates the Federalist "Jeremiahs" who repeatedly identified the dangerous extremes in American culture.

However, there were a group of Federalists who weren't chiefly concerned with social, technological, and economic issues. Bercovitch does not account for the Federalist clergymen who served as the moral and spiritual barometers of the incipient nation. While these godly jeremiads were of the same Federalist genus, they were not of the same species. Federalist divines weren't simply admonishing extremist

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<sup>55</sup> Mason, *An Oration*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Abercrombie, *Death of Major General Alexander Hamilton*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> M'Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> M'Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 26–27.

<sup>59</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 134.

<sup>60</sup> Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 135, 137.

Republicans; they were also speaking sternly to their fellow Federalists. Samuel Spring believed that no duelist, regardless of party, should be allowed to hold public office after a duel:

For custom is the offspring of the public mind. It is evil communication which corrupts good manners: and it is public neglect or indulgence which supports public criminality. Without public influence to punish a duelist or disqualify him from holding any office in the union except that of a retired penitent we are a ruined nation. Duelists whether they go to the combat to assert and maintain the claims of personal honor; or to gratify their malevolent hearts in removing their rivals or adversaries, are hostile to the best interest of men and must and will be suppressed by a virtuous administration and a virtuous nation.<sup>61</sup>

Years later, Lyman Beecher stormed, “It is in vain to cry out ‘priest-craft’ or ‘political preaching.’ These watch-words will not answer here. The crime we oppose is peculiar to no party; it is common to all. It is a crime too horrid to be palliated; too threatening, to be longer endured in officers of government.”<sup>62</sup> Beecher even indicted the American people for voting for such men. In his mind, hypocrisy was not reserved simply for the duelists; it also revealed the hypocrisy of the nation:

In your prayers, also, you entreat that God would bestow upon you good rulers; and you always pray, in reference to their moral character, that they may be just men, ruling in the fear of God. But by voting for duelists you demonstrate the hypocrisy of these prayers – for when, by the providence of God, it is left to your choice whom you will have, you vote for murderers. Unless, therefore, you would continue to mock God, you must cease praying for good men, or you must cease to patronize men of blood. Do you not pray also for the preservation of liberty and the continuance of national prosperity? And do you not know that good rulers are the instruments of the divine blessing; and that when God would chastise a people, unprincipled rulers are the rod of his anger? When, therefore, the selection of rulers is left to yourselves, will you disregard his chosen instruments of mercy, and expect his blessing? Will you put into his hand the rod of his anger, and expect to escape chastisement?<sup>63</sup>

In *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch sees Federalist Jeremiahs as a “long way from the Puritans.”<sup>64</sup> However, not all Federalist Jeremiahs were so far away from their Puritan roots. In fact, many Federalist clergymen were theological descendants of the Puritans who took seriously the moral and spiritual implications of the Hamilton–Burr duel. The fact that almost every eulogy to Hamilton by a Federalist divine was preached from an Old Testament text is further evidence that American Christianity still saw itself much as the Puritans did: as a covenant people. Dueling attacked the heart of covenant theology by severing the bonds that Christians made with one another and defiling the covenant they made with their God.

Hezekiah North Woodruff’s stance on the Hamilton–Burr duel was obvious from the title of his August 12 sermon: “The Danger of Ambition Considered.” Like so many other Federalist pastors,

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<sup>61</sup> Spring, *A Discourse, in Consequence of the Late Duel*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Beecher, *The Remedy for Duelling*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 137.

Woodruff believed that Hamilton's death was an opportunity to call Americans back to God: "O that his example might wake the feelings, and rouse the attention of every immoral and unbelieving heart!"<sup>65</sup> This message crossed party lines, to all sinners, and Hamilton's death ensured that everyone was listening.

#### 4. *American Prophets*

The death of Alexander Hamilton was a turning point in American history, and Federalist divines knew it. John M'Donald describes the scene of widespread mourning:

In every place the wounding intelligence of his death has been received with consternation, with indignation, with horror. Whole cities have assembled to consult on the most becoming method of expressing their grief, and offering some tribute of respect to his memory. Societies of various kinds, military, social, literary and religious, have also met and agreed to join, on some peculiar ground, the universal mourning.<sup>66</sup>

Seizing the national moment, Federalist clergy used the Hamilton–Burr duel to speak prophetically to the American people and to try to end the practice of dueling once and for all. While Federalists were not the only pastors and theologians who preached earnestly against dueling, the death of Alexander Hamilton gave Federalist clergy the platform and the moral high ground to establish themselves as the guardians of American public morality. Federalist divines were not simply preaching to their congregations; they were stewarding American culture. Like the Puritans of old, they were shepherding a modern American people. With time, the practice of dueling waned in public life, largely due to the efforts of those clergymen who sought to convict the American conscience by laying bare the sin of one of its favorite sons.

Political rivals no longer draw pistols against one another in the public square, but the division, enmity, and toxicity of American politics has sharply increased in recent years. Too often our nation's leaders seek the honor of their party above the praise of God. Sadly, the Hamilton–Burr duel was a bitter, albeit shocking, foretaste of things to come in the land of the free. Today, the venom of partisanship is no longer exchanged from the barrel of a gun, but rather from Twitter accounts, radio shows, news outlets, and sometimes even the pulpit. In an age no less polarized and politicized than the days of the early republic, the church can ill afford to lose its prophetic voice. When pastors simply echo the platform of a particular party rather than heralding the holy love of the cross, the church hides its light under the bowl of political pragmatism, the authority of Scripture is replaced with the fear of man, and the witness of the gospel is lost to the wisdom of the world. May the Federalist clergy in the early republic serve as a reminder to contemporary American pastors that the church draws its most lasting strength not from its ability to parrot the voices of the world or to rally against a common earthly enemy, but in its beautiful distinction *from* the world and in its worship of a common Lord. At critical moments in American history, Christian leaders are called to speak simply and truthfully into the cacophony of American politics, not as pundits or political rivals, but as those who have been set apart from the

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Craig Bruce Smith, *American Honor*, 215; Hezekiah North Woodruff, *The Danger of Ambition Considered in a Sermon Preached at Scipio, New York, Lord's Day, August 12, 1804, Occasioned by the Death of General Alexander Hamilton, Who Fell in a Duel with Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States of America, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, 1804* (Albany, NY: G. Webster, 1804).

<sup>66</sup> M'Donald, *Death of General Alexander Hamilton*, 14.

earthly duels that continue to plague the kingdoms of the world. By decrying and lamenting rather than justifying the callousness of those even in their own political tribe, Christians not only strengthen the moral compass of their own party; they also testify to the character and compassion of their King and declare to the world which kingdom they ultimately serve. In a nation of dueling parties, the church remains a holy nation, and a people for His own possession.

# “Love One Another When I Am Deceased”: John Bunyan on Christian Behavior in the Family and Society

— Jenny-Lyn de Klerk —

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**Abstract:** In the last two decades, Bunyan studies has seen an increase in scholarship that examines his life and thought from various angles, such as the psychological experiences and socio-political convictions found in his allegorical and autobiographical works. This scholarship has greatly enriched our understanding of Bunyan as a whole person living in a particular historical context. However, it has also led to some unwarranted critiques of Bunyan for being tyrannical, cold, and sexually immoral, appealing to his clearer didactic works like *Christian Behaviour* for proof. One way to balance these extreme views is to examine the context and content of Bunyan’s *Christian Behaviour*, as well as relevant aspects of his life. In the end, this will show that Bunyan was giving instructions on what he considered to be a primary aspect of the Christian life, that these instructions called for a gentle, warm love both within and outside of the family, and that he sought to follow these instructions himself.

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In the last two decades, Bunyan studies has seen an increase in scholarship that examines his life and thought from various angles, such as the psychological experiences and socio-political convictions found in his allegorical and autobiographical works. This scholarship has greatly enriched our understanding of Bunyan as a whole person living in a particular historical context. However, it has also led to some unwarranted critiques of Bunyan for being tyrannical, cold, and sexually immoral, appealing to his clearer didactic works like *Christian Behaviour* for proof. One way to balance these extreme views is to examine the context and content of Bunyan’s *Christian Behaviour*, as well as relevant aspects of his life.<sup>1</sup> In the end, this will show that Bunyan intended to instruct his readers on what he considered

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson laments that “many critical studies of Bunyan, however, have adopted strategies so monolithic that they have overlooked or even distorted the one with which Bunyan expected his readers to begin: his theology.... Frequently viewing Bunyan’s Puritanism as a drawback to appreciating him as an author, they either reinterpret his theology as veiling social concerns and/or psychological issues, or they confess that his theology

to be a primary aspect of the Christian life, that these instructions called for a gentle, warm love both within and outside of the family, and that he sought to follow these instructions himself.

### *1. Bunyan’s Christian Conduct in the Family and Society*

Since recent scholarship has evaluated not only Bunyan’s work but also his life, it is helpful to begin by summarizing information known about his personal behavior in the family and society before examining his teachings on this topic in *Christian Behaviour*. As a child, Bunyan followed in the footsteps of his unbelieving father who frequently used foul language by imitating this swearing and acting in a generally rebellious manner.<sup>2</sup> Later in life he would recall that he felt embarrassed when a female shopkeeper rebuked him for saying profanities, yet he kept sinning.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it seems his father modeled questionable behavior in more than one way since only one month after his mother died, his father re-married, which “must have seemed to violate the canons of decency and abiding love.”<sup>4</sup>

After leaving home as a young man Bunyan began to recognize his own sin and even grieve it, but felt unable to repent; it is possible his reading of devotional manuals that seemed to emphasize works over grace made this worse.<sup>5</sup> What eventually gave Bunyan the initial guidance he needed in understanding sin and salvation came from a group of “poor and unlearned” women who unknowingly sparked Bunyan’s curiosity when he heard them talking lovingly about their God.<sup>6</sup> After Bunyan joined their conversation, they introduced him to their pastor John Gifford, who “lead Bunyan to repentance and faith”<sup>7</sup> and trained him for ministry.

Bunyan’s dedication to ministry was so strong that he refused to stop preaching even when it led to his imprisonment for violating the Act of Uniformity. Sadly, this came with the consequence

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is now completely unpalatable and avoid it as much as possible.” Galen Johnson, “‘Be Not Extrem’: The Limits of Theory in Reading John Bunyan,” *Christianity and Literature* 49 (2000): 448. These types of publications have only increased since Johnson’s critique. Similar to Johnson, Dunan-Page affirms the need to present a moderate picture of Bunyan, saying his “tendency to run to extremes in his most famous work of fiction cannot be read in isolation from [his] discourse of sobriety and poise.” Anne Dunan-Page, *Grace Overwhelming: John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, and the Extremes of the Baptist Mind* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 42. Furthermore, Underwood’s evaluation that Bunyan’s publications other than the four most popular (*Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Grace Abounding*, *Mr. Badman*, and *Holy War*) “deserve study” is still relevant for his *Christian Behaviour*. T. L. Underwood, “‘It Please Me Much to Contend’: John Bunyan as Controversialist,” *Church History* 57 (1988): 457. Swaim skillfully applies *Christian Behaviour* to the story of Christian leaving his family in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, but does not go beyond this specific issue. Kathleen M. Swaim, “Christian’s ‘Christian Behavior’ to His Family in *Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *Religion and Literature* 21 (1989): 1–15. Thus, this article seeks to continue on the trajectory of contributing to a well-rounded understanding of Bunyan.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and his Church, 1628–1688* (New York: Random House, 1989), 42, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, *A Tinker*, 72.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Danny Hyde, “Meet a Puritan: Lewis Bayly,” *Reformation21*, 14 March 2016, <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/meet-a-puritan-lewis-bayly>.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, *A Tinker*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Joel Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 225.

of being separated from his wife and children for over a decade. Yet, far from ignoring the ways this would negatively affect them, Bunyan sincerely lamented this and did what he could to financially and spiritually provide for them by selling shoelaces and writing books.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Walker suggests, “it [was] in prison that Bunyan’s genius ... for writing works that evangelise and enrich the spiritual commitment of his congregation to the Baptist faith, [was] confirmed and enhanced.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Bunyan channeled his grief into his writing as he mourned for being away from his family, which he considered the worst part of prison, saying,

The parting with my Wife and poor Children hath oft been to me in this place as the pulling the flesh from my bones; and that not onely because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind Child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.<sup>10</sup>

This must have been a difficult time for them, but perhaps they also learned to trust God from their father’s example, a lesson that Bunyan himself did not seem to receive as a child.

Unfortunately, even after his release from prison Bunyan continued to face trials, such as when he was accused of committing adultery with Agnes Beaumont. Beaumont was a young convert and new member of the Bedford congregation whom he once took on horseback to a church gathering. On the day she was meant to be taken to this gathering by another minister who never came, Bunyan happened to pass her house and was convinced by her brother to help them. Bunyan initially refused, thinking her father would be angry, but was eventually persuaded by her brother’s desperate plea, “if you do not carry her, you will break her heart.”<sup>11</sup> Sadly, upon Beaumont’s return from church, her father locked her out of the house because he was suspicious of Bunyan, about whom he had heard disconcerting things. Further, as a nominal Christian he did not like his daughter’s newfound devotion to God as worked out in a socially subversive group, especially one led by a controversial figure.<sup>12</sup> Though Beaumont and her father reconciled several days later, rumors spread about inappropriate behavior between Bunyan and Beaumont and the premeditated murder of her father since he had mysteriously died after their reconciliation.<sup>13</sup> In the end, Beaumont denied committing adultery and was “found innocent” regarding

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<sup>8</sup> J. Sears McGee, “Introduction,” in John Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour, The Holy City, The Resurrection of the Dead*, ed. J. Sears McGee, The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> David Walker, “Piety and the Politics of Anxiety in Nonconformist Writing of the Later Stuart Period,” in *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, eds. Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 159–60.

<sup>10</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 98.

<sup>11</sup> Agnes Beaumont, *The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont*, ed. Vera J. Camden (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), 43. See James Anderson, *Memorable Women of the Puritan Times* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001), 2:216.

<sup>12</sup> According to Adcock, many thought Baptists promoted a view of society that was a threat to the family structure. Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women’s Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640–1680* (New York: Ashgate, 2015), 31, 41.

<sup>13</sup> This would have been “regarded as petty-treason because it re-enacted the monarch and subject relationship: the penalty was to be burnt at the stake,” according to Adcock, *Baptist Women’s Writings*, 32.

her father’s death, and “Bunyan maintained his own innocence in the fifth edition (1680) of *Grace Abounding*.”<sup>14</sup>

This experience must have angered Bunyan, but he continued to preach and care for those around him until his death in 1688, which was caused by his insistence on getting from one pastoral duty to another.<sup>15</sup> After riding to the town of Reading to reconcile an estranged father and son Bunyan had to endure harsh weather in order to get to his lodging before preaching the next morning, and though he succeeded in facilitating their reconciliation and delivering his sermon, he fell ill and died.<sup>16</sup> In the conclusion to what would be his final sermon he preached, “Doest thou see a Soul that has the Image of God in him? Love him, love him ... serve one another, do good for one another; and if any wrong you, Pray to God to right you, and Love the Brotherhood.”<sup>17</sup>

In sum, though Bunyan may have not been instructed well as a child, his conversion experience gave him an understanding of sin and salvation, which led him to devote his life to teaching and guiding those in his care, most importantly his immediate family and congregation. This is clearly seen in his conduct manual *Christian Behaviour, or the Fruits of True Christianity*, written in 1663, when he thought he would be executed in prison. McGee explains that though this expectation was incorrect because Bunyan misunderstood the law, “there were still reasons to fear the worst” since “prisons were dank, cold, unhealthy places.”<sup>18</sup> Using what he thought would be his last days, Bunyan urgently wrote on what he believed was a primary aspect of the Christian life.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Christian Behavior: A Plain Call for All Christians to Love

Bunyan opens his *Christian Behaviour* with an explanation of why he chose to write a book on good works, saying he wanted to compose the logical follow-up to his book on justification, present a gospelized treatment of specific good works (currently not available elsewhere), respond to accusations of antinomianism, provide a more accessible and affordable book on good works for new converts, personally testify of God’s fruit-producing grace in his own life, and encourage that which pleases God. Bunyan clarifies that his discourse is not only about good works in general, but also those performed in specific life roles, including husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant, and neighbor. After an introduction on justification and a definition of good works, Bunyan describes good works in these roles, identifies primary sins that keep one from doing good works, and offers motivations for good works.

First, Bunyan is adamant that works flow from faith, not vice versa. Yet, he simultaneously insists that good works are a necessary part of the Christian life, and that they must be maintained on an ongoing basis by motivating oneself using the doctrine of justification.<sup>20</sup> Works must flow from faith

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<sup>14</sup> T. L. Underwood, “Introduction,” *Miscellaneous Works* 4:xlii.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael A. Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Press, 1997), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Charles Belmonte, *John Bunyan* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 136–38.

<sup>17</sup> John Bunyan, *Last Sermon*, *Miscellaneous Works* 12:93.

<sup>18</sup> McGee, “Introduction,” *Miscellaneous Works* 3:xvi.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 161.

<sup>20</sup> John Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, *Miscellaneous Works* 3:11–12.

because that is what defines a good work; it is axiomatic. Bunyan explains, “*Good Works* must come from a good heart ... [and] from love to the Lord Jesus.... *For Faith worketh by love, and by that means doth good*, as Gal. 5.6.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, good works cannot be carried out without knowing that God chose his children, loves his children, and forgives their sins, which is what faith reveals and uses to comfort and enliven the soul; good works live by the ongoing strength of Christ, which is communicated to the believer through faith. On the other hand, works are also necessary to prove one’s salvation to others. To support this point Bunyan repeatedly uses the biblical analogy of fruitfulness—that living plants always produce fruit. Showing his literary skill, he warns: “take heed of being painted fire, wherein is no warmth; and painted flowers, which retain no smell; and of being painted trees, whereon is no fruit.”<sup>22</sup>

Next, Bunyan defines a good work as having “the *Word for its authority*,” “*flow[ing] from Faith*,” “*rightly time, and rightly placed*,” and performed “*willingly, [and] cheerfully*.”<sup>23</sup> A good work cannot be good unless it is informed by the truth revealed in God’s Word. Furthermore, all works have a proper time and place in which they should be done. For example, one should not be working when it is time to hear the Word, or be outside of the home when it is time for family worship. This also means that more important works should be done more often.

Then, Bunyan describes the specific good works to be done as a husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant, and neighbor. The husband must govern the family both spiritually, in order to “increase Faith,” and externally, by providing for physical needs.<sup>24</sup> To increase faith, he should lead his family in private worship (i.e., praying, reading Scripture, and conferencing), lead them to public worship, and protect them from heresy. Bunyan reasons that the importance of leading a household is seen in the fact that Scripture says only those who succeed in this area can be considered as pastoral candidates. Regarding the family’s physical needs Bunyan warns husbands to not let work distract from spiritual duties, saying, “to feed, cloath, and care for, is as much as heart can wish” and to go beyond that is greed.<sup>25</sup> Husbands are also responsible for maintaining harmony in the home, which includes not tolerating sin against God but also knowing when to humbly “pass by personal injuries, and to bury them in oblivion. *Love covereth a multitude of sins*.”<sup>26</sup>

This harmony is worked out between spouses, as well as parents and children. A husband married to a believer should thank God for her, doubly love her, and carry himself to her as Christ does. Overall, their relationship is characterized by a sense of sweetness.<sup>27</sup> A husband married to an unbeliever should think about her lost state in order to develop sympathy for her, act rightly so that she does not have occasion to imitate sin she sees at home, overcome the evil she does with good, try to convince her of the gospel, speak purposefully, and not become angry.

In turn, a believing wife must look to her husband as head and be subject to him rather than participate in gossip, meddle in worldly affairs, talk idly, or dress immodestly. However, Bunyan clarifies, “do not

<sup>21</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:12, emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:10.

<sup>23</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:18, emphasis original.

<sup>24</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:22.

<sup>25</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:25.

<sup>26</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:26, emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup> “There is a sweet scent wrapped up in the relations of husbands and wives (Ephes. 5.32).” Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:27.

think that by the subjection I have here mentioned, that I do intend women should be their husbands' slaves. Women are their husbands yoke-fellows, their *flesh* and their *bones* ... the wife is master next to her husband, and is to rule all in his absence.”<sup>28</sup> Bunyan counsels the wife with an unbelieving husband to strive all the more to live a holy life and practice patience in the hopes of “win[ning] him to the love of his own Salvation.”<sup>29</sup> When her husband is in a tender mood or is convicted of some sin, the wife should use that opportunity to speak respectfully and sympathetically to him about the gospel. Bunyan recognizes the severity of being in such a difficult situation and says the wife and her Christians friends should pray to God for help.

As a couple, parents must be careful to act rightly before their children and raise them in the Lord. This means instructing them with gentleness and words they understand, and only teaching them the truth, not fables. When correcting their children, parents should first “see if fair words will win them from evil” for “this is God’s way with his Children, Jer. 25.4, 5.”<sup>30</sup> They can do this by speaking calmly and giving scriptural support for their words. Though parents must show their dislike of naughtiness, this should “be mixed with such love, pity and compunction of spirit, that ... [the children] may be convinced, [their parents] dislike not their persons, but their sins.” Again, “this is God’s way, Psa. 99.8.”<sup>31</sup>

In response, children must obey, honor, and love their parents by considering their parents better than themselves instead of scorning them. Children should also be willing to help their parents since they brought them into the world, cared for them when they were helpless, and went through the painful ordeal of raising them. If one’s parents are unbelievers, one should yearn for their salvation, speak wisely, bear with their “railing and evil speaking,” and look for opportunities to share the gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Though masters and servants do not have the same relationship as parents and children, masters must treat their servant with respect and care like they would their own child so that their servant “may become [their] spiritual Son in the end, Prov. 29.21.”<sup>33</sup> Bunyan explains, “know that it is thy duty so to behave thy self to thy Servant, that thy service may not only be for thy good, but for the good of thy Servant, and that both in body and soul.”<sup>34</sup> This means masters should not overwork their servants and thus turn them into slaves (which would make them more like “*Israel’s* enemies than Christian Masters”), threaten them, set a bad example for them, misrepresent the work when hiring them, or underpay them.<sup>35</sup> Rather, they should behave well towards them so that their servants have nothing to complain about. In sum, masters should learn from Christ how to treat their servants; they are to

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<sup>28</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:34, emphasis original.

<sup>29</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:34.

<sup>30</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:29.

<sup>31</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:30–31. Lynch comments that “the importance of upholding such a distinction [between hating a person and hating the person’s sin was] a key concern in manuals of spiritual conduct” in Bunyan’s time. Beth Lynch, *John Bunyan and the Language of Conviction* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 91. For example, this distinction is seen in John Owen, *True and False Religion*, ed. William H. Goold, *The Works of John Owen* 14 (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 65, 335.

<sup>32</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:29.

<sup>33</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:31.

<sup>34</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:30–31.

<sup>35</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:30–31, emphasis original.

perform the same good works as a servant, namely, completing their tasks “as to the Lord, and not to men.”<sup>36</sup>

In turn, servants must remember that they are not on the same level as the master’s family; even if the servants are equally a part of Christ’s family as their masters are, there is still a hierarchy in the workplace. Furthermore, servants should remember that they work not with that which belongs to themselves, but to their master. Yet above all they serve God: the servant’s “work in [their] place and station ... [are] as really God’s ordinance, and as acceptable to Him, in its kind, as is Preaching, or any other work for God.”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, neighbors must be courteous, charitable, and gracious, always ready to meet the physical needs of others (especially of the poor), talk about the gospel, and use kind language, rather than use offensive or provoking language, gossip, serve themselves, or talk about religion but never do anything to help others. Three chief sins in professors of religion are covetousness, pride, and adultery. The first can work itself out in being discontent despite having a comfortable life, the second leads to many sins against others (including deceit, prejudice, and murder), and the third easily overtakes people by immodest looks, speech, and dress. To avoid discouraging his readers Bunyan pleads, “My Friends, I am here treating of *Good Works*, and perswading you to fly those things that are hinderances to them; wherefore bear with my plainness when I speak against *Sin*; I would strike it through with every word, because else it will strike us through with many sorrows, I *Tim.* 6.9, 10.”<sup>38</sup>

Bunyan concludes that one of the hardest yet necessary parts of doing good works is continuing in them over time, though one is not saved by works. Actually, Bunyan argues, the best way to motivate oneself and others to do good works is by believing, thinking, and talking about the doctrine of justification by grace. This doctrine states that God freely clothes his children with Christ’s righteousness and gives them all Christ’s benefits, which then infuses a principle of grace in the believer’s heart that produces fruit. Bunyan explains the necessity of both doctrine and community by again using fruit and garden imagery. First, when “good Doctrine” is “planted” and “watered with the Word of Grace” in an individual’s heart, it produces the “fruit of Holiness, and the end everlasting Life, *Rom.* 6.22.” Then, Christians become “like the several flowers of a Garden, that have upon each of them the Dew of Heaven, which being shaken with the wind, they let fall their Dew at each other’s roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of one another.”<sup>39</sup> Reflecting his expectation that this would be his last work, Bunyan signs off saying that he has written this “because I desire that you may have the Life that is laid up for all them that believe in the Lord Jesus, and love one another when I am deceased.”<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Recent Evaluations of Bunyan’s Conduct and Christian Behaviour

In recent years, respected scholars like Greaves, Mullett, and Camden have helpfully brought psychological and socio-political factors to bear on Bunyan’s life and works, including *Christian Behaviour*. For example, Greaves explains that Bunyan’s instructions in *Christian Behaviour* are drawn

<sup>36</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:32.

<sup>37</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:41.

<sup>38</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:51, emphasis original.

<sup>39</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:54.

<sup>40</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:62.

from his own experience of gaining assurance, and that Bunyan offers “a sweeping indictment of Restoration society and its moral maxims,” rebukes the magistrates who put him in jail, critiques both Anglicans and Quakers, and presents a traditional view of gender.<sup>41</sup> According to Mullett, *Christian Behaviour* shows that though Bunyan was associated with a radical church and identified with the large population of “plebeian English people” who had “emancipated themselves intellectually from the ancient thraldoms of monarchy, nobility, gentry, clergy, and academia,” he still had conservative politics.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Ross argues that *Christian Behaviour* shows Bunyan’s “solid belief in a hierarchical societal order.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, Camden rightly highlights that in *Christian Behaviour* Bunyan roots outward sexual sin in inward lust, and that the Puritans considered this to be a particularly serious sin.<sup>44</sup>

However, at times these scholars take their method too far, and their more extreme statements form a picture of Bunyan as tyrannical, cold, and sexually immoral.<sup>45</sup> First, Greaves claims that

to the wife who objects that her husband is a sot, a fool, and incapable of pursuing his vocation, Bunyan offered no hope, insisting she remember that her husband is her head and lord, that she not exercise authority over him, and that she not disclose her husband’s weakness to others.<sup>46</sup>

Greaves’s perspective on Bunyan’s view of women is also seen in his evaluation of the controversy with Beaumont. He posits that Bunyan reacted so severely against it because of the “not unnatural attraction he felt toward women, undoubtedly those who, like Agnes Beaumont, were awed by his ministerial prowess.”<sup>47</sup> Even though he knew he did not behave immodestly, “the motive force of his denials of sexual impropriety suggest discomfort stemming from his probable battle with carnal thoughts,” which he admitted when he said, “Not that I have been thus kept [from sexual misbehavior], because of any goodness in me more than any other, but God has been merciful to me, and has kept me ... from every evil way and work.”<sup>48</sup> Greaves concludes that even if Bunyan was pious, he was also human. Finally, Greaves explains that in Bunyan’s section on parents disciplining children, his “key point is that physical punishment must afflict a child’s conscience as well as his or her body,” and in general he “emphasized the pragmatic” in the parent-child relationship.<sup>49</sup>

Comparable to Greaves, Mullett claims that in *Christian Behaviour* “the cold, smug, silent and distant tyranny that Bunyan recommends to the husband of an ‘unbelieving’ or ‘carnal’ wife amounts

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<sup>41</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 162, 164, 166.

<sup>42</sup> Michael A. Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Press, 1997), 52–53.

<sup>43</sup> Aileen Ross, “Baffled, and Befeoled’: Misogyny in the Work of John Bunyan” in *Awakening Words: John Bunyan and the Language of Community*, ed. David Gay, James G. Randall, Arlette Zinck (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 153.

<sup>44</sup> Vera J. Camden, “Carnality into Creativity,” in *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton*, ed. John Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 85–86.

<sup>45</sup> The specific arguments addressed in this article do not represent all of the work done by Greaves and others, and thus does not discount their great contributions to Bunyan studies at large. Rather, it seeks to interact with specific critiques of his *Christian Behaviour* and related life issues.

<sup>46</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 169.

<sup>47</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 169.

<sup>48</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 169.

to a kind of married divorce, imposed on the marriage by the all-powerful husband.”<sup>50</sup> He says the same about parent-child relationships, summarizing: “Bunyan deals with fathers ‘governing’ their households,” “exercising religious leadership in families,” and “controlling their reading and thinking.”<sup>51</sup> Overall, Bunyan’s “emphasis was in fact entirely on authority and discipline” as based on the “principles of paternal dictatorship.”<sup>52</sup> Just like other men of his time, he “envisaged fathers in terms of authority, command and discipline rather than of intimacy and affection.”<sup>53</sup> Mullett admits there is an “occasional glimpse of a warmer, more personal and emotional relationship,” but believes that Bunyan’s teaching is “mostly conditioned by formal and doctrinal considerations and by somewhat judicial concept of ‘recompense’ by children for debts to their parents.”<sup>54</sup> Here, Mullett connects Bunyan’s theology to his life saying, “there is little in this work on the family to suggest that Bunyan had a particularly close relationship of love and friendship with his father,”<sup>55</sup> and his “theory of the family does not seem too far removed from the domestic regime of Agnes Beaumont’s father.”<sup>56</sup>

Searle, Ross, and Camden come to similar conclusions. For example, Searle argues that “in *Christian Behaviour* (1663), Bunyan’s imagined reader is distinctly male” because he says “Hast thou a Wife?”<sup>57</sup> Ross explains Bunyan’s view of women by quoting Hill, who points out that the duties of wives are twice as long as the duties of husbands in *Christian Behaviour*, and Sharrock, who suggests Bunyan may have added Giant Despair’s regret for taking his wife’s advice because of the controversy involving Beaumont.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Ross finds it surprising that the social norm for women to obey their husbands in everything was waived by Bunyan’s congregation when a believing wife had to disobey an unbelieving husband to attend church.<sup>59</sup>

Last, Camden supports Davies interpretation of the “procreative, but also, and importantly, creatively onanistic” in *Pilgrim’s Progress* by saying that *Christian Behaviour* shows Bunyan’s own beliefs about how “uncleanness starts in the lusts of the inner man and proceeds, as it were, ‘outward’ in a kind of hierarchy leading to other sins of the body.”<sup>60</sup> She concludes, “given the prevalence of what Davies calls Bunyan’s onanistic imagery, it is reasonable to speculate that Bunyan’s ‘worser thoughts’ partake of the secret thoughts referred to in *Grace Abounding* that may not be uttered nor written, they are so filled with vice.”<sup>61</sup> She speculates that Bunyan’s “determination to go to prison for his faith ... would

<sup>50</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 246.

<sup>51</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>54</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Alison Searle, “Bunyan and the Word,” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 91.

<sup>58</sup> Ross, “Baffled,” 153–54.

<sup>59</sup> Ross, “Baffled,” 159.

<sup>60</sup> Camden, “Carnality,” 85. See Michael Davies, “Bunyan’s Bawdy: Sex and Sexual Wordplay in the Writings of John Bunyan,” in *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan*, ed. Vera J. Camden (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008), 117–18.

<sup>61</sup> Camden, “Carnality,” 85.

have confronted him with loneliness and isolation and put him in direct conflict with his own ... sexual impulses.”<sup>62</sup> She even goes so far to say that “we can virtually witness Bunyan sublimating the[se] sexual urges” while writing in prison, and that he himself “affirms the motive of self-gratification” in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4. *Response to Critiques of Christian Behaviour*

These critiques do properly interpret *Christian Behaviour* in some ways, such as Bunyan’s instruction for husbands to take a leading role in their homes, wives to not complain about their husbands to other people, and children to submit to their parents as a way of showing appreciation for their sacrifices. However, they also misrepresent specific statements and the overall tone of *Christian Behaviour* when they argue that it silences wives, promotes a transactional relationship between parent and child, and sets up the father’s role as primarily dictatorial. In short, these distort Bunyan’s emphases on the wife’s personal agency, warmth between parent and child, and father’s gentleness, all of which are undergirded by Bunyan’s ultimate concern for love in the family and society.<sup>64</sup>

First, Bunyan speaks to wives as individuals who have personal agency. He addresses them directly, provides instructions for them to follow as individuals, and never cuts them off from seeking help. In fact, Hill’s statistic and Searle’s conclusion are simply wrong—Bunyan actually listed more duties for husbands than for wives,<sup>65</sup> and he repeatedly addressed women and children as readers in their respective sections.<sup>66</sup> Contrary to Greaves, the wife of an unbeliever is addressed as the spiritually superior person who has control over herself and can influence a difficult situation by her behavior, showing she has hope not only in Christ but also in her own ability to improve her marriage. Further, Bunyan suggests the same course of action for Christian husbands with unbelieving wives. Both are

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<sup>62</sup> Camden, “Carnality,” 86.

<sup>63</sup> Camden, “Carnality,” 86.

<sup>64</sup> This article has focused on *Christian Behaviour*, but Bunyan’s other works also show the priority he placed on love. For example, in his famous *Differences in Judgement About Water-Baptism, No Bar to Communion*, Bunyan bases his argument that baptism is not required for church membership on the fact that Christian fellowship is not primarily marked by baptism but love. He says, “Love, which above all things we are Comanded to put on, is of much more worth than to break about baptism,” and he emphasizes Jesus’s words, “By THIS shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love to one another, John 13.35” (Miscellaneous Works 4:225, 242, emphasis original). He makes the same argument in *Peaceable Principles*, claiming that those who break over baptism practically say that “Water is above Love” though “the Scripture...everywhere commandeth and presseth to Love” (Miscellaneous Works 4:280, 287, emphasis original). Similarly, in *A Holy Life* and *Saving Faith* Bunyan says love is a mark of salvation (Miscellaneous Works 9:282). Finally, in *Jerusalem Sinner Saved* he appeals to Jesus’s example on of love on earth, saying, “Remember your Lord, he was familiar with publicans and sinners to a proverb: ‘Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners’ (Matt 11:19). The first part ... was an horrible slander; but for the other, nothing was ever spoke truer of him by the world” (Miscellaneous Works 11:11).

<sup>65</sup> The husband’s duties span pages 22–28, and the wife’s duties span pages 32–36. Since Bunyan’s list of duties for each role overlap one another, it is difficult to measure this in any other way.

<sup>66</sup> He says to women: “if thou art ... a Mother, then thou art to consider Calling under this Relation and “Object. *But my husband is an unbeliever ... Answ.* If so then...lyeth upon thee with an engagement so much the stronger. For first, thy husband...will be watchful.” Bunyan similarly answers the objections of children. *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:28, 34–40.

exhorted to pay attention to their spouse's dispositions in order to use the most opportune time to share the gospel so that their hearts would be open to it, and to do so with gentle behavior so the latter becomes "an argument that thou speakest in love"; all of this requires a genuine connection to another person and sensitivity to their state of mind.<sup>67</sup> Contrary to Greaves and Ross, Bunyan never forbids a wife from getting help or even a divorce, which according to Packer, was allowed by both English law and the Puritans.<sup>68</sup>

Second, Bunyan's instructions for parents and children are characterized by warmth. Contrary to Mullett and Greaves, Bunyan actually opposes the idea of an emotionally stunted parent-child relationship, as well as harshness and aloofness on the side of the parent. Bunyan's first line to parents is "thy children have souls."<sup>69</sup> Further, even when correcting sin parents must be calm and affectionate. Bunyan says if (not when) they are led to use physical discipline, then

Strike advisedly in cool blood; and soberly shew them, 1. Their Fault; 2. How much it is against thy heart thus to deal with them; 3. And that what thou dost, thou dost in conscience to God, and love to their Souls; 4. And tell them, that if fair means would have been done, none of this severity should have been.<sup>70</sup>

Though parents must be firm in their punishment because sin is against love, they must also use "fair words" and not "unsavory and unseemly words in thy chastising of them, as railing, mis-calling, and the like" because "this is devilish."<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, children must respect their parents even if their parents are in some way below them, such as social status. Bunyan instructs, "though thy Parents be never so low, and thou thy self never so high, yet he is thy Father, and she is thy Mother, and they must be in the eye in great esteem."<sup>72</sup> Those with believing parents must "love them because they are thy Parents; because they are godly; and because thou must be in Glory with them," and those with unbelieving must "let thy bowels yearn towards them."<sup>73</sup> Bunyan plainly pleads, "remember the love of thy parents."<sup>74</sup> In response to objections Bunyan replies, "thou arguest like an Atheist and a Beast, and standeth in this full flat against the Son of God."<sup>75</sup>

Third, Bunyan instructs husbands and fathers to be gentle. Again, contrary to Greaves and Mullett, Bunyan opposes controlling or tyrannical behavior. He literally rebukes husbands who do not make the most of loving their wives, exclaiming, "Oh! how little sence of the worth of souls is there in the hearts

<sup>67</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:35.

<sup>68</sup> Packer explains, "English law at that time recognised ... declarations of nullity and judicial separation...but Puritan thinkers generally agreed that divorce with right of remarriage was biblically permitted after adultery... [or] desertion, broadly interpreted to cover all behaviour that nullified the matrimonial relationship in practice." J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 269.

<sup>69</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:18.

<sup>70</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:30.

<sup>71</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:29–30.

<sup>72</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:37.

<sup>73</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:39.

<sup>74</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:39, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:37.

of some husbands, as is manifest by their unchristian carriage to, and before their wives!”<sup>76</sup> Bunyan also tells the husband to overcome an unbelieving wife’s evil with “Goodness ... Patience ... and Meekness” and “speak to her very heart” when sharing the gospel, to bear with, help, and honor his wife since she is the weaker vessel, and to “let all be done without rancor” not just in his heart but even avoiding the “least *appearance* of anger.”<sup>77</sup> More than this, the husband must carry himself towards his wife like Christ does by laying down his life, protecting her, and helping her in her employments in the world so that she will get the benefit of the ordinance of marriage.<sup>78</sup> Even when his wife and children are being disobedient—not to him but to God by disbelieving or not attending church services—husbands are instructed not to force them against their wills, but to “get godly and sound men to thy house, and there let the Word of God be preached.”<sup>79</sup> In this section Bunyan includes two women in the Bible (Hannah and Lydia) as examples for leading a family in worship.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, nothing is done primarily or solely for the sake of the husband’s authority or honor, but God’s, and upholding God’s honor leads to the good of everyone in the household.<sup>81</sup> This is why Bunyan exhorts husbands to “be not like those that will rage and stare like mad-men when they are injured; and yet either laugh, or at least not soberly rebuke, and warn, when God is dishonored.”<sup>82</sup>

Clearly, contrary to Mullett, Bunyan would have never supported Beaumont’s father’s decision to lock her out of the house the night she returned from worshipping God, and it is uncharitable to assume that Bunyan’s negative experiences with his father meant there was no love in their relationship or that a lack of love would have driven his theological convictions later in life since his teaching on the family was characterized by love.<sup>83</sup> In fact, it is probable that Bunyan would describe what he is critiqued of as unchristian, atheistic, or devilish based on his use of these terms in *Christian Behaviour*.<sup>84</sup>

### 5. Response to Speculations about Bunyan’s Conduct

In addition to these critiques of *Christian Behaviour*, Greaves, Mullett, Ross, and Camden also misrepresent aspects of Bunyan’s his life and character by speculating about his feelings for or

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<sup>76</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:27.

<sup>77</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:26, 27, 28, emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:27. This is one of four notes that Bunyan makes in the margins (it is also the longest, compared to the other two which function more as short subtitles), which Hancock has shown “forc[es] attention to specific thematic and pictorial elements.” Maxine Hancock, *The Key in the Window: Marginal Notes in Bunyan’s Narratives* (Vancouver: Regent College Publications, 2000), 154.

<sup>79</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:24.

<sup>80</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:23–24

<sup>81</sup> Greaves notes that Bunyan believed the minister was “fundamentally a servant” of Christ and his church and though he “might be exalted to a place of service ... by himself he had no power except as he was a channel of divine grace and authority.” Greaves, *John Bunyan*, 134–35.

<sup>82</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:26.

<sup>83</sup> In fact, it seems that even Beaumont’s father did not think he behaved well. Beaumont recalls that, weeping, he “told me how trouble he was for me that night he shut me out, and could not sleep. But he thought I had been gone to my brother’s.” Beaumont, *The Narrative*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:27, 29, 30.

relationship with Beaumont and vice versa.<sup>85</sup> In short, these critiques are inaccurate because they are based on the claim that Bunyan and Beaumont were guilty of lusting after one another, though the only available information about this scenario (the internal proof of their accounts, which seem to include external proof like Beaumont's acquitters) explicitly denies this. Instead of believing Bunyan and Beaumont, they interpret a denial as an affirmation, use words that would have been considered immodest by their subjects, and in doing so discount the grief that Bunyan and Beaumont experienced as a result of this trial.

First, Greaves is correct to say Bunyan was human and struggled with sin himself, but to insinuate that he lusted after Beaumont as a commentary on his specific denial of lust twists Bunyan's words to mean the opposite. This use of a denial for an affirmation is also seen in Hill and Keeble.<sup>86</sup> To accuse Bunyan of lust is to accuse him of real sin from his own point of view, as he makes clear in *Christian Behaviour* by saying adultery can be committed even when a man looks at a woman or has "thoughts of immodesty," and that he wrote this book to bear personal testimony to the fruit-producing work of God in his heart.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Though historians must not shy away from a figure's wrongdoings, it is inappropriate to plant in the reader's mind the possibility of a sin for which there is no proof and to suggest it under the veil of historical inquiry. Even when offered as a speculation, it leaves a lingering feeling of veracity, not unlike the "tale-bearing" gossip that Bunyan warns against in *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:24. Johnson argues against Camden that conclusions like "it is at least plausible," and "it is worth suggesting" actually "do not bolster confidence" that Bunyan "can be explained completely by the tools of modern psychoanalysis." Galen Johnson, "Review of *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan*," in *Christianity and Literature* 59 (2009): 138.

<sup>86</sup> Hill argues, "Bunyan no doubt protests too much ... this would account for his 'roughness' and apparent insensitivity towards Agnes Beaumont." For Hill, allusions to fornication before conversion can be made into proof for sexual immorality later in Bunyan's life: "Bunyan seems to never have been wholly at ease with women," "God had made him 'shy of women' from his 'first conversion until now'. (We can read what significance we please into that chronological reservation)." Hill, *A Tinker*, 303. Keeble similarly argues, "Bunyan's defense goes beyond what is required to defend himself against any specific charge of sexual misconduct ... the almost obsessive particularity of this defence, its determination to resist and avoid physical contact with women at all costs, invests with them a far more potently dangerous allure and disturbing mystique than is possessed by witches, Jesuits or highwaymen, to whose company Bunyan does not even bother to show he is falsely charged with belonging." N. H. Keeble, "Here is her Glory, even to be under Him': The Feminine in the Thought and Work of John Bunyan," in *John Bunyan and his England, 1628–88*, ed. Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens, and Stuart Sim (London: Hambledon, 1990), 140. This is also partly seen in Ezell, who says, "as commentators have noted, Bunyan's claim to be oblivious to women's bodies is simply not borne out of his writings. Women's bodies, especially exposed female flesh, are dangerous to men, and Bunyan, in *Christian Behaviour* (1663), highlights this in the section 'of Adultery and Uncleaness.'" Ezell, "Bunyan and Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 124. However, this is not a contradiction since Bunyan meant he did not focus on women's bodies in a sinful way, but would speak against immodest dress and behavior when necessary.

<sup>87</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:50. In Greaves and others, sexuality is also connected to spirituality, but not in a way that the Puritans would have expressed the idea of love between Christ and the believer, which was a common theme. For example, Greaves mentions that "masochistic themes are common in nightmares of people suffering from moderate depression" when describing Bunyan's struggle with nightmares earlier in life. Greaves, *Glimpses*, 8. Similarly, Mullett describes Christiana's discourse as "erotically charged ecstasies," and Sharrock says Christiana and Mercy are "idealized female characters ... held up as female masochism." See Mullett, *John Bunyan*, 247; Ross, "Baffled," 154. These interpretations are used in recent publications, such as *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton* edited by John Rumrich and Stephen Fallon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and approved by several reviewers like Parnham and Searle. David Parnham,

Second, Greaves’s choice of words are unnecessarily over-sexualized, and this would have been offensive to Bunyan and Beaumont. For example, when asking about the potential motivation for Bunyan’s warning against immodest dress, Greaves says, “as he looked down from the pulpit, was he uneasy because of what he saw?” Perhaps this was true, but when read in context it insinuates that while he was preaching, Bunyan was letting his eyes wander. More seriously, Greaves speculates about Bunyan’s supposed sexual thoughts, saying,

when he initially refused to share his horse with Beaumont, he must have known what feelings, however unwanted, would well up within him as they rode for seven miles, her body rubbing against his, her hands clasped tightly around his waist.<sup>88</sup>

Though Bunyan was not opposed to using striking imagery to convict his hearers, he would have been horrified to hear these words as a commentary on his own heart.<sup>89</sup> In fact, it sounds like the “wanton and immodest talk” Bunyan says should not even be named.<sup>90</sup> Of course, Bunyan admitted that he was a sinner. Yet to speculate about particular sins of the mind or heart that had no outward expression, and psychoanalyze his writings to find hidden meanings, is to take advantage of his openness.<sup>91</sup>

Last, these speculations discount the grief that this episode gave both Bunyan and Beaumont.<sup>92</sup> The fact that accusations of adultery had been raised against Bunyan several times explains why he lashed out against them in *Grace Abounding*, which may have even been (on some level) appreciated by Beaumont since she wrote her own account specifically to testify to God’s help to endure this trial

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“Review of *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan*,” *Church History* 79 (2010): 211–12. Alison Searle, “Review of *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan*,” *The Journal of Religious History* 35 (2011): 299–300.

<sup>88</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses*, 171, 311–12. Camden recalls that when searching for information about riding together, she found one instance of a man and woman who were caught fornicating. However, this seems to be a unique instance. Beaumont makes clear in her narrative that she was initially supposed to ride behind another minister and that this was approved by her father. Beaumont, *The Narrative*, 42.

<sup>89</sup> For example, in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, Mr. Wiseman shows disgust at the proud, who abuse God’s majesty: “But what can be the end of those that are proud, I the decking of themselves after their antick manner? why are they for going with their Bulls-foretops, with their naked shoulders, and Paps hanging out like a Cows bag? ... is it because they would ... beautifie Religion...? No, no. It is rather to please their lusts.” John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, ed. James F. Forrest and Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 125. However, this is a rebuke of sin not the suggestion of a private sin in a certain individual’s life.

<sup>90</sup> Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour*, Miscellaneous Works 3:50.

<sup>91</sup> Other over-sexualized interpretations of Bunyan quoted earlier largely base their arguments on Bunyan admitting to vile thoughts that he could “not, nor dare not utter, neither by word nor pen.” However, when read in context, it is clear that Bunyan is referring to thoughts of “blasphemies, both against God, Christ, and the Scriptures,” meaning he questioned God’s existence, Christ’s divinity, and the Bible’s authority. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 32.

<sup>92</sup> The affection between her and her father despite their disagreement is clearly seen in her narrative. See Beaumont, *The Narrative*, 19, 61, 65. Beaumont’s father’s death must have been traumatizing on a number of levels. First, she cared for her father on a daily basis before his death and witnessed his death in their home. Second, she had to deal with the legalities of proving her innocence against the accusation of murder while trying to grieve. Third, her mother died when she was young (which is why Beaumont cared for her father), and thus his death technically rendered her an orphan.

of being wrongly accused.<sup>93</sup> Her experience—from her own perspective, in her own words—is worth hearing. It shows that her interests and emotions were set on worshipping God and associating with a godly man, rather than on lust, the accusation of which replaced her happiness with embarrassment. She recalls,

My heart was puffed up with pride, and I began to have high thoughts of myself, and proud to think I should ride behind such a man as he was ... and sometimes he would be speaking to me about the things of God as we went along. And indeed I thought myself a happy body that day; first that it did please God to make way for my going to the meeting; and then that I should have the honor to ride behind him. But ... my pride had a fall ... there met with us a priest one Mr. Lane who ... looked of us ... and afterwards did scandalize us after a base manner, and did raise a very wicked report of us, which was altogether false, blessed be God.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, interpretations of Beaumont as looking for anything other than a means of getting to a worship gathering are not helpful but sexist. Sadly, representations of Beaumont are worse than Bunyan. Hill blithely says, “Agnes may have had a crush on her pastor;”<sup>95</sup> and Camden argues Beaumont’s father “rightly senses that his daughter’s intense admiration for Bunyan constitutes an expression of her womanhood. Her ‘distraction’ is the distraction of the lover,” positing this was a way to break from her father’s reverse Oedipal complex.<sup>96</sup> Payne even claims this characterizes the female sex: “like so many women before and after, Agnes’ enthusiasm for religion seems to have gone hand in hand with an enthusiasm for the man through whom her faith had been mediated.”<sup>97</sup> These communicate the message that Beaumont, a silly girl who does not deserve to be called by her family name, was motivated by romance instead of worship or theology, which is a common theme in Christian women’s writings throughout history. Yet, the only hint of sexual issues in Beaumont’s narrative is not the truth but her record of the gossip; it is rather one sustained discourse of how she had to do the cognitive work of answering questions about practical theology, as well as the heart work of trusting God in a trial.

On the other hand, it seems Bunyan had much sympathy for Beaumont. Thus, instead of identifying Beaumont as the inspiration for Giant Despair’s wife or emphasizing Bunyan’s backlash against rumors,

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<sup>93</sup> Bunyan was also reacting to acts he disagreed with because they could be perceived as sexual in his context, such as greeting women with a holy kiss.

<sup>94</sup> Beaumont, *The Narrative*, 44–45. Cf. Anderson, *Memorable Women*, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Hill, *A Tinker*, 301.

<sup>96</sup> Vera J. Camden, “Introduction,” in Agnes Beaumont, *The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont*, ed. Vera J. Camden (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), 19, 20. Ezell is more moderate than Camden in her evaluation of Beaumont’s possible attraction to Bunyan, but still seems to link an admiration for him with sexuality instead of spirituality. In her words, “The incident with Agnes Beaumont in 1674 makes it abundantly clear that it was not due to a lack of interest in him by women. Beaumont herself records her pride at being seen in such a familiar pose with this famous preacher ... and he was notably reluctant to let Agnes ride behind him.” Ezell, “Bunyan and Gender,” 123–24. Other scholars have suggested that Bunyan also had an Oedipal anxiety (see Ezell, “Bunyan and Gender,” 127). Thankfully, an alternative interpretation of “distracted” is offered in Adcock, who explains that Beaumont’s account is an example of the common Puritan practice of intense self-examination as a way of attaining assurance of salvation, which could sometimes be interpreted by outsiders as a mental health problem.

<sup>97</sup> She also describes Beaumont as a “rash girl.” Patricia Payne, “Agnes Beaumont of Edworth,” *Baptist Quarterly* 35 (1993): 5.

it is again most useful to look at what he explicitly did and said. In this case, the available facts are that he agreed to help Beaumont get to the church gathering despite perceived difficulties with this solution, and that he blamed the “slanders, foolish, [and] knavish lies, and falsehoods” said about him on the “the Devil and his Seed” rather than any woman.<sup>98</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, recent scholarship on Bunyan’s life and work in context has greatly enriched our understanding of who he was and what he believed, especially regarding the psychological experiences and socio-political convictions found in his allegorical and autobiographical writings. However, some evaluations that have grown out of this scholarship have unwarrantedly critiqued Bunyan for being tyrannical, cold, and sexually immoral, using his clearer didactic books like *Christian Behaviour* for proof. To balance these extreme evaluations, this article has examined the context and content of *Christian Behaviour*, as well as relevant aspects of Bunyan’s life. It has shown that in what Bunyan expected to be his last publication, he instructed believers on the necessity of a gentle, warm love in the family and society, and that he attempted to follow these instructions himself. Though future readers will certainly have qualms with different parts of Bunyan’s manual, it is important that studies on Bunyan accurately represent the general tone of this book and apply it to relevant aspects of Bunyan’s life story so as to interact with this historical figure both critically and empathically concerning conduct in the family and society.

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<sup>98</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 93. Bunyan himself does not identify with Giant Despair. Though a character or event could have been inspired or influenced by something the author then changed, this is difficult, if not impossible, to prove, when there is no clear connection.

# A Generous Reading of John Locke: Reevaluating His Philosophical Legacy in Light of His Christian Confession

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**Abstract:** Locke is often presented as an eminent forerunner to the Enlightenment, a philosopher who hastened Europe’s departure from Christian orthodoxy and “turned the tide” toward a modern, secularist orientation. Yet there are reasons to think that such an understanding of Locke has not sufficiently taken into account his Christian faith as it relates to his philosophical project. A more generous reading of Locke requires further grappling with the works which emerged during the final period of his life (1695–1704), works which demonstrate distinctly religious interests and provide greater clarity regarding his proper philosophical legacy. Locke’s views on human nature serve as a case study.

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It is largely recognized that the last sentiments of a person’s life (and particularly the last words of that person upon their death bed) are to be respected and understood as summarizing the concerns and even the ultimate values of that person. One such example comes from the year 1704 when an Englishman of renown called for a reading from the Psalms with his dying breath, exhorting those around his bed to study the Holy Scriptures with care and noting that such study would bring them happiness in this world and the next, even eternal life. The man instructed friends who came to say their final goodbyes that his own reading of the Bible had brought him again and again to admire the stunning revelations of God Almighty. Those who looked on as this man breathed his last left convinced that he was “sincere and Christian” and that his demeanor matched his earlier proclamation: “A Christian I am sure I am, because I believe ‘Jesus to be the Messiah,’ the King and Saviour promised, and sent by God; and, as a subject of his Kingdom, I take the rule of my faith and life from his kingdom [and] from his will, declared and left upon record in the inspired writings of the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament; which I endeavor to the utmost of my power, as is my duty, to understand in their true sense and meaning.”<sup>1</sup> While this all might be quite ordinary for a typical Englishmen at the beginning of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 6, quoted in Wioleta Polinska, “Faith and Reason in John Locke,” *Philosophy & Theology* 11 (1999): 287. All references to *The Works of John Locke* in this article will refer to *The Works of John*

eighteenth century, it is actually quite striking when we learn that the identity of the man in question is none other than the eminent philosopher and supposed forerunner to the Enlightenment, John Locke.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, such an account of Locke's final days highlights aspects of his biography that are often downplayed or even ignored when he is presented as a philosopher who helped "turn the tide" in the Christian West toward a modern, secularist orientation. One only need to look at Hans Aarsleff's essay, "Locke's Influence," to see that his contention that "John Locke is the most influential philosopher of modern times" is certainly not because of his religious sentiments but rather because he offered a "great message ... to set us free from the burden of tradition and authority, both in theology and knowledge."<sup>3</sup> Though Aarsleff does acknowledge in passing that he "was a pious believer in Scriptural revelation," it is clear that in the predominant story of Western intellectual history the religious aspects of his life and work have been severely neglected.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff agrees and has noted that Locke's role in the story of Europe's modernization has not sufficiently taken into account Locke's professed faith and what Wolterstorff labels his "ethics of belief."<sup>5</sup> His point is that Locke is often grievously misunderstood as a willing developer of secular modernity and passionate catalyst of a post-Christian Europe.<sup>6</sup> Wolterstorff questions this dominant narrative, sensing that there are good reasons to suspect the way the story has been told; indeed, he sees Locke not as an ivory-tower modernist philosopher seeking to hasten a cultural revolution but instead as "the philosopher in the street offering advice to his anxious combative compatriots on how to overcome the cultural crisis engulfing them."<sup>7</sup> All that to say, the question is put before us: do we know John Locke, or only a caricature of him? In other words: will the *real* John Locke please stand up?

Another way to ask this question would be: has Locke been fully understood in his own context (rather than simply through the Enlightenment tradition history) and, more importantly, *on his own terms*? It is the contention of this paper that, though Locke studies has made some steps in the right direction in this regard, we still don't have a sufficiently "generous reading" of Locke, one that assesses his project and his legacy in view of his own sense of what he was up to and what he had accomplished. It will be argued here that such a generous reading requires more grappling with the "later Locke" and the works which emerged during the final period of his life (1695–1704), works which are dedicated to distinctly religious interests. These later works have been relatively ignored even though they give us keen insight into Locke's own evaluation of his philosophical project. Indeed, along with insights into aspects of his work that he wanted to clarify, revise, or even recant, they also provide us with clarity on what Locke wanted his philosophical legacy to be. As we will see, these insights ultimately muddy the

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*Locke in Nine Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Rivington, 1824), accessible at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/locke-the-works-of-john-locke-in-nine-volumes>.

<sup>2</sup> This description is adapted from Justin Champion, "A Law of Continuity in the Progress of Theology': Assessing the Legacy of John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1695–2004," *Eighteenth-Century Thought* 3 (2007): 111.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Aarsleff, "Locke's Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 252.

<sup>4</sup> Aarsleff, "Locke's Influence," 258.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, ix.

<sup>7</sup> Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, x.

waters of a streamlined narrative which understands Locke as a philosophical forerunner of a monolithic Enlightenment movement, particularly by demonstrating his desire to uphold and strengthen, rather than overthrow, Europe's Christian foundations.

In seeking to establish this more generous reading of Locke we would do well to follow the advice of W. M. Spellman, who asks whether "it might be of some use to return to Locke himself, especially on this very basic question of the nature of man, in order to identify whether or not the philosopher deliberately broke with the historic Christian view of man as is so readily assumed."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Spellman is right to imply that if, in fact, Locke remained a man thoroughly informed by a Christian worldview, even an orthodox Protestant, "then our perspective on Locke both as a thinker and as an educator is bound to change ... [particularly] that Locke [would] emerge [as] something other than the precursor and prophet of the European Enlightenment."<sup>9</sup> Here we seek to build on Spellman's insights by further assessing Locke and his philosophical legacy on his own terms, genuinely grappling with the religious aspect of his thought, particularly as it relates to the case study of his views on human nature.<sup>10</sup> We will do so by examining three critical sources in this regard: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (1704).<sup>11</sup>

### *1. Assessing Locke's Understanding of Human Nature: A Case Study*

First, we must briefly examine why Locke's understanding of human nature is such a critical issue when it comes to grappling with Locke's philosophical legacy and assessing the extent to which Locke ought to be understood as a forerunner to the Enlightenment movement which largely called for the renunciation of Christian orthodoxy. There is no question that Locke's view of human nature (with its familiar concept of the *tabula rasa* and its inherent questioning of the doctrine of original sin) is a key battleground for interpreting Locke, not just in our own day but going all the way back to the controversies over Locke's work in his own. From the first publishing of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* until today there have been many who have seen "Locke's rejection of innate ideas as tantamount to the dismantling of Christianity."<sup>12</sup> Spellman has summarized well how Locke's perceived questioning of the Christian teaching on humanity and sin led to "the claim that Locke laid the foundations of what was to be one of the most influential forms of eighteenth and nineteenth-century perfectibilism ... [placing Locke] at the forefront of an important movement that was committed to undermining one of the central beliefs of the historic Christian faith."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in Enlightenment studies this has been the line which has predominated since the work of Paul Hazard, who argued that just as Newton overthrew the doctrine of providence by discovering the

<sup>8</sup> W. M. Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, 5–7.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent edited volume giving exposure to Locke's religious writings, see John Nuovo, ed., *John Locke: Writings on Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> In each case we will also examine Locke's personal correspondence which assists us in interpreting these works and better understanding his intentions in writing them.

<sup>12</sup> Nuovo, *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> W. M. Spellman, "Locke and the Latitudinarian Perspective on Original Sin," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 42 (1988): 287.

laws of nature, so Locke overthrew the biblical doctrines of sin and a fallen humanity by discovering that human beings are morally innocent *tabulae rasae* rather than depraved sinners predisposed to sin and error.<sup>14</sup> The argument was picked up and developed by Roger Mercier, who asserted that Locke was a crucial figure in establishing the key project of the Enlightenment: the rehabilitation of human nature.<sup>15</sup> John Woodbridge summarizes the point nicely:

Locke's epistemology, in which the premise of innate ideas was denied, seemed to imply ... [that] the orthodox Christian view of man was deeply flawed. Did not Christians affirm that man has a sinful nature at birth? Locke's stance appeared to suggest by contrast that we are morally neutral at birth and that in one sense we become morally what our experience of the external world happens to make of us.... [Thus] we are not bound to sin due to a sinful nature inherited from Adam.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to show how Enlightenment scholars (especially Hazard and Mercier) connected the dots between Locke's controversial work and the Enlightenment project: "those who read Locke in this fashion believed that the English philosopher had overthrown the Christian doctrine of original sin with its needlessly pessimistic teachings about our sinful nature. For many partisans of the "Enlightenment" Locke had rehabilitated human nature and given hope that we humans can progress morally and be more successful in our pursuit of happiness.... For the *philosophes*, Locke had opened up the possibilities of genuine Enlightenment."<sup>17</sup> On Hazard and Mercier's interpretation of Locke, then, he is indeed the philosopher who opened the doors wide for the deists and *philosophes* to finish the job of overthrowing Europe's Christian fetters, at least where anthropology was concerned.

One prominent example in this regard is the influence which Locke had upon that most infamous of French *philosophes*, Voltaire. That Voltaire favored Locke highly is beyond dispute; indeed, Maurice Cranston can note with confidence that "the English philosopher whom Voltaire praised most frequently was Locke."<sup>18</sup> Voltaire himself speculated that "perhaps no man had a more judicious or more methodical mind, or was a more acute logician than Mr. Locke"<sup>19</sup> and confessed to finding himself returning again and again to Locke "like a prodigal son returning to his father ... [throwing] myself into the arms of that modest man, who never pretends to know what he does not know."<sup>20</sup> And there are certainly places in Voltaire's corpus where we see him directly building on Locke's work (in ways that, as we will see, Locke would not exactly have intended or approved). One telling example is the sustained reflection which Voltaire gives to Locke's declaration that "we shall perhaps never be capable of knowing whether

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

<sup>15</sup> Roger Mercier, *La Rehabilitation de la Nature Humaine* (Seine, France: La Balance, 1960).

<sup>16</sup> John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History, Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 402.

<sup>17</sup> Woodbridge and James, *Church History, Volume Two*, 402.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers: Political Theorists of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45.

<sup>19</sup> Voltaire, "On Mr. Locke," quoted in Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 190.

<sup>20</sup> Voltaire, "On Mr. Locke," quoted in Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers*, 46.

a being, purely material, thinks or not.”<sup>21</sup> Such a statement provides a classic example of how Locke seemed to prepare the way, in the arena of human nature, for the overthrow of Christian thought, in this case opening the door for certain materialist perspectives which deny that a spiritual nature is absolutely necessary to be capable of thinking.<sup>22</sup> But when it came to religious influence, Voltaire was quite underwhelmed with Locke, noting in his brief comments on *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that “it was a bad book, that in it Locke had degraded his understanding, and that its lack of influence was proof of the incompatibility of Christianity and reason.”<sup>23</sup> Considering that it is the significance of Locke’s Christian confession and later religious works (with which Voltaire vehemently disagreed) which are in question here, we would do well to keep Voltaire’s appropriation of Locke in perspective and ultimately ask if a reevaluation of the significance of Locke’s religious convictions would in fact bring into greater question the narrative that understands him as a forerunner to Voltaire, the Enlightenment, and the post-Christian modernity which followed in their wake. In other words, there is clearly more work still to be done to understand Locke on his own terms, especially when it comes to how Locke’s Christianity informed his view of human nature and his overall philosophical project.

### 1.1. Source #1: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

We begin with what is Locke’s most well-known and influential work. Lex Newman in his introduction to the *Essay* provides us with characteristic praise for the text by calling it “an undisputed philosophical masterpiece. The systematic empiricism he develops would become the standard for subsequent theorists. The importance of ... the *Essay* continues to the present day ... [remaining] a philosophical gold mine.”<sup>24</sup> As such, any reading of Locke that is going to be compelling has to go through the *Essay*. We do so now not because it comes during the period of Locke’s life we are most interested in (1695–1704), nor because it has religious concerns at its very center (though, as we will see, they are certainly present and pervasive), but because a generous reading which takes Locke’s religious views seriously must demonstrate that Locke’s Christian convictions (which emerge strongest in his final years) don’t contradict but are in fact compatible with the content of the *Essay*. We need to show that the work which has been more influential than all his others in establishing Locke as an Enlightenment forerunner is both religious in its own right and blends well with Locke’s later religious revival. We want to argue, with Pearson, that the question of Locke’s religious orientation in the *Essay* is of great significance. For we agree with his assertion that, to date, “Locke’s fame as the author of the *Essay* and father of modern empiricism and the appropriation of his ideas by the deists have suggested a narrow understanding of his religious views.”<sup>25</sup>

Though we don’t have space to provide a detailed overview of the work, we will highlight aspects of the *Essay* that suggest a religious grounding and orientation. We begin at the beginning, for as Pearson has reminded us, “Even the *Essay*, an attempt to elaborate a new epistemology...grew out of a discussion

<sup>21</sup> Voltaire, “On Mr. Locke,” quoted in Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, 193.

<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to John Woodbridge for this insight.

<sup>23</sup> Norman L. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* (Oxford: Marston, 1963), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Lex Newman, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Lex Newman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel C. Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke and the Character of His Thought,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 261.

of ‘the principles of morality and revealed religion.’”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Locke confesses at the beginning of the *Essay* in his “Epistle to the Reader” that in a conversation with friends regarding ethics and things of faith they “found themselves quickly at a stand, by the difficulties that rose on every side ... without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us.”<sup>27</sup> Convinced they had started on a wrong course, Locke believed that “before we set ourselves upon inquires of that nature” (that is, of an ethical and religious nature) “it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with.”<sup>28</sup> So when Locke says that he sees himself as an “under-laborer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge,” we should understand that for him this work was necessary so that he *could* ultimately move into the arena of moral and religious issues that were of great interest to him, his friends, and a large number of the original readers of the *Essay*.<sup>29</sup> In some sense we can say that Locke viewed his groundbreaking epistemological work as serving the ultimate end of ethical and religious pursuits.

Then we move into the heart of the vast work, where it can be easy to lose our orientation in light of Locke’s technical and often repetitive discussions of innate notions, of clear and distinct ideas, and of knowledge, judgment, and probability (among many other subjects). Essentially the *Essay* breaks down into four books: in Book 1 Locke sets forth his famous thesis that there are no innate ideas (contra Descartes); in Book 2 he begins to set forth more positively his view of understanding (by exploring the concepts of ideas, perception, identity, etc.); in Book 3 he focuses on the specifics of language; and in Book 4 he gives his attention to the difference between knowledge and opinion and between certainty and probability. Our approach to analyzing the work will resemble that of Wolterstorff, who argues convincingly that “The traditional schoolbook interpretation of Locke, which places the *Essay*’s center of gravity in Book II, must be rejected. The center of gravity is Book IV; that is clear from Locke’s own comments on the *Essay*.”<sup>30</sup> What Wolterstorff means is that the vast majority of the *Essay* (Books 1–3) is essentially clearing the land for what Locke is really up to, which only emerges in Book 4 with his discussion of the degrees of knowledge that contribute to our understanding. This is where discussion of religion and faith becomes explicit and prolonged, though it is clear that Locke’s Christian faith also pervades Books 1–3.<sup>31</sup> Thus from 1.1.5, where Locke says “we have cause enough to magnify the bountiful Author of our being ... [who] has put within the reach of [our] discovery the comfortable provision for this life and the way that leads to a better,” to 3.10.12 where he condemns “empty speculations” and “useless ... disputes” regarding affairs of religion and the laws of God, we see that religion is certainly a matter that is on Locke’s mind throughout the *Essay*, his own convictions informing and shaping the work in various ways.<sup>32</sup>

But it is indeed with Book 4 that we see the centrality of Locke’s religious concerns emerge. For, as Nicholas Jolley has pointed out regarding the whole of the *Essay*, “what is at issue for Locke is not the

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<sup>26</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 247.

<sup>27</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reprint ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “John Locke’s Epistemological Piety: Reason Is the Candle of the Lord,” *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 579.

<sup>31</sup> For support of this point, see Nuovo, *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, 245–56.

<sup>32</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 57, 442.

reliability of reason or of our natural faculties in general, but rather their scope; Locke wants to chart the limits of our human understanding in such a way that we come to know where we may reasonably hope to achieve knowledge.”<sup>33</sup> It is only by Book 4 that the limits have been set in place, allowing Locke to begin making some conclusions regarding the questions of understanding and our capacity to know that he initially set out to answer (and, we will remember, that he sees as preparing the way to answer questions of ethics and religion). Again, Wolterstorff is helpful here, for he picks up on the very image that Locke himself uses to describe the shift which is made in the middle of Book 4: from the bright light that accompanied “the certainty of true knowledge” to the “twilight of probability” which covers the landscape of belief and judgment.<sup>34</sup> In a significant chapter entitled “Of Faith and Reason, and their Distinct Provinces” (4.17), Locke sets out some crucial definitions that make this transition more understandable. He says, “*Reason* ... I take to be the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties, *viz.* by sensation or reflection.” He then goes on: “*Faith* ... is the assent to any proposition, not thus made only by deductions of reason; but upon credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men we call *revelation*.”<sup>35</sup> Thus here, almost at the end of the *Essay*, Locke introduces a whole other way of acquiring truth (a significant addition indeed!). He says, “where the principles of reason have not evidenced a proposition to be certainly true or false, there clear *revelation*, as another principle of truth, and ground of assent, may determine; and so it may be [a] matter of *faith*, and be also above *reason*.”<sup>36</sup> Of course for Locke this is no small claim, for indeed Book 4 in many ways sets forth, in the words of Pearson, “the limited content of intuitive and demonstrative knowledge, the failure of sensitive knowledge to reach ‘perfectly to either of the foregoing degrees of certainty,’ our ‘want of ideas,’ our ‘want of a discoverable connection between the ideas we have,’ [and] our ‘want of tracing and examining our ideas.’”<sup>37</sup> Locke’s exploration of these limits and his understanding of their extent lead him to conclude, again in the words of Pearson, that “our knowledge is narrow and our ignorance great.”<sup>38</sup> The fact that there is another avenue for knowledge apart from reason (understood as being *above* it, not *opposed* to it), even if it does involve judging claims of revelation as more or less *probable*, is a stunning assertion, one that is more informed by his Christian faith than any sort of proto-Enlightenment position.

To return to our larger concern, we see that, contrary to the Locke proposed by Mercier and Hazard, Richard Ashcraft is correct when he argues that “what is striking about the *Essay* is not the claims it advances on behalf of human reason, but rather, its assertion of the meagerness of human knowledge.”<sup>39</sup> It is not the unencumbered potential of human reason or the unlimited possibilities of human knowledge that emerge in the *Essay* (as we would expect on the traditional reading). Instead, it is the inadequacies of human reason and the realistic, limited view of human nature which seem

<sup>33</sup> Jolley, “Locke on Faith and Reason,” 455.

<sup>34</sup> Wolterstorff, “John Locke’s Epistemological Piety,” 579.

<sup>35</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 608, italics original.

<sup>36</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 613, italics original.

<sup>37</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 249.

<sup>38</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 249.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy,” in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 195.

to be highlighted, and even the few cognitive capacities we do have are compared only to a candle (significantly, a candle Locke believes we have received from the Lord [1.1.5]). Parker is thus right when he notes that the *Essay* particularly has been seized upon and abused to portray Locke as having the kind of supreme confidence in the efficacy of reason that made him a key harbinger of “eighteenth-century deism and, ultimately, the death of God.”<sup>40</sup> Yes, Locke makes statements such as “Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in every Thing” (4.19.14), endorses reason over revelation when it comes to the *certainty* of what we can know (4.18.3–6), and adds a chapter in the last edition of the *Essay* on the abuses of religious enthusiasm.<sup>41</sup> But none of these things put Locke in the position of an overthrower of Christianity, or even a precursor to one. On his own terms, Locke is simply being realistic about the limitations of human knowledge, holding that reason can only provide certain knowledge about very few things and that revelation can provide certain knowledge regarding many other things (though *claims* to revelation must be judged regarding their probability by reason). It seems that, when we start reading Locke on his own terms, we find ourselves in agreement with Parker that “the *Essay* is more properly understood as a book about the limits of our knowledge rather than propaganda about its unlimited potential,” and thus we find ourselves increasingly unable to agree with the picture of Locke as a key contributor to the Enlightenment view of an unencumbered human nature.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, even when we begin to examine the religious criticisms brought against Locke’s *Essay* in his own day, we see how Locke responds out of a desire to show that “all the great ends of religion and morality” were secured rather than destroyed.<sup>43</sup> This is especially seen in Locke’s interaction with the Bishop of Worcester, Edward Stillingfleet, who argued that Locke’s attack on innate ideas undermined the principles of Christianity. Locke disagreed, holding that neither the teaching of Scripture nor the truth of Christianity was at risk if Cartesian notions of human nature were proven false. As Ashcraft points out, Locke seems to see what many others in his day could not, that if there were in fact no innate ideas, there were still other (better!) foundations for our knowledge of religion and morality to be built upon.<sup>44</sup> Locke sought to remedy what he saw as a flawed epistemological orientation, with the end that he might fully pursue truth in matters of morality and religion (which were founded for him ultimately in biblical revelation, as we shall see).

And indeed, Locke would move on to that very investigation at the end of his life, turning more explicitly to matters of religion and directly examining the claims of Christianity. But for now, we ought to notice what is happening at this stage of his life and work. It is clear that Locke’s conclusions in the *Essay* are not only compatible with his Christian faith but actually demonstrate deep-seated religious convictions. As Pearson says, in the *Essay* Locke sought “to provide a way to think about reason and revelation which would carefully delimit the realms of faith and reason and use reason to guide faith along a sane but narrow ... course between authoritarianism and enthusiasm.”<sup>45</sup> We can thus conclude that “in the *Essay* no less than in the *Reasonableness* Locke’s concern is that of a latitudinarian

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<sup>40</sup> Kim Ian Parker, “John Locke and the Enlightenment Metanarrative: A Biblical Corrective to a Reasoned World,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 64.

<sup>41</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 621.

<sup>42</sup> Parker, “John Locke and the Enlightenment Metanarrative,” 65.

<sup>43</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 2, quoted in Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy,” 198.

<sup>44</sup> Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy,” 201.

<sup>45</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 256.

Anglican firmly committed to the Christian faith.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, we affirm with Ashcraft over and against the interpretation of Hazard and Mercier that “the purpose of the *Essay* is essentially a conservative one ... [seeking] a renovation and reinforcement of the faith by which the men of the seventeenth century lived.”<sup>47</sup> This claim is strengthened by the fact that “whenever others employed his epistemological principles in an assault on Christianity, Locke renounced them and sought refuge in the safety of his commitment to that faith within which he had confined the arguments of the *Essay*.”<sup>48</sup>

### 1.2. Source #2: *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*

Locke’s turn to religion is one of the defining characteristics of his later years, a fact acknowledged, but interpreted very differently, by his many biographers. This religious turn or revival was, quite significantly, professed by Locke himself. Woolhouse, for instance, quotes Locke’s own words throughout in saying,

After a lifetime much of which had been devoted to what he now referred to as “the wisdom of the world ... [that is], the knowledge, discoveries, and improvements ... attainable by human industry, parts and study,” he was now concerned with his ultimate destiny and his mind was almost entirely on the “wisdom of God ... [that is], the doctrine of the gospel coming immediately from God by the revelation of his spirit.”<sup>49</sup>

Such sentiments emerged not only in Locke’s official publications (of which *Reasonableness* is the most obvious) but also in his personal correspondence. As one example of the way that Locke began (re) evaluating his life and work, he wrote in what would end up being his last letter to his friend Anthony Collins that, “this life is a scene of vanity that ... affords no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing well and in hopes of another life.”<sup>50</sup> And we only need to recall Locke’s deathbed scene to see how this turn shaped his sentiments. Indeed, we have an account from Lady Masham that on that day Locke spoke surely “of the goodness of God ... [and] exalted the love which God showed to man, in justifying him by faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

The beginning of this religious turn is easy to identify as it corresponds with the publishing of one of the most significant works of Locke’s career, *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*, in 1695. It was published anonymously and only fully identified with Locke after his death (though many of his contemporaries had their strong suspicions). But its anonymous publication, perhaps initially a reason to suspect Locke’s Christian convictions, is seen in proper perspective when we remember that at the end of the seventeenth century religious innovation of *any* kind (even if it was still within the broad bounds of Christian orthodoxy) was severely frowned upon and even punished. Though Locke was certainly one to question religious traditions of his day, it is another claim entirely that Locke sought to fully subvert the truth claims of Christianity as a whole. Rather, a generous reading of Locke allows us to hear his own testimony regarding why he wrote and published the work.

<sup>46</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 256.

<sup>47</sup> Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy,” 202.

<sup>48</sup> Ashcraft, “Faith and Knowledge in Locke’s Philosophy,” 202.

<sup>49</sup> R. S. Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 452.

<sup>50</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 9, quoted in Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, 452.

<sup>51</sup> Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, 459.

On that issue, Locke himself says that he wrote *Reasonableness* to “convince ... men of the mission of Jesus Christ, [and] make them ... see the truth, simplicity, and reasonableness, of what he himself taught, and required to be believed by his followers.”<sup>52</sup> In the opening pages he confesses, though, that there was more than just that motive alone. Indeed, the work begins with Locke proclaiming that he took it upon himself to read the Scriptures and come to an understanding of Christianity because of “the little Satisfaction and Consistency [he had] found in most of the Systems of Divinity [he had] met with.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on to describe two extremes which he saw emerging in the doctrinal systems of the day: authoritarianism (manifested in doctrinal teachings which were unreasonable, going against “the plain and direct meaning of the words and phrases” of Scripture) and naturalism (manifested among those who make “Jesus Christ nothing but the Restorer and Preacher of pure Natural Religion” and thus making “Christianity almost nothing”).<sup>54</sup> Regarding the first extreme, Locke wants to establish the basic message of the Scriptures in contrast to unwieldy, complex theological systems that distract “the illiterate bulk of Mankind” from the plain instruction of the Word of God and “the way to Salvation.”<sup>55</sup> A few pages into the work Locke identifies what he understands to be the basic message of Christianity and the necessary content that one must believe to be saved: “Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>56</sup> Pickard understands this highly inclusivist statement of faith as designed both to undercut the strong exclusivism generated by competing ecclesial traditions of the day and to call Christians back to the basics of the faith directly asserted in Scripture rather than derived (with much less probability) from it.<sup>57</sup> As Pickard emphatically put it, Locke was clearly reacting to “the rivalry between different theological systems of the seventeenth century—e.g., Calvinist, Lutheran, Catholic—[that] had left its heritage in blood.”<sup>58</sup> On the other side, Locke clearly wanted to avoid the extreme that was embodied by the deists, who equated Christianity with natural religion and made Jesus nothing more than its finest guru. Reedy is right in arguing that by the “reasonableness of Christianity” Locke primarily meant not the equation of true Christian doctrine with natural reason/religion (as is often assumed by those who see Locke as an Enlightenment forerunner) but rather “that Scripture can reasonably be shown to come from God, through the argument from testimony, and that, befitting its source, the saving truth of Scripture has a decorous simplicity and plainness.”<sup>59</sup> This conforms to Locke’s final words of the work, where he wonders at the “simplicity of the Gospel, [which makes] way for those poor, ignorant, illiterate, Who heard and believed promises of a Deliverer; and believed Jesus to be him; Who could conceive a Man dead and made alive again, and believe that he should at the end of the World, come again and pass Sentence on all Men, according to their deeds.” Locke concludes that this “Gospel ... was without doubt ... as the

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<sup>52</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 6, quoted in Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in Nuovo, *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, 89.

<sup>54</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 91.

<sup>55</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 91.

<sup>56</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 102.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Pickard, “John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology,” in *The Task of Theology Today: Doctrines and Dogmas*, eds. Victor Pfitzer and Hilary Regan (Hindmarsh, Australia: Australian Theological Forum, 1998), 124.

<sup>58</sup> Pickard, “John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology,” 125.

<sup>59</sup> Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 141.

poor could understand, plain and intelligible.”<sup>60</sup> It is such a Gospel that Locke found reasonable thanks to the testimony of the Scriptures rather than the scrutinizing of the philosopher or the systematizing of the theologian.

In terms of Locke’s larger philosophical project, Pearson rightly argues that we see in the *Reasonableness* continuity rather than discontinuity with the *Essay*, noting that in the work Locke returned “to the unfinished task of clarifying the relationship of reason and revelation which he had begun in the *Essay* and [undertook] the further task of explicating the content and authentication of revelation.”<sup>61</sup> Like in the *Essay*, Locke clarifies the goal from the beginning; in this case it is clarifying the content of revelation found in the Christian Scriptures, and specifically their teaching regarding “the Doctrine of Redemption, and consequently of the Gospel ... founded upon the Supposition of *Adam’s* Fall ... [and] what we are restored to in Jesus Christ.”<sup>62</sup> Yolton notes how Locke guides the reader through this content by saying that he “takes the reader carefully through the Scriptures in order to show the exact, plain meaning of Adam’s fall and Jesus’s redemption,” giving special attention to the Gospels and the book of Acts.<sup>63</sup> Wolterstorff connects the dots between the *Essay* and *Reasonableness* by saying that, for Locke, “most of the content of Christianity is reasonable—that is to say, probable on satisfactory evidence available to us human beings.”<sup>64</sup> Locke, by setting forth the most reasonable elements of the Christian faith, “had drawn into theological form the epistemology developed in the *Essay*.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, as we have been arguing, Locke’s epistemology and anthropology are shown to be integrally related to his theology.

Critical reactions of the day and Locke’s responses to them further inform our view of what Locke was up to in *Reasonableness*. The most pressing critique came from John Edwards, a Calvinist divine who accused Locke of being an atheist and a Socinian (particularly on grounds that he denied the doctrine of the Trinity). Locke composed two different vindications of the work in response to Edwards, where he was able to further identify his purposes and defend his cause. Justin Champion can note that, contrary to Locke’s own intentions, many of his readers (Edwards included) “claimed that the *Reasonableness* asserted definitive doctrinal claims ... [and thus] contradicted the purpose of [the work], which was to show people how to read Scripture, not what to believe.”<sup>66</sup> He goes on to explain that “Locke’s method placed great emphasis upon the individual mind searching for its own understanding, rather than aiming to determine how scripture confirmed an external set of doctrinal positions.”<sup>67</sup> To be pigeon-holed into one particular doctrinal system, much less to be accused of subtly seeking to impose that system upon his readers, was not only offensive to Locke but went against the very grain of his deeply held theological convictions. Locke had an aversion to “Systems of Divinity” and set forth a consistent call for believers to read and believe the words of the Scriptures themselves in their plain, original sense. It is this commitment to the authority of the Scriptures alone and the clarity of their content that

<sup>60</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 210.

<sup>61</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 252.

<sup>62</sup> Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 91.

<sup>63</sup> John W. Yolton, *Locke: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 80.

<sup>64</sup> Wolterstorff, “John Locke’s Epistemological Piety,” 584.

<sup>65</sup> Pickard, “John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology,” 121.

<sup>66</sup> Champion, “A Law of Continuity in the Progress of Theology,” 111.

<sup>67</sup> Champion, “A Law of Continuity in the Progress of Theology,” 127.

makes caricatures of Locke as a crypto-deist or forerunner to a secularist Enlightenment untenable. Indeed, Locke's own words in answer to Stillingfleet's concern that the *Essay* jettisoned the authority of Scripture and the possibility of revelation drives this home: "The Holy Scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide to my assent; and I shall always harken to it, as containing infallible truth, relating to things of highest concernment ... and I shall presently condemn and quit any opinion of mine, as soon as I am shown that it is contrary to any revelation of Holy Scripture."<sup>68</sup> Similarly he later assures Edwards in defense of *Reasonableness* that "I know no other infallible guide but the Spirit of God in the Scriptures."<sup>69</sup> This is clearly a man whose religious convictions, specifically about the infallibility and perspicuity of Holy Scripture, cannot be denied without compromising a proper assessment of his work and legacy.

In light of all this, what view of Locke's religious convictions should we hold based upon his *Reasonableness*? As John Marshall has rightly noted, the task of definitively pinning Locke down theologically is not exactly an easy one. He says, "Contradictory estimates of Locke's religious thought abound even in the best works on his thought. Boxing the compass of Protestantism, Locke is seen as essentially Calvinist, as the ideologist of dissent, as a Latitudinarian Anglican or Arminian, and as a Unitarian (or Socinian)."<sup>70</sup> We shouldn't be too surprised at the variety of "Lockes" that exist, given what Woolhouse has said: "If the *Reasonableness of Christianity* has been less misunderstood than the *Essay*, it is only because less attention has been paid to it."<sup>71</sup> But at the same time, it does seem clear that we can go beyond an agnostic stance toward Locke's religious convictions, especially vis-à-vis his supposed Enlightenment heirs. For one, we can say with Ashcraft that, "It is nothing less than a total misconception to regard the *Reasonableness* as a denigration of Christianity and a defense of philosophy. Rather, the precepts of faith are necessary precisely because of the failure of philosophy."<sup>72</sup> Locke's decidedly Christian convictions and his commitment to the authority of Scripture puts him at odds with the Enlightenment trajectory after him. We can't affirm summaries such as Nuovo's that "Locke's book...exemplifies the wisdom of modernity ... [and is] a milestone on the highway towards human enlightenment."<sup>73</sup> Such conclusions seem to go against the grain of a generous reading that allows Locke to speak for himself. Such a reading would insist that, rather than reading between the lines to determine what Locke *actually* thought (but couldn't write due to the restrictions of his day), we ought to allow the lines to speak for themselves, hearing Locke's straightforward exposition of the reasonable basics of Christianity according to the Scriptures, basics which he believed were sure and true.

### 1.3. Source #3: *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*

Lastly, we turn to the *Paraphrase*, published posthumously in 1704. As the last work of Locke's life it is of particular significance in helping us understand what captivated Locke's attention at the end. The *Paraphrase* essentially exhibits Locke's method of Bible study with a focus on certain Pauline epistles: Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians. Pickard picks up on the continuity of Locke's

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<sup>68</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 3, quoted in Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," 223.

<sup>69</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 6, quoted in Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," 223.

<sup>70</sup> John Marshall, "John Locke's Religious, Educational, and Moral Thought," *Historical Journal* 33 (1990): 993.

<sup>71</sup> Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography*, 218.

<sup>72</sup> Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," 218–19.

<sup>73</sup> Nuovo, *John Locke and Christianity*, xii.

emphases from the *Reasonableness* and notes that in the *Paraphrase* “Locke’s method of Scripture analysis—of disregarding customary chapter and verse divisions and focusing on the natural flow of the text—was designed to undercut the fancies of the system makers and to obtain access to the one original meaning of the text.”<sup>74</sup> Champion concurs: “The *Reasonableness* and *A Paraphrase* delivered to the reading public the results of his own reading and study of scripture ... [offering] a meticulous explanation of [its] meaning.”<sup>75</sup> The choice of Pauline epistles was likely not coincidental; it may very well have related to the fact that one of the criticisms John Edwards brought against Locke regarding his *Reasonableness* was that it seemed to demonstrate that the philosopher was operating with a “canon within the canon,” setting aside the epistles to give priority to the Gospels and Acts. It is all the more significant, then, that Locke, in the preface to the *Paraphrase*, admits that he had not previously grasped the significance of Paul’s letters, confessing, “I found that I [had] understood them not; I mean the doctrinal and discursive parts of them: though the practical directions ... appeared to me very plain, intelligible, and instructive.”<sup>76</sup>

Though we can only briefly peruse this work due to space constraints, we would do well to look at a couple of biblical passages that touch directly upon our continuous case study: Locke’s view of human nature. The most significant that Locke touches upon is Paul’s discussion of Adam’s trespass and its implications for all of humanity in Romans 5:12–21. Locke summarizes the content of the passage thus: “Here [Paul] shews that Adam transgressing the law ... forfeited immortality, and becoming thereby mortal, all his posterity descending from the loins of a mortal man were mortal too, and all died, though none of them broke that law but Adam himself. But by Christ they are all restored to life again; And God justifying those who believe in Christ they are restored to their primitive state of righteousness and immortality ... it being all wholly and solely from Grace.”<sup>77</sup> In his actual paraphrase of verse 12 he says “by the act of one man Adam the father of us all, sin entered into the world, and death, which was the punishment annexed to the offence of eating the forbidden fruit, entered by that sin so that Adam’s posterity thereby became mortal,” and explains in a footnote that “‘have sinned’ I have rendered ‘became mortal’ following the rule I think very necessary for understanding St Paul’s Epistles, [that is] the making him as much as is possible his own interpreter.”<sup>78</sup> Thus for Locke his departure from an Augustinian/Reformed interpretation of Adam’s Fall and its associated notion of original sin is not because of a rejection of the Scriptures (and of a Christian understanding of human nature) but because he sees it as incompatible with what Paul says elsewhere (and ultimately as incompatible with a ‘reasonable’ understanding of God’s justice, for Locke sees it as unjust that God would punish humanity for sins not committed by their own person). Locke’s interpretation of Romans 5 thus resembles more of an Arminian or Latitudinarian interpretation of the passage, and we would do well to remember that while this departs from the Calvinism prevalent in England at the time, it does not necessarily depart from Christian orthodoxy on the whole. Locke’s making much of humanity’s need of salvation from sin and

<sup>74</sup> Pickard, “John Locke and the Fate of Systematic Theology,” 124.

<sup>75</sup> Champion, “A Law of Continuity in the Progress of Theology,” 111.

<sup>76</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 7, quoted in Richard J. Mouw, “John Locke’s Christian Individualism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 449.

<sup>77</sup> John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, reprint ed. Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 2:522–23.

<sup>78</sup> Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 2:523.

death (and that by the grace of God) seems very much to be an expression of what we would characterize today as evangelical Arminianism.

A glance at Ephesians 2:1–10 further confirms this position. There Locke paraphrases verses 1–2 to say, “You also being dead in Trespasses and Sins, in which you Gentiles, before you were converted to the Gospel, walked according to the State and Constitution of the World, Conforming your selves to the Will and Pleasure of the Prince of the Power of the Air.”<sup>79</sup> After setting forth the sinful nature of humanity and the need for conversion he then celebrates “the great things that were done for them, and the glorious estate they were in under the Gospel ... by their Faith alone in Jesus Christ, to whom they are united.”<sup>80</sup> Such proclamations of the depth of sin and the glories of the gospel of grace, accepted by faith alone, certainly seem to represent strong Protestant convictions. When we remember that such expressions of human depravity (of a certain kind) and a need for humanity to be saved by faith in Christ came at the very end of his life, we would do well to reflect on what Locke’s supposed Enlightenment heirs would have thought of this profound thinker had they more closely consulted the *Paraphrase*.

We can see in these passages that Locke was still very much informed by the biblical witness when it came to understanding human nature and the human condition. In this regard Parker notes that “through the story of the Fall we can glimpse Locke’s own despairing views about the nature of the human condition.... Whether Locke drastically broke with the Christian view of an impaired human reason, as is so often assumed, is a debatable point.... [But we can say that at] the center of Locke’s world-view was the concept of Adam’s Fall and a general strain of pessimism about human nature and human reason.”<sup>81</sup> He goes on, “Locke’s conception of the Fall, coupled with his doctrine that there are no innate ideas, is an effective rebuttal of the Augustinian notion of original sin ... [but] not [a] break with the traditional Christian view of the impaired reason of all individuals.”<sup>82</sup> This is a crucial point, for many who have linked Locke up to the Enlightenment trajectory have failed to realize that a departure from *one strand* of the Christian tradition does not entail a departure from the Christian tradition entirely. Polinska, in filling this point out, brilliantly observes that, “Although Locke denies that we are guilty for Adam’s sin, he recognizes that the whole of humanity is guilty and corrupted by personal sins.”<sup>83</sup> It does seem then, in light of the *Paraphrase*, that Locke is drinking deeply from Scripture in his final days and that this saturation is producing a view of human nature that would not resonate with the *philosophes* in the least.

This vision of Locke as a philosopher grappling with Christian scripture and his own religious convictions is further confirmed when we examine Locke’s correspondence, especially from this later period in his life. For instance, in writing to Philip Limborch on May 10, 1695, Locke made his intentions in writing the *Reasonableness* quite clear:

For this winter, considering diligently wherein the Christian faith consists, I thought it ought to be drawn from the very fountains of Holy Writ.... From an intent and careful reading of the New Testament the conditions of the New Covenant and the teaching of

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<sup>79</sup> Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 2:625–26.

<sup>80</sup> Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 2:620.

<sup>81</sup> Parker, “John Locke and the Enlightenment Metanarrative,” 66.

<sup>82</sup> Parker, “John Locke and the Enlightenment Metanarrative,” 71.

<sup>83</sup> Wioleta Polinska, “John Locke, Christian Doctrine and Latitudinarianism,” *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 6 (1999): 178.

the Gospel became clearer to me ... than the noontide light, and I am fully convinced that a sincere reader of the Gospel cannot be in doubt as to what the Christian faith is.<sup>84</sup>

His later correspondence thus helps us to see how central Locke's religious sensibilities were, for far from the public sphere he freely and frequently made appeal to his Christian faith. One prominent example is the letter Locke wrote to Peter King on October 4, 1704, just days before Locke passed away. There, in reflecting on his *Paraphrase*, he expresses his hope that it will "be of great use to religion in giving the true sense of those Epistles ... [in light] of what St Paul taught."<sup>85</sup> He goes on, "St Paul I have made my guide as much as possible, and concluding him to be as I every where find him a rational pertinent arguer ... I have every where endeavored to follow [him] impartially."<sup>86</sup> In the same letter he also offers this moving salutation to the man who was his closest friend and primary heir: "I wish you all manner of prosperity in this world and the everlasting happiness of the world to come. That I loved you I think you are convinced. God send us a happy meeting in the resurrection of the Just. Adieu."<sup>87</sup> That such a letter could be full of both affirmations of the authority of Scripture and final greetings where the mercy of God is implored in this life and the next is yet another proof that Locke's worldview, especially at the end of his life, was thoroughly Christian, and that of an orthodox variety.<sup>88</sup>

## 2. Concluding Thoughts and Further Trajectories

After having only briefly surveyed three critical sources and some of Locke's correspondence, we are left to finally evaluate the significance of Locke's Christian confession for his philosophical legacy, particularly vis-à-vis the Enlightenment. Polinska, commenting on the *Paraphrase*, notes that, "while Locke's emphasis on the superiority of divine revelation is evident in those passages, I do not think that Locke changed his position from that presented in the *Essay*."<sup>89</sup> Polinska thus signals an important debate regarding how to interpret Locke's final years, and that is the debate between whether change or continuity with the earlier Locke should predominate. Polinska and Spellman represent Locke scholars who argue for continuity throughout Locke's life, holding that his religious sensibilities always informed his work but became particularly explicit in his final days. For instance, Spellman argues regarding Locke's view of human nature that he was "a man working throughout his adult life, with unflagging dedication, to articulate and defend what was still very much a Christian view of human nature and human potential."<sup>90</sup> He can thus conclude, "Locke remained, throughout his adult life, loyal to the

<sup>84</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 8, quoted in Reedy, *The Bible and Reason*, 140.

<sup>85</sup> John Locke, "3647: Locke to Peter King, Oates, 4 October 1704," in *John Locke: Selected Correspondence*, ed. Mark Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 332.

<sup>86</sup> Locke, "3647: Locke to Peter King," 332.

<sup>87</sup> Locke, "3647: Locke to Peter King," 333.

<sup>88</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the important question of whether Locke was more Trinitarian or Socinian in his theological outlook, see Victor Nuovo, ed., *John Locke and Christianity: Contemporary Responses to The Reasonableness of Christianity* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

<sup>89</sup> Polinska, "Faith and Reason in John Locke," 306.

<sup>90</sup> Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, 205.

Christian view of man's essential nature as it was understood by so many of his Latitudinarian friends, and by not a few of his Puritan enemies."<sup>91</sup>

But there are also scholars who argue for discontinuity in Locke's life, even of a radical variety. One such scholar, John Marshall, argues (against Spellman, and against the notion that Locke's change was toward religion rather than away from it) that, "The story of the development of Locke's theology is the story of the transition from the Reformation towards the Enlightenment, whose Protestant theology was often Unitarian as well as Deist. Locke did not stand as firmly on the Reformation side of the divide as Spellman wishes to suggest."<sup>92</sup> Here we see emerge once again the old story of Locke as part of the European crisis and as a crucial forerunner to the Enlightenment. For Marshall, despite Locke's own protests to the contrary, he is indeed a Socinian who sought to subvert traditional Christianity but was unable to speak as openly as he would have liked.<sup>93</sup> Others, such as Woolhouse and Pearson, argue for a narrative of discontinuity but believe that the change was toward an increasingly religious perspective. The debate acknowledged, it would still seem that all sides agree (to some degree) with the emphasis of this article that a revival of Locke's religious convictions later in life prompted him to have a *greater focus* than he had previously on how such convictions ought to inform the whole of his philosophical project and specifically his view of human nature. Even Marshall notes that in his latter days, "Locke's theological enquiries and his reliance on Christ for a saving faith and for information about virtue, about its rewards and about the very existence of an afterlife, did clearly become more important."<sup>94</sup>

That further work needs to be done in Locke studies in order to resolve such debates and better determine the relationship between Locke's Christian confession and his philosophical project (especially vis-à-vis the Enlightenment) is evident. One possible avenue for this work<sup>95</sup> would be to explore the link that may exist between Locke and Boyle's view of reason as it relates to faith (specifically whether, and to what extent, Locke is influenced by Boyle's understanding of "right reason").<sup>96</sup> Another avenue of study would be (following the lead of Polinska and Spellman) to explore the connections between John Tillotson and Locke, further articulating how Locke's religious convictions could be understood as squarely within the Latitudinarian camp and thus within Christian orthodoxy. A third avenue would involve exploring in greater depth the three crucial issues set forth by Pearson regarding the nature of Locke's religious thought: (1) the relationship between Locke's theology and his epistemology, (2) the question of the evolution/revolution in Locke's religious views, and (3) the character and authenticity of Locke's personal religious views.<sup>97</sup> Each of these issues is only at the beginning stages of exploration, but it is the opinion of this writer that these paths of inquiry are worth pursuing.

That being said, it does seem at the end of this article that there are things about Locke's religious views, specifically as they relate to the Enlightenment and his overall philosophical legacy, that we *can*

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<sup>91</sup> Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, 213.

<sup>92</sup> Marshall, "John Locke's Religious, Educational, and Moral Thought," 997.

<sup>93</sup> Against Marshall, see Locke's interpretation of Ephesians 1:10 in the *Paraphrase*, which seems to make clear his view that the Son preexisted the man Jesus Christ.

<sup>94</sup> John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and "Early Enlightenment" Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 453.

<sup>95</sup> I am indebted to John Woodbridge for this insight.

<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Locke explicitly cites and commends Boyle in the "Epistle to the Reader" of the *Essay*, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Pearson, "The Religion of John Locke," 244–45.

say. We can say with Spellman, “The optimism of the Latitudinarians, and of Locke, was always tempered by their Christian consciousness of the power of sin, of human frailty and disobedience, of mankind’s constant need for that grace which was available only through the God of mercy and forgiveness. It was not, surely, an outlook easily amenable to the Age of Enlightenment.”<sup>98</sup> We can say with Polinska, “Locke’s commitment to the infallibility of the Scriptures and his appreciation of the God given ability to reason need to be seen as signs of his great concern for the truthfulness of the Christian tradition. These should be also seen as signs that, contrary to some critics, Locke is quite consistently the Christian thinker he wished to be.”<sup>99</sup> We can say with Wolterstoff and Pearson among others that the place of John Locke in the story of Western civilization has been vastly misunderstood, especially in failing to see Locke as one who recognized “the dramatic transformations taking place in European thought and society ... [and sought] to assure the place of religion and morality in the new era ... [struggling] to clarify the great issues of the relationship of reason to revelation and of church to state ... [and understating that] what was at stake was the validity of any kind of religious interpretation of the universe.”<sup>100</sup> Lastly, we can say with Mouw that “the entire framework of Locke’s thinking was ‘theocentric’ and the key commitment of his intellectual life as a whole was the epistemological vindication of this framework.”<sup>101</sup> In all of this we are rightly exhorted that a generous reading of Locke must lead us to reconsider the significance of Christianity for his work and thus to reevaluate the nature of his philosophical legacy downstream.

To close, we could do no better than once again returning to Locke’s final sentiments, this time to the epitaph that Locke prepared for himself. It read, in part, “A scholar by training, he devoted himself wholly to the pursuit of truth.”<sup>102</sup> Marshall notes that these words “enunciated very clearly ... his central concern at the end of his life” and concludes from them that “it is in this daring to know and to inquire that Locke most clearly deserves his place in the pantheon of the Enlightenment.”<sup>103</sup> But in light of the present study, we can’t help but think that such an interpretation of Locke’s words and legacy might not be recognized by the man himself. We are more inclined to think that there is another way to interpret what Locke meant by the “pursuit of truth,” one that better resonates with his own concerns rather than the concerns of his eighteenth century (supposed) heirs. Such a reading would look a little further down the epitaph where he goes on to point people to the Gospels and to Christ as an example of virtue.<sup>104</sup> It is from *this* Locke, the one who uttered with conviction “A Christian I am sure I am, because I believe ‘Jesus to be the Messiah,’ the King and Saviour promised, and sent by God,”<sup>105</sup> that we hear an exhortation from the grave *not* to abandon Christianity and its understanding of human nature, but rather to more fully study the Scriptures in order to see how they provide a reasonable understanding of God, humanity, and the gospel message of reconciliation through Christ. As we gain a greater picture of “the real John Locke,” it becomes more and more clear that understanding him as a forerunner to the *philosophes* and

<sup>98</sup> Spellman, “Locke and the Latitudinarian Perspective on Original Sin,” 228.

<sup>99</sup> Polinska, “Faith and Reason in John Locke,” 307.

<sup>100</sup> Pearson, “The Religion of John Locke,” 262.

<sup>101</sup> Mouw, “John Locke’s Christian Individualism,” 450.

<sup>102</sup> See Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 482.

<sup>103</sup> John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 455.

<sup>104</sup> See Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography*, 482.

<sup>105</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 6, quoted in Polinska, “Faith and Reason in John Locke,” 287.

the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment is not a generous enough reading of his life and work. Rather, it is best to see Locke's philosophy as one that was deeply informed by Christian faith, leaving us a legacy that stands as a rebuke not only to much of what transpired in eighteenth century intellectual history but also to much of twenty-first century Locke scholarship. To date, both have largely failed to take Locke at his word regarding the compelling claims of Christianity, claims that he commended not only to his contemporaries but to all who are devoted wholly to the pursuit of truth.

# Did the New Atheists *Rationally* Lack Belief?

— Michael Berhow —

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**Abstract:** For those who enjoy debates, there has never been a debate more routinely rehashed than the debate over God’s existence. If you have followed the various iterations of this debate over the past two decades, you might have come across a somewhat influential argument that is definitional in nature—what I call *the Definitional Argument For Atheism* (DAFA). In short, this argument claims that atheism is not a positive belief system, and therefore requires no justification to be considered rational. Such a claim implies that theists bear the full burden of proof when arguing about God’s existence. In this article, I provide an epistemological and a metaphysical critique of DAFA, and then attempt to show why theism is more reasonable than atheism.

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For those who enjoy debates, there has never been a debate more routinely rehashed than the debate over God’s existence. If you have followed the various iterations of this debate over the past two decades, you might have come across a somewhat influential argument that is definitional in nature. No, I am not talking about the ontological argument for God’s existence. I am talking about what I call *the Definitional Argument For Atheism* (DAFA)—which can be formulated as follows:

1. Atheism is not a positive belief, but a lack of belief in theism (premise).
2. Theism is a positive belief in the existence of God (premise).
3. Positive beliefs, and only positive beliefs, require evidence if they are to be considered rational, reasonable, justified, or warranted (premise).
4. Theism requires evidence if it is to be considered rational, reasonable, justified, or warranted [2&3].
5. Atheism does not require evidence to be considered rational, reasonable, justified, or warranted [1&3].
6. Therefore, given the lack of evidence for theism; atheism is more rational, reasonable, justified, or warranted.

Though never stated this explicitly, the formulation above seems to capture the central argument of the ever-declining movement known as the New Atheists.<sup>1</sup>

While many have rightly noticed the waning influence of the New Atheism,<sup>2</sup> Christians would still be wise to remember the various critiques leveled against belief in God throughout the 2000s. We never know, after all, when such critiques might resurface.

Richard Dawkins, just to provide one example, is still promoting his version of DAFA that he introduced in *The God Delusion*—only now he is targeting younger readers in his new book *Outgrowing God*. In an attempt to show the arbitrariness of picking one particular religion, Dawkins writes,

Do you believe in God? Which god? Thousands of gods have been worshipped throughout the world, throughout history. Polytheists believe in lots of gods all at the same time (*theos* Greek for “god” and *poly* is Greek for “many”). Wotan (or Odin) was the chief god of the Vikings. Other Viking gods were Baldr (god of beauty), Thor (the thunder god with his mighty hammer) and his daughter Throd.... Countless Greeks and Romans thought their gods were real—prayed to them, sacrificed animals to them, thanked them for good fortune and blamed them when things went wrong. How do we know those ancient people weren’t right? Why does nobody believe in Zeus any more? We can’t know for sure, but most of us are confident enough to say we are “atheists” with respect to those old gods (a “theist” is somebody who believes in god(s) and an “atheist”—a-theist, the ‘a’ meaning ‘non’—is someone who doesn’t).<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his atheistic ministry, Dawkins’s oft repeated sales pitch has been to highlight how everyone is an atheist when it comes to gods like Zeus, Apollo, Amon, Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan,

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<sup>1</sup> The origin of this movement is typically traced back to a 2004 publication by Sam Harris, entitled, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004). Harris’s book was quickly followed by Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006); and the late Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007). Frequently referred to as the “Four Horsemen of Atheism,” these public intellectuals initiated a public discussion over the reasonableness and potential dangers of religions, which resulted in well over twenty published responses. For just a few examples of these works, see Alister McGrath, *Why God Won’t Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010); Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Boston: Brill, 2010); Victor J. Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (New York: Prometheus, 2009); Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great about Christianity?* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2007); Becky Garrison, *The New Atheist Crusaders and Their Unholy Grail: The Misguided Quest to Destroy Your Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); and John C. Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Chicago: Lion Hudson, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Egnor, “New Atheism: A Shipwreck of Fools,” *Evolution News & Science Today*, 12 December 2019, <https://evolutionnews.org/2019/12/new-atheism-a-shipwreck-of-fools/>; Tom Gilson, “The Death of New Atheism,” *The Stream*, 27 October 2017, <https://stream.org/the-death-of-new-atheism/>; Elliot Kaufman, “What Ever Happened to the New Atheists?” *National Review*, 28 July 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/voplysc>; Steven Poole, “The Four Horsemen Review—Whatever Happened to New Atheism?,” *The Guardian*, 31 January 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y9b3egok>; and Jacob Hamburger, “What Was New Atheism? On Liberalism’s Fading Faith,” *The Point*, 14 January 2019, <https://thepointmag.com/politics/what-was-new-atheism/>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Dawkins, *Outgrowing God: A Beginners Guide* (New York: Random House, 2019), 4–5.

the Golden Calf, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. To close the sale, he would then conclude by explaining that he just goes one god further.<sup>4</sup>

Dawkins's version of DAFA was (and likely still is) persuasive for his many hearers. What makes it persuasive, moreover, is the simplicity of the argument. Put simply, Dawkins attempts to show why atheists do not need sophisticated arguments to demonstrate the reasonableness of a *lack of belief*. A lack of belief, for Dawkins, is just the default position for any proposition. Thus, if atheism is a *lack of belief* in any version of theism, then by implication one does not need an argument to justify the position of atheism—since atheism is not really a position.<sup>5</sup>

When atheism is defined this way—as a *lack of belief*—then atheism is the rational position to hold until someone provides evidence for theism. This is because theism is a positive claim, and positive claims require evidence. As an analogy, most people intuitively recognize that it would take substantial evidence to verify one's belief in, say, Santa Claus, witches with supernatural powers, the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, or celestial teapots orbiting around the moon. The New Atheists claimed that they were simply applying this common-sense intuition to one's belief in God. Harris explains,

We can believe a proposition to be true *only because* something in our experience, or in our reasoning about the world, actually speaks to the truth of the proposition in question.... We can see that religious beliefs, to be beliefs about the way the world is, must be as evidentiary in spirit as any other.... The concessions we have made to religious faith—to the idea that belief can be sanctified by something other than *evidence*—have rendered us unable to name, much less address, one of the most pervasive causes of conflict in our world.<sup>6</sup>

Any proposition about the existence of God, according to Harris, is equivalent to all other propositions that are debated in philosophy. To rationally affirm any proposition about God, therefore, one must offer compelling evidence. This is why Bertrand Russell, when asked what he would say to God if he encountered him after death, famously replied, “Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?” In other words, Russell contended—like Dawkins and Harris—that atheism is the most rational position until one provides evidence to the contrary.

### ***1. The Epistemological Problem with DAFA***

Due to the simplicity of the argument, different versions of DAFA grew in popularity. At the same time, however, the underlying presuppositions of the argument faced significant criticism among religious epistemologists and Christian philosophers. Alvin Plantinga, for example, critiqued DAFA by contending that it relies upon a narrow form of evidentialism—as articulated by philosopher W. K. Clifford. In a frequently cited article on the ethics of belief, Clifford contended that “it is wrong,

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 53.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris both share this sentiment with Dawkins. See Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 210–11; and Harris, *End of Faith*, 16, 46–47.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 29, 62–63. Italics in original.

always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”<sup>7</sup> Plantinga’s various responses to Clifford have been persuasive to both religious and non-religious epistemologists.<sup>8</sup>

To understand why, Plantinga convincingly demonstrated that Clifford’s notion of evidence represents a version of evidentialism that is akin to classical foundationalism. Classical foundationalism is the position that *self-evident propositions*, *sense perception*, and *incorrigible beliefs* are the only foundational axioms needed to ground non-foundational beliefs—where non-foundational beliefs are defined as any beliefs that require justification to make them rational beliefs. In other words, according to Clifford, non-foundational beliefs are justified only when one can demonstrate that such beliefs are either self-evident, traced back to sense perception, or incorrigible.<sup>9</sup>

While such high standards might initially seem reasonable, Plantinga showed that classical foundationalism actually excludes many common-sense beliefs, such as the belief that I had breakfast this morning, the belief that murder is morally reprehensible, the belief in other minds, etc. Even more problematic, however, classical foundationalism seems unable to live up to its own standard, since the standard itself is not self-evident, incorrigible, nor is it evident to the senses.<sup>10</sup> This means that, given classical foundationalism, we should reject classical foundationalism—and thus we should reject Clifford’s evidentialism by implication. In doing so, we have undermined the epistemic basis for DAFA.

## 2. *The Metaphysical Problem with DAFA*

The problems with DAFA are even deeper, however, because it unfairly and inappropriately stacks the deck against theism. That is, DAFA maintains that the burden of proof rests solely on the theist, given that atheism is allegedly not a belief. Again, Plantinga provides useful insights. He responds that two can play the “lack-of-belief” game, but it does not add to the discussion, since the theist could simply claim he is an *a*atheist—meaning that he just lacks belief in atheism.<sup>11</sup> Using this debate tactic, the theist would then shift the burden of proof back onto the atheist—claiming that theism is the real default position. If the atheist fails to provide evidence for atheism, then theism (or *a*atheism) is more reasonable by definition.

To understand the force of Plantinga’s simple response here, one must reflect deeply on the definition of theism. For Dawkins and company to claim that atheism is merely a lack of belief in theism, they must first provide a definition of theism. Unfortunately, when one reads the literature authored by proponents of the New Atheism, it becomes clear that these writers offer unsophisticated caricatures

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<sup>7</sup> W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” in *The Ethics of Belief: And Other Essays*, ed. Timothy Madigan (New York: Prometheus, 1999), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Before Plantinga, moreover, several philosophers developed critiques of other forms of evidentialism—most notable is W. V. O. Quine’s groundbreaking article, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” *The Philosophical Review* 60 (1951): 20–43. In it, Quine argued against a version of evidentialism known as logical positivism—which states that only statements verified by their analyticity or by empirical observation are meaningful. Quine’s influential article revealed that this perspective should be rejected based upon its own standard, given that logical positivism is not verified by its analyticity, nor is it demonstrated by empirical observation.

<sup>9</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 84–85.

<sup>10</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Religious Belief as ‘Properly Basic,’” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford, 2000), 51.

of God. Pertaining to Dawkins's error on this point, J. Angelo Corlett quips, "If it is true that in order to refute a view one needs to properly understand it, ... then Dawkins fails in his assessment of theism."<sup>12</sup> He continues,

How can Dawkins embrace with logical credulity a position of denying with high probability the existence of God when he has considered and refuted only the most obviously non-existent but alleged divinity having hyperbolic attributes? What Dawkins' arguments support is the idea that a certain rather popular notion of God is implausible.<sup>13</sup>

Though not a traditional theist, Corlett provides insight into recognizing the central problem with DAFA. The New Atheists, he explains, define God as a spatial-temporal object whose existence could in principle be confirmed through scientific experimentation. In fact, Dawkins explicitly calls the God question a scientific hypothesis, which can be evaluated using the standard tools of science. He admits, of course, that science cannot disprove the existence of God, but he also explains that science is not in the business of providing proofs. Science provides guidance into what is plausible, and thus he concludes that the existence of God is scientifically implausible.

Harris agrees with Dawkins on this assessment, presumably because he also assumes that God must be defined as an object that could be observed by empirical investigation (if God were to exist). At one point in *The End of Faith*, Harris compares believing in God with believing that there is a diamond the size of a refrigerator buried in one's backyard.<sup>14</sup> And how might one determine whether there is a refrigerator-sized diamond in his backyard? He must go outside and start digging. That is, he must provide empirical evidence. In an analogous way, one must provide empirical evidence for God in the cosmos to be considered intellectually credible.

On the classical definition of theism, however, DAFA is not convincing. This is because classical theism defines God as a necessary being who transcends all contingent beings. God is infinite, personal, non-material, non-temporal, and non-spatial. The question of God's existence, then, is a metaphysical question concerning the nature of ultimate reality.<sup>15</sup> Viewed from this perspective, theism is a full-fledged worldview, and therefore it makes no sense to call atheism a lack of belief—since the negation of theism

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<sup>12</sup> J. Angelo Corlett, "Dawkins' Godless Delusion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65.3 (2009): 126.

<sup>13</sup> Corlett, "Dawkins' Godless Delusion," 129.

<sup>14</sup> Harris writes, "Let's say that I want to believe that there is a diamond buried somewhere in my yard that is the size of a refrigerator. It is true that it would feel uncommonly good to believe this. But do I have any reason to believe that there is *actually* a diamond in my yard that is thousands of times larger than any yet discovered? No." Harris, *The End of Faith*, 62. Italics in original. Ryan Falcioni also highlights this problematic comparison in, "Is God a Hypothesis? The New Atheism, Contemporary Philosophy of Religion, and Philosophical Confusion," in *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Amarnath Amarasingam (Boston: Brill, 2010), 212.

<sup>15</sup> For an extended explanation of God as a metaphysical thesis, see the chapter on God in Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 99–116. See also Michael Peterson, "The Encounter Between Naturalistic Atheism and Christian Theism," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford, 2014), 438–50; Ronald Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 107–12.

is an alternative worldview that is antithetical to theism. In most cases, this alternative worldview is something like a metaphysical commitment to naturalism or materialism.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we have moved beyond mere *object atheism*, and are instead given the task of defining atheism as a worldview. A theistic worldview is committed to the idea that ultimate reality is personal, and by implication the observable universe derives from ultimate personality. We might call this a *mind-first worldview*.<sup>17</sup> An atheistic worldview, on the other hand, must contend for an opposing perspective on ultimate reality. That is, if ultimate reality is not personal, then it must be impersonal or non-personal—implying that the observable universe derives from ultimate impersonality. We might call this a *matter-first worldview*, which is significantly more than a mere lack-of-belief. As such, the New Atheists were wrong to define atheism as a simple lack of belief.

### 3. Is Atheism Reasonable?

Once the terms of the debate are properly defined, one can better understand what has become a central objection to atheism—namely, that it is a self-defeating worldview. To understand this objection, one should note that if theism claims that the order, complexity, and motions of the cosmos originated from a personal creator, then atheism must contend for the antithesis of that claim. That is, atheism must maintain that the order, complexity, and motions of the cosmos originated from an impersonal source. Nancey Murphy—borrowing from the opening lines of Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos*—describes the atheist story as follows: “the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”<sup>18</sup> The important thing to recognize about this description is that cosmos is impersonal—meaning that it does not function according to a good design plan.

Many philosophers and apologists have convincingly demonstrated that such a worldview is unable to provide the necessary preconditions for scientific investigation. C. S. Lewis, for example, offered this compelling argument against naturalism:

All possible knowledge ... depends on the validity of reasoning. If the feeling of certainty which we express by words like *must be* and *therefore* and *since* is a real perception of how things outside our own minds really “must” be, well and good. But if this certainty is merely a feeling *in* our own minds and not a genuine insight into realities beyond them—if it merely represents the way our minds happen to work—then we can have no knowledge. Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true.<sup>19</sup>

Lewis continues,

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<sup>16</sup> Dawkins seems to recognize this when he describes an atheist as a “philosophical naturalist,” meaning he is “somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world.” Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 14. Victor Stenger likewise argues that an atheist “believes that we need not include anything beyond matter to describe the universe and its contents.” Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (New York: Prometheus, 2009) 21–22.

<sup>17</sup> William Dembski describes theism as a mind-first worldview in, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Religion* (Downers Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 214.

<sup>18</sup> Nancey Murphy, “Robert John Russell Versus the New Atheists,” *Zygon* 45.1 (2010): 194; the original quote is from Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, reprint ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 21. Italics in original.

It follows that no account of the universe can be true unless that account leaves it possible for our thinking to be real insight. A theory which explained everything else in the whole universe but which made it impossible to believe that our thinking was valid, would be utterly out of court. For that theory would itself have been reached by thinking, and if thinking is not valid that theory would, of course, be itself demolished. It would have destroyed its own credentials. It would be an argument which proved that no argument was—a proof that there are no such things as proofs—which is nonsense.<sup>20</sup>

The insights offered in these paragraphs are devastating for atheism. Given the impersonal nature of the cosmos, atheism provides a theory that makes it impossible to believe that our thinking is valid.

Why is this so? Consider Dawkins again, who asserts that the apparent design in the universe was produced by a bottom-up *blind* watchmaker, rather than by a top-down *intelligent* watchmaker.<sup>21</sup> According to Dawkins, the biological mechanisms of natural selection and random mutations are sufficient to explain the origin of our sensory and cognitive faculties necessary for scientific investigation. Harris agrees, and explains this process as follows:

It was probably the capacity for movement, enjoyed by certain primitive organisms, that drove the evolution of our sensory and cognitive faculties. This follows from the fact that if no creature could do anything with the information it acquired from the world, nature could not have selected for improvements in the physical structures that gather, store, and process such information.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, Daniel Dennett adds that the evolutionary processes involved in the origin of our cognitive faculties have “no goals, no predefined problems, and no comprehension to bring to the task; [these processes] myopically and undirectedly muddle along with what [they have] already created, mindlessly trying out tweaks and variations, and keeping those that prove useful, or at least not significantly harmful.”<sup>23</sup> Thus Dawkins, Harris, and Dennett all seem to reduce human thoughts and emotions to complex interconnections of physical entities within the brain that originated through blind and unguided evolutionary processes. Such reduction highlights why Lewis argued that atheism makes it impossible to believe that our thinking is valid.

To make this argument explicit, Plantinga developed a version of the argument called the Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism (EAAN).<sup>24</sup> This argument states, in short, that a naturalistic (or atheistic) account of scientific knowledge—including one’s knowledge of biological evolution—leads to self-referentially incoherent ideas. Specifically, there are epistemic challenges that arise when one embraces both atheism and evolution. As mentioned above, atheism implies that our cognitive faculties developed through an unguided process, which should suggest that we have no reason to think our

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Miracles*, 21–22.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: Norton, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *The End of Faith*, 52

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (New York: Norton, 2018), 77.

<sup>24</sup> For the original formulation of his argument, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 194–237. Plantinga develops this argument in several other places as well—most recently in *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford, 2011).

cognitive faculties produce reliable information. Charles Darwin acknowledged this problem in a letter he wrote to William Graham:

The horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?<sup>25</sup>

Plantinga formulates Darwin's horrid doubt using conditional probability, where he attempts to determine the probability (P) that our cognitive faculties are reliable (R), given the truth of metaphysical naturalism (N), *plus* evolution (E), and *plus* the fact that our cognitive faculties include things like memory, sense perception, reason, etc. (C). As an equation, this can be stated as follows:  $P(R/(N\&E\&C))$ , where:

N = Metaphysical naturalism (the view that there is no such person as the God of traditional theism).

E = The proposition that human cognitive faculties arose by way of the mechanisms to which contemporary evolutionary thought directs our attention.

C = A complex proposition whose precise formulation is both difficult and unnecessary, but which states what cognitive faculties we have—memory, perception, reason, Reid's sympathy—and what sorts of beliefs they produce.

R = The claim that our cognitive faculties are reliable (on the whole), in the sense that they produce mostly true beliefs in the sorts of environments that are normal for them.<sup>26</sup>

Using this equation, Plantinga contends that there is an extremely low probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable (R) if naturalism (N) and evolution (E) are both true, and especially if the various states of our cognitive faculties (C) originated through a naturalistic evolutionary process. In other words, if naturalism (N) and evolution (E) are both true, then our cognitive faculties are the product of unguided evolutionary happenstances. This further means that the various parts of our cognitive faculties—such as reason and sense perception—are likewise the product of unguided evolutionary happenstances.

If someone argues, therefore, that reason and sense perception lead to the conclusions that naturalism (N) and evolution (E) are both true, then Plantinga argues that there is a devastating defeater for this position. That is, there is no reason to think our cognitive faculties—including reason and sense perception—have been constructed in such a way as to deliver true conclusions. This is because unguided evolutionary happenstances are simply not interested in producing true beliefs.<sup>27</sup> As such, there is no reason to think that naturalism and evolution are both true, since it is extremely improbable

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Darwin, "Letters to William Graham, Down, July 3, 1881," in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin 1: Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin (New York: Elibron, 2005), 285.

<sup>26</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 220.

<sup>27</sup> Plantinga refers to a famous passage by Patricia Churchland to support this contention: "Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F's: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principle chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive.... Improvements in the sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing is advantageous *so long as it is geared to the organism's way of life and enhances the organism's chances of survival*. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost." Patricia Churchland, "Epistemology in

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that our cognitive faculties would be reliable (R) given naturalism (N) and evolution (E). Thus, it is also unreasonable to believe in both atheism (naturalism) and evolution at the same time.

Some have complained that this type of argument represents a version of the “God-of-the-Gaps” fallacy.<sup>28</sup> In other words, if scientists cannot yet explain how our cognitive faculties originated, then theologians will be quick to proclaim that God is the only explanation. Such a response is only persuasive if we forget that theism and atheism are competing metaphysical worldviews. From a worldview perspective, theism views the entire cosmos (not just the supposed gaps) in terms of personal design, purpose, and intentionality. Atheism, on the other hand, suggests that the cosmos operates according to impersonal, unguided, and blind physical forces. This leads to the conclusion that our cognitive faculties are subject to the same impersonal happenstances as everything else in the universe. Given this worldview, our reasoning capabilities are the result of chance forces in nature, which undercuts any reason to embrace atheism. That is, if atheism is true in the objective sense, then we could never know that it is true. Atheism provides no basis for reasoning, and thus no basis for scientific investigation.

This problem can be further illustrated using a thought-experiment. Suppose a certain person named Dan was walking on a beach and encountered the following message written in the sand: *Hi Dan, you should build a sandcastle*. As Dan stares at this particular configuration of sand, he considers whether it contains a message. He recognizes that such configurations do not normally originate through chance movements—as would be the case with wind and water erosion—but wants to open himself up to the possibility nevertheless. Dan reasons that two basic types of causes might explain the configuration—a personal cause or an impersonal cause.

Starting with the assumption of impersonal causation, Dan attempts to demonstrate that the configuration of sand does contain a message. In the end, he determines that this cannot be done, since messages are forms of communication that originate through the acts of personal agents. Put simply, a message requires an act of communication, and an act of communication requires a person to communicate. Impersonal causes, however, are (by definition) not personal. In principle, therefore, impersonal causes cannot perform acts of communication, which further implies that they cannot produce meaningful sentences.

Dan then considers whether a personal cause is able to make the configuration meaningful. He concludes that it is, since personal agents can produce meaningful sentences. Though the configuration of sand never changes in this thought experiment, notice how it illustrates a principled precondition for meaning. When Dan assumed a personal cause, the notion of a meaningful sentence was logically coherent. When he assumed an impersonal cause, however, the notion of a meaningful sentence became logically incoherent.

This thought experiment illustrates the key distinction between atheism and theism. While atheists and theists live in the same cosmos, their opposing perspectives on the cosmos are vastly different. When observing the same exact configuration of the cosmos, atheists assume an impersonal cause, whereas theists assume a personal cause. Given theism, the movements of the universe are meaningful,

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the Age of Neuroscience,” *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 548, italics in original. See also, Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 315.

<sup>28</sup> See Harris, *The End of Faith*, 58.

rational, and intelligible. Given atheism, it seems that we must conclude that *the same universe* has no meaning, rationality, nor intelligibility.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, many atheists will want to reject such a conclusion, since the appearance of meaning, rationality, and intelligibility seem too obvious to discard. Such an intuition is certainly true, just like our intuition regarding the meaningful message in the sand. The problem, however, is that meaning, rationality, and intelligibility does not logically follow from impersonal causation. If one wants to assume impersonal causation, therefore, one is seemingly stuck with this absurd and self-defeating outlook on life. Thus, atheism is not only a worldview; it is apparently a worldview that makes life—including all scientific investigation—meaningless. To assume that unguided processes are responsible for the universe and our cognitive faculties, is to assume that everything produced by the universe and our cognitive faculties is also meaningless—including the assumption that unguided processes are responsible for the universe and our cognitive faculties. One might be free to assume such things, but such assumptions are irrational in principle. This is perhaps why the psalmist wrote, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Ps 14:1).

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<sup>29</sup> For a similar critique of the atheist worldview, see Ronald Nash’s chapter on naturalism in, *World-Views in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 116–29.

# Deep Motivation in Theological Education

— Jonathan D. Worthington —

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**Abstract:** “How can I motivate my students more?” In theological education, as in all education, students will gain the most from our classes and programs if they are deeply motivated and therefore engaged. So, the question of motivation is not minor. But the quantitative aspect of the question above—motivate them *more*—is actually not quite right. Rather, “Are we helping our students be motivated in the best *way*?” This article explores the basic difference between “intrinsic motivation” and “extrinsic motivation.” Most scholars of education think intrinsic motivation is the most potent for deep learning. It is potent, and important for theological education. But there are actually four types of extrinsic motivation, the final of which is just as deep and potent and essential for transformative theological education as anything. This article lays a theoretical foundation and a few practical ideas toward subsequent crucial practical experiments and suggestions for transformative theological education.

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“How can I motivate my students more?” This is a noble ambition, though it is not on the radar of many professors. They focus on how to express something accurately, perhaps even clearly. It will be a new idea to many teachers that they may have a responsibility, or at least an opportunity, to aid a student’s motivation. Some will jump at the opportunity: “Yes, I want to motivate them more. But how?”

In theological education, as in all education, students will gain the most from our classes and programs if they are deeply engaged. So, the question of motivation is not minor. But the quantitative aspect of the question above—motivate them *more*—is actually not quite right. Rather, “Are we helping our students be motivated in the best *way*?”

You have likely heard the catch phrase, “Practice makes perfect.” But what if you are practicing wrong? A tennis player who practices a badly formed serve more and more will actually be harder to help shift to a healthy swing. As my father taught me (borrowed from Vince Lombardi), the truth is that *perfect* practice makes perfect. The type, the way, the quality matters profoundly. It is similar in education. If you help your students be motivated *more*, but with the *wrong kind* of motivation, you may actually be shooting them in the feet as they try to walk the path of growth.

This article on deep motivation nestles into a global movement in higher education that seeks “transformational education.”<sup>1</sup> Transformation is at the heart of education.<sup>2</sup> God’s Spirit transforms, creating life where there is none, shaping dust into beautiful vessels. Yet the Potter has molded humans so that psycho-social motivation is close to the heart of *how* he transforms people. And within human learning, God has not designed all types of motivation to be equal.

### *1. Basic Types of Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic*

There is an important qualitative distinction within motivation: extrinsic vs. intrinsic. (See Figures 1 and 2 below.) The fundamental division point within education is *enjoyment* and *satisfaction* in a learning-task in and of itself. There are additional crucial factors, as we will see below, but this is the most basic divide. My working definitions of these two types of motivation are as follows.<sup>3</sup>

**Intrinsic motivation:** A given task is an end in and of itself.

Enjoyment of the task *per se* is what motivates the student. The motivation to do the task is intrinsic to the learner-and-task relationship.

**Extrinsic motivation:** A given task is performed as a means to an end.

The end, rather than enjoyment of the task itself, is what motivates the student to perform the task. The motivation to do the task is extrinsic to the learner-and-task relationship.

Notice what “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” mean and do not mean within motivation theory. As I have taught motivation theory, this is the typical first point of confusion. The terms are *not* synonymous with “within the person” versus “outside of the person.” The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are about *the relationship between the task and the actor*, not about the internal psychological experience of the actor himself. That is, something will be going on inside the actor’s psyche in both types of motivation, so to equate intrinsic motivation with an internal experience over against extrinsic motivation as something that is merely outside the actor will start us on a poor trajectory from the very beginning and create problems later. We will return to this. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

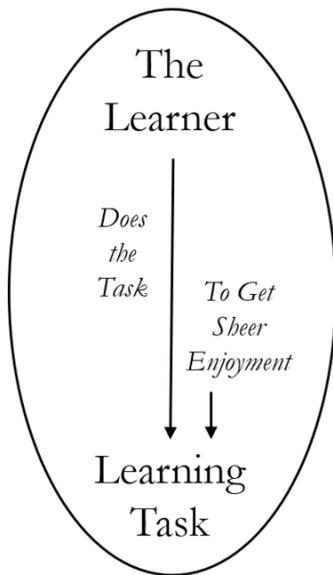
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<sup>1</sup> Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Raymond P. Perry and John C. Smart, “Introduction to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective,” in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective*, ed. Raymond P. Perry and John C. Smart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 2.

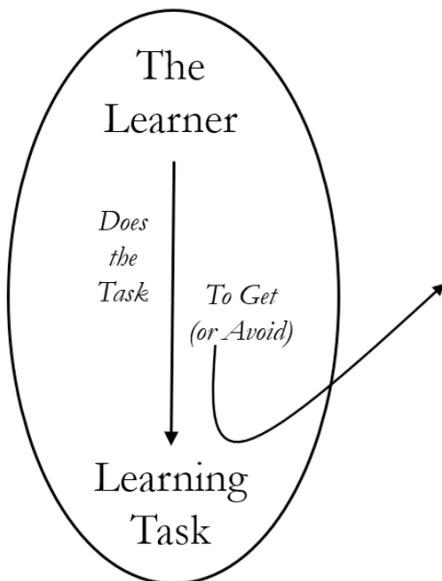
<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jay L. Wenger, “The Implicit Nature of Goal-Directed Motivational Pursuits,” in *Psychology of Motivation*, ed. Lois V. Brown (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2007); Bland Tomkinson, Rosemary Warner, and Alasdair Renfrew, “Developing a Strategy for Student Retention,” *International Journal of Electrical Engineering Education* 39.3 (2002), 210–18; Wilbert J. McKeachie, “Good Teaching Makes a Difference—and We Know What It Is,” in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective*, ed. Raymond P. Perry and John C. Smart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 457–74.

**Figure 1: Intrinsic Motivation**



**“Intrinsic Motivation”**  
The learning task itself is satisfying.

**Figure 2: Extrinsic Motivation**



*“You should do the learning task.”*

*[Here] is what you’ll gain (or avoid) if you do the learning task.*

**“Extrinsic Motivation”**  
The learning task is a means to an end.

According to proponents of intrinsic motivation in learning, the sense of *enjoyment*, of “intrinsic task interest,”<sup>4</sup> is the heart of genuine, deep, perpetual learning.<sup>5</sup> Without *enjoyment* of the learning task, they suggest, the student will not keep at it in a meaningful way, for it will not have sunk deeply into both aspects of their long-term memory, explicit and implicit.<sup>6</sup> Task enjoyment “enhances the attention, effort, and learning one directs toward that activity.”<sup>7</sup> By contrast, *extrinsic motivation* means that something other than the learning task motivates the learner to do it—i.e., something *external* to the relationship between learner and task. The task *per se* is not enjoyable or satisfying. It is the means to a different end.

Most people think of extrinsic motivation as the carrot versus stick technique. An assignment is given. A reward (an A) or punishment (an F) is promised. A student does the assignment to get the grade and pass and graduate. The problem with *extrinsic* motivation, some say, is that “there is no direct relationship between extrinsic motivation and the desired behavior except the sought-after reward.”<sup>8</sup> Neither the carrot, which is the promised reward for good work, nor the stick, which is the threatened punishment for bad work, is truly effective, for they will never “help create the conditions that encourage and inspire others to motivate themselves and achieve optimal performance.”<sup>9</sup> What exactly *is* the natural relationship between, for example, exegeting Exodus 12 or 1 Corinthians 7 and an A grade? Is there anything about being motivated by an A and away from a C or F that, in itself, actually equips the student to exegete better? Granting grades of quality after the fact is one thing; using those as motivations to perform the task itself is quite another.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Eisenberger and Linda Shanock, “Rewards, Intrinsic Motivation, and Creativity: A Case Study of Conceptual and Methodological Isolation,” *Creativity Research Journal* 15.2–3 (2003): 121–30.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Prosser and Keith Trigwell, *Understanding Learning and Teaching: The Experience in Higher Education* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>6</sup> “*Explicit* memory is the conscious recollection of information.... *Implicit* memory comprises habitual actions and attitudes, and includes such things as complex synthetic and evaluative thinking skills, as well as empathetic and aesthetic responses. The key to effective Christian teaching and training is the deep-learning goal of developing significant long-term *explicit* memories that are a continuous resource for life, and, even more importantly, substantial and theologically sound *implicit* memories that have come so much to shape the person that life decisions are habitually formed by healthy reflective practice. It is the retrieval of these long-term explicit and implicit memories that forms the basis of life decisions and actions,” according to Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Cumbria: Langham Partnership, 2014), 135. Cf. Peter Graf and Daniel Schacter, “Implicit and Explicit Memory for New Associations in Normal and Amnesic Subjects,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 11 (1985): 501–18; Björn H. Schott, Richard N. Henson, Alan Richardson-Klavehn, Christine Becker, Volker Thoma, Hans-Jochen Heinze, and Emrah Düzel, “Redefining Implicit and Explicit Memory: The Functional Neuroanatomy of Priming, Remembering and Control of Retrieval,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102 (2005): 1257–62.

<sup>7</sup> Johnmarshall Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 137.

<sup>8</sup> RoseAnne O’Brien Vojtek and Robert Vojtek, *Motivate! Inspire! Lead! Strategies for Building Collegial Learning Communities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2009), building on Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A’s, Praise, and Other Bribes* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Vojtek and Vojtek, *Motivate! Inspire! Lead!*, 16.

On the other hand, scholars observe that *intrinsically* motivated people “learn for its own sake”<sup>10</sup> and do an activity “for inherent satisfaction or pleasure” as if the activity “is reinforcing in-and-of-itself.”<sup>11</sup> Because their motivation is naturally and immediately linked to the task itself, they are thereby “more likely to plumb the depths of understanding.”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Deeply Transformative Intrinsic Motivation

*Intrinsic* motivation—enjoyment and satisfaction with the learning task *per se*—is often connected to maintained satisfaction<sup>13</sup> and good quality production.<sup>14</sup> High-quality conceptual understanding, creativity in their thinking, and persistence in the overall task of learning are each significantly enhanced by *intrinsic* motivation.<sup>15</sup> High *intrinsic* motivation “promotes flexibility in one’s way of thinking, active information processing, and tendency to learn in a way that is conceptual rather than rote.”<sup>16</sup> These qualities sound important for the tasks involved in transformational theological education!

The descriptions above of intrinsic motivation and its benefits compare well with the descriptions of deep learning rather than surface learning by Graham Gibbs (see Figure 3).<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3: Approaches to Learning: Surface to Deep**

<p><b>(1) Surface: Learning as an Increase in Knowledge</b></p> <p>“The student will often see learning as something done to them by teachers rather than as something they do to, or for, themselves.”</p>
<p><b>(2) Surface (Deeper): Learning as Memorizing</b></p> <p>“The student has an active role in memorizing, but the information being memorized is not transformed in any way.”</p>
<p><b>(3) Surface (Deeper): Learning as Acquiring Facts or Procedures to Be Used</b></p> <p>“What you learn is seen to include skills, algorithms, formulae which you apply etc which you will need in order to do things at a later date, but there is still no transformation of what is learnt by the learner.”</p>

<sup>10</sup> Tomkinson, Warner, and Renfrew, “Developing a Strategy for Student Retention,” 211.

<sup>11</sup> Wenger, “The Implicit Nature of Goal-Directed Motivational Pursuits,” 143.

<sup>12</sup> Tomkinson, Warner, Renfrew, “Developing a Strategy for Student Retention,” 211; cf. Graham Gibbs, *Improving the Quality of Student Learning* (Bristol: Technical and Educational Services, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> McKeachie, “Good Teaching Makes a Difference,” 471; Edward L. Deci, “Effects of externally mediated rewards on intrinsic motivation,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 18 (1971): 105–15.

<sup>14</sup> Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25 (2000): 54–67, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 112–13; cf. Ryan and Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations.”

<sup>16</sup> Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> See Gibbs, *Improving the Quality of Student Learning*, 4–5.

**(4) Deep(er): Learning as Making Sense**

“The student makes active attempts to abstract meaning in the process of learning. This may only involve academic tasks.”

**(5) Deep(est): Learning as Understanding Reality**

“Learning enables you to perceive the world differently. This has also been termed ‘personally meaningful learning.’”

Intrinsic motivation can powerfully aid a student in shifting from shallow, surface learning to deep, creative, meaningful, and transformative learning.

When I began teaching, I thought about motivation as merely “intensity level”—the students having more or less.<sup>18</sup> But motivation is about *kind* as well as *level*, about *quality* as well as *quantity*. My understanding was ill-equipped to effectively help students be motivated in a targeted and powerful manner toward deeper, more creative, and more robust biblical and theological learning. I was toying with tabbies instead of stirring up a tiger.

It is hopefully clear that our question should be “How can we motivate our students *in a way* that is conducive to deep learning?” I have already guided you on two steps toward a healthy answer. I described the healthy first step in motivating our students in a better way: recognize *the basic distinction* between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (§1). I then described the healthy second step: see how *intrinsic* motivation is a powerful tool in theological education (§2). But there is more, for a shallow exploration of *extrinsic* motivation has given it a bad rap in deep and transformational learning. There are different levels of extrinsic motivation (§3), and the deepest is profound and powerful (§4).

### *3. Exploring Types of Extrinsic Motivation*

For those who know the basic distinction described above between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, it is popular to champion intrinsic over extrinsic—as if intrinsic motivation claims the lion’s share of raw power for deep learning. We see evidence of this perspective in many of the quotations above. Truly, intrinsic motivation is *very* effective for deep learning. But it is a mistake to downplay the importance of *extrinsic* motivation for deep learning—particularly certain *levels* of extrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation itself has four different levels.<sup>19</sup> When the task *per se* is not inherently enjoyable or satisfying, what might “regulate” a student’s engagement in the learning task? (See the chart in figure 4 below.) The first level of extrinsic motivation is actually effective and good, but for shallow and relatively straight-forward learning. The second and third plumb deeper in important ways. The fourth level of extrinsic motivation is actually excellent for deep and creative learning; in fact, it is just as potent as intrinsic motivation.

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<sup>18</sup> Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan and Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations,” 54–67; Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*.

### 3.1. Reward and Punishment (Extrinsic Motivation Level 1)

A student wants to carry out the learning task in order to get an external reward (e.g., a good grade) or avoid an external punishment (e.g., a fail). He thinks, “What I want is the reward, and I don’t want the fail; I’ll learn the thing.” His motivation to learn X is regulated by gains that are extrinsic to the learner-task relationship *as well as* totally external to the learner himself. The literature calls this form of extrinsic motivation “external regulation.” I will call it “Reward and Punishment” to capture its heart. This is the type of motivation that many people think of when they contrast extrinsic as impotent (like a housecat) with intrinsic as potent (like a tiger). But this is only the first, shallowest level of extrinsic motivation. (See more in §4.1 below.) Keep searching; a lion of motivation is still at large.

### 3.2. Obligation Borrowed (Extrinsic Motivation Level 2)

A student is told he *should* complete the learning task, that it is important. He injects into himself the teacher’s “should” in such a way that he now really does want to do it, but only so as to feel pride or avoid feeling guilt. He reasons (perhaps unconsciously), “You say this is important to do? Okay, it’s important; I’ll do it.” The literature calls this form of extrinsic motivation “introjected regulation.”<sup>20</sup> I will call this level “Obligation Borrowed” to capture its heart. The student’s motivation to learn X is regulated by something external to the learner-task relationship. It is borrowed from outside that relationship, though being introjected it is therefore a little more internalized, and thus a little deeper than the purely external regulation at Level 1.

### 3.3. Abstract Importance (Extrinsic Motivation Level 3)

A student is told that a certain learning task demonstrates or aids in acquiring a certain value or quality, such as the responsibility to handle the poetic aspects of God’s word well. Since the student identifies with the *abstract principle* that such a responsibility is good and valuable, he wants to do the learning task. He reasons, “Yes, this task matches what I also think this is important. I’ll do it.” He is not motivated by some disconnected and purely external offering (Level 1). He also does not merely unconsciously borrow and introject someone else’s (the teacher’s) ought (Level 2). Rather, the importance and benefit of the learning task resonates with his own value system. His motivation to learn X is “regulated” by something he already identifies as valuable, even though only as an abstract principle. This form of extrinsic motivation is thereby more internalized and deeper still than either Reward and Punishment (Level 1) or Obligation Borrowed (Level 2). It is still “extrinsic” to the task-and-doer relationship, for it is not the enjoyment or satisfaction of doing the learning task itself that motivates the learner. The literature calls this third level of extrinsic motivation “identified regulation.” I will call it “Abstract Importance” to capture its heart. This *relevance* of a learning opportunity for a present but abstract value system is potent for deep learning. Though the lion is next.

### 3.4. Relevance for Identity (Extrinsic Motivation Level 4)

A student is told the learning task demonstrates or aids in acquiring a certain value or quality, such as the responsibility to handle poetry in God’s word well. (This is like Level 3 above, at this point.) But he does not merely think that this responsibility is valuable, in the somewhat abstract sense of Level 3 above.

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<sup>20</sup> Merriam-Webster defines “introject” as “to incorporate (attitudes or ideas) into one’s personality unconsciously.”

He believes that such a responsibility regarding Scripture is part of his very character and identity—*who he is*—so he wants to do the task. Perhaps he believes that honoring God and his ways is non-negotiable for himself as a human and Christian, and that handling God’s word with careful attention to the way God inspired it is necessary for honoring God appropriately. He reasons, “I must learn this if I am to *be* who I am supposed to *be*. I’ll do it.” The literature calls this form of extrinsic motivation “integrated regulation” since the motivation is integrated into the very fabric of the student’s self-identity. I will call this deepest level “Relevance for Identity” to capture its heart. Even though he still does not enjoy the learning task *per se*, and so his motivation to engage it is still extrinsic to the student-task relationship, his motivation to learn X is “regulated” by something fully integrated into his personhood, his sense of

**Figure 4: Intrinsic Motivation and Four Types of Extrinsic Motivation**

<p><b>Intrinsic Motivation</b> The task is the end itself. It is done because it is enjoyable and satisfying.</p>	<p>A student wants to do a learning task because he finds it satisfying and enjoyable in itself.  <i>“This is enjoyable and satisfying. I’ll do it.”</i></p>	<p>Deep Motivation (deep learning)</p>
<p><b>Extrinsic Motivation</b> The task is a means to an end. It is done not out of enjoyment itself but because it will lead to something else that is deemed desirable.</p>	<p><i>Rewards and Punishments</i> (External Regulation)  <i>“I want to get the reward. I’ll do it.”</i></p>	<p>Shallow Motivation (shallow learning)  ↓</p>
	<p><i>Obligation Borrowed</i> (Introjected Regulation)  <i>“You say I should do it? Okay, I’ll do it.”</i></p>	<p>(deeper motivation)  ↓</p>
	<p><i>Abstract Importance</i> (Identified Regulation)  <i>“Yes, I do see this is important. I’ll do it.”</i></p>	<p>(deeper learning)  ↓</p>
	<p><i>Relevance for Identity</i> (Integrated Regulation)  <i>“This is important for who I am. I’ll do it.”</i></p>	<p>Deep Motivation (deep learning)</p>

identity. This form of *relevance* for personal and communal identity is the most potent form of extrinsic motivation and powerfully feeds the deepest, most lasting, and transformative learning.

Abstract Importance (Level 3) and Relevance for Identity (Level 4) are both essentially about *relevance*. Does the student “identify” with the relevance of the task, even if abstractly so? Abstract Importance is deep extrinsic motivation: “I can see that this is *relevant* to principles I value; therefore, it is *important*. I want to do it.” But the relevance is still relatively abstract, about held principles. This shifts when the relevance of the task is fully “integrated” in the student’s self-perception. Relevance for Identity is *very* deep extrinsic motivation: “This is so *relevant* for my own identity that it is *essential*. I really want to—indeed I *must*—do it or I will not be who I was created, saved, and called to be!” The student still may not find it enjoyable. But the identity-formation and the learning task are so naturally and intimately connected that the student is now deeply motivated and even equipped to perform the learning task. It will transform him. And it will enable him to transform others.

#### *4. Deeply Transformative Extrinsic Motivation*

I have briefly outlined the four basic types of extrinsic motivation (§3). Let us now compare some of them in more detail, particularly the shallowest level of extrinsic motivation (Reward and Punishment, “external regulation”) with the deepest level of extrinsic motivation (Relevance for Identity, “integrated regulation”). The nuances will help us understand our students more fully and enable us to creatively contemplate our practice in the classroom.

##### **4.1. Exploring Shallow Extrinsic Motivation—Reward and Punishment**

A common type of motivation used by teachers and professors is Reward and Punishment, or “external regulation,” the shallowest form of extrinsic motivation. In some ways, most educational systems lend themselves to this. The teacher presents a reward—a carrot, a good grade, a degree—or a punishment—a stick, a bad grade, a fail—as motivation to participate in learning tasks. The students are motivated to learn X, not because they *enjoy* X (intrinsically), nor because they *care* about X (either as Obligation Borrowed or as Abstract Importance), and certainly not because they feel they *must* do X so as to *be* who they understand they are created, saved, and called to be (Relevance for Identity). They are motivated to learn X because they want the good grade and the degree, and they don’t want the bad grade or the fail.

Students ask, “Will this be on the exam?” Their subtext is, “Do I need to learn this to get a good grade? Because if it won’t help me pass, then I won’t waste my time learning it.” Professors say, “If you want an A on this essay, you need to do X, Y, and Z.” It is helpful to make expectations clear, of course; but if such statements are the professor’s majority approach to motivation, they subtly embed student motivation in the shallowest realm of reward and punishment. It becomes the pattern in which the majority of the professor’s students function and the default source from which they seek motivation.

Because of the *type* of motivation used—Reward and Punishment—the student may be able to perform X quickly. He may even be able to perform X “well”—i.e., getting a good grade. However, because he craves the carrot or despises the stick without (1) caring about X itself (intrinsic, the tiger of motivation) or (2) caring about how his character or identity would be shaped by learning X (deep extrinsic, the lion of motivation), his learning of X will not actually sink into him deeply. He is being nudged along by that tabby cat rubbing his leg. Neither the learning nor the motivation will stick with

him over the long haul. He will not persevere in the learning when it is difficult. The carrot and stick will certainly not help him be transformed by his learning and enable him to transform others by it, for he does not find it enjoyable or relevant.

But it is not just that shallow extrinsic motivation is *weak* compared to deep extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. *Quality* is an issue here too. Do you want your students to learn or do something that inherently involves critical thinking and creativity?<sup>21</sup> The *type* of motivation matters again.

Education in general can have a transformative and moral aim, helping shape students into global citizens who are better able to produce health in and through their respective fields. Charles Kivunja points out that a crucial aspect of this transformation in any field involves gaining “skills in critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation,” and that one important task of an educator is to “provide for the training of students to gain mastery” in these skills and patterns.<sup>22</sup> For theological education, wise living, biblical interpretation, theological thinking, and expositional and pastoral communication all involve creativity—they tend to be more art than science. However, when students arrive for a theology degree, “criticality” is not on many of their radars, and certainly not to the degree of importance that it is for their soon-to-be professors.<sup>23</sup> Students tend to consider the education they are about to undergo as having their knowledge *quantitatively expanded*; professors tend to want students’ knowledge *qualitatively deepened* as well. The latter involves learning to critically engage primary and secondary material and to creatively solve problems.

But the carrot or stick form of motivation can actually undercut such learning aims. Not all types of motivation aid flexible, creative, and critical thinking. In particular, totally external motivators such as grades in education and monetary bonuses in a work-place actually appear to cripple creativity.<sup>24</sup> Carrots and sticks put blinders on a thinker, narrowing his view to accomplish the task. This helps him “get the job done.” And this can be good—depending on what *type* of job it is. But when the “job” requires thinking “outside the box,” such shallow incentives streamline the sight and thereby block from view anything beyond the blinders, anything outside the box.<sup>25</sup> But how much of the work of biblical

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<sup>21</sup> For definitions of critical thinking, see Peter A. Facione, “Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts,” *Insight Assessment* (2013): 1–28; Peter A. Facione, *Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction* (Millbrae: California Academic Press, 1990); and the interaction with his summary in Edward de Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*, revised and updated (London: Penguin, 2000) and Charles Kivunja, “Using De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats Model to Teach Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills Essential for Success in the 21st Century Economy,” *Creative Education* 6 (2015): 380–91.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Kivunja, “Do You Want Your Students to Be Job-Ready with 21st Century Skills? Change Pedagogies: A Pedagogical Paradigm Shift from Vygotskian Social Constructivism to Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Siemens’ Digital Connectivism,” *International Journal of Higher Education* 3.3 (2014): 81–91.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara E. Walvoord, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 13–18.

<sup>24</sup> See Vojtek and Vojtek, *Motivate! Inspire! Lead!*; McKeachie, “Good Teaching Makes a Difference”; Kohn, *Punished by rewards*; Deci, “Effects of externally mediated rewards on intrinsic motivation.” Cf. Dan Pink, “The Puzzle of Motivation,” *TedGlobal*, July 2009, [https://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_pink\\_the\\_puzzle\\_of\\_motivation](https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_the_puzzle_of_motivation); Kendra Cherry, “What is Intrinsic Motivation?,” *Verywell Mind*, 27 September 2019, <http://psychology.about.com/od/motivation/f/intrinsic-motivation.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Pink, “The Puzzle of Motivation”; Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 112–13; Beth A. Hennessey and Teresa M. Amabile, “Reality, Intrinsic Motivation, and Creativity,” *American Psychologist* 53 (1998): 674–75; Mary Ann Collins and Teresa M. Amabile, “Motivation and Creativity,” in *Handbook of Creativity*, ed. Robert Sterberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 297–312.

scholars, students, or pastors is neatly contained in a box? The popular version of motivation is not only weak; it can be damaging for precisely what professors want in their students! Our default form of motivation actually may be blinding their ability to engage in deep, creative learning.

Do you want your students to be deeply transformed by their biblical and theological studies? Do you want them to be better able to transform others? Do you want them to be more equipped to think critically and creatively? If so, then you do *not* want to give them *more* motivation—if this is the type. But, as we have seen, there are more options.

#### 4.2. Exploring Deep Extrinsic Motivation— Relevance for Identity

Phil Race and Sally Brown agree that “motivation to learn” is enhanced “by raising interest levels”—that is, intrinsic motivation—but *also* by “helping them [the students] to see the *relevance* of the topics they are working with.”<sup>26</sup> This was a crucial addition for me as a New Testament professor and designer of theological education. Students do not always *think* that perceived relevance is crucial to their learning,<sup>27</sup> but it is truly profound.

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci argue that when the student “has identified with the *personal importance* of a behavior,” seeing the task (or the behavior that comes from learning the task) as “relevant” to what they “value as a life goal,” they have actually shifted toward being intrinsically motivated to learn it.<sup>28</sup> One aspect of this statement is helpful; two aspects of it need to be modified in light of the research presented above.

First, positively, it is helpful to recognize that *relevance* and *personal importance* are indeed important for deep acquisition of knowledge and skill. However, negatively, identifying with the importance of a learning task because it is relevant for a life goal, as important as that is, is actually more akin to the third level of *extrinsic* motivation (Abstract Importance), not the deepest level. It is still relatively abstract as it is about *where they want to get* in life rather than *who they are* and *believe they must be*. (Identity and goal are, of course, intimately related.) Seeing the learning as relevant to, valuable as, and integrated into their very identity is the even deeper form of extrinsic motivation (Relevance for Identity) than Ryan and Deci direct us toward.

There is one other problem with Ryan and Deci’s otherwise valuable statement above. The shift toward seeing a learning moment as relevant for what they value as a life goal is *not* really a shift toward being *intrinsically* motivated to learn it. This is a confusion of categories. Imagine a student shifting from *borrowing* someone else’s conviction that the learning task is important (Extrinsic Level 2, Obligation Borrowed or “introjected regulation”) to fully identifying with the value *in principle* because of their own value system and life goals (Extrinsic Level 3, Abstract Importance or “identified regulation”) and even finally to seeing the learning task as *integral to their very sense of self* (Extrinsic Level 4, Relevance for Identity or “integrated regulation”). While this progression toward depth does shift further into the heart of the person (and it is therefore being more deeply *internalized*), it does *not* thereby shift them

<sup>26</sup> Phil Race and Sally Brown, *The Lecturer’s Toolkit* (London: Kogan Page, 1999). This is done well in biblical studies by Moyer Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2010), 2–3.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth A. Feldman, “Identifying Exemplary Teachers and Teaching: Evidence from Student Ratings,” in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective*, ed. Raymond P. Perry and John C. Smart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 93–143.

<sup>28</sup> Ryan and Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations,” 62.

into *enjoying and finding satisfaction in the learning task itself*. The basic distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is important to maintain here. I will explain why.

Remember, intrinsic motivation is about enjoyment and satisfaction in the task *per se*. It is not about what is internal in the learner's psychology, but about what is intrinsic to the learner-task relationship. The deepest forms of *extrinsic* motivation are also highly *internal* to the learner—principles and values (Level 3) and identity (Level 4)—but they are nonetheless still extrinsic to the learner-task relationship. If the learner does not inherently enjoy and find satisfaction in the task itself, then his motivation is not “intrinsic” even if it is psychologically deeply internal; it must come from somewhere other than (outside of) the learner-task relationship itself—such as obligation, principles, or self-identity.

Some scholars think intrinsic motivation is essential for deep learning. It is certainly profound for deep learning. But is it essential? Is it essential for critical and creative learning? For *all* deep learning? No.

First, the deepest form of extrinsic motivation (relevance for identity) also enlivens critical and creative thinking. Being motivated extrinsically—if one of the deeper forms—enables the student to engage in *high-quality* conceptual understanding, *creativity*, *persistence* in learning, and ability to “think about and integrate information in a *flexible*, less rigid, and conceptual way.”<sup>29</sup> So, no, intrinsic motivation is not essential for all deep learning.

Second, some ideas and tasks are crucial to learn deeply but are never enjoyable and satisfying in and of themselves—nor should they be. We do not actually want our students to have *only* intrinsic motivation. We must *not* cultivate the mindset or practice that they only engage in learning if they enjoy it. Many of them already have that idea, and it is a problem when trying to get them to engage in learning tasks that we know are valuable regardless of enjoyment. For such tasks, Abstract Importance (Extrinsic Level 3) and, especially, Relevance for Identity (Extrinsic Level 4) are needed, not intrinsic motivation. Our students need the variety in their program of learning.

Since we are addressing theological education in particular, consider Christ's own suffering and his followers' suffering for Christ and his people. Did Jesus himself *enjoy* the suffering he was tasked with by his Father, and should his followers?

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, *he learned obedience through what he suffered*. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Heb 5:7–9 ESV, emphasis added)

As Jesus faced his pain and shame, he pled and supplicated the Father with strong clamour and tears for such fatal suffering to be taken away. This is not enjoyment of the task at hand!

Christ's suffering was not (and should not be) enjoyable in and of itself. Enjoying and being satisfied with pain, injustice, and abuse is a dangerous form of psychopathology!<sup>30</sup> And it is a misunderstanding

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<sup>29</sup> Quoting but contra Reeve, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 112–13. The deeper forms of extrinsic motivation can also produce creativity, flexibility of thinking, high-quality deep learning—indeed robust criticality. See James C. Kaufman, *Creativity 101* (New York: Springer, 2009); Eisenberger and Shanock, “Rewards, Intrinsic Motivation, and Creativity”; Judy Cameron and W. David Pierce, *Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation: Resolving the Controversy* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Otto Kernberg, “Clinical Dimensions of Masochism,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 36 (1988): 1005–29.

of Christ and his calling. Jesus deeply *learned* something valuable—obedience—by persevering in the unenjoyable and unsatisfying task. He also gained the satisfying honor of being the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, and the joyful task of sitting at the right hand of God’s throne. The suffering was a means to an end, not an end itself. It was “for the *joy* set before him” that “he *endured* the cross” (not enjoyed it) and “*despised* its shame” (not being satisfied with it). And thus he got to “sit down at the right hand of God’s throne” (Heb 12:2). While the task *per se* was not enjoyable or satisfying, what Jesus would deeply learn and gain by engaging it and persevering in it was relevant and valuable to himself—and to those whom he would transform through it.

In the language of this article, Christ was *not intrinsically* motivated to go to the cross. He rightly despised the cross and its shame in and of themselves. But he was nonetheless profoundly and deeply motivated to accomplish the task. Christ was *extrinsically* motivated to bear the cross and shame for us—*deeply* motivated, even *internally* motivated, but “*extrinsically*” motivated.

And what of Jesus’s followers? How do we learn to obey him? The author of Hebrews resumes the theme later in his sermonic epistle: we fix our eyes on Jesus (12:2–3) and “endure” difficulties so that we are “disciplined, trained, educated” (παιδεία, 12:7). Of course, “no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful” (12:11). This means we will *not be intrinsically motivated* to accomplish such learning—that would be wrong. “Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have received exercise [γεγυμνασμένοις] through it” (12:11). Like Christ before us and for us, we are to be *deeply extrinsically motivated* to endure and be educated by difficulties, for they are *relevant* to our very identity and calling as siblings and followers of Jesus.

Therefore we strive to deeply study and learn and practice and grow in following Christ in his mission. We bear our cross and serve others sacrificially. We should see this aspect as essential to *who we are* as followers of Christ, since it is part of Christ’s own *identity*. It is *not* worthwhile to pursue *because we enjoy it*. But suffering *is* deeply *relevant* to our core identity in Christ in this fallen world. We do not enjoy *it*. We should not. But that deep form of *extrinsic* motivation should, in fact, motivate us to persevere in learning the patience and obedience and selflessness that come through suffering in a deep and transformative way—and a way that helps us transform others.

So it is with other elements of theological education. Some tasks and aspects are enjoyable and satisfying in and of themselves—more than many of us realize and more than many of us nurture in the classroom (see §5.1 below). But some elements and tasks are simply not enjoyable. Yet they are exceedingly good. They are important for our identity as humans created by God and re-created in Christ together. And they are important for teachers to try to stimulate in a suitable way (see §5.2 below).

## 5. Conclusions for Practice

This article has provided a theoretical framework for understanding human motivations and their relationship to theological education. It also has attempted to stimulate you within that research-based framework to experiment practically with various forms of motivation for your students’ transformation. A few concrete classroom ideas and examples regarding intrinsic and deep extrinsic motivation will help.

## 5.1. Practical Experiments with Intrinsic Motivation

As we have seen, “How can I motivate my students more?” is not quite the right question. Imagine instead that you can motivate your students differently—more deeply, more appropriately, more richly. Imagine that you can help your students *enjoy* different aspects of biblical studies and theological thinking *per se*. Imagine that you can help them *find satisfaction* in the hard work of digging into Scripture and discussing its meaning and implications with their community of believers. Intrinsic motivation is a powerful tool for deep, transformative learning. It is a tiger among the motivations. Pursue it. There are practical ways. For example, when seeking to stir up the king of the lush jungle of joy and satisfaction—intrinsic motivation—remember four key words: Contagion, Longing, Action, Wonder.

### 5.1.1. Contagion

A professor’s own intrigue with and passion for his subject or skill is highly *contagious*. This helps stimulate enjoyment and satisfaction in the topic or skill itself. Marva Collins has famously said, “The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.” I have seen its impact. One student said to me after a public lecture I gave, “Thank you for inviting us into your curiosity and guiding us with you along your journey of discovery. I had never before asked those questions in that way, and I look forward to thinking more about those texts.” Contagion.

### 5.1.2. Longing

In addition, a sense of *longing* for what will be revealed and discovered is highly compelling<sup>31</sup> and helps invigorate enjoyment in the topic or skill. I begin some classes with “The Challenge.” I put intriguing but seemingly disconnected pictures or words on the screen. One morning the slide had an elephant, an elf, a lemur, and a highway cloverleaf. The day’s topic was Second Temple Judaism and Messianic Expectation. At the beginning of class, the students must guess the connection between the images or words and the day’s topic. (They will never get it “right,” so I encourage creativity, which also brings some laughs and “situational interest.”) Throughout the learning time, then, each picture reappears in a context that finally makes sense within the topic. One morning, as the third picture was revealed (two hours after it was initially put up!), a student uncontrollably exclaimed, “Ooooh—*that’s* how!” Similar murmurs followed from other students. She had retained for hours the curiosity and longing for how the images could possibly be connected to the day’s topic, paying attention to the details of the topic and waiting for how it would all make sense. Longing.

### 5.1.3. Action

What is more, a student finds greater satisfaction in a given task when he actually experiences success *in action*—in the doing of it<sup>32</sup>—i.e., when he feels in concrete real time his own “self-efficacy”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Reeve (*Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, 137) points to the potential of “situational interest” as a spark for task interest, in turn creating or enhancing intrinsic motivation.

<sup>32</sup> McKeachie, “Good Teaching Makes a Difference,” 471; James H. McMillan and Amanda B. Turner, “Understanding Student Voices about Assessment: Links to Learning and Motivation” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, April 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Dale H. Schunk, “Self-Efficacy and Academic Motivation,” *Educational Psychologist* 26 (1991): 207. Cf. J. E. Susskind, “PowerPoint’s Power in the Classroom: Enhancing Students’ Self-Efficacy and Attitudes,” *Computers &*

and “competence”<sup>34</sup> in what he has been challenged to do. My previous approach to teaching critical engagement with scholarship on biblical themes involved scattered pep-talks and “motivational speeches” about how they can use constructive criticism more than they may think. Then I learned that *action* is profound for satisfaction in learning.

So, I divided a class into groups of five students. Each group selected a topic from a book—e.g., creation, covenant, idolatry, messiah, law, salvation, kingdom—and had to read the book’s chapter on their topic.<sup>35</sup> As a group they had to research other secondary literature on their theme. In their group presentation, then, each member of each group had a task: one must accurately describe what Williams wrote about their theme; one must describe at least one alternative view of that theme; one must explain at least three strong points from Williams; one must explain at least three weak points of Williams’ presentation; one must summarize what their group had learned about the theme. Instead of merely being *told* that they could constructively critique a piece of theological scholarship better than they realized, they were given the opportunity to actually do it, to experience success in action. Numerous students reflected afterward that critical engagement was no longer that scary and foreign beast that it had seemed; it was doable—and even kind of fun. Action.

#### 5.1.4. Wonder

A sense of *wonder* in subjects and skills is one of the greatest God-given tools for being intrinsically satisfied with joy in learning itself. For instance, John Steinbeck wrote about three standout teachers he had, and especially one, in a short essay to his son called “...Like Captured Fireflies”:

My three had these things in common: They all loved what they were doing. They did not tell—they catalyzed a burning desire to know. Under their influence, the horizons sprung wide and fear went away and the unknown became knowable. But most important of all, the truth, that dangerous stuff, became beautiful and very precious.

I shall speak only of my first teacher because, in addition to other things, she brought discovery. She aroused us to shouting, bookwaving discussions.... She breathed curiosity into us so that we brought in facts or truths shielded in our hands like captured fireflies.... She left a passion in us for the pure knowable world and me she inflamed with a curiosity which has never left me.... I have had many teachers who told me soon-forgotten facts but only three who created in me a new thing, a new attitude and a new hunger.<sup>36</sup>

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*Education* 45 (2005): 203–15. J. E. Susskind, “Limits of PowerPoint’s Power: Enhancing Students’ Self-Efficacy and Attitudes but not Their Behavior,” *Computers & Education* 50 (2008): 1228–39.

<sup>34</sup> Ryan and Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations,” 58. Cf. Gregory C. Wolniak, Matthew J. Mayhew, and Mark E. Engberg, “Learning’s Weak Link to Persistence,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 83 (2012): 795–823; McKeachie, “Good Teaching Makes a Difference,” 462.

<sup>35</sup> We used Drake Williams III, *Making Sense of the Bible: A Study of 10 Key Themes Traced Through the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> John Steinbeck, “...Like Captured Fireflies,” *California Teachers Association Journal* 51.11 (November 1955): 6–9.

An insatiable sense of wonder seems particularly fitting in theological education wherein the subject is the wonder-full God and the mystery of his revelation in Christ, through Scripture and creation, by the Spirit, within the community of faith. Wonder.

Based on the concepts and research presenting in this article, and perhaps prompted by these few practical ideas and experiments, think creatively and with colleagues about how you can stimulate *contagion*, *longing*, *action*, and *wonder* in your classroom, homework, and even assignments. (Yes, those too.) Experiment for the sake of your students' enjoyment, satisfaction, and thus deep intrinsic motivation to learn, be transformed, and transform others.

### 5.2. Practical Experiments with Deep Extrinsic Motivation

Finally, also imagine helping your students find *relevance* in understanding and communicating Scripture and in responsible theological thinking, even in the parts and at the times that are simply not fun. Push beyond surface-level *rewards and punishments* while being conscious that such motivations are what students have been trained to crave. Allow your students to *borrow your sense of obligation*—i.e., tell your students that this idea or that task is important—but do not be satisfied to stop there. Do not set them up merely to introject the values of their respected authority figures (as good as that is at one level). Help them see the *importance* of an idea or task within their own value system, even though this is relatively *abstract*. Yet do not stop even with that, as good as that type of motivation is for certain tasks.

Rather, picture your students also seeing the *relevance* of various aspects of their theological education for the essence of *who they are* as humans, in Christ, and in a community.<sup>37</sup> That form of extrinsic motivation is a lion among the motivations. It is the king of the arid savannah where joy and satisfaction may be hard to come by but where life and learning are still vital and good to hunt down. Consider how to stimulate *relevance for identity*. There are practical ways. Here are two ideas, one seeking to stimulate Abstract Importance (Extrinsic Level 3) and the other Relevance for Identity (Extrinsic Level 4).

#### 5.2.1. Abstract Importance

Regarding Abstract Importance, I explained to my students in Theological Study Skills a citation game that they were about to play. (Yes, you read that correctly: a citation game.) Each team would race to put different types of bibliographic information into proper Chicago style footnote and bibliography formats. Before they attempted the task—which, although made more interesting and fun by the game, still seemed pointless to many of them—I paused to share an idea as to how this was important for something they already deemed worthwhile:

It is obviously important to give credit where credit is due—in general. But why do you really need to learn details of formatting it? Parentheses? Commas?!

Think about it this way: When you go to a different culture or begin a new job, you must learn seemingly strange customs, ways the people in the new environment do things. They have reasons for doing what they do, even if it is lost on you at first. It would be easy to simply not care about and not learn the new ways. But then you would not have as much impact on the new environment as you otherwise could. You wouldn't

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<sup>37</sup> Identity should not be hyper-individualized. Fight that American short-sightedness.

make as much sense to the new listeners. You may even offend your new neighbors or colleagues. The *skill* of paying careful attention, learning, practicing, and adhering to new ways of doing something within a new culture is an important *life-skill*. And it is precisely that skill that you are practicing with citation styles. Practice for life.

The learning task itself was actually helpful for equipping them to practice something they already thought was important, and now they saw the connection. It was still relatively abstract. But there was nevertheless now a more powerful force within them to learn and do it. (And practicing citations in a game was like taking medicine with a spoonful of intrinsic motivation.)

### 5.2.2. *Relevance for Identity*

Finally, regarding Relevance for Identity, the deepest form of extrinsic motivation has to do with seeing the theological subject, or task, or skill as relevant for their very identity—as a human, in Christ, within relationships. How can we help rouse the king of beasts in our students, helping their theological education be *relevant for their identity*? Here is one final story, given to stimulate your own creative thoughts, conversations, and experiments.

I had a student, Wade, who did not like to exegete books or passages of Scripture. He did not see the point in analyzing the minutiae of grammar and syntax (which was his understanding of what exegesis was) or exploring socio-historical issues related to texts. He did not even see the value in constantly asking, “But is that what the author intended?” because, he reasoned, it is the Holy Spirit that gives understanding. (His theology of inspiration wrongly assumed there is no link between those two). Exegesis was certainly not inherently enjoyable and satisfying for him—he was a self-proclaimed “practical hands-on kinda guy” and did not *enjoy* thinking hard. And perhaps he never would *enjoy* such things, at least not the way some people do who are wired differently. But even more problematic than his lack of enjoyment was that Wade did not find thinking hard about authorial intent in exegesis *important* either. It was not *relevant* for pastoring. It was certainly not *relevant* for him to be who he thought he was or needed to be.

Over months of in-class engagement, and some out-of-class chats too, Wade became deeply motivated to exegete Scripture. A few years later he reached out to me and reflected the key change as he saw it:

I didn’t see the point. But that changed when you started comparing Bible exegesis to my relationship with my wife. And my kids too.

I’d thought for a long time that to be a true man, and to be the type of man God calls me to be, I need to listen carefully to other people—especially my wife. My dad taught me that, though I see it more clearly now that I’m married. I’ve seen it so many times. Whenever I’m not really listening to what my wife is sayin’, but thinkin’ I already know and don’t agree and what I’ll respond back, we get in big fights. And she’s always like, “That’s *not* what I’m sayin’!” And then I realize, I’m not being the husband God wants me to be because I’m not really listenin’ to what she really means. I’m not really being the Christian man Christ saved me to be.

And then you were like, “Asking what the author is sayin’ and really payin’ careful attention to what the Holy Spirit inspired the author to write is like listening carefully to your wife, or mom or dad, or kids, or neighbor. Relationships flourish more when you actually *exegete* what someone is sayin’ to you.”

And I was like, “Oh man. How can my relationship with God flourish if I don’t even really listen carefully to what he inspired and how he inspired it? If I don’t exegete his word carefully?! If I don’t even do with God what I know I need to do with my wife and kids!”

Most student motivation stories have not been this clear and exciting. Wade is a success story, but not because he started to enjoy the hard work of exegeting Scripture. (Though I do think he has grown in his satisfaction with exegesis *per se*, at least to some extent.) Wade is a success story because his motivation to learn responsible exegesis turned into a lion within him as he realized that the call to and skills to exegete were intimately tied to his sense of self-identity before God and in relation to others. He did not merely value the abstract *principle* of “listening carefully” to a speaker, admitting that such practice is truly helpful and healthy for the Bible too. Even that would have been powerful. But still more powerfully, Wade understood that his own identity—as a human under God, as a man, as a Christian, as a husband—profoundly matured in a causative positive correlation with a maturing ability to exegete what others say or write, especially if the speaker is God through a human author. This shift in the type of motivation changed his learning. He not only began exegeting with more quantitative vigor. He also began exegeting with greater qualitative worth.

This article has provided a theoretical framework for understanding human motivations and their relationship to theological education. It also has attempted to stimulate you within that research-based framework to experiment practically with various forms of motivation for your students’ transformation. Ultimately, I seek to challenge you to *demonstrate and nurture intrinsic task enjoyment* in theological education, but also to clarify and help your students think deeply about *the relevance of their training for their identity as humans in Christ within community*. Remember, it is not so much about helping your students be more motivated, but better motivated. Get creative in your theological education—for the sake of your students’ deep and lasting growth, and for their consequent transformation of others.

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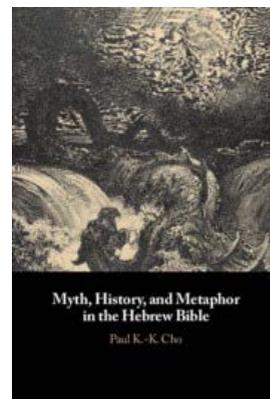
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## — OLD TESTAMENT —

Paul K.-K. Cho. *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xii + 265 pp. £75.00/\$105.00.

This is a PhD dissertation completed in 2014 at Harvard University under the supervision of Jon Levenson. The book's title suggests a general exploration of myth and history with reference to metaphor, but the original Harvard dissertation's title of "The Sea in the Hebrew Bible: Myth, Metaphor, and Muthos" is more accurate for highlighting Cho's focus on the sea as a mythological motif. Beginning with Hermann Gunkel's 1895 publication of *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, Old Testament scholars have debated whether the Hebrew term תְּהוֹם ("deep, abyss"; Gen 1:2) represents a demythologization of *Enuma Elish's* portrayal of the Babylonian sea goddess Tiamat. In contrast to both positions, Cho asserts that the either-or choice between myth and history is unnecessary because "the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and sea myths is metaphorical, which is not to say that is merely ornamental—but neither is the relationship one of literal equivalence or figural similitude" (p. 3).



The novelty of Cho's approach lies not so much in its use of metaphor theory to approach the myth-history nexus (see, e.g., Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 41–81), but in his claim that the so-called *Chaoskampf* lies at the center of the Old Testament: "The sea myth did not only color biblical historiography and theology but also gave shape to its theological and historical imagination *as its structuring principle*.... Biblical writers mapped *all biblical time*, from the creation to the eschaton, onto the plot of the sea myth" (p. 10, italics added). The result of this totalizing approach to myth resembles older OT scholarship in identifying a single *Mitte* for OT theology, such as covenant for Walther Eichrodt or the promise-plan of God for Walter Kaiser, Jr. Accordingly, Cho's proposal for the sea myth exhibits the same propensity to combine a heuristic sense for the unity of the OT with an inability to encompass its diversity.

Cho's book unfolds across eight chapters. Following an opening chapter to situate his argument, chapter 2 offers Cho's own definition of myth as "a story about weighty matters involving deities, human beings, and other personalities that, in the understanding of its adherents, reveals something true about the real order of the world" (pp. 11–12). While such a broad definition falls within the mainstream of myth studies, Cho's use of the underlying Aristotelian term *muthos* shows that he regards myth narrowly as the narrative feature of plot: "the *muthos* of a story is the events set in their chronological order" (p. 15). Cho also draws on Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor to propose that the biblical writers used the sea myth "to en flesh and motivate their accounts.... They do not retell the sea myth, but they recount what they believed or hoped are real events as metaphor displays" (p. 33). Chapter 3 builds on these theoretical foundations by summarizing the main ideas from Mesopotamia's *Enuma Elish* and Ugarit's *Baal Cycle*. Cho finds that they both contain the four characteristic themes of the sea *muthos*: combat and victory over the sea, creation, temple, and kingship (p. 63). The next four chapters examine this myth's presence in OT texts on creation (ch. 4), the exodus (ch. 5), the exile (ch. 6), and the eschaton (ch. 7), followed by a concluding chapter.

Cho succeeds in showing that the choice between myth and history in the OT often becomes a false dichotomy which is at odds with ancient Near Eastern ways of thinking. However, two significant problems hamper his work. First, Cho never resolves the tension between his thesis that “the sea myth is the ocean that bears the islands of biblical literature and thought” (p. 10) and the textual reality of “the fragmentary nature of biblical allusions and references to myth” (p. 17). If the sea myth in the OT were truly ubiquitous as water, it would be at best an ocean which is rarely visible, or at worst like minor waterways which surround the OT’s massive continents of historical narrative and non-mythic poetry. It is true that OT writers use the imagery of primordial combat as one way of conceptualizing creation (as in Psalms 74 and 77), but Cho has overlooked his *Doktorvater’s* observation that the Hebrew Bible also speaks of rebellion from within creation itself, which has nothing to do with mythic conflict (Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], 10). Simply put, Cho’s recognition that each phase of biblical history can be described with sea imagery does not support his conclusion that this is the most dominant, or even a common, way of doing so.

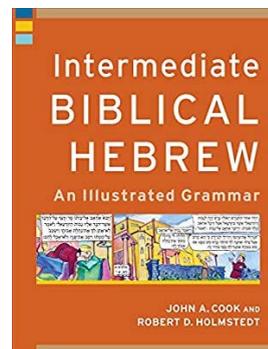
Second and more seriously, the book can be dismissive of alternative evidence and explanations. As one example, Cho fails to engage the substance of David Tsumura’s case that Hebrew תְּהוֹם is closer to Ugaritic *thm*, which is used metaphorically without personification, rather than the Akkadian goddess Tiamat. For Cho to aver that “the conclusion of his [Tsumura’s] study is a case of missing the forest for the trees... The two words [*tēhōm* and Tiamat] may not be directly dependent etymologically, but they are cognates nonetheless of a common Proto-Semitic word” (p. 78) misrepresents Tsumura as a linguistic naïf who had not shown in detail that the Hebrew and Akkadian cognates are “false friends” for their divergent usage (see Tsumura’s *Creation and ,Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaokampf Theory in the Old Testament* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 42–49). A similar tendency can be seen in largely ignoring the important works of Debra Scoggins Ballentine (*The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015]) and Rebecca Watson (*Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible*, BZAW 341 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005]).

Though Cho’s book is the newest work on the age-old topic of myth and history, it represents a throwback of sorts to the “parallelomania” that characterized a bygone era of OT scholarship. The aforementioned books by Ballentine and Watson are superior for being more methodologically disciplined and text-oriented in their treatment of OT sea imagery.

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John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt. *Intermediate Biblical Hebrew: An Illustrated Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 208 pp. £28.00/\$35.00.

This volume is the follow-up to Cook and Holmstedt's *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (Baker Academic, 2013) and is positioned as a textbook suited for students who have completed introductory coursework in Hebrew and wish to advance to the next stage of competence. While the authors state that their own beginner's grammar is best suited to set that stage, this volume is meant to be serviceable following the use of any introductory text. The most important advantage that the authors claim for their volume over competing resources is its facilitation of an active approach to learning. Cook and Holmstedt critique other intermediate grammars for being more pedagogically passive and assuming that more paradigms, parsing, and "Latin-based case language labels" will foster proficiency (p. 6).



Cook and Holmstedt are well-known and active scholars within the current world of Hebrew language studies, which includes much discussion of pedagogy. In light of the ongoing movement towards active learning models in the classroom, this textbook aims to be immersive and communicative. For example, the authors encourage instructors not to ask for translations of the passages included in the grammar, focusing instead on reading aloud in class, memorizing sections, performing scenes from the narrative, and follow-up question and answer sessions (perhaps in spoken Hebrew) to evaluate comprehension. To help facilitate such activities, Cook and Holmstedt have also created e-resources for both student and instructor, which are available freely on the Baker Publishing website for the textbook. For instructors, these resources include a nineteen-page Hebrew-English glossary (also at the back of the book) and a list of vocabulary by lesson. A test-bank of questions is slated to appear but was not yet available at the time of this review. For students there are online, Quizlet-based flashcards sets for each lesson. Links to audio files for each chapter are also available, but either have not yet been finished or were not in working order (in either Chrome or Edge browsers) at the time of this review.

As for the content of the grammar itself, there is much to praise. The core material consists of twenty-four readings drawn from the Elijah narrative (1 Kgs 16:29–2 Kgs 2:14), meant to fit the typical schedule of two meetings per week in a semester. Each reading is wonderfully and thoughtfully illustrated in full color by the artist Philip Williams. The illustrations affect the style of a graphic novel, complete with well-placed boxes and speech bubbles that include the Hebrew text itself. Since the flow of the narrative is the controlling organizing principle, Cook and Holmstedt touch on syntactic and semantic topics in a less systematic and more inductive fashion than the typical reference grammar. Since the goal of this volume is to expose students to the kind of linguistic variation and repetition characteristic of real Hebrew narrative, the authors have no hesitations about any perceived lack of strategic organization in content. One practical effect of this approach is that, when many grammatical features are discussed outright, it will not be the first time students have encountered them in the readings.

Each chapter and its illustrated reading are accompanied by several key features. A list of vocabulary is provided for the passage, including any words occurring fewer than two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. Notably, for this list no English glosses appear. Rather, blanks are provided so that the student can write in a gloss based on inductive reading (hence the instructor Hebrew-English glossary). Non-Qal verbs in vocabulary lists also have three blanks for students to write in the trilateral root. Each

chapter also has a section discussing grammatical issues based on the reading, along with a “Challenge” section diving deeper into a more advanced topic. Chapters also include one or two explanatory aids called “Reading Insights” that relate certain grammatical features to textual comprehension. Finally, the readings are followed by review questions that gradually build on concepts introduced over the course of the textbook.

There is no doubt that this intermediate grammar is unique given its approach and the wealth of valuable material it includes. For example, aside from the pedagogical method and content as described above, this text also makes use of actual manuscripts. Numerous chapters refer students to a full-color, thirteen-page facsimile of the Aleppo Codex in an appendix. Unlike some other grammars, which occasionally include manuscripts, Baker has done a wonderful job of providing an image with high enough resolution to make use of it. Additionally, those familiar with the work of Cook and Holmstedt might hope to see their expertise in linguistics inform the syntactic discussion in this textbook, and they will not be disappointed (but see further below). Those who may be reluctant to wade into what can seem to be the intimidating territory of more linguistically informed analysis than most traditional grammars contain can be reassured that the authors have provided a glossary at the back to lower barriers to entry.

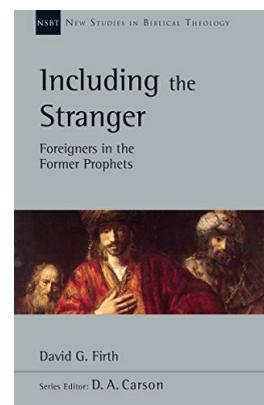
A few critical observations are in order. First, this textbook goes far in applying linguistically informed analysis in a student-friendly format, as indicated above. However, the authors do not provide any kind of table of contents, index, or other list directing the reader to relevant sections of the book where a given syntactic feature or linguistic issue is discussed. This shortcoming is unfortunate since, although not designed to function as a reference grammar, adding this sort of topical index would have added considerable value to the book. As it is, the only way to know what grammatical or linguistic topics are addressed in the book is to page through the entire book. Second, when it comes to the grammatical discussion, challenge section, and reading insights in each chapter, it is not always clear what the differences are between these categories. This issue is not necessarily a drawback or weakness, *per se*, but it left this reviewer wondering about the underlying logic for locating a given syntactic issue under one heading rather than another, except perhaps to break up content into more manageable chunks. Third, readers should know that Cook and Holmstedt have particular views on important topics that are not universally held. One such issue is the verbal system (see pp. 105–6, 199–20). Cook is one of the most prolific scholars today advocating aspect-prominence, with *qatal* as perfective, *yiqtol* as imperfective (both being modal when clause-initial), and *wayyiqtol* a genuine preterite. Another important issue is word order and information structure (see pp. 39–40, 45–6, 91). On this topic, Holmstedt—who is informed by generative linguistics—argues for a subject-verb-object default Hebrew word order. Although Holmstedt defends this view with robust argumentation, it is a minority report that has been criticized by a number of scholars who uphold a verb-subject-object view. The extent to which these two issues affect the textbook overall is probably fairly small. However, with no further discussion and no topical index or table of contents for grammatical issues, readers may not be aware that other views exist within a very lively (sometimes vehement) ongoing debate among Hebraists. Consequently, readers could easily be left confused, particularly if coming to this textbook from a different introductory grammar. At the same time, for those more familiar with these intricate debates, the views baked into this grammar could serve as an interesting forum for analysis and discussion.

Despite these points of weakness, this textbook remains a very valuable addition to the growing range of resources available to students and instructors of Biblical Hebrew. The authors and illustrator are to be commended for their work, which deserves a wide audience.

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David G. Firth. *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 50. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. xiv + 214 pp. £14.99/\$26.00.

David G. Firth is a tutor in Old Testament at Trinity College, Bristol. He writes from a wide experience of being “other” “in a strange land” (pp. 1–3). Between introduction and conclusion, Firth addresses each book in successive chapters. Reading the Former Prophets together, he notes three main themes (pp. 173–86). Firstly, all nations are under the sovereign rule of God, and he deploys them to serve his redemptive plans and purposes. This applies whether they operated within or beyond the boundaries of the Promised Land. Secondly, Israel was the means of making Yahweh’s person, character, and purposes known to the nations. Thirdly, “just as foreigners who commit themselves to Yahweh can become part of Israel, so also Israelites who abandon Yahweh lose their status as his people” (p. 177). The line separating “us” and “them” was never ethnicity or geography. God’s people are defined as a “faith community” (p. 184). Building on Wenham’s *Story as Torah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), he argues that what Torah defined, the Former Prophets illustrate through narratives of events that exemplify these themes (pp. 7–11). They continue throughout the rest of the Scriptures (pp. 178–83).



From the outset, any reading of the Former Prophets must confront the horrors of מִלְחָמָה warfare. Firth attempts to address the issue by introducing a brief discussion of genre, arguing that these descriptions deploy hyperbole (pp. 13–18), a term which strikes this reader as inappropriate. It is true that these accounts are approximations, but they are not exaggerations (see the discussion in John M. Frame’s *The Doctrine of the Word of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010], 167–76). In a world of refugees and random bombings, there can be no hyperbole when describing such horror. The questions pertaining to מִלְחָמָה warfare stand regardless of the body count, but it is not the purpose of this book to answer those questions. Firth’s work helps the reader to better understand these events within the context of God’s wider engagement with the nations, noting his justice and grace to very cruel and dysfunctional people, whether Israelite or gentile.

In the book of Joshua, Firth identifies Rahab and Achan as key exemplars. Rahab is the extreme “other” who crosses the line to become “us.” The contrast is “an Israelite of the Israelites.” Firth notes the similarity with Paul (Phil 3:5; pp. 24–25). Achan places himself under the same judgement as the Canaanites. Firth points to the inclusion of the Gibeonites, the faithful example of Caleb (a descendant of Esau) and his family’s honored place in Israel, along with the right of resident aliens to access the cities of refuge. It is the proximity of idolatry and the threat of syncretism that are the concern.

In the book of Judges, Firth points out the focus on God's use of foreign nations to punish Israel's unfaithfulness, as per Deuteronomy 28:7, 25 (cf. Judg 2:2, 11). God also uses foreigners to save Israel. Othniel is a Kenizzite. Shamgar is "the son of Anath," an Egyptian goddess. Jael is married to a Kenite, a descendant of Moses's father-in-law. She is "most blessed of women" (Judg 5:24). The boundary is whether one is an enemy or a lover (in the sense of covenant commitment) of God (v. 31). Firth points to a trajectory of Israelites who become more depraved than their Canaanite neighbors, starting with Gideon, to Micah, Samson, the tribe of Dan, and through to the Benjaminites (Deut 7, 20), who are akin to Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Judg 19–21; Gen 19).

Turning to the Books of Samuel, Firth observes that "Samuel uses foreigners as a means of evaluating Israelites" (pp. 93–94), featuring individuals rather than nations. These include Uriah, Benaiah, Ittai, Hushai, and Araunah. These foreigners highlight what it means to be faithful (p. 132). David's treatment of the Gibeonites contrasts with Saul's treatment of the priests at Nob. Firth observes the parallel abuse of women, contrasted with the characters of both Tamar and Bathsheba (p. 124).

In the Book of Kings, Firth focuses attention on Solomon's prayer for resident aliens, and the function of the temple "that all the peoples of the earth may know your name" (p. 145). He links this prayer with the cairn at Jordan (Josh 4:24), David's statement confronting Goliath (1 Sam 17:46), and Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kgs 19:19). He notes contrasting pairs of characters: Pharaoh's daughter and the Queen of Sheba, the craftsman Hiram (paralleling Bezalel) with the king of the same name, Jezebel and the widow of Zarephath, Naaman and Gehazi. In keeping with the exemplar of Achan, he singles out Ahaz and Manasseh, and cites the constant affirmation that God controls the nations, including Assyria and Babylon.

At a time of impassioned focus on refugees, racism, and national identity, Firth has produced a timely contribution. He reminds us that, while national identity is a reality through which God works in history, God's people are defined by their faith in him, and faithfulness to him. Under Old and New Covenant, the door has always been, and remains, open for people of every nation, tribe and language to make that commitment, finding their salvation, unity and identity in his person and saving work. Axiomatically, syncretism moves those who are nominally God's people beyond the pale. Firth rightly concludes, "God is not a petty racist, but a God whose purposes have always included all peoples, irrespective of ethnicity" (p. 184).

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Michael LeFebvre. *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding the Calendars in Old Testament Context*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. xx + 256 pp. £23.23/\$30.00.

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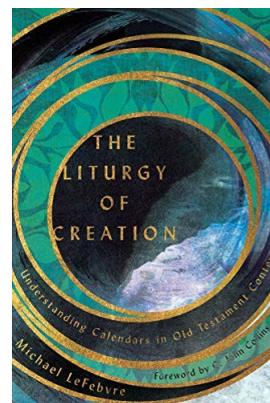
Michael LeFebvre rigorously addresses the topics of worship and labor, creation and liturgy with pastoral insight in this book. LeFebvre reads the chronology of Genesis 1 through a textual study of the Torah's calendar references to demonstrate a connection of dates to Israelite worship and work. Reading Genesis 1 as a calendar narrative instead of poetry, myth, or a literal scientific account reprioritizes the questions brought to the text and opens new vistas of practical application.

LeFebvre's well-placed summary statements throughout *The Liturgy of Creation* facilitate comprehension of his three-part argument that the creation week is a guide for weekly labors and worship (p. 7). Part 1, chapters 1–3, provides the technical calendar details related to a day, the week, the lunar month of 30 days, and the solar year (pp. 16–18). The heavenly lights of day four (Gen 1:14–15) are the clock behind Israel's calendar, which provided Israel the cadence to steward their land in harmony with the Lord's provision of seasons and rain to make them fruitful in it (p. 36). Israel's seven feasts fit within the agricultural program of the nation and align with the recorded dates of the flood and exodus accounts. The festivals brought the community together at key points around harvests and established a diversified economy as an ideal (p. 53).

Part 2, chapters 4–6, examines the twenty-one events given dates in the Pentateuch. These are the "engine" of LeFebvre's argument (p. 6). They guide the reader to how the Pentateuch arranges calendar dates with Israel's festival observances instead of the original occurrence date of the events. The dates link a historical memory for liturgical remembrance, not journalistic detail, to the specific festivals that later Israel observed (pp. 60–61). The dates associated with the flood, journey to Sinai, the Tabernacle installation, and journey from Hor to Nebo are scrutinized to demonstrate the writer's transparent chronological intentions. Part 2 concludes with an investigation of the legal and literary techniques at work behind the methods of assigning the observance dates to the events. According to LeFebvre, Torah is law that contains narrative and not narrative that contains law (pp. 95–96).

Part 3, chapters 7–12, explores the creation week detailed in Genesis 1:1–2:3. LeFebvre's conclusions sympathize with framework, analogical day, and literary day views of the creation text (p. 7). Accordingly, Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a calendar narrative that presents six ordinary days followed by one set apart as holy, a 6+1=7 pattern (p. 136). A secondary arrangement in which the six ordinary days are grouped into two panels of three for an overall structure of (3+3) +1=7 is proposed. In the first triad of days, תהו וָבֶהוּ ("formless and empty") is reversed. The earth is given order and made fruitful. The second triad of days accommodates the residents of this fruitful world (p. 139). Day 7 is a Sabbath, a holy day, blessed and set aside for rest and anticipation of the world's good *telos* (Heb 4:1–13) (p. 192). In summary, the creation week narrative, presented as a calendrical narrative "contains the history of God's ordering of the world, mapped to Israel's observance schedule for stewarding that order with labor and worship, without any concern to preserve the event's original occurrence timing. The 24-hour days of God's work guide Israel's sabbath festival observance" (p. 116).

LeFebvre's research and documentation are exceptional. His writing style is strong and clear. However, he does on occasion fall short of tying research to the targeted conclusion. For example,



he deduces that blessing (Gen 1:22) is fundamentally an expression of relationship yet does not fully develop the relationship idea with the living creatures or the relationship involved in the blessing of the seventh day in Gen 2:3 (171–72, 188).

Another example that begs more attention is the connection of Genesis 2:4–25 to the account of 1:1–2:3. Other than brief comments in Part 3, LeFebvre refers to 2:4–9 as the next section of the creation story with need for, and expectation of, fruitfulness (p. 193). It is not clear if LeFebvre views 2:4–25 an additional perspective of the creation week or the next week.

A debatable position within the essentials of LeFebvre’s argument is the classification of the Torah as law, a technical kind of instruction, legal guidance in the rituals, institutions, and regulations that defined Israel as an ordered kingdom (p. 95–96). In chapter 6, LeFebvre acknowledges the use of Torah in contexts of teaching and guidance in addition to commands to be obeyed. However, he subsumes all of it under the genre of law. His appeal to the use of a speech act that declares the legal status of the observance dates fails to identify the authority that declares this new status (p. 105).

The *Liturgy of Creation* is also an apologetic for a non-scientific approach to Genesis 1:1–2:3. LeFebvre identifies names and organizations in an attempt to pull back Christians from misuse of a scientific approach (pp. 6, 144–45). In this context, LeFebvre also offers constructive commentary on the relationship between faith and science (pp. 208–11).

The *Liturgy of Creation* is a positive contribution to the creation conversation as well as issues of ancient chronology. Sorting through the calendar details presented by LeFebvre is tedious, but he engages the reader through discussions of vocabulary and dated record keeping. As a result, the reader better understands Israel’s calendar (p. 43). Additionally, his research offers insights into the social and economic aspects of Mosaic era Israel (pp. 41–42, 49).

The plot of the creation week presenting God as the Model Worker ordering creation, bringing fruitfulness and inhabiting it with residents facilitates easy recall for meditation and application. Although the final chapter is somewhat a “catch all” of the author’s closing thoughts, observations related to the rich theology of vocation and sabbath are timely and significant for spiritual formation.

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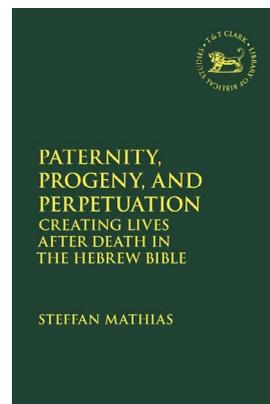
Stefan Matthias. *Paternity, Progeny, and Perpetuation: Creating Lives after Death in the Hebrew Bible*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 696. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020. xiv + 288 pp. £85.00/\$115.00.

This is Mathias's published PhD thesis, completed in 2016 at King's College, London, supervised by Paul Joyce and Joan Taylor. The core question he explores is: how do people in the Old Testament establish perpetuity for themselves after death? The key text is the law of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–10), which deals with the dilemma of an ancient Israelite man who dies without a male heir. Mathias's core thesis is that this and similar texts present the failure to produce a son and continue the family line as "a failure in masculinity, the male and social order, leading to eradication of the name, estate and memory of the man" (p. xiii). His thesis is presented over seven chapters, preceded by an introduction, and followed by a conclusion.

Chapter 1 outlines Mathias's methodology. To uncover the cultural paradigm operating behind the relevant OT texts, he uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" to determine how social discourses (death, reproduction, memory) predispose people to act (see esp. *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge: Polity, 1990], 53). He also outlines some contemporary gender and queer theories, alighting on Lee Edelman's concept of "reproductive futurism" (in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004]). This concept is employed to see how OT texts construct the future around the idea of the child.

Chapter 2 outlines four scholarly approaches to the levirate law. Johannes Pedersen focuses on the soul of the deceased (in *Israel: Its Life and Culture* [London: Oxford University Press, 1926]), Raymond Westbrook on the legal establishment of the man's title (in *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991]), and Eryl Davies on the protection of the widow (in "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 1," *VT* 31 [1981]: 138–44; "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 2," *VT* 31 [1981]: 257–68). Mathias's evaluation is that these approaches miss the mark, because they fail to consider sex and reproduction, the "fundamental thread" of the levirate law. Herbert Chanan Brichto's article, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex," *HUCA* 44 (1973): 1–54, is evaluated more positively, because it attempts a cultural synthesis. According to Mathias, this article requires updating, which is what he aims to do, in conversation with Jacob Wright and Michael Chan, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou. Mathias presents the case for employing social-scientific material exploring contemporary examples of levirate marriage, widow inheritance, and ghost marriage to interrogate a reader's interpretive assumptions and cultural biases (pp. 52–60).

Since levirate marriage can negotiate the boundary between the living and the dead, chapter 3 describes the symbolic and social relationship between the living and the dead. Mathias discusses burial, veneration, memorialization, and the territorial and political use of the dead, with a focus on the social interaction between the living and the dead. I appreciated his even-handed discussion of the possibility of a "cult of the dead" in the OT (pp. 79–86). Chapter 4 focuses on the name and naming, which can also negotiate the boundary between the living and the dead. Mathias argues that the continuation of the name functions as a substantive social existence beyond death, similarly to proper burial. Chapter 5 explores the way gender and sexuality are constructed, particularly how OT narrative and legal texts focus on male procreation and present women in maternal roles. Chapter 6 focuses on the בֵּית אָב, the



“house of the father,” as the locus for the transmission and maintenance of individual and communal identity.

With chapters 3 to 6 as foundational, chapter 7 assesses the following texts with an eye to the common motifs of land, name, progeny, continuity, and death: Lot’s daughters (Gen 19), Judah and Tamar (Gen 38), the levirate law (Deut 25:5–10), the book of Ruth, the widow of Tekoa (2 Sam 13–14), Absalom’s monument (2 Sam 18:18), the promise to the eunuch (Isa 56:3–5), and Zelophehad’s daughters (Num 27; 36). My primary interest in reading this book is its intersection with the Ruth narrative; Mathias affirms the link between redemption and levirate marriage, which functions to link land, name, and progeny (p. 223).

Mathias adds a fresh contribution, which derives from his methodological matrix of social-scientific and gender studies. If we assume that the social circumstances behind each OT text he examines are consistent, his thesis is cogent. Broadly, I think we can, and I appreciated the book’s focus on the underlying social “doxa” behind the OT texts rather than on a hypothetical diachronic reconstruction. Mathias establishes sound conclusions in this study of post-mortem perpetuity in the OT from a social-scientific perspective and demonstrates that such an approach can be illuminating.

*Themelios* readers will want to extend his work. The paternity-progeny-perpetuation nexus connects to the metanarrative of Scripture in two ways. First, in the OT this nexus is central to God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1–7), so this programmatic text needs to be integrated into the nexus. Mathias briefly looks at Gen 12 (p. 134) but more discussion is needed. He also broadens his analysis beyond his main selected texts by mentioning the development of resurrection in Daniel 12:2 (pp. 251–52), but he does not connect the dots through the OT. Second, Mathias’s work can be extended by viewing his findings in light of Christ and the NT. Christ changes our conception of paternity and parenthood, our view of heirs and children, and our perpetuation and legacy through name, children, and land. There are already hints of this shift in some of the Old Testament texts Mathias examines (esp. Isa 56:3–5). As Christians, we need to look at this nexus through the lens of Christ before we can consider the implications for and application to us today. One book to get us started is Paul R. Williamson’s *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions*, NSBT 44 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017).

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## — NEW TESTAMENT —

Christopher M. Blumhofer. *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 177. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiii + 246 pp. £75.00/\$99.00.

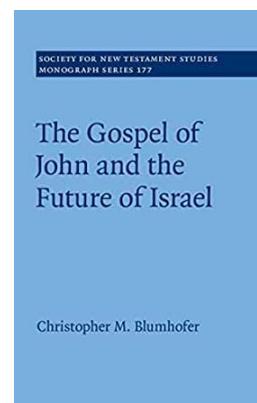
Christopher M. Blumhofer (PhD, Duke University) is currently visiting assistant professor of New Testament at Fuller Seminary and ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA). A former employee of Christianity Today, Blumhofer has published in *New Testament Studies*, *Review of Biblical Literature*, and *Cambridge Companion to the Gospels* (forthcoming). Originally his dissertation under Richard B. Hays, *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel* is Blumhofer's first full-length monograph.

The volume's aim is to demonstrate that John's Gospel frames a narrative creatively manifesting a commitment to the future of Israel. Written against Bultmann's imposing interpretive challenges over John's debated history and theology, Blumhofer's solution is to synthesize various stands relating to John's view of first-century Judaism. The linchpin is Christ—the king of Israel and exemplary Jew (John 1:49; 4:24)—who connects Israel's past to her future. The Fourth Gospel, then, presents a “theological vision of Israel” as a basic element of its gospel message, with Christ holding together both its past and future (pp. 1–3).

The volume's three central chapters trace the “narrative argument” of John vis-à-vis Israel's eschatological future. By “narrative argument” the author means that the Fourth Gospel is a narrative that shares elements of Greco-Roman *bios*, but it is not merely narrative. Read as a whole, it also contains a historical and theological argument relevant for its Second Temple period, answering how the Jewish tradition can remain faithful to its ancient past while anticipating its future. Following the introductory chapter, this idea is developed in linear progression through a three-step arrangement covering John 1–20: Chapter 2: Announcement (John 1–4); Chapter 3: Debate (John 5–10); and Chapter 4: Crisis (John 11–20). The narrative argument leads to a “theological center” proposed for the Gospel of John in the book's concluding chapter: Jesus is the only one by whom the God of Israel leads his people into their eschatological future (p. 225).

A major argument unfolded throughout is that the Fourth Gospel is written within a first-century Jewish “epistemological crisis” (pp. 33–35). By this is meant a specific sub-group John calls οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, representing a stream of first-century Judaism refuses to acknowledge Jesus for who he is—their Messiah who connects Israel's past to its promised future. A significant portion of the discussion is spent on this issue, with the author carefully distinguishing between the terms “Jews” (Ἰουδαῖοι) and “Israel.” Contrary to modern tendencies that conflate “Jews/Jewish” and “Israel,” they are not coextensive in the Fourth Gospel; to assume so is to commit significant anachronism. Whereas the “crisis” of the Ἰουδαῖοι (and its related Judaism) was epistemological, Israel's “crises” were christological and eschatological. The gap between the concepts is bridged christologically. Summarized, Jesus is the one who brings Israel's future into identity (p. 212).

Blumhofer's monograph offers a refreshing contribution to Johannine scholarship that succeeds in *synthesizing* John's Gospel. By his “narrative-argument” Blumhofer achieves a coherent reasoning for



the Fourth Gospel's origin that can bear the weight of the entire Gospel, viz., that the future of Israel is indeed a major concern for John and that Israel is ushered into her future through Christ (pp. 224–25). Such a case for the Fourth Gospel distances itself from similar structures that have been proposed—one recent example is John Ashton's "proclamatory narrative," which yields suspicion toward the Gospel's historicity. Blumhofer's approach is to be commended for viewing the Gospel of John holistically, each strand serving to connect the future of Israel with her Kingly Messiah.

Meriting further praise is Blumhofer's criticism of previous interpretive approaches viewing John's use of Ἰουδαῖοι as anti-Semitic (cf., e.g., select essays from R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds. *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001]). He rightly refuses to define Ἰουδαῖοι by wholesale categories, whether geographical, sociological, or via historical-reconstructions—all of which yield subpar meanings for Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel. By choosing to leave the Greek term Ἰουδαῖοι merely transliterated *Ioudaioi*, the author wisely escapes assumptions attached to modern terms. Related are the fitting critiques offered of supersessionism, which has unfortunately punctuated readings of John throughout Church history. Rejecting a theology of replacement of Israel by the church, the monograph offers an alternative reading that maintains a future for Israel connected through Christ (pp. 187–93). Finally, an insightful connection Blumhofer draws between the "righteous suffering" of King David and King Jesus is a worthy contribution in itself, inviting future dialogue (pp. 194–211).

A few possible weaknesses do present themselves. First, John 21 does not factor into Blumhofer's argument at all, and no explanation is given as to why. One can presume its dismissal from the study revolves around the never-ceasing debate over the placement and/or integrity of John's final chapter within the Fourth Gospel. In any event, it would seem relevant to explore implications of Jesus's restoration and commissioning of Peter and how that might relate to future Jewish and Christian relations. A more significant critique is that despite repeated claims made throughout regarding the "future of Israel," no *actual* future for the nation is ever given. In other words, the volume never explains if Israel—since the writing of John—still has a national future. Rather, Israel's "future" is rendered as a present absorption into Christ. Among other texts, surely Acts 1:6–7 is relevant to the argument as there Jesus himself suggests the arrival of Israel's kingdom is *still* future and dependent on His Father. While the author admits that his argument of Israel's fulfillment by Christ "looks like supersessionism" (e.g., p. 46), such a fulfillment is still a form of supersessionism. Thus, a systematic irony remains in the volume in that the Fourth Gospel's Israelology is *replaced* or *superseded* by Christology. Perhaps a future study that explores connections between John's theological vision for Israel and that of Acts would clear up the matter.

Critiques aside, Blumhofer's *The Gospel of John and the Future of Israel* is a welcomed addition to Johannine scholarship. The volume is a penetrating analysis of the Fourth Gospel that demonstrates Israel will continue by way of Jesus—the Jewish messiah and Israelite king. In this sense, the entire volume can be considered an answer to an internally implied question advanced throughout the Fourth Gospel's narrative: Which of the two competing visions for the future of Israel will win: that of the Ἰουδαῖοι or that of Jesus? There is little doubt, as the volume makes clear, that the latter is victorious as

His death and resurrection solidify to the former that Jesus really is their king, indeed, the eschatological King of Israel.

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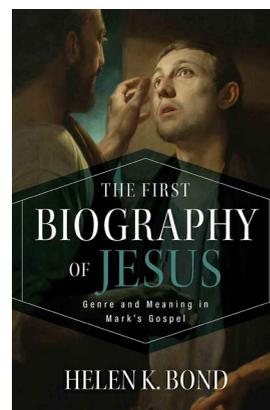
Helen K. Bond. *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. xiii + 317 pp. £35.00/\$42.99.

This fine book fills a key gap in study of Mark's Gospel. As Professor Bond observes, the scholarly consensus has shifted in recent years to the view that the canonical Gospels are ancient biographies (*bioi*), rather than being *sui generis*, not least because of the influence of Richard Burridge's work. This consensus has found its way into introductions to Gospel commentaries, but has not been fully worked out in reading a Gospel. Accordingly, Professor Bond seeks to read Mark from this perspective: the result is a book which is very well researched, limpidly clear, and beautifully written (something one can rarely say of scholarly writing).

Professor Bond is known for her careful historical work in relation to NT characters (notably Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, and the historical Jesus). She here applies her historian's skills to engaging with a wide range of ancient biographical literature in order to assess Mark as a biography. She is clear that she is not seeking to prove that Mark is a biography, but wants to see how understanding Mark as biography illuminates its interpretation (p. 12). A brief introduction outlines the book's aims, a brief sketch of authorship, date, and location for Mark's Gospel, and an overview of the book. A review of scholarship (ch. 1) traces how Mark has been read, identifying the recent consensus that the Gospels are ancient biographies. Professor Bond sketches the shape and contents of ancient *bioi* (ch. 2), before looking at Mark as biographer (ch. 3). Three key chapters review Jesus's life according to Mark (ch. 4; 46 pp.), other characters in Mark (ch. 5; 54 pp.), and Jesus's death in Mark (ch. 6; 30 pp.)—these are the heart of Professor Bond's interpretation of Mark as biography. Brief "Final Reflections" conclude, reviewing and summarizing the argument. A 35-page bibliography shows the depth of Professor Bond's reading.

This thoughtful book has much of value; it is at the cutting edge of academic study of Mark. Professor Bond stresses that Mark is a *reception* of the Jesus tradition, and not a passive reproduction of material (p. 5). In particular, by using the genre of *bios*, Mark expands early Christian proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus to include the stories of his life and teaching. She places Mark's writing in the early-to-mid 70s, following the fall of Jerusalem, located in Rome, and identifies Mark as a church leader and an educated man.

In sketching features of ancient biography (ch. 2), Professor Bond has been influenced by the important classicists Thomas Hägg and Christopher Pelling. She notes that "Biographies ... were *exempla writ large*" (p. 47), i.e., that they existed to teach and influence readers/hearers. She sees Mark's biography as close in many respects to philosophers' lives. She is critical of narrative-critical approaches because they read ancient writings using tools for reading modern novels; rather, she aims to read Mark



in tune with *ancient* writers. She also notes the importance of the subject's death, whether good or bad, in many *bioi*. She highlights biographers' freedom to tell anecdotes about their subject which may not be entirely factual, and thinks Mark does this in places.

So what kind of biographer is Mark (ch. 3)? He uses forms known from the *progymnasmata* (p. 85), and utilises comparison to highlight his subject (*synkrisis*, p. 86). He writes as a Jesus-follower of Jewish heritage for fellow-believers (pp. 90, 94), to keep Jesus's memory alive (p. 92). Professor Bond notes Richard Bauckham's argument that the Gospels were written for a wide audience, and cautiously agrees that Mark is not writing for a very particular local Jesus-community.

Professor Bond then reads Mark in conversation with the ancient biographical tradition, with great effect (ch. 4). She argues (controversially) that Jesus's baptism is Jesus's *adoption* as God's Son, as the Spirit infuses him, rather than the baptismal vision confirming Jesus's *existing* status (p. 128). Jesus's deeds compare with healings by emperors, and storm-stillings told by Diogenes Laertius. Jesus himself is "an example of a way of life rather than the mouthpiece of a doctrine" (p. 150 n. 108)—although his teaching is important in similar manner to philosophers' teachings, Jesus's consistency of life and word are vital to understanding him aright. Jesus's rejection of worldly honour and devaluing of wealth and comfort has parallels among philosophers and in Philo's *Life of Moses* (p. 154), and Mark wants his audience to share such values (p. 160). The lack of description of Jesus's appearance contrasts with many *bioi*, and thereby opens Jesus to a wide range of people as a model for imitation (p. 165). In sum, Mark's biography calls people to be committed to Jesus as a real person with whom they engage (p. 166).

In considering other characters (ch. 5), Professor Bond notices the lack of consistent characterization of these people. Given that she sees Mark as grafting anecdotes together into a narrative, this is unsurprising—indeed, only Peter among the disciples speaks (p. 194 n. 92). Other characters come on stage for brief appearances with the sole function to illuminate the subject, Jesus, often by enhancing a quality Jesus has. This is even true with the Twelve: Professor Bond argues that narrative critics over-read characters in Mark for consistency and coherence, rather than seeing them in relation to Jesus. Specifically, she argues (cogently, in my view) that the Twelve are *not* models of discipleship in Mark—rather, *Jesus himself* is the model for faithful discipleship (p. 196). The disciples highlight Jesus as teacher gathering followers, are foils who enable Jesus to expand his teaching, and show Jesus's courage and loneliness in death by contrast, as they abandon him (pp. 197–209).

Concerning Jesus's death (ch. 6), Professor Bond highlights crucifixion as a slave's death, by contrast with philosophers (e.g., Socrates, who swallows hemlock). She stresses Jesus's passivity and abandonment (by people and by God) in his death. His death is deeply shameful, although Mark prepares for it with the passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33) and interprets it with the ransom saying (10:45) and Jesus's eucharistic words (14:24). Jesus's death is both means of redemption, and model of godly death—Professor Bond considers that Mark knows believers who have been martyred, and seeks to encourage others facing that fate. She provides a fine discussion of the phenomena of darkness and the temple veil's tearing (pp. 241–46), arguing persuasively that the latter is a portent of the temple's destruction and (thus) Jesus's vindication.

There are few typos in this well-produced book, and the font is easy on the eye. I confess I was irritated by transliterated Greek throughout (the publisher's decision, I imagine): if readers don't have Greek, transliteration won't help them; if they do, why not use a Greek font?

I have barely scratched the surface of this fresh, stimulating, and engaging book. I shall return it in my reading and teaching on Mark often. For those studying Mark at upper undergraduate and graduate level, this is essential reading (a term I do not use lightly).

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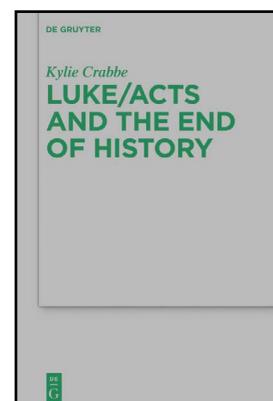
Kylie Crabbe. *Luke/Acts and the End of History*. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 238. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019. xviii + 418 pp. £79.00/\$99.00.

Kylie Crabbe is Research Fellow in Biblical and Early Christian Studies at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, and this book is a revised version of her Oxford DPhil thesis, supervised by Markus Bockmuehl and Christopher Rowland. In it Dr Crabbe enters the longstanding debate over the relationship of history and eschatology in Luke and Acts. She does this by a fascinating comparison with other ancient texts that have a variety of views on history and its direction (or lack of direction), to illuminate how Luke writes about these themes.

Her starting point is unsurprising: Hans Conzelmann's view that Luke detached history from eschatology in order to handle the "delay of the parousia." Dr Crabbe shows that this led scholars to read Luke and Acts as uneschatological—the End was dismissed into the indefinite future, and had little or no impact on how Luke sees history and present life for Jesus-believers. Her sensible response is to consider how Luke's writings look when compared with other writers of a similar period, both Jewish and Graeco-Roman. A fresh part of her thinking is that she rejects the idea that genre should determine which texts are legitimate comparators for views of history and eschatology in Luke and Acts, because books of the same genre (roughly, historiography) do not necessarily address the questions concerned. Rather, in order to consider conceptions of history, other kinds of texts may be good—or better—comparators.

Because Dr Crabbe is interested in conceptions of history, its end, its direction, and the relationship of divine and human action in history, she rightly argues that such questions transcend genre. Her key texts, then, spread from the second century BCE to the early second century CE: Polybius's *Histories*, Diodorus Siculus's *Library of History*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Valerius Maximus's *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, Tacitus's *Histories*, 2 Maccabees, the War Scroll from Qumran (1QM), Josephus's *Jewish War*, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch. A strength of her analysis is that she engages with such a wide range of texts in conversation with Luke/Acts. Ah yes, and that / —Dr Crabbe declines to use Cadbury's famous hyphen because, even though she reads Luke and Acts together, she recognizes that, at least at the level of our extant manuscripts, the two were not presented as a contiguous whole (pp. 54–55). Thus, she lays out her method as studying this group of texts of differing genres and provenances in order to look at history from four key perspectives: the direction and shape of history; determinism and divine guidance of history; human responsibility and freedom; and the present time and the end of history.

Her study of the direction and shape of history (ch. 3) highlights two key issues: the direction (or lack of it) of history, and whether history is split up into periods ("periodisation"). Texts which lack



periodisation fall into three kinds: those which lack the idea of an endpoint to history even while seeing progress within history (Polybius, Diodorus Siculus); those having a steady continuation of history (Valerius Maximus); and those presenting history as a decline (Tacitus). Other texts have periodisation and an end to history which marks a qualitative change to the state of affairs: Virgil sees progress going on to the end of history; 2 Maccabees, Josephus, and 1QM see a steady continuation of history with an end to come; 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch see history declining towards an end. Luke/Acts emerges as containing both periodisation and end-expectation, but without any sense of things overall improving or declining towards that end; so, history and eschatology belong together, against Conzelmann.

Her study of determinism and divine guidance of history (ch. 4) reviews a number of key words that are the tips of icebergs of ideas: fortune, providence, fate, necessity, and “it is necessary.” Characters in her texts have insights into the future which vary in their deterministic character, although mere humans can misunderstand or misinterpret dreams and oracles (for example). The texts can use prophecy to bolster hope for the future by claiming divine guidance of events, even where those who worship the god concerned are suffering. Luke/Acts assures readers that the divine will cannot be stopped, even though humans may oppose or reject that will for themselves.

“Human responsibility and freedom” (ch. 5) considers how far events are divinely determined and how far affected by human agency. She makes good use of John Barclay’s threefold classification of possibilities: a competitive model, where either humans or the gods have agency, but both cannot; a kinship model, where humans act in concert with God/the gods; and “non-contrastive transcendence,” in which the divine creates the space within which humans may exercise agency (p. 209). She compares Jewish texts with a Deuteronomistic approach which affirm God’s sovereignty over history, seeing signs of this in 2 Maccabees, Josephus, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra as in continuity with this approach. By contrast, some texts have other spiritual forces at work (1QM, 2 Bar 53–76), and other texts have those who “fight against God” (Josephus, 2 Macc). The non-Jewish writers also vary in how far human agency can really make a difference. In Luke/Acts, among much else, Dr Crabbe highlights the contrast of Mary and Zechariah: both are offered a chance to participate in God’s purposes in Luke 1, but only Mary does so willingly. Zechariah’s rejection of God’s purposes does not prevent them taking place, but it does sideline him from participating in them, at least for a time (p. 257). This pair exemplify Luke’s understanding that people are invited into God’s purposes in response to God’s initiative, and that God does not work irrespective of people’s responses, but also that God’s purposes cannot ultimately be frustrated.

In considering the present and the end of history (ch. 6), Dr Crabbe studies, first, texts which are non-teleological (see on ch. 3 above); second, Virgil’s view that the present *is* the end, in the triumph of Rome; and third, the relationship of present and end in the Jewish texts, where periodisation allows authors to portray cycles of divine punishment and rescue in the past, which function as a call to live a particular way in the present. Luke locates the present as a stage towards the end of history, but the difference from the other texts is that he considers that the end has already entered history through the resurrection of Jesus, the gift of the Spirit, and the exaltation of Jesus to God’s right hand. Here, we meet the familiar now/not yet tension in New Testament eschatology, but seen from a fresh angle. Dr Crabbe reads key texts (notably Luke 21:5–36) as eschatological (rather than focused on the fall of Jerusalem), and argues that Luke sees more end-time events still to come before the end of all things. A helpful diagram (p. 329) shows her view of the present in the flow of history according to Luke.

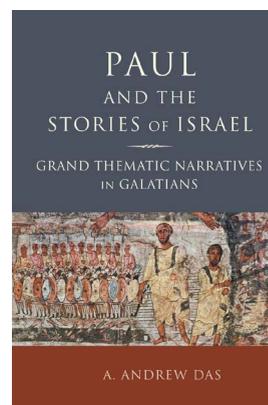
A clear and helpful conclusion (ch. 7) summarizes the argument, reviews the method used, and shows how her work reframes and reshapes thinking about history and eschatology in Luke/Acts.

This is a fine book whose full and detailed arguments I have scarcely been able to sketch in this review. There are numerous discussions I shall return to in thinking about Luke and Acts, particularly as illuminated by the comparisons Dr Crabbe makes with her Graeco-Roman and Jewish texts. Students of Luke and Acts, particularly the history and eschatology of those books, will find this indispensable to their reading and research.

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A. Andrew Das. *Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. x + 304 pp. £40.99/\$49.99.

Composed of essays interacting with different scholars, *Paul and the Stories of Israel (PSI)* means to provide “a more critical examination” (p. 28) of supposed narratives lurking beneath the text of Paul’s letters. Interacting exclusively with Paul, Das intends this book to be a sort of clarion call for the entire field of NT studies: “this volume is a call for sobriety and methodological rigor in the recognition and analysis of grand thematic narratives—to escape the sirens’ summons and the interpretive shipwreck on the shoals” (p. 31). Scholars, especially from Britain and America, have been too quick to find stories of Israel as the backdrop of the New Testament, especially the Pauline Epistles, and have succumbed to what Seyoon Kim (invoking a term coined by Samuel Sandmel) calls “parallelomania” (pp. 31, 215). Das wants to disabuse readers of this temptation and model a more reflective, analytical exegesis.



Das directs his critique towards six prominent “grand thematic narratives,” devoting one chapter to analyzing each. The majority of these narratives reflect stories found in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, and the sixth one concerns an anti-imperial narrative that supposedly arises from Paul’s Roman context (pp. 179–215). The five Old Testament “grand thematic narratives” that Das identifies as particularly pervasive are these:

1. the Gentile Influx into Zion, introduced by Terence Donaldson and popularized by N. T. Wright, James Dunn, and Ben Witherington, et al. (pp. 33–63);
2. covenantal readings of Paul, particularly those informed by the New Perspective on Paul (pp. 65–92);
3. the Aqedah, as Scott Hahn and others have argued is a typology running throughout Paul’s writings, most notably Galatians 3 (pp. 93–124);
4. the Exodus as read by Sylvia Keesmat and James Scott in Paul’s use of *υιοθεσια* in Galatians 4 (pp. 125–45); and
5. the Spirit-Cloud narrative in Galatians 5:17–18, promoted adamantly by William N. Wilder, which has received some more recent attention through the work of Rodrigo J. Morales and Matthew Harmon (pp. 147–78).

In each essay, Das provides a careful overview of the arguments for finding a “grand thematic narrative,” itself a nebulous concept that scholars have had difficulty defining, to test out their stability as

plausible readings. Showing his skill in several different fields, Das finds each reading ultimately without warrant and therefore unnecessary. While each narrative has its unique weakness, Das finds them all guilty of a certain kind of chronological snobbery where the older, calmer methods of biblical exegesis are not proved wrong but discarded as boring. In order to quicken their pulses, scholars may resort to all sorts of exciting, but indefensible, interpretations.

There are too many strengths in *PSI* to name them all. Overall, Das has provided a remarkable and penetrating critique of many current fads in New Testament studies that have not received the criticism that they likely deserve. He displays sobriety, precision, and judiciousness throughout, carefully evaluating what may be considered worth-while evidence for any sort of “grand thematic narrative.” For this reason alone, Das’s book should be required reading for anyone working or hoping to work in the field of New Testament studies. This is only doubly so if one is hoping to learn how to read the New Testament in light of the Old. Grand thematic narratives are persuasive in large part because of their advocates’ familiarity with the Old Testament, presenting a coherent reading of Scripture that, ostensibly, seems to honor the unity and coherence of the Bible. However, one must be careful not to get ahead of themselves. Following Das’s exegesis and paying close attention to his argument will prove helpful to those examining New Testament texts and their Old Testament backgrounds.

Another great strength to the book is when Das proposes for a more tempered narrative reading. Prior to writing *PSI*, Das published an 800–page commentary on Galatians. The rewards of that labor are evident as he unpacks sections of Paul’s little epistle. The unique format of the book allows for insights to arise out of his polemical engagement with other scholars. For instance, as he examines arguments for reading the Aqedah as a backdrop to Paul’s soteriology, Das makes a convincing case for reading Paul’s soteriological statements in Galatians as *subversive to*, rather than reliant on, the Aqedah traditions that had developed in Second Temple Judaism.

That being said, the book is not perfect. Because it is more like an essay collection than a single unified thought, *PSI* is uneven as a whole. The essay dealing with Donaldson and Wright is particularly strong and helpful in its critique. The weakest essay, on the other hand, is his interaction with covenantal readings of Paul. Though he is certainly right to push back against some aspects of covenantal interpretations, some of Das’s critiques will seem flat to readers who are already more covenantal in their approach, and his positive proposal leaves only more questions rather than answers. Also, because *PSI* is composed largely of *negative* assessments, readers will often find themselves wondering what Das would suggest as an alternative or a more persuasive “grand thematic narrative,” since he obviously finds the category helpful. In his conclusion, he gives a qualified “Yes” to Matthew Harmon’s reading of the Suffering Servant but remains unsatisfied overall with any of the preceding narratives.

Das has done scholars and students a remarkable service by writing this book. Those who learn from Das will only be better exegetes. If *PSI* receives the readership it deserves, especially younger scholars, then future studies in New Testament may be able to move beyond some of the more fantastical readings and return to the rigorous, disciplined tools that characterize good interpretation.

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Buist M. Fanning. *Revelation*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. ix + 624 pp. £35.99/\$54.99.

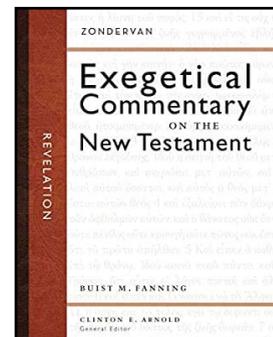
Buist M. Fanning, professor emeritus of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, has contributed the volume on Revelation to the well-known Zondervan Exegetical Commentary series. The series, meant to be an accessible commentary on the Greek text, provides the student with detailed analysis of the Greek text of each verse but is also alert to structural and literary issues. Fanning's work does this admirably.

Fanning begins with an introduction to the last book of the Bible that treats standard features such as authorship, date and setting, literary genre, Greek text and language, and other features particular to the book of Revelation, such as the interpretation of symbolism and the use of the OT. Regarding authorship, despite early testimony that John the apostle was Revelation's author, Fanning opts for a prophet well-known to the churches in Asia Minor named John, who was influenced by the apostle. Based on external and internal evidence he favors a date in 95–98 AD under the reign of Domitian. Fanning recognizes the threefold genre of Revelation (apocalypse, prophecy, epistle), but privileges prophecy as the most central. For Fanning this means that we should expect a good measure of *foretelling* the future in judgment and salvation. A key feature of the way Revelations communicates is through symbolism. Fanning eschews the symbolic vs. literal divide and sees in Revelation instead a range of associations with both literal (referring to real persons, places, events, not only spiritual realities) and metaphorical (evocative and emotive) meanings. This means that there is an "earthiness" to Revelation's eschatology. Furthermore, he is eclectic in his approach to interpreting Revelation's visions, combining futurist, preterist, and idealist approaches, though his commentary makes it clear that a futurist approach is central.

Another key feature is his understanding of the sequencing of the book. While he allows for some foreshadowing and intensification between visions, he largely sees the literary sequence as indicating a chronological sequence. However, at times he places too much weight on the mere presence of "I saw" as indicating the sequencing in the "chronological storyline" (p. 499), rather than only telling us the sequence in which John saw the visions.

Crucial for Fanning's approach to interpreting the Apocalypse is his understanding of Revelation's use of the OT. His approach to how John uses the OT can be characterized as *typological*. Types and patterns in the OT find their escalated fulfillment in Revelation's visions. The clearest example that Fanning finds is the Exodus plagues typologically anticipating God's end-time judgments in Revelation 8–9, 16. A typological approach also explains how a vision can have a fulfillment in the first century Roman context, but a further, future one at the second coming of Christ. Thus, the seal judgments in Revelation 6 are primarily references to God's climactic judgments in the end times, though patterns of these judgments could occur throughout history as a pointer to the climactic judgments. The vision of Babylon and its destruction in Revelation 17–18 has significance both for John's time and for the future world empire that will exist at the second coming of Christ. One issue with this approach is how the reader of the visions discerns what is fulfilled in the first century, and what can only find a climactic fulfillment at the end of history.

Overall, Fanning's interpretive approach to Revelation could be described as a modified futurist-dispensational one. Without subscribing to a strict literalism, Fanning still wishes to see the OT



prophecies of the restoration of Israel to the land maintaining their integrity and finding straightforward fulfillment, giving the OT contexts priority. Therefore, the 144,000 sealed in Rev 7:1–8 refer to the restoration of a group within ethnic Israel and should be distinguished from the “great multitude” in vv. 9–17. In my view, this approach, while rightly emphasizing the physical, earthly nature of the promises of restoration, does not take seriously enough the application of the OT texts of restoration to both Jew and Gentile, in the present and future, throughout Revelation. Thus, in Revelation 21–22 all the major promises of the restoration of Israel in the OT find fulfillment in the New Creation in a people consisting of both Israel and the church (which is given a foundational role in the end-time restoration).

A key feature for Fanning’s approach is the millennium in Revelation 20:1–6. He sees this as a *penultimate* stage in the fulfillment of the OT promises of a coming messianic kingdom, with the *ultimate* fulfillment in Revelation 21–22. The millennium, for Fanning as with other dispensationalists, is where God’s promises of the defeat of God’s enemies and the restoration of his people and Christ’s reign from Jerusalem will be fulfilled. However, I do not think this takes seriously enough the observation that there are virtually no OT allusions in 20:1–6 to the restoration of Israel to their land and a universal reign from Jerusalem. The vision of the New Creation and New Jerusalem is saturated with OT prophetic texts of restoration of Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, and the reigning Messiah. In my view this supports an initial fulfillment at the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ, followed by only *one* future fulfillment at the second coming. While the NT (including Revelation) sees an initial and a future fulfillment of OT promises corresponding to the first and second comings of Christ, this does not justify seeing multiple stages of fulfillment *at* the second coming of Christ.

Fanning’s work has numerous helpful grammatical comments in the footnotes, and his applications are sound and very helpful for preaching. Overall, this is probably the best commentary from a futurist, dispensational perspective. Even those that do not share this perspective will find much that is of value in Fanning’s careful analysis.

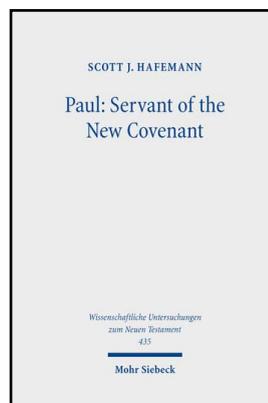
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Scott J. Hafemann. *Paul: Servant of the New Covenant*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 435. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019, xviii + 420 pp. \$216.00.

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This collection of essays by Scott J. Hafemann, former reader in New Testament studies at the University of St. Andrews, now retired, and author of numerous books on the Pauline corpus, builds on his earlier 1995 monograph *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). These essays seek to test the coherence of this earlier monograph’s conclusion that “Paul’s contrast between the old and new covenants is not a material, theological contrast between two distinct means of redemption ... it is [rather] an eschatological, two-age contrast between the era of Israel ... and the era of the church” (p. xii). Thus, he has an eye toward the specifically “theological,”



“salvific,” and “conceptual significance” of the texts in view (p. xiii). In sum, he is seeking to develop “a consistently eschatological, covenantal reading of Paul’s theology” (p. 3).

In the introduction, he offers his understanding of covenant eschatology. First, Paul’s eschatology suggests “continuity in the structure of God’s covenant relationship with his people,” while “at the same time ... discontinuity ... between the character of his people within the two eras of this same history” (p. 9). Second, he posits that a threefold covenant structure characterizes Paul’s thinking. Given this covenant eschatology, Hafemann defends the thesis “that ... the Pauline polarities” (p. 16) such as law vs. gospel or faith vs. works ought to be understood as formally distinct not materially different. The newness of the new covenant entails a renewal rather than replacement of the old.

In chapter 1, Hafemann looks at Galatians 3:6–14 in conversation with Martin Luther. He rejects the anthropological reading offered by Luther and his followers, emphasizing in turn an eschatological one. Chapter 2 explores Galatians 3–4. The author concludes that “Paul’s ... ultimate concern is” the “eschatological restoration ... in Christ” (p. 85). In chapter 3, he argues that 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 is the “center” of 2 Corinthians 1–9 and thus where we discover Paul’s conviction that “the new creation entails” the “new covenant” (p. 117). In his treatment of 2 Corinthians 10:12–18 (ch. 4), Hafemann insightfully argues that Paul has a divine commendation because of his “missionary work” (p. 136). Hafemann persuasively argues (ch. 5) that Galatians 4:12–20 and 2 Corinthians 4:7–12 present Paul’s weakness as grounding “his preaching” (p. 147). In chapter 6, he provocatively contends that Paul’s blamelessness in Philippians 3:6 is not “a sham, illusory” or “over-confidence,” but rather Paul’s possession of true righteousness and blamelessness pre-Christ (p. 174).

In chapter 7, Hafemann, commenting on the thorny passage of Romans 2:12–16, argues that the Gentiles in 2:14 ought to be understood as Christians and thus their “Torah” obedience “will be the criterion of final, eschatological judgment ... God will use to judge those who sin” (p. 236), whether Jews or unbelieving Gentiles. In conversation with Krister Stendahl (ch. 8), Hafemann, giving attention to Romans 11, affirms Stendahl’s critique of the introspective West and its subsequent “law/gospel contrast” (p. 269) while rejecting his claim that justification by faith only applies to Gentiles. Chapter 9 looks at the OT quotes in Romans 15 as connecting “the eschatological hope of the gentiles ... with the redemption of Israel” (p. 295). In chapter 10, he argues that Galatians 5–6, 1 Corinthians 7, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 reinforce the connection between the new covenant and the new creation. Hafemann concludes this monograph by comparing Paul’s thought with the ideas of the Qumran community.

By way of evaluation, three major criticisms emerge. Hafemann’s argument that the difference between the old and new covenant is not material but rather formal will not persuade everyone. It seems better to read (e.g.) Galatians 3–4 as indicating that the Mosaic covenant if taken in isolation is materially different, but that Paul argues for its necessary connection with the prior Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gal 3:17). In addition, while covenant is an important category for Paul, one wonders if it has as much interpretive significance as Hafemann gives it. Direct engagement with A. Andrew Das’s contrary position (*Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 65–93]) would have bolstered this claim. Lastly, Hafemann seems to understand justification by faith as a future event. He writes, “the criterion of justification on the day of ... judgment will be the faithful ‘doing the law’” (p. 359). At the very least, this obscures the past reality of justification in Rom 3–4. One wishes he had interacted with the nuanced eschatological understanding of justification offered by, among others, G. K. Beale (*A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011, 469–557]).

Despite these criticisms, this collection of essays is superb and the work of a scholar immersed in the Pauline corpus and the secondary literature. Hafemann's exegesis, while sympathetic to the new perspective trajectory, wrestles with the text itself and is not afraid to take a dissenting or minority position. Because he reads Paul deeply and attempts to understand the polarities in the apostle's thinking, he is a scholar that ought to receive a wide readership as he will challenge the reader to engage Paul's writings more deeply and thoroughly, even if one may disagree at points. To conclude, this work is highly recommended for the serious student of Paul and especially for the Pauline scholar.

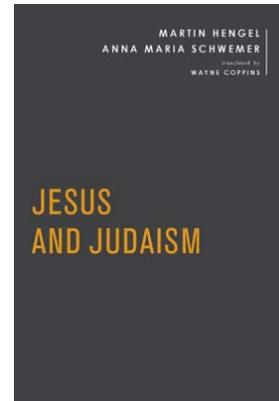
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Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer. *Jesus and Judaism*. Translated by Wayne Coppins. Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity 6. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. xx + 800 pp. £75.50/\$89.95.

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Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer's 2007 co-authored volume on the early years of Paul and the Jesus-movement will already be well-known to English-speaking *Neutestamentler*. Their newest translated volume, *Jesus and Judaism*, joins *Paul between Damascus and Antioch* (trans. John Bowden [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997]) as a volume that must be consulted by New Testament scholars when studying the earliest years of the Jesus-movement. *Jesus and Judaism* is the first in a planned four-volume series with Mohr Siebeck entitled *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, which aims to describe the history of early Christians from Jesus through the end of the second century. As the title suggests, the first volume explores the Jewish world in which early Christianity grew up and focuses on the person of Jesus.



This hefty tome is divided into preliminary observations followed by seven parts. The authors set out their vision for the series and put forward the thesis that the early Jesus-movement is best described as a development from within Judaism that makes sense within the diversity and historical exigencies of Second Temple Judaism. Part 1 then offers a historical sketch of Judaism from Pompey to the fall of Jerusalem (63 BCE–70 CE) while also examining the various religious parties that occupied Roman Palestine. The following section begins to turn to Jesus by outlining the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus and analysing the sources that point the way forward on this quest. Part 3 engages Jesus's early experiences in Galilee and devotes particular attention to John the Baptist. Hengel and Schwemer consider Jesus's activity and proclamation in part 4. They locate a key difference between Jesus and John the Baptist in Jesus's proclamation of God as Father. In part 5, Hengel and Schwemer take up Jesus's healings, exorcisms, and resurrections. They regard the stories in the Gospels to "have a concrete basis in the actions of Jesus," although Jesus may be "more foreign" in these stories than post-Enlightenment Christians sometimes like to believe (p. 525). Part 6 examines the last week of Jesus's life and gives attention to the trial. For example, Jesus's silence could be regarded as an admission of guilt due to a tradition that goes back to the Twelve Tables (p. 637–38). The final part examines the resurrection testimonies and gives particular attention to 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 since it is the earliest report. They argue that faith and reality cannot be separated when trying to understand the resurrection.

For contemporary readers, it may be the resurrection rather than the cross that serves as the point of offense and foolishness in the gospel (see pp. 684–85).

The authors summarize some of the chief findings of the book in a concluding note. They hold that Jesus's proclamation that the kingdom of God is in the process of realization is key to understanding who Jesus is. Likewise, although Jesus presents himself in prophetic terms, the term prophet on its own is not sufficient to describe Jesus. Jesus is differentiated from his prophetic herald John by his messianic claim. Finally, the disciples are called to follow Jesus and are sent out by him. The disciples thus provide continuity between Jesus himself and the early Jesus-movement.

While this last point serves as a transition to volume 2 in the series (*Die Urgemeinde und das Judenchristentum* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019]), Hengel and Schwemer's study of Jesus highlights the importance of studying Jesus himself if one is engaged in historical study of the Jesus-movement. The study of early Christianity cannot be undertaken without a good grasp of the movement's founder and focus of worship. The authors rightly point out that it is unnecessary to assume that there is a gulf between Jesus and later believers. The disciples provide both points of transition and points of continuity. The authors are also correct to emphasise the importance of understanding Jesus within the Judaism of Roman Palestine. The claim that the Jesus-movement can be described wholly as a child of Judaism will be more controversial. However, if one allows that Roman Palestine had encountered Hellenism not only in the aftermath of Alexander the Great and Pompey but also in the intervening Maccabean period, it becomes easier to see what Hengel and Schwemer mean when they seek to describe early Christianity in thoroughly Jewish terms.

In a review of the German edition of this book, Peter Tomson wrote that Hengel and Schwemer have laid "a fascinating and important book" on the table ("ein faszinierendes und wichtiges Buch"; *JSJ* 40 [2009]: 404). There is something wonderful about being guided along in the current of Jewish and Jesus studies by the work of two great historians. The prose is lively, a testament to both the authors and the translator. The argument is carefully laid out. The authors do not wobble in their position, nor does their footing falter. While Anglophone scholars will be familiar with Hengel and Schwemer from their other translated books, they will also be grateful that English is now one of the languages around the table where Hengel and Schwemer's book lies.

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Chris Keith. *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 276 pp. £47.99/\$74.00.

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Manuscripts, rather than being merely a vehicle for text, are material objects more akin to a finely crafted sculpture or work of art. In his latest work, *The Gospel as Manuscript*, Chris Keith adds his voice to the growing chorus of scholars giving greater emphasis to manuscripts as material objects in their own right (p. 9). Chris Keith is Research Professor of New Testament and early Christianity and is the Director for the Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible at St Mary's University, Twickenham.

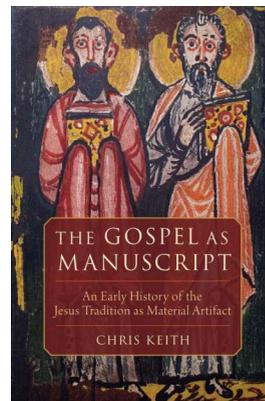
The main thrust of *The Gospel as Manuscript* is clearly articulated in the introduction: “the Jesus tradition that unfolded in the first three centuries of the Common Era would not have happened in the precise way that it did without manuscripts” (p. 9). Keith places this thesis in tension with but not in complete opposition to theories of orality that prefer “living traditions” over the written word (p. 6).

This work is composed of three parts. Part 1, “The Gospel as Manuscript,” consists of chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 engages with the work of both William A. Johnson and Jan Assmann (p. 17) and proposes that manuscripts and the texts they contain functioned as cultural “identity markers” (p. 33). Chapter 2 orients the present study within both past and present scholarly trends (pp. 36–39), though the bulk of the chapter primarily dialogues with the work of Eva Mroczek and Matthew Larsen (pp. 40–64).

Part 2, “The Gospel as Gospels,” containing chapters 3, 4, and 5, analyzes evidence from the Synoptic, Johannine and Thomasine traditions indicating that they were in competition with the textualized Markan tradition. Chapter 3 postulates that “Mark enabled an open-ended reception history for the Jesus tradition when he shifted it into written medium” (p. 13). Chapter 4 highlights the importance of Mark’s mention of its own “reader” (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων, Mk 13:14; p. 111), Matthew’s self-reference as a book (βίβλος, Matt 1:1; p. 115), and Luke’s competitive posture towards other Gospels such as Mark (p. 112). Chapter 5 focuses on the Johannine attitude towards other written Jesus traditions (John 20:30–31; 21:24–25; p. 135) and the Thomasine incipit positions itself in competition with other written Gospel predecessors (p. 154–55).

Part 3, “The Gospel as Liturgy,” includes the final two chapters. Chapter 6 discusses the instances of the “public” reading of the Jesus tradition referred to in early Christian sources and argues that it was public reading during worship gatherings that helped to shape the canon. Chapter 7 evaluates the relationship between Jewish synagogue worship and the liturgical reading of the Torah and the practice of reading Jesus traditions in Christian assemblies. In the final segment Keith concludes the work by stating that “the Gospel book, and what one did with it, became a physical space on which Christian standing with the rest of the world was negotiated” (p. 235).

The main thrust of the book works from the premise that Mark “offers no indication whatsoever of why it was placed on a manuscript” (p. 90). In addition, it is noted elsewhere that it is “a fact that textualization of tradition was not a predetermined eventuality or organic outgrowth of the tradition process” (p. 97). According to Keith, Mark and the other Gospel writers then began to see their textualized traditions in competition, either with the Jewish scriptures (p. 129), or, as in the case of Luke and John, in competition with Mark and other textualized Jesus traditions (pp. 130, 154).



In light of this, it is surprising that Keith does not consider passages such as Deuteronomy 18:18 (that a prophet like Moses was foretold) and the role this prophecy played in second temple Jewish messianic expectations. Keith already noted that Matthew likely viewed Jesus as a Moses-like prophet (p. 118) and, as Deuteronomy 18:18 reveals, this coming Moses-like prophet was to receive and to speak a new message from God. This is evidenced within the Qumran community in writings like DSS 4Q175, which quotes from Deuteronomy 18 and refers to a coming prophet like Moses and it is obvious that this community textualized their own messianic traditions. It appears that if the early Christians viewed Jesus as a fulfillment of this prophecy—that Jesus came with a new message from God (see Matt 1:1; John 5:46; Acts 3:2–23)—the natural progression then would be to write this new message from God into a book in the tradition of Moses (Deut 31:9). This places the Gospels not in “muted” competition or in tension with the Jewish scriptures as Keith argues (p. 129) but as a natural continuation of messianic prophecies in the second Temple Jewish tradition.

Despite this, *The Gospel as Manuscript* gives a detailed overview of the impact that the written Jesus traditions and their reading in worship gatherings had upon the Christian community in the shaping of the New Testament canon. Keith is to be commended for this thorough and up-to-date engagement with the relevant scholarship on orality, liturgical reading of the Jesus traditions, and early Christian book culture. The work is approachable yet rigorous, making it beneficial to scholars, students, pastors, and teachers alike.

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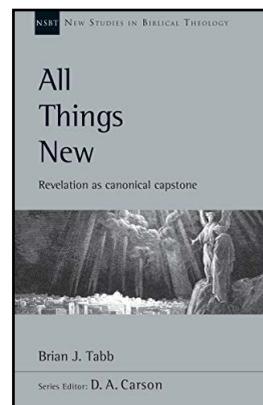
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Brian J. Tabb. *All Things New: Revelation As Canonical Capstone*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 48. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 270 pp. £14.99/\$28.00

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Reading, writing, or preaching the book of Revelation need not be like Alice falling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland. Granted, there are complex passages and multiple OT allusions which can make it challenging. However, as Brian Tabb shows in this addition to the NSBT series, tracing key biblical theological themes makes it possible to form a coherent interpretation of the Apocalypse that benefits both the academy and the church.

So why another book on Revelation? One reason is that much of the existing material is either set on predicting the future or has decided to confine the book to its historical context, but Tabb provides an alternative approach. He adopts an eclectic position, suggesting that Revelation “is a book—indeed, the *final* book—of Christian Scripture meant to decode our reality, capture our imagination and master our lives with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (p. 2, emphasis original). The central thesis of his work is an expansion of Bauckham’s argument concerning Revelation as the climax of prophecy. Tabb wants to take this a step further, recognizing that the canonical position of the book means that it is not only the climax of prophecy but the capstone of Christian Scripture. Revelation is not a detached piece of literature but the “fulfilment or goal of previous prophecy” (p. 19), the “grand conclusion in the already-not-yet reign of Christ” (p. 24). Allowing the



location of the book to frame and shape our interpretation of its message is something which I fully agree with and I am grateful for Tabb's work in highlighting this important hermeneutical principle.

Making a claim is one thing, however; substantiating it is another. Across the four sections which make up the body of this work Tabb does provide a convincing case for viewing Revelation as the canonical capstone. Some may like to have seen detailed engagement with the Apocalypse's checkered history in the early church's process of defining the boundaries of the canon, however, I do not think that this detracts from the book. Each section traces a theme across the OT which finds its climactic fulfilment in Revelation. The themes are as follows: the Triune God (chs. 2–4), Worship and Witness (chs. 5–6), Judgement, Salvation and Restoration (chs. 7–9), and the Word of God (ch. 10).

Two chapters help to illustrate how Tabb fleshes out his thesis. First of all, in chapter 6, he discusses the place of the nations in the Apocalypse and the battle for universal worship. The OT is replete with passages concerning the place of the nations and the opportunity for them to draw near to God. In light of Christ and the climactic role of Revelation, the choice which has always been discussed and issued in Scripture is given unmistakable clarity. As the capstone of the canon, Revelation places a binary decision before all the peoples of the world: will you worship God and the Lamb or the dragon and the beast? This is not only helpful as it shows the connections between the Apocalypse and passages from Ezekiel and Zechariah, but it reminds the reader of the pressing need for all nations to have uncompromised gospel witnesses who are worshiping the Lamb, inviting those they live beside to join them from among all peoples in giving glory to God.

In chapter 8, Tabb draws upon the theme of the urban world across scripture, demonstrating how the Apocalypse utilises OT depictions of the city such as Babel (Gen 11:1–9) and Tyre (Ezek 27:1–28:19) to make sense of the prominent influence of Rome in the everyday lives of the believers in the first century. As an aside to his main thesis, Tabb helpfully argues that “Babylon is not simply a cipher for Rome but is a rich biblical-theological symbol for the world's idolatrous, seductive political economy” (p. 164). Standing at the climax of Scripture, John presents believers with a radical Christocentric alternative. They are to focus on the coming new Jerusalem, the faithful bride (21:1–22:5) as opposed to the great whore, Babylon (17:1–18:24). In an increasingly urbanized world, where compromise with Babylon is only a click away, it is important to remember “the bride's enduring beauty and the harlot's borrowed bling” (p. 183).

At a more mundane level *All Things New* provides a number of helpful tables laying out passages from the OT alongside their counterparts in Revelation that some will find very helpful. The bibliography is also a good resource as it identifies not only the main contributors to studies in Revelation, such as Beale and Bauckham, but more recent articles and texts as well.

In recognizing the canonical position of Revelation, and by handling it as a book within the wider context of the canon of Scripture, Tabb offers the reader a very helpful guide to making sense of the climax of the canon. I find his argument and assessment convincing and would recommend this volume to any student, pastor, or lecturer who is preparing to teach on the book of Revelation.

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## — HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

John Coffey, ed. *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume 1: The Post-Reformation Era, 1559–1689*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 544 pp. £113.14/\$145.00.

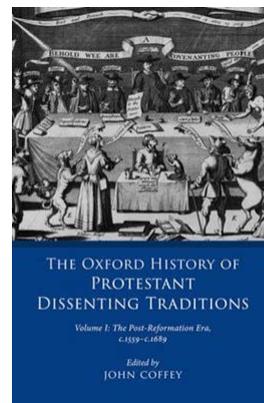
*The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions* is a collection of five substantial volumes exploring the narrative of Protestant dissent from the Reformation era to the twentieth century. The first volume examines Protestant dissent in the Anglophone world from the Act of Uniformity of 1559 to the Act of Toleration of 1689. It features twenty-one contributions, each one teasing out a particular dimension of the variegated, complex landscape of religious nonconformity. Arranged in four parts, the first half of the volume considers the dissenting traditions within and outside England: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers. The second half reassesses the nature of dissent concerning gender, sermons, politics, print literature, and worship.

While the structure and the progression of the volume are logically arranged, there is a peculiarly striking imbalance of material. Four chapters are devoted to Presbyterianism, including R. Scott Spurlock's chapter on dissent in Scotland, devoted to Scottish Presbyterianism. In contrast, there are two chapters on the Quakers and one chapter each on the Baptists and Congregationalists. One strength of the chapter arrangements, however, is the attention given to Transatlantic and Continental Anglophone dissent, as demonstrated by chapters on American colonial dissent and English nonconformity in the Dutch Republic.

This tome challenges older historiography on nonconformist dissent by reassessing the idea of denominational lines of demarcation, one that tends to highlight denominational identities in the early modern era as clear-cut and straightforward. This work aims to demonstrate “the contingency of Dissent, as well as the fluidity of seventeenth-century denominational identities,” while also acknowledging that nonconformists “went to great lengths to sharpen the boundaries of group identity” (p. 3). The chapters that address denominational traditions aptly illustrate and support the volume's primary purpose by tracing the heritage of Protestant dissenting traditions, highlighting their flexible borders.

Two chapters are noteworthy of mentioning. Jacqueline Rose's intriguing study investigates how Dissenters and their polity advocated the notions of persecution and toleration. Rose argues that persecution and suffering “fostered the identity of Dissent, and the memory of suffering retrospectively solidified categories of Dissenters” (p. 314). She challenges and corrects the mid-twentieth century assertion that England was transformed from a persecuting state to a tolerant state in the seventeenth century, contending that the narrative is much more complicated and nuanced than previously purported.

In his chapter on Congregationalists, Tim Cooper stresses the challenges in labeling English Dissenters with concrete binaries. He suggests that more attention be given to appreciating the “underlying complexity and divergence even within those labels” (p. 110). John Owen, a Congregationalist, viewed the practices and principles of Presbyterians as essentially the same as his denomination's distinctives, demonstrating that denominational lines were much more porous than has been interpreted. At the same time, however, the attitudes of Dissenters towards one another across denominational boundaries



created a paradoxical ambiance in which “minor differences” of doctrine or practice instigated “major aggravation” (p. 111).

Unfortunately, this volume contains a surprisingly high number of typos, errors, and formatting gaffes for an expensive scholarly work by a top-tier publisher. Inconsistent footnote formatting, with the occasional incomplete or missing data in the footnotes, plagues every chapter. Some will find it frustrating that sometimes when references to primary sources are made (such as on page 464), there is no corresponding citation in a footnote, making it difficult to follow up.

Those aside, this work stands out in the way in which it highlights the richness and diversity of each dissenting tradition, avoiding the monolithic approach that many works addressing confessional identities tend toward. The scope of topics featured in the second half of the volume conveys the multi-faceted, nuanced world of Protestant dissent, reminding us that dissent involved and affected multiple layers of religious and social life. This volume is an essential compendium for and welcome addition to early modern religious studies, bringing a fresh approach and a much-needed reassessment of confessional identity in early modern Protestantism.

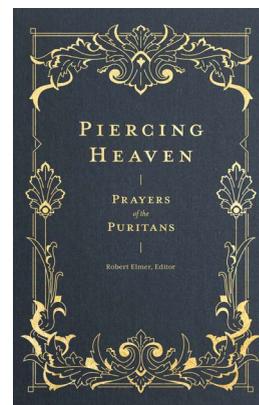
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Robert Elmer, ed. *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. 321 pp. £18.99/\$23.99.

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Nearly forty-five years since the first appearance of *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of Puritan prayers that has been reprinted over a dozen times, Lexham Press has published a new anthology of Puritan devotion: *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*. The book contains over two-hundred prayers from the past, “edited and compiled from sermons and original writings” of the Puritans and those their spiritual tradition (p. 2). Having spent the better part of twenty years as a novelist of historical fiction, editor Robert Elmer hopes this work will portray the “authors” as real people who, despite their different contexts and styles of speech, are remarkably accessible for Christians today. Though not a prayer manual per se, the book offers a healthy balance of laments, praises, supplications, and confessions that can equip an aspiring reader to “pray like a Puritan” (p. 1).



Elmer argues that the Puritans were “neither casual nor perfunctory” in prayer but devoted and humble as they drew deep from the wells of God’s sovereign care as revealed in Scripture (p. 1). Indeed, filled with awe and love, they prayed God’s own words back to him (p. 4). To help the modern reader, Elmer has updated the language of these prayers to remove any “barrier between their understanding of God, and ours” (p. 1). Often, words spoken in treatises *about* God are reformatted on these pages to the second-person to make the personal address of a prayer. Like *The Valley of Vision*, each page is fitted with a title for the prayer but, unlike the older book, also lists the Puritan who penned it.

The presentation of the material in *Piercing Heaven* is certainly one of the book’s best features. Elmer has divided the book thematically into sixteen chapters, including as many as thirty-six prayers

in a chapter and as few as five. The divisions range from “Help Me Begin the Day” to “Help Me Close the Day,” from “Forgive My Sins” to “Help Me Rest in God’s Love.” On average, the prayers are shorter and more manageable than those in *The Valley of Vision*. The modernized English is an improvement, too. The authors themselves are diverse, too. There are some who boasted distinguished careers, like Bayly and Owen, others who did not, such as Bunyan, and still more who lived over a century after these. Perhaps in light of this variety, Elmer appended to the end of the book a list of small biographical paragraphs for each author to provide a general frame for their context (pp. 301–9). Elmer also includes a helpful searchable index (pp. 311–13).

Readers also may appreciate the specificity of selections within each chapter. For example, chapter 4 (“Suffering”) includes a prayer entitled “Prayer For a Dying Father,” and chapter 14 (“Help Me Live the Day”) has “A Midday Prayer for Perspective.” But the chapter selections themselves deserve a further word. Readers may recall that the first two chapters of *The Valley of Vision* are dedicated to the doctrines of the Trinity and redemption, respectively. This is not the case with *Piercing Heaven*. There are no properly theological sections. Rather, chapters stress the *experience* of theology—the personal interaction with divine attributes and the Spirit-initiated application of divine works. Resting in God’s love (ch. 6), for instance, contains prayers highlighting divine condescension (p. 89), covenantal favor (pp. 91–92), and sovereignty (p. 98). Likewise, prayers accenting God’s holiness (p. 240), the work of creation (p. 245), and Christ’s ascension (p. 226) are each cataloged as prayers giving praise and thanks to God (ch. 12). It seems that whatever chapter one determines best to pick up and read, it will likely afford him a sense of the well-blended theological material the Puritans applied to life’s situations.

Of course, not every author here was a Puritan. And, while Elmer acknowledges this right away (p. 5), the representation of those more commonly known as “Puritans” compared to those who are not is somewhat odd. Octavius Winslow (1808–1878), Robert Hawker (1753–1827), and George Whitfield (1714–1770) are included, but there is nothing from Perkins, Hooker, Goodwin, Flavel, or Manton. The skewed distribution of material between authors is also surprising. Among those with the most entries are Hawker (54), Doddridge (38), and Henry (14). Owen, however, has only one prayer in the book, and it spans just five lines!

His inclusion, though, does also shed light on what may have been a pragmatic, and perhaps hurried, editorial process. There is nothing drawn from Owen’s other eight million published words—not even from his *Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer* (1682). Thomas Brooks’s *The Mute Christian* (1659) make up his two entries, but at the exclusion of his 1665 work on prayer, *The Price Key of Heaven*. It may be no surprise, then, that of Hawker’s fifty-four prayers, each came from a single published work.

Despite these critiques, Elmer’s editing has provided readers with a fresh, accessible, and applicable collection that every praying person ought to keep nearby.

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Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds. *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020. xix + 379 pp. £23.99/\$34.99.

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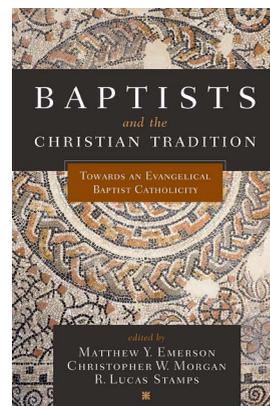
In 1974 W. A. Criswell, then already two-time president of the Southern Baptist Convention, began a Wednesday night teaching series at First Baptist Church of Dallas on ancient Christian creeds and confessions. In a laudable moment of honesty, Criswell declared, “This is the first time that I have ever studied such a thing as this.” Amy Carter Whitfield, relaying this fascinating story, calls Criswell “typical” among Southern Baptists of his day in his general lack of engagement with the Christian tradition (pp. 249–50). Recognizing this legacy, the editors of the present volume hope to offer a way forward.

Specifically, the work aims at “retrieval for the sake of renewal” (p. 351) and seeks to show that “Baptist convictions and catholic sensibilities are not mutually exclusive” (p. 3). It should perhaps be noted here that the book’s title could be slightly misleading. The work, while noting a range of Baptist history, frequently focuses on *Southern* Baptists and the Christian tradition, with virtually every contributor somehow associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. With this in mind, after a foreword by Timothy George and a brief introduction by the editors, sixteen chapters cover how Baptists have either engaged (or failed to engage) the broader Christian tradition on a range of issues.

The chapters cover topics ranging from baptism (Matthew Emerson) and the Lord’s Supper (Michael Haykin), to a variety of subjects labeled as “classic”—classic Trinitarianism (Malcolm Yarnell III), classic Christology (R. Lucas Stamps), classic ecclesiology (W. Madison Grace II), classic biblical interpretation (Patrick Schreiner), and classic spirituality (Dustin Bruce). Further chapters cover the unity of the church (Christopher Morgan and Kristin Ferguson), *Sola Scriptura* (Rhyne Putnam), corporate worship (Taylor Worley), denominational structures (Amy Carter Whitfield), the relationship of Baptists to wider evangelicalism (David Dockery), global Christianity (Soojin Chung), racial tension (Walter Strickland III), and Baptist contributions in the areas of ecclesiology and religious liberty (Jason Duesing).

Rather than making a foolhardy attempt to summarize each chapter, I will take the reviewer’s privilege to highlight some of what I found to be the strongest chapters before noting a few weaknesses. Haykin, a leading Baptist historian and scholar, unsurprisingly offers perhaps the most well-researched contribution. He ably demonstrates how early seventeenth-century Baptists did not generally hold memorialist views of the Lord’s Supper but rather embraced the notion of a spiritual presence usually associated with Calvin and the Reformed tradition. The memorialist view only came to dominate Particular Baptist circles in the late eighteenth century as Baptists became highly focused on missionary endeavors and saw less use for non-converting ordinances.

Malcolm Yarnell III provides a fascinating survey of Baptist creeds and confessions and the extent to which they used classic Trinitarian language of ontology (e.g., essence, substance) and relationality (e.g., persons). His chapter, along with Putnam’s on scripture, should at least give pause to any inclined toward a “no creed but the Bible” approach. Amy Carter Whitfield and Walter Strickland II, in their contributions, commendably take postures of lament for the less-than-savory aspects of Southern Baptist history. For her part, Whitfield notes ways in which twentieth-century Southern Baptists have



had isolationist tendencies that have at times led to thinly veiled feelings of superiority relative to other denominations and traditions. Strickland, in turn, narrates the racist history of the SBC before providing a series of suggestions for how to move toward racial unity. In a particularly engaging moment, he writes, “In America, the struggle for racial reconciliation is a premier litmus test for spiritual maturity” (p. 324).

Yet several weaknesses also recur throughout the volume. First, in contrast to Whitfield and Strickland, some chapters strike a tone that, at times, borders on triumphalism, uncritically noting only Baptist strengths. Further, although the book’s arguments frequently rely upon particular reconstructions of Baptist history, few of the contributors are historians, and the sources cited are often survey-level textbooks. It might also be asked whether labeling many doctrinal *loci* as “classic” at times omits the real diversity inherent in the Christian tradition. For example, Schreiner’s call to read the Bible “like Jesus, his disciples, and even the early church” (p. 151) commendably calls us to engage pre-critical exegesis. But Schreiner does not address the diverse exegesis of the early church and leaves unanswered the difficult questions of whom we ought to imitate, and how. There are no easy answers to such questions. Finally, the work includes an Appendix by moderate Baptist theologian Steven Harmon that could have been a fascinating rejoinder to the book’s more evangelical proposals. Unfortunately, Harmon does not interact with any of the chapters and instead writes what could have been a standalone piece unattached to the present book.

In 1974, W. A. Criswell’s cursory engagement with the Christian tradition was perhaps all too typical among Southern Baptists. Today, the winds are changing, and more Baptists, as evidenced by this volume, are interested in retrieving past resources for the sake of renewing present ecclesial vitality. This book deserves to be commended as a preliminary venture in this direction. Yet a number of its contributions themselves display a notable lack of nuanced historical engagement with the church’s pluriform past. The work thereby inadvertently points to the pressing need Baptists still have to truly engage on a deep level with the entire catholic history of Christ’s church.

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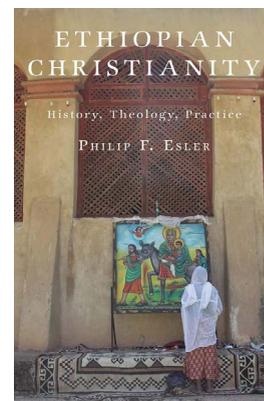
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Philip F. Esler. *Ethiopian Christianity: History, Theology, Practice*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. xv + 310 pp. £36.50/\$39.95.

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Philip F. Esler is Portland Chair in New Testament Studies in the School of Education and Humanities at the University of Gloucestershire. In *Ethiopian Christianity*, Esler introduces readers to the distinctive features of Christianity in Ethiopia.

Chapter 1 details the uniqueness of Ethiopian Christianity because of several factors. First, Ethiopian emperors acted as patrons of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (335–1974 CE). Second, the geographical location of Ethiopia enabled the people to maintain the traditions of Ethiopian Christianity. Esler argues that Ethiopian Christianity is a cultural amalgam of Judaism, Syriac and Coptic Christianities, and African religion. Along with the Oriental Orthodox



churches, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) subscribes to a “miaphysite” Christology rather than Chalcedonian Christology. Although the EOC dominates the terrain of Ethiopian Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam also coexist alongside it.

Chapter 2 presents the introduction of institutional Christianity in the 4th century CE. During the reign of King Ezana, the spread of Christianity progressed. Confined initially to Greek-speaking merchants in Aksum, Christianity began to spread due to their effort to evangelize the Aksumites. Ezana likely converted after Frumentius’s return from Alexandria and then cautiously began contextualized evangelism efforts.

Chapter 3 overviews the state of Christianity between the 5th and 17th centuries. After Ezana’s reign, the Ethiopian kings continued to produce coins with crosses on them to spread Christianity under their patronage. The effort of Christianization and building churches with the royal army’s support extended as far as Yemen. Following Pachomius’s cenobitic-style monasteries, the Nine Saints built monasteries to train and evangelize Aksum. They also engaged in Bible translation. The Golden Years of Aksum dwindled with the rise of Persian and Islamic powers in Arabia and North Africa. Christianity, however, was penetrating the regions south of Aksum. The expansion of Christianity continued in the period of the Zagwe dynasty (1137–1270). The kings of Zagwe built numerous churches in the region. In 1270, the Solomonic dynasty came to power with the reign of Yekunno Amlak. The kings in the Solomonic dynasty utilized *Kebrā Nagast*, a 14th-century national epic, to establish the notions that the kings descended from King Solomon, Moses’s tablets were housed in Aksum, and Aksum was the New Jerusalem. The 16th and 17th centuries were tumultuous for Ethiopia as Christians dealt with the Muslim and the Oromo invasions and a civil war due to the imposition of Roman Catholicism under Susenyos I’s directive. The EOC tradition was threatened and several invaluable artifacts, monasteries, and churches were destroyed.

Chapter 4 covers the period between the mid-17th century to the present. The country recovered from invasions and civil wars, but the political turmoil echoed that of the Old Testament judges. The EOC played a significant role in gluing the society back together and creating a national identity. Nevertheless, Emperor Tewdros II and subsequent emperors labored to unify Ethiopia. The Solomonic dynasty ended with the death of Haile Selassie and with the rise of the Derg, which confiscated lands from the EOC and gave Muslims and the Pentecostals freedom to conduct public worship. As a result, the EOC began losing its grip as the state religion. However, the anti-religious sentiment would later affect the Protestant churches due to the Derg’s embrace of socialism. After the fall of the Derg, the present regime came to power in 1991. Religious entities were free to practice their beliefs. The EOC experienced internal conflicts between the Abunas in the diaspora and in Ethiopia. Nonetheless, the current Prime minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, was able to mediate and reunify the two factions in 2018.

Chapter 5 overviews the intellectual and literary traditions of Ethiopia. Writing has existed in Ethiopia since the 7th century BCE. Later, the invention of Ge’ez and the expansion of writing assisted the literary traditions in Ethiopia. Monasteries played a significant role in Bible translation and the preservation of various manuscripts such as 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

Chapter 6 discusses the EOC’s art, architecture and music. Esler identifies eight periods (4th century–20th century CE) where EOC Christian art developed. Although Ethiopian artistic traditions have their own unique style, Western artists have contributed to Christian art development in Ethiopia. The EOC also contributed in the areas of architecture and music. The cathedral of St. Mary Zion and Lalibela’s churches are some notable examples of architecture found in Ethiopia. When Jerusalem fell

in the 12th century, Lalibela's churches were constructed to establish the New Jerusalem in Ethiopia. Regarding music, St. Yared is considered to be the one who invented the "music and chant of Ethiopian Orthodoxy ... [and] musical notation (p. 166).

Chapter 7 delineates the theology of the EOC. Ethiopia and her churches are considered sacred, reflecting the Jewish roots of EOC's theology. The EOC has also carved out sacred times like Christ's epiphany and the true cross's exaltation. The celebration of Mary, saints and angels occurs on annually designated days. The EOC also adopted seasons for fasting. The eucharistic liturgy is the central sacred activity of the EOC.

Chapter 8 discusses the history of Protestant Christianity in Ethiopia. The arrival of Protestant missionaries from Europe and the United States enabled evangelical Christianity to permeate the Ethiopian context. Bible translation into the vernacular, the writing of hymns, radio broadcasting, outreach to university students, the Billy Graham crusade, and Pentecostalism have played a significant role in advancing Protestant Christianity.

Chapter 9 briefly overviews Catholicism in Ethiopia. The number of Catholics in Ethiopia constitutes 0.8% of the entire population. The Catholic Church was mainly unsuccessful in Ethiopia because of the historical disaster caused by Alfonso Mendez in the first quarter of the 17th century. Since then, the aversion against the Catholic missionaries in Ethiopia has been vehement.

Chapter 10 concludes with a discussion of the future of Christianity in Ethiopia. Esler notes that Islam, ethnic, and religious conflicts are the major challenges of Christianity in Ethiopia. He proposes that a healthy ecumenism between churches in Ethiopia could alleviate many of the problems among themselves. In turn, this will help them reach out to Muslims, and create cohesion around their national identity as Ethiopians.

Esler ably overviews Ethiopian Christianity from its humble inception to its current progression with clarity and care. His work highlights the unique features and contributions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity through the centuries, countering the notion in some circles that Christianity began with Martin Luther or Billy Graham. Esler's work stands out as the most up-to-date; it does not merely cover the past history of Christianity in Ethiopia as many works do. He deals with religio-political situations in Ethiopia as recent as 2018.

However, Esler's book excludes a major historical piece in EOC's history: the Stephanites challenged several of King Zara Yaqob's theological assertions that they deemed unbiblical and became martyrs. Their agenda of reforming the church precedes that of the Reformers of the 16th century. Esler also erroneously assumes miaphysite Christology to be the position of Ethiopian Christianity from its beginning. Prior to 1878, the Ethiopian Church did not officially hold the *Tewahedo* (Union) or miaphysite position, but had three different positions on Christology (Son of Grace, Three Births, and the Union). This controversy threatened the unity of the country, and as a result Emperor Yohannis settled the disputes by adopting the Union position.

Notwithstanding these flaws, *Ethiopian Christianity* is a helpful piece in understanding the genesis and expansion of Christianity in Ethiopia. If the book is read along with Tibebe Eshete's *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), the reader will have a comprehensive understanding of Christianity in Ethiopia.

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Marthe Hesselms. *Racial Integration in the Church of Apartheid: A Unity Only God Wants*. Studies in Reformed Theology 36. Leiden: Brill, 2018, xiv + 270 pp. £48.00/\$64.00.

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Hesselms is a senior researcher at Van Mierlo Foundation in the Netherlands. She is the co-author with Jonathan D. Teubner of the booklet *An Analysis of Gustavo Gutiérrez's A Theology of Liberation* (London: Macat, 2017). With this monograph, she offers a revision of her PhD dissertation at Boston University.

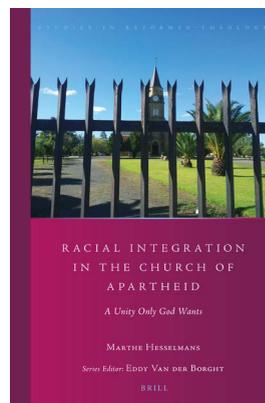
In the introductory chapter, she notes that while the “mother” Reformed church in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church (hereafter, DRC), denounced “the racial and ethnic divisions it once so fervently supported” (p. 1) near the turn of the millennium, the Reformed churches remain segregated in a post-apartheid era. She contends that to grasp persistent divisions within this family of churches fully, one must first understand “their roots in the apartheid era” (p. 3). Because of the pressure toward integration faced by South African Reformed churches and their simultaneous desire to maintain their distinct ethnic identities, they provide a telling glimpse into South Africa’s social and religious realities and, in turn, warrant her specific focus on this church family’s struggle with diversity.

Given the complexities that emerge from the dilemma of embracing diversity, on the one hand, while preserving a distinct identity, on the other, she takes “an interdisciplinary approach” that consists of insights from “religious studies” as well as “identity studies” (p. 4). With the latter, she focuses on how distinct identities (e.g., religious, national) are interwoven; with the former, she highlights the move away from secularization toward pluralism and increased religious diversity in society. She combines this with the use of such methods as “discourse analysis, archival research and qualitative field research” (p. 20). Yet, she admits that as a Dutch speaker with limited connections, she was unable to fully “address the perspective of the black African churches” (p. 22).

The book has two parts. The first part is historical; the second part is sociological, employing the aforementioned interdisciplinary approach. The conclusion to the book takes a more prescriptive tone, arguing a way forward for “overcoming social divisions in South Africa, and beyond” (p. 234).

In chapter 1, Hesselms surveys the history of South African from the beginning of its “apartheid regime in 1948” (p. 30) to the present day. Here, she covers the role of the DRC in justifying systemic racial segregation by grounding it in God’s will, but even more, the DRC’s hand in constructing “a Christian-nationalist civil religion,” which proved formative for the church as well as for “the ruling National Party” and the “highly influential ... Afrikaner *Broederbond*” (p. 30). Despite the eventual dissolution of this civil religion, its influence, she suggests, continues to be felt in South Africa, with deep socioeconomic and political divisions as evidence. In fact, as recent as 2012, “ethnicity and color remain central issues” (p. 61).

In the second chapter, she describes the struggle for unity in the Reformed church family from 1948 to the present. Previously, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) was formed to serve the “colored’ community” consisting of an Afrikaans speaking group of “mixed Asian, African and European heritage” (p. 66). Indigenous communities were served with the formation of synods, which later emerged as the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and Indian and Asian populations were served with the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA). The DRMC and DRCA merged into the URCSA (United Reformed Churches of Southern Africa) in 1994. These distinct bodies with their respective



ethnic identities and ecclesial expressions are key to understanding the struggles this family of churches faces. The author demonstrates that one major example of this is the conflicting reactions to the anti-apartheid Belhar Confession, first drafted in 1982, with some opposing it on Kuyperian grounds (e.g., sphere sovereignty) and others affirming it in line with Karl Barth and the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

These two chapters pave the way for the sociological analysis of chapters 3–4. Chapter 3 investigates how the Reformed identity is being reframed “in post-apartheid South Africa through a discourse of unity” (p. 99). Tragically, Hesselmanns finds that the discourse has led to an entrenched division between the DRC and its now-autonomous, though still associated, “daughter” church, the URCSA. The final chapter drives home the failed attempt to unite the disparate groups in the Reformed family into one “multiracial institution” (p. 231) by providing case studies of attempts at unity and the lack thereof in different regions of South Africa. Moreover, the author discovered that “circumvention of delicate issues” resulted in “few interracial alliances” formed among Reformed churches (p. 233).

The author concludes the book by reiterating why efforts toward unity didn’t work and by offering some suggestions as to what could produce true unity. Though unity was urged from the pulpit, it often had the unintended result of bolstering the need to protect “communal distinctiveness” (p. 237). Moreover, the top-down, institutional approach to unity marginalized church members who were forming interracial connections and exacerbated the fears of those concerned with losing their distinct ethnoreligious identity. She contends that greater levels of collaboration on the local level will build trust and allay the fears that accompany integration. This trust can be strengthened by the use of religious “symbols, beliefs and practices” to produce a “common sense of belonging” (p. 246).

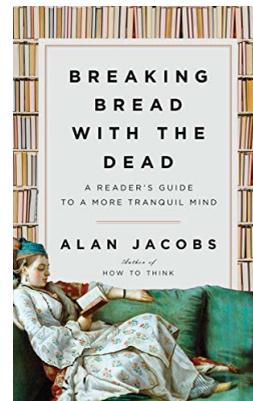
This is a sobering book because it touches on so many of the same struggles churches are experiencing in the North American context. By giving detailed attention as to the reasons for the failed attempts at unity among the Reformed church family, Hesselmanns has done an excellent service to the churches in South Africa but also to the churches abroad, especially those in North America whose past and present share some noticeable similarities with their South African counterparts. One of the most significant insights that emerged in the course of her study was that true unity is hard-earned and requires deep humility and honesty. Highly recommended.

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Alan Jacobs. *Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader's Guide to a More Tranquil Mind*. New York: Penguin, 2020. 192 pp. £13.90/\$25.00.

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In an age of outrage, a book on learning from dead authors for the sake of a more tranquil mind stands out among recent titles. With this book, Alan Jacobs completes his trilogy that began with *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and continued with *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Penguin, 2017). All focus on “a few things” that Jacobs has learned “in my teaching life that are relevant to our common life” (p. xii). The book, then, emerges from Jacobs’s years teaching humanities first at Wheaton College and now at Baylor University and responds to our “common current attitude” that “all history hitherto” is evil (p. 11).



Yet, this book’s structure is nothing like a college lecture or a typical how-to or self-help styled book. Jacobs writes the book more in the essay genre, which he compares to a spiral staircase that winds around a central idea viewed at ascending vantage points. Like an essay with chapters, this book spirals up around the central idea that “the deeper your understanding of the past, the greater *personal density* you will accumulate” (p. 18–19, original emphasis).

Jacobs argues that increasing personal density is important because our current “environment of high *informational* density produces people of low *personal* density” (p. 150). Personal density is directly proportional to “temporal bandwidth,” which Jacobs defines as “the width of your present, your *now*.... The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth” (p. 19, original emphasis). Thus, a person with high personal density is not tossed to and fro by every wave of crisis in the news nor blown around by every wind of outrage from the Twitterverse. Personal density is a specific kind of mental maturity developed through fellowship with the past.

Jacobs warns, though, that “any *genuine* kinship with our ancestors must be earned through hard mental work.” (p. 77, original emphasis). And his book commends, primarily through examples, doing that hard, mental work of expanding one’s temporal bandwidth by hosting a “permanent banquet” with dead authors, not just the ones we admire but even those who we find adverse to our values. To make his case, Jacobs both defends why keeping such table fellowship matters while he also commends strategies for not simply replacing the errors of this moment with the errors of the past.

First, breaking bread with the dead matters not merely because it increases personal density, but ultimately because it demands that we cultivate a “disposition to love.” Jacob’s argument for developing a more tranquil mind—or greater personal density—is ultimately “an argument for a genealogy of love” (p. 151). It is, of course, much easier to love a dead author who cannot talk back to you, yet, Jacobs believes, cultivating the habits of reading the past with generosity and love can not only mature us mentally, but also engender greater love for those in the present.

Second, Jacobs sifts through different approaches to reading and identifies better ways for approaching the past. For example, in chapter 4—“The Past Without Difference”—Jacobs warns of two opposing tendencies when reading the past. On the one hand, we can emphasize “negative selection” that rejects a book or person from the past as soon as we discover something that grates against our present cultural values. “But we can also get ourselves into the opposite problem—a determination to read in a sanitizing way—when faced with a text that we know is in some sense a ‘classic’ but which offends, or seems to offend” (p. 70). Instead of reading those ways, Jacobs commends in chapter 5—“The

Authentic Kernel”—looking for what one essayist calls “utopian moments” where a work reveals genuine humanity despite the book’s contrary values. Such a habit of generosity towards what one reads expands personal density.

Jacobs marshals a panoply of evidence from authors as diverse as Horace and Zadie Smith to commend this type of sympathetic engagement. In doing so, Jacobs traverses an impressive variety of topics and concepts, frequently explaining how the perspective of “the modern reader” (p. 127) may be at odds with a past author’s sentiments. Yet, since “the modern reader” is a diverse group holding a wide range of positions on the topics Jacobs mentions—like feminism, climate change, or Stoicism—it makes his use of the inclusive “we” occasionally ambiguous. Perhaps this ambiguity stems from a “crisis of audience” that Jacobs has described in interviews earlier in his career. As Jacobs felt disoriented by having to “code switch” between his scholarly work for a secular academy and essays for Christian magazines and journals, he realized that God was calling him to speak to both audiences. Yet, perhaps more than the previous two books in this trilogy, Jacobs’s intended audience felt the least clear in this book.

Nevertheless, Jacobs’s tenor of generosity is a welcome model for engaging past and present authors. He demonstrates how *and* why listening generously to real people and fictional characters from the past should create a “double realization,” namely, the discovery that such figures can both affirm values we already hold and simultaneously affront us by holding contrary values. In that moment, we must avoid the impulse to immediate “moral triage” that demands “straightforward binary decisions about whether we admire or despise a given person” (p. 131). Jacobs’s comments about the authors in this short book exemplify a generous disposition to love.

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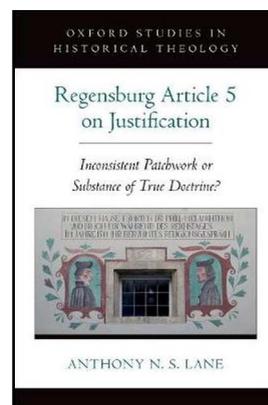
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Anthony N. S. Lane. *Regensburg Article 5 on Justification: Inconsistent Patchwork or Substance of True Doctrine?* Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. £64.00/\$99.00.

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The last seventy years have seen a profusion of dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the doctrine of justification. Behind each of these discussions has stood the Regensburg Colloquy, where in 1541, a panel of Protestant and Catholic theologians gathered to discuss their doctrinal differences. To the surprise of many, they managed to find agreement in the famed Article 5. In this volume, nearly twenty years in the making, Anthony Lane provides a thorough account of the article’s historical background, content, outcome, and significance.

For those who may be unfamiliar with Article 5, the controversy revolved around the underlying idea of double righteousness (*duplex iustitia*). Thus, on the vital question of whether justification involved an inherent or imputed righteousness, Article 5 asserted that it is *both*. In justification, the article asserted, God imparts divine righteousness by the Holy Spirit and he also forensically imputes it. For



some Reformers, however—particularly for Luther—this doctrine threatened *sola fide* and amounted to a fatal concession to Rome. He compared the article to a new patch sewn onto an old garment (p. 36).

*Regensburg Article 5 on Justification* is animated by the question of the subtitle. Does Article 5 represent an inconsistent patchwork of theological concepts, or does it represent a cohesive doctrine? Some, like Luther, dismissed it as an incongruent hodgepodge, while others, such as Calvin, saw it as a legitimate expression of Christian doctrine. Eventually most interpreters came to regard Article 5 as a discordant patchwork. In this regard, Peter Matheson's quip is often cited: "The dialogue between Protestantism and Catholicism at the Diet of Regensburg in 1541 did not fail. It never took place." Others, such as Dermot Fenlon, have called it a "scissors and paste job." Lane, however, begs to differ and spends 370 pages illustrating why.

Recognizing the highly polemical nature of the topic, Lane begins by placing his ecclesial cards on the table, identifying himself as an "Evangelical (of a more Reformed than Lutheran persuasion) who believes the Protestant doctrine of justification" (p. 3). In addition to illumining the details of Article 5, he seeks to clarify the doctrines of key figures such as Calvin, Contarini, Gropper, and Pole, all of whom interact with the article. Lane's research offers insights that will enrich contemporary discussion on justification among Protestants and Roman Catholics.

In the interest of making this academic work accessible to a larger audience, Lane has translated the material into English in the body of his text, except for a few technical terms, which are defined in the "Glossary of Latin Terms" at the conclusion (p. 335). He also includes an appendix with major drafts of Article 5 from Worms, Melancthon, Eck, Gropper, and the final version. All but the Worms draft (which is much longer) appear in two columns, with the Latin to the left and English to the right—a splendid gift to students.

The heart of Lane's book is chapter 5, where he offers a meticulous analysis and commentary of every line of the article. Bolded names of various noteworthy sixteenth-century teachers punctuate these pages (e.g., Contarini, Eck, *Tridentine Decree on Justification*, Pighius, Bucer, Calvin, etc.). For example, following §3:7, Lane says, "The emphasis on the role of the Spirit in uniting us to God by faith is in line with Calvin's approach in the first chapter of Book 3 of his *Institutio*, most of which is from 1559" (p. 167). Such comments reveal how important figures were processing and being influenced by Article 5. Surrounding chapters address important dimensions of the sixteenth-century justification debate: reactions to the article, developments following it (including the Council of Trent's *Decree on Justification*), and a distinction between "double righteousness" (*duplex iustitia*) and "double justification" (*duplex iustificatio*). Finally, chapter 6 summarizes Lane's argument for the theological integrity of Article 5.

What Lane convincingly argues is that, according to Article 5, justification is on the basis of imputed, *not* imparted, righteousness. The forensic declaration of Christ's righteousness is the necessary ground by which God accepts sinners because inherent righteousness remains flawed and unworthy of divine favor. Precisely because of this emphasis on the ongoing need for mercy, the Protestants at Regensburg could embrace the final version of Article 5. Lane thus quotes Calvin, who wrote to Farel on May 11, 1541: "You will be astonished, I am sure, that our opponents have yielded so much.... Our friends have thus retained also the substance of the true doctrine, so that nothing can be comprehended within it which is not to be found in our writings" (p. 38).

*Regensburg Article 5 on Justification* is a meticulous work of scholarship. At the same time, it is a delightful read that draws us into the lives and works of the various participants. It also lays important

groundwork for future scholarship on the subject, such as the impact of double righteousness upon renewal movements of the Italian Peninsula. Lane never ambles into history in search of points to score in contemporary religious debate. Rather, he plunges into the past to understand it and find resources to illumine present-day challenges and opportunities. Lane's capacity to understand these figures in the context of their religious communities (e.g., Wittenberg, Geneva, Cologne, Rome) allows him to avoid both idealizing his subjects and cynically dismissing them. Such a perspective enables him to grasp the diplomatic turns of their arguments and decisions rooted in the demands that confronted these figures at Regensburg.

No future historian of the Reformation should have the confidence to label Article 5 an "inconsistent patchwork" without first addressing the formidable argument of this volume.

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Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews. *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017. 204 pp. £28.50/\$29.95.

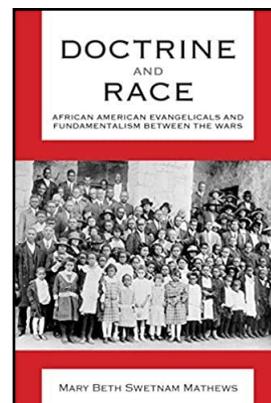
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Contemporary historians have noted the division that exists among evangelicals of different ethnicities. As Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews demonstrates in *Doctrine and Race*, these divisions go back at least a century, to the days before conservative Christians self-identified as "evangelical," and the American Protestant landscape was bifurcated into Modernists and Fundamentalists.

How did African American evangelicals fit into the Protestant landscape? Mathews, professor of religious studies at the University of Mary Washington, argues with clarity and concision that black Baptists and Methodists in the interwar years paved a third way. Using the denominational papers of two Baptist and two Methodist denominations, she shows how African American evangelicals between the wars embraced "twin ideals of African American life—racial identification and overwhelmingly Protestant church allegiance—to reshape the world around them" (p. 1). They would not side with Fundamentalists or Modernists, for "with one they would be safe in inspiration but not in life; with the other they could gain the world but lose their soul" (p. 2).

In chapter 1, Mathews examines the ministries of white (mostly Baptist) Fundamentalists. She shows their shared attitude toward blacks was oppressive. At worst, Fundamentalists were outright racist; at best, they were paternalistic. These white Fundamentalists were mostly segregationists. They saw no need for a religious dialogue or alliance with blacks. Most viewed blacks as gullible, good-hearted simpletons, prone by nature to be misled by false teaching. Thus, African Americans could be helped by Fundamentalists and their gospel but had nothing to offer in return.

Chapter 2 shows the general stance of black evangelicals toward the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. While all of these denominations opposed Modernism, only the National Baptist Convention Unincorporated went so far as to identify as Fundamentalist. Moreover, all black Protestants occasionally made use of Modernist terminology, even if sometimes not using it in the same way or for



the same purpose. While they did not fit neatly into either camp, Mathews proves that black Protestants were more doctrinally akin to the Fundamentalists.

Mathews continues to examine the third way of black evangelicals in chapter 3 with regard to eschatology and evolution. Almost all blacks rejected the dispensationalism of (mostly Baptist) Fundamentalists, both because it smacked of novelty and because they weren't convinced of a central tenet of the system: that the world was getting worse. For African Americans, it had been difficult enough for them already. On the second issue, while some blacks rejected evolution, they were generally more open to a kind of evolution that would not directly contradict Scripture. This led them to clarify their doctrine of inerrancy and biblical infallibility.

In chapter 3, Mathews shows that African American evangelicals kept pace with Fundamentalists on social morals both because of their biblical convictions and because they believed this would bring social uplift. Their moral beliefs were manifested in their writings on Prohibition, marriage and divorce, dancing, and more. But they also spoke to social ills that white Fundamentalists left alone, like lynching. While the unity of black evangelicals on most of these social matters would eventually disintegrate, the one issue on which they remained undivided was civil rights (p. 125).

In her final chapter, Mathews shows the consistent outcry against racism by all black Baptists and Methodists spanning the interwar years. For them, this was a test of orthodoxy, of true religion. Thus, many white Fundamentalists were not believed to be a part of the true church. Black evangelicals spoke biblically as they prophetically decried lynching and other acts of racial injustice. While Mathews sometimes refers to this prophetic denunciation as “progressive,” she concludes more accurately by writing that, to black Christians, they were neither conservative nor progressive; for them, it was just “the plain truth” (p. 152).

Mathews demonstrates with clarity and force her thesis that black Protestants in the interwar years paved a third way for Christianity—indeed, a way that was more biblical than the two options for white Christians. They refused to accept the Christianity of Fundamentalists who seemed unconcerned with their station in this life, and the Christianity of Modernists that offered them nothing for the next.

There are few flaws in this work. While Mathews argues that black Protestants were more doctrinally akin to Fundamentalists than Modernists, she seems at times to overstate their occasional Modernist tendencies. For example, she quotes J. H. Frank saying Scripture “was NOT written to be authority in history, in science, in art, in philosophy—but to teach life and how to live.” She labels this statement “sweeping in its apparent modernism” (p. 64). Yet is this statement so different than the doctrine of inspiration set forth by the Princeton theologians of the late-nineteenth century, who affirmed “that all the affirmations of Scripture of all kinds,” including “physical or historical fact,” are without error when rightly understood, they too recognized that the Scriptures “were not designed to teach philosophy, science, or human history as such” (Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, “Inspiration,” *The Presbyterian Review* 6 [1881]: 255–60)? Isn't Frank's statement, likewise, a statement about the usage and purpose of the Bible, rather than its truthfulness?

Similarly, Mathews argues that black Protestants used Social Gospel terminology by highlighting their talk of “the kingdom of God.” Yet the language of God's kingdom is not Social Gospel language—even if it was appropriated by Modernists. Rather, this language came from the very mouth of Jesus, who came preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15 CSB). It is not the exclusive property of theological liberals; all Christians have used it for 2,000 years. It may

be the case that black evangelicals used “kingdom of God” language in a manner more akin to the Social Gospel use of the phrase, but if so, Mathews does not argue or demonstrate this.

This is perhaps the greatest tension in the book—Mathews’s tendency to identify black evangelicals with either Fundamentalists or, as above, Modernists, when they were simply aiming to be biblical. Yet perhaps this tension is unavoidable, and Mathews is not showing where black Protestants were “fundamentalistic” or “modernistic,” but where their biblical ideas simply overlapped with one group or the other. Ironically, identifying this tension makes a case for the effectiveness of the book and the faithfulness of its subjects. For, as Mathews concludes, black Baptists and Methodists were not interested in being theologically conservative or progressive. They were interested in “the plain truth” (p. 152). This interest led them to theological fidelity *and* social action. In this, black Protestants in the interwar years give us a unique model of faithfulness—a model Mathews has helpfully retrieved, and a model we would be wise to heed in our own racially divided and culturally chaotic moment.

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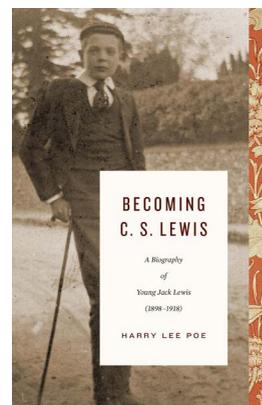
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Harry Lee Poe. *Becoming C. S. Lewis, A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1898–1918)*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 276 pp. £18.05/\$22.99.

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With all of the emphasis we in America place on what the education bureaucracy calls “early childhood education,” usually meaning the formal schooling of children beginning around age three, the large majority of studies on the impact of such only consider “outcomes” through about fourth grade. *Becoming C. S. Lewis* by Union University Professor of Faith and Cultural Studies Harry Lee Poe takes it quite a bit further, examining the impact of education on the adult. Poe’s thesis is that the habits and preferences that captivated Jack Lewis—directing his thinking, reading, and philosophizing—formed quite fully in his childhood and especially adolescence. The ideas and preferences that engaged and drove the intellect of C. S. Lewis the man first presented themselves to and found a home in the fertile imagination of Jack Lewis, the boy. So much of Lewis’s formation begins at the age of 9, when Lewis lost his mother and embarked on a rich if sometimes brutal education amidst boarding schools and tutors. Starting at that point, Poe expertly shows numerous instances and expressions of thought in young Jack’s life, which he then skillfully attaches to the C. S. Lewis the rest of us already know.



While numerous examples could be given, I particularly liked the section “Finding Narnia” in chapter four, where Poe briefly recounts the beloved children’s books to show how seeds of their plots, main characters, and even their fantastical settings first found soil in the stories and landscapes of Lewis’s youth.

However, the connections Poe makes across the years spanning Lewis’s youth to adulthood are not crystal clear in every instance. Sometimes he delves into a cumbersome level of detail about the original influence. For example, Poe spends several pages describing Wagner’s operas, interesting to be sure and likely new information for some. Still, this reader fails to see how such detail contributes overall to a

portrait of Lewis or even the operas' influence on him. But this does not detract from the overall work because such instances are rare, and readers not wishing to go that deep can always skim. In other parts, the order of the material is a little puzzling. Poe attributes a lot of importance to the impact on Lewis of the English epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, even calling it "the making of C. S. Lewis" (p. 167). However, he waits until the very end of that section in chapter 5 to give a summary of the work "for the benefit of those that have never read *The Faerie Queene*" (p. 169). Those who are unfamiliar with the work may find this frustrating.

Now, the rest of this review is directed at those who have taken upon themselves the daunting and, at times, discouraging task of educating and ministering to teenage boys. As a mother of four sons, I found myself time and again instructed and encouraged. I would recommend it to every parent or aspiring youth minister. Sally Clarkson, a popular author of parenting books, writes about "awaking wonder" in the minds of children and youth. *Becoming C. S. Lewis* is, in some ways, just an extensive recounting of how "wonder" took root and developed in the heart and mind of Jack Lewis. It took such deep root that even the thoroughly secular worldview of his brilliant and much-admired tutor, W. T. Kirkpatrick, could not snuff it out. The books and stories Lewis read and identified with in his boyhood and adolescence placed a protective shield around his mind, one that in the end could not be penetrated even as he sat under atheist tutors.

This is not to say Lewis walked a straight or, from the looks of it, a safe path from the great literature and Norse mythology he loved to embracing Christianity. On the contrary, he dabbled in the occult, professed atheism, then agnosticism, and even exhibited a disturbing albeit brief interest in sadomasochism as a teen. However, great books and epic stories that valued heroism and sacrifice put "Jack the literary man" at odds with "Jack the philosopher" (p. 192).

The lesson this mother and educator of boys gleaned is that insisting upon great and uplifting literature as part of the curriculum, even over and above objections from the student, is worth it. Not all of us come to that conclusion quickly or easily. It can be an uphill battle when there is much competition from not so great books and ubiquitous screens. But this is all the more reason to introduce students to the overarching narratives of heroic and virtue-laden great stories. From that perspective, *Becoming C. S. Lewis* offers one of the best arguments in favor of a literary education I can imagine.

The other important lesson from this book is that despite our deepest yearning to see those to whom we seek to minister profess faith in Christ, we cannot skip ahead to that part. We do not have the benefit of knowing "the rest of the story," as in the case of C. S. Lewis. But we can feel encouraged knowing the God who saves sinners not only knows their story from start to finish but is also its sovereign Author.

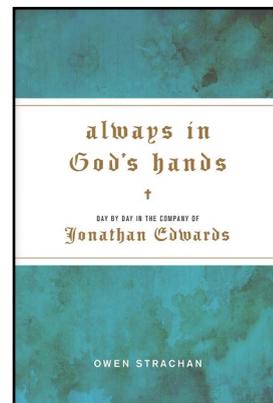
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Owen Strachan. *Always in God's Hands: Day by Day in the Company of Jonathan Edwards*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2018. 415 pp. £16.99/\$22.99.

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Like many people, I was introduced to Jonathan Edwards in an English literature anthology in high school as a cold-hearted fire and brimstone Puritan who preached about God's wrath. The powerful images in the abridged version of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" supported this thesis well: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; ... there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you don't this very moment drop down into hell. O sinner!" In his new devotional, *Always in God's Hands: Day by Day in the Company of Jonathan Edwards*, Owen Strachan seeks to overturn this bleak image by revealing a spiritual mentor who has a deep understanding of God's gracious mercy and providence. In this inspirational day by day devotional, Strachan allows the reader to walk in the company of one of the greatest theologians and biblical pastors in American history by providing powerful, nurturing reflections on various quotes from Edwards's sermons, letters, books, blank Bible, personal writings and more. Strachan's entries provide the reader with biblical insights from a man who "is an inspiring motivator, counselor, and guide into the wonders of the God-made world" and our heavenly hope (p. viii). These devotions encourage the reader to follow in the footsteps of a man who desired more than anything to live for the glory of God.



Owen Strachan is an associate professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is considered an up and coming Jonathan Edwards scholar, having written several important works on the Puritan, including the five-volume series co-authored with Douglas Sweeney, *The Essential Edwards Collection* (Chicago: Moody, 2010).

This volume serves as a great companion to Kyle Strobel's earlier practical work on Edwards, *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013). While Strobel focuses on Edwards as a model for Christian living, this book presents approximately 30,000 of Edwards's words with Strachan's practical reflections on them. Both books have the same ultimate goal: mining the thoughts and spiritual practices of Edwards for direction in living a life for the glory of God. Strachan's insightful devotions, chock full of biblical precepts and practical wisdom, are appealing to scholars and popular audiences alike. You do not need to be an Edwards scholar to glean spiritual insights from these daily readings. He covers timeless topics such as the Trinity, justification, sanctification, temptations, anxiety, faith, eternal hope, election, love, the authority of Scripture, and many more. The author concludes each entry with a Scripture passage that relates to that day's entry.

The one-page entries are deep and practical. They are written for a broad audience that will draw the mind and heart into contemplation of the glories of the Triune God. For instance, reflecting on Edwards's meditation on the Trinity and God's happiness, Strachan writes,

Knowing the character of God reframes our spiritual life. God is whole and pure; we are not. He is divine, and infinite, and holy. He deserves worship, not us or any other fallen person. Nothing in this world, however much we may appreciate it, qualifies as God: we dare not worship the creation, the human body, the mind, the scientific

accomplishments of humanity, athletes, celebrities, or anything other than God. It is the perfect character of God that causes us to find total and unceasing happiness in him. We are never more like God than when we love, and rejoice in his essence and perfections. (p. 185)

He then follows this with Jeremiah 32:27. Gems like this are scattered throughout this work. While some of the daily entries are not as profound as others, the reader will discover many life-changing biblical insights throughout this work. The reader should be aware that Edwards's quotes are not modernized, making some of them challenging to read. Strachan's reflections, however, help one focus on the key insights within the passages. This daily devotional offers a venue for becoming conversant with Jonathan Edwards's varied corpus of writings, while simultaneously encouraging readers to glorify God by living a life of joyful obedience.

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Steven M. Studebaker and Amos Yong, eds. *Pentecostal Theology and Jonathan Edwards*. T&T Clark Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology. New York: T&T Clark, 2019. 288 pp. £81.00/\$108.00.

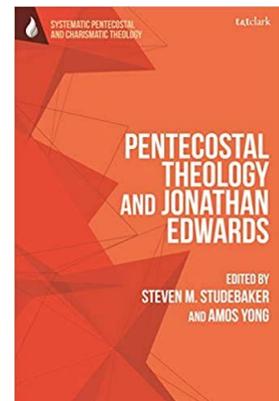
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As Studebaker notes in his introduction, "Northampton and Azusa Street seem worlds apart." Edwards's cessationism would be a non-starter for any Pentecostal, and his Calvinism puts him at odds with most. However, Edwards's promotion of revivals, his emphasis on experience, and his awareness of the Spirit's activity make "America's theologian" a prime dialogue partner for the movement. This volume is made up of seventeen chapters, grouped into five parts: Affections and the Spirit, God and Salvation, Church and Culture, Mission and Witness, and Responses.

In chapter 1, William Oliviero's observation that Edwards viewed "God's hand at work in furthering the gospel through Protestant political governments" (p. 28) would be firmly rejected by those Pentecostals who affirm a dispensational eschatology. Yet, Yong observes that, on a global scale, Pentecostals are "less beholden to the dispensational eschatology of earlier generations but, more importantly, also have a much more this-worldly soteriology" (p. 229). Globally, Pentecostals might also appreciate Edwards' "internationalist horizons" that "resist an American centric nationalism"—an approach to politics that could prove invaluable with the decline of Western Christendom (p. 234).

Chapter 4 by David Courey on Pentecostal experience and Edwards's theology of religious affections is a particularly praiseworthy essay, given obvious common ground. That "Edwards appears prepared to accept the premise that authentic encounters with God may be occasioned through experiences not explicitly foreseen in Scripture" (p. 70) is notable in that the theologian of Northampton goes beyond even what some more straight-laced Pentecostals would argue.

Steven Studebaker's chapter 5 looks to the "narrative of the Spirit of Pentecost," which "portrays the Spirit as a personal agent in the history of creation and redemption" to address perceived deficiencies in Edwards's Trinitarian theology. He claims, "In pneumatological terms, Edwards's theology was more



pentecostal than traditional Pentecostal theology,” evidenced by Edwards’s assertion that “Christ’s work culminates ... in the gift of the Holy Spirit.” While Pentecostals make much of the gifts of the Spirit, Edwards might help the movement develop a deeper pneumatology by understanding the Spirit himself as “the gift of grace” (p. 99).

Andrew Gabriel’s contribution to constructive pneumatology observes that “pentecostal theology has done well in promoting the connection of the Spirit and power, but, until more recently, they have been weak in developing an understanding of the divine person of the Holy Spirit” (p. 115). For Edwards, “the Spirit is the love of God that unites the Father and the Son” (p. 118). Gabriel charges that Pentecostalism has principally associated the divine attribute of power with the Spirit, though “some early North American Pentecostals described the baptism of the Holy Spirit ... as a reception of divine love” (p. 119). Thus, Edwards could help the Pentecostal tradition recover a long-neglected element of their cardinal distinctive.

Chapter 9 by Lisa Stephenson focuses on Edwards and charismatic ecclesiology with reference to the Toronto Blessing. Her contribution is especially helpful in demonstrating how dialogue with Edwards could be helpful to Pentecostals on the local church level. She makes a crucial point concerning their differences on spiritual gifts, noting “these were *judgments made in two different eras and judgments based on differing sets of data*” (p. 174, emphasis original). She also highlights a principle Pentecostals would be wise to emulate: refusing to draw hasty conclusions concerning whether a revival is a genuine work of the Spirit or not. “Edwards,” Stephenson asserts, “would have had a problem with someone who attended a Toronto Blessing meeting and said—‘People are falling to the ground! Alleluia! Isn’t it wonderful?’—just as he would with someone else who said—‘People are falling to the ground! Appalling! How can this be from God?’” (p. 177).

Some essays appear especially valuable for the future of constructive Pentecostal theology. Tony Richie’s chapter 13, “The Grand Design of God in All Divine Operations,” might make readers familiar with Yong’s proposal for a pneumatological theology of religions wonder if sustained engagement with Edwards could enrich such a proposal (p. 210). Also, Ritchie notes that in *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards employs “a doctrine of natural theology or common grace closely resembling Wesleyan-Arminian-pentecostal theology of prevenient grace” in engaging non-Christian faiths (p. 224). If accurate, Edwards’s thought might contribute to the construction of a uniquely Pentecostal understanding of common grace as well.

Yet this volume has one significant weakness. Racial reconciliation is briefly mentioned in reference to the Montreal Catch the Fire church (p. 48). However, it is striking that Edwards’s sin of slaveholding is never addressed—hardly a minor transgression on his part, and relevant to this conversation given that some of Pentecostalism’s founding figures such as William Seymour were themselves descendants of slaves. The question of whether the theology of a slaveholder may be trusted has been raised of Edwards in the past. A 2012 dialogue at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School’s Henry Center between Thabiti Anyabwile and Charlie Dates on this very topic provides an excellent model for engagement.

Nevertheless, this volume is groundbreaking in that it details how Pentecostalism might be greatly enriched by dialogue with a theologian with whom it appears to have little in common at first glance. Unlike some of his Reformed brethren skeptical of granting much weight to experience, Edwards might

well serve as a catalyst for Pentecostalism—with his profound appreciation of the Spirit’s presence—to develop an even deeper love for the Spirit’s person and work.

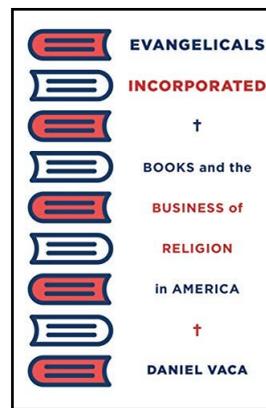
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Daniel Vaca. *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. 329 pp. £31.95/\$39.95.

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What hath Grand Rapids to do with American evangelicalism? According to Daniel Vaca’s newest volume, almost everything. In *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America*, Vaca, the Robert Gale Noyes Assistant Professor of Humanities at Brown University, argues that commercial initiatives, especially as they relate to the publishing industry, have defined and maintained evangelicalism as a discernable movement. Through a blend of storytelling and analysis, Vaca seeks to demonstrate that the publishing infrastructure “became the bedrock of evangelical cultures” to such an extent that evangelicalism can best be understood by its commercial foundations (p. 17).



Vaca begins with an examination of the “Moody market,” an ecumenical and middle-class evangelical “public” (a distinct group of consumers) focused on the ministry of Dwight Moody. Proliferated by the shrewd Flemming H. Revell, this public became the precursor to the commercialism of later enterprises (p. 56). New efforts resulted from Revell’s entrepreneurial spirit, including the Bible Institute Colportage Association, which supplied rural areas with inexpensive books from Moody and his associates (p. 49). These arrangements, though financially lucrative for the publisher, were undertaken with a nod to the greater mission of God. This tension would remain in the years to come.

Next, Vaca examines the development of two towering publishing companies based in Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans and Zondervan. Vaca demonstrates that these companies carefully curated their images through relationships with authors, retreat centers, and networks. Their distinct brand identities were forged in the crucible of commercial competition and a fair amount of family drama (pp. 84–95).

Vaca then turns to the role that trade associations and marketing strategies played in the boon of evangelical book sales in the mid-twentieth century. Organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals “identified publishing and bookselling as trades that ... had the power to enhance evangelical allegiance” (p. 109). The industry adopted creative strategies to reach new customers and retain current ones. Specifically, publishers targeted women as “primary consumers and laborers” (p. 135) and capitalized on the nation’s growing youth culture. By mimicking the merchandising strategies of supermarkets (including a distinct suburban ambiance), booksellers delivered “cultural commodities” that functioned as “engines of evangelicalism” (p. 160). Bookstores especially served as gravitational hubs that kept evangelicals from various locations connected through their shared experiences.

In the final two chapters, Vaca explores the corporate nature of the publishing industry and its eagerness to tailor products to specific consumer subsets. Among major evangelical publishers,

ownership conglomerates and stock sales became standard practice, which led to increased attention to profit and consumer satisfaction (p. 188). One way publishers bolstered satisfaction was to offer products (translations, specialty Bibles, books, music) catered to unique consumer niches. This market segmentation made it easier for consumers to identify products they felt familiar with, thus reinforcing certain ideological, ethnic, and linguistic fault lines (p. 228).

*Evangelicals Incorporated* is an engaging account of the commercialistic spirit of American evangelicalism. Vaca moves seamlessly between history, economics, marketing, and sociology to craft a unified narrative. He captures macro currents and micro episodes, providing the reader a scholarly treatise sprinkled with anecdotes (many quite humorous) conveying the humanity of his subjects. Vaca challenges certain preconceived notions and uncovers others that haven't been explored at length. His discussions regarding the ethnic dimensions of evangelical publishing, the role of women in the industry, and the phenomenon of celebrity authors (some of whom exhibit little Christian fruit) finding success among evangelical consumers are all insightful. Despite the crisp writing, detailed research, and coherent narrative, I am not convinced that commercialism carries the same explanatory power for evangelicalism that Vaca does. Ultimately, I think he stresses the sociological and commercial at the expense of the theological. He sees doctrinal definitions as insufficient to capture the lived experiences of evangelicals (p. 8). However, there are good reasons to see economic and political emphases as somewhat novel rubrics for evangelicalism and to see theological criteria as the more rooted lens through which to understand the movement. Vaca's perspective gives insight into the dynamic activities of evangelical publishers and defends the conclusion that commercialism has played *a* (if not *the*) role in evangelicalism's story.

Because the book draws from numerous disciplines, it has broad appeal to scholars in various fields. Readers interested in American evangelicalism, American culture, marketing, economics, and media studies will all benefit from Vaca's work. Students will find it a stellar example of crafting archival research into readable and entertaining prose.

What hath Grand Rapids to do with American evangelicalism? More than we have recognized, and Vaca uncovers the important ways that commercial enterprises have informed this movement in a uniquely American fashion.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

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Joshua R. Farris. *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xxiii + 339 pp. £19.99/\$29.99.

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Joshua Farris has provided in this book an introductory text that takes readers on a survey tour through the world of theological anthropology. In it, Farris weaves together patristics, major figures of Reformed theology, and a heavy dose of contemporary analytic theology. The book is structured in a very user-friendly loci approach, which allows readers to consult specific topics as well as traverse the whole of the text from start to finish.

After an introductory chapter in which he lays out theological prolegomena for his project, Farris works through discrete topics in the next ten chapters. These topics move from the questions of personal and narrative identity (ch. 1), human origins, evolution, and the source of the soul (ch. 2), the nature of the *imago Dei* (ch. 3), the freedom and responsibility of human agency (ch. 4), the character and transmission of original sin (ch. 5), Christological anthropology (ch. 6), work, race and disability (ch. 7), gender and sexuality (ch. 8), life after death in the intermediate state and the resurrection (ch. 9), the human teleology of beatific vision and theosis (ch. 10), and then finally a brief conclusion and an appendix that surveys recent anthropological literature.

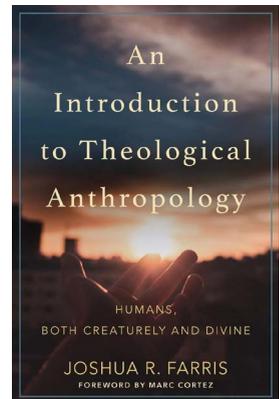
Throughout Farris does not simply present a range of positions without himself committing to theological conclusions. He stakes claims. Yet, he does so only after fair presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of varying alternatives. The book is thus more than just an overview of a menu of anthropological options.

Several overarching anthropological theses undergird all of the chapters and give the book distinct theological hue and cohesion. The most salient of these are anthropological substance dualism (i.e., that humans are composed of body and soul), the soul as the locus of personal identity, and the telos of humanity in beatific vision and deification.

Farris explicitly acknowledges his intent to advance certain traditional positions held by the church catholic (p. xix), positions which may be controversial in the ever-widening diversity of contemporary Christian theology, but are nevertheless rather non-controversial within the tradition of the church catholic. However, on several scores what he advances is decidedly controversial within at least the Reformed tradition.

Certainly, the model of theistic evolution he advances in relation to human origins in chapter 2 would find few defenders in the Reformed tradition prior to the 20th century and a plethora of opponents within the Reformed tradition since then.

Farris also dismisses the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin on the basis of his federal headship as a "legal fiction" (p. 142). In its place he proffers an Augustinian realism "that is metaphysically grounded in something actual" (p. 147). This raises a set of questions that Farris leaves unaddressed. Does this logic also apply to the doctrine of justification as it has been classically understood in the Reformed tradition? Does the imputation of our guilt to Jesus and the imputation of his righteousness to us entail a legal fiction as Rome long has maintained? Does justification also need to be metaphysically grounded in something actual like an infused righteousness as Rome has long maintained? These are troubling



questions for any confessionally Reformed theologian. And they cannot be said to be out of the bounds of Farris's project in the book as he does actually venture into discussions of atonement and justification in chapter 6. In light of this, a significant lacuna in the book is a distinct chapter giving a thematic treatment of the covenantal arrangement God establishes with Adam, a covenantal arrangement that Farris assumes in multiple places in the text.

Another troubling question which lies beneath the surface of the whole work is a matter of theological prolegomena. Farris holds that "the Scriptures are underdetermined and require the information from other theological authorities taken up in a systematic presentation of the issues" (p. 120). Alongside of Scripture, these "normative sources" are understood to be "tradition (or 'Holy Tradition'), reason, and experience" (p. 8). Farris's theological method then appears to be opposed to the classic Reformed affirmation of Scripture as the sole *principium* of theology and instead to offer a model of theological method which affirms multiple theological *principia* alongside of Scripture. Put more succinctly he seems implicitly to deny the sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture.

Farris also advances the thesis that "metaphysically Christ carves out a new humanity" (p. 171). What is meant by this is that through an elevation of the soul (p. 281) the "frailties and epistemic weaknesses" that humans possess "even apart from sin" (p. 171) are overcome so that humanity in Christ can see God and participate in the divine nature. Farris's Christological anthropology and account of the beatific vision thus appears strikingly similar to a Roman Catholic supernaturalism in which the nature of man, even in his unfallen state, needs to be elevated through a super-added gift of grace in order to participate in beatific vision.

Farris's account of deification is a corollary of this as well. The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Jesus in the incarnation seems to carry redemptive and deifying freight even when considered apart from Christ's atonement for sin (p. 192). Farris frames the incarnation in such a way that the human nature of Christ is deified (p. 281). He is sensitive to how his formulations might impinge upon Chalcedonian boundaries and insists that he does not transgress them (p. 279). But it is difficult to see how on such a formulation Christ's natures remain unconfused and unchanged.

Farris's titular theme that humanity is divine as well as human hinges upon the goal that man should ultimately reside in heaven with God (p. 283). Heaven itself as a realm is "understood to be the life-infusing and suffusing power of this world" (p. 254). This formulation and others in the book seem to conflate the created, eschatological realm of heaven with God himself as the one whom heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain (1 Kgs 8:27). It presents an almost Platonic understanding of heaven as a realm of forms and ideas which is metaphysical in character rather than eschatological and redemptive-historical in character. Without this subtle conflation of the realm of heaven with God, it is hard to see how humanity's heavenly destiny in any way makes it "divine" given that heaven itself, if it is something other than God, is created and not divine.

There are many outstanding features of the book alongside of some of its more salient problematic positions. Throughout the book Farris offers penetrating criticisms of the varieties of monistic materialism that occupy the contemporary theological landscape. The chapter covering the gendered and sexual nature of humans breaks fresh ground. Farris advances a very insightful, thetic account of how "the sexual identity of male and female" is "essential to the human story, which is predicated on biological difference as well as similarity for the 'productive' function of bringing about a 'dynasty' through the covenants" (p. 212). He also provides a very fair treatment of the complex and nettlesome

issues involved in the contrasting positions of traducianism and creationism on the origin of the soul (pp. 67–77) and their relation to questions about original sin (pp. 149–59).

Overall, the book is an especially useful introductory text to acquaint one with the current state of issues in theological anthropology. It offers many criticisms, analyses, and conclusions which, even if one disagrees with them, are still formidable and thought-provoking contributions to both the hoary debates of theological anthropology and fresher ones that have emerged more recently.

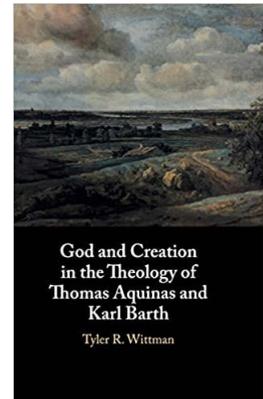
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Tyler R. Wittman. *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 328 pp. £75.00/\$105.00.

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Debates about the doctrine of God continue to rage in contemporary theology. Questions range from what the Creator/creature distinction entails to whether God has any real relation with creation. Many current thinkers overturn some classically held beliefs that God has *no* real relation with creation. Enter *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* by Tyler Wittman, Assistant Professor of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. His monograph seeks to recover a more classical approach to confessing “God as God” when it comes to thinking about God’s relationship to creation. It is a slightly revised and somewhat expanded version of his St. Andrews PhD thesis and focuses on topics such as the divine act, being, order, and relations.



Wittman locates the importance of his work in light of the Apostle Paul’s distinctively moral aspect of knowledge in Romans 1. Confessing God as God is to know the truth about God and to respond properly in worship—to do otherwise is to refuse his glory (p. 5). Therefore, Wittman’s chief aim is to consider how one can uphold the Creator/creature distinction (p. 11), while insisting upon a relation between God and creation. He goes about this task in three steps, beginning first by expounding the thinking of Thomas Aquinas as it relates to God’s being and his relation to creation before doing the same for Karl Barth, and then concluding with his own systemization. Both historical sections are standard reconstructions that are designed to listen to significant figures in the history of the church to better equip the reader for thinking about the topic (p. 14). His concluding chapter concerning his own systematic thinking on the subject draws upon the insights of these two figures. He concludes that “God’s activity in the economy is absolutely binding on us, but it [his economic activity] need not for that reason be irreducible” (p. 279).

Wittman’s book has several worthy features. Initially, however, it is necessary to identify some potential cautions. First, while he is clearly well acquainted with the primary literature, engagement with the secondary literature is lacking throughout the work. For example, a significant aspect of the theological inquiry that Wittman attempts to engage is the nature of relations—just what does it mean for God to “relate” to the world? While his summary of Thomas Aquinas is ripe for theological thinking, there is no reference to contemporary metaphysical treatments on relations. While the book is not primarily concerned with the metaphysical intelligibility of God’s relation to the world or with

presenting metaphysical models, being focused on the thinking of Aquinas and Barth, Wittman states that the purpose is not purely for historical consideration but for contemporary appropriation (p. 14). This end goal would have been strengthened by more engagement with other thinkers on this topic.

Secondly, at points Wittman's arguments lack clear definitions of terms and concepts. For example, God as "pure act" plays a central role in Thomistic thinking and in Wittman's explanation but lacks any explicit definition. Elsewhere, Wittman attempts to circumvent the problem of simplicity and God's freedom with reference to the "two moment inquiry" wherein God is absolutely free but hypothetically necessary (p. 88). While this is a worthwhile distinction, it lacks a robust treatment.

But Wittman's book also delivers several compelling areas worthy of commendation. First, his choice of interlocutors serves the reader well. Thinking and wrestling alongside Aquinas and Barth greatly benefits the reader. Moreover, in his treatment of these two figures, Wittman achieves his goal of retrieval. He regularly exposes the reader to the key insights that Aquinas and Barth provide on the topic and attempts to use them to uncover forgotten issues that lurk behind the surface of contemporary treatments of God's relation to creation.

Second, Wittman provides clarity over defining certain attributes of God in strictly negative or apophatic terms. Oftentimes discussions about divine simplicity or God's relation to the world are intended to be stated in entirely negative terms but never indicate to the reader that this decision has been made. Wittman does not fall into this trap. He plainly states his definition of simplicity is strictly negative along with his understanding of God's relation to the world. While some may wish for a positive treatment of these subjects, it is commendable to follow an apophatic route so long as one doesn't promise to deliver an overly positive treatment.

Finally, Wittman offers several insightful reflections on retrieving divine names to chasten concepts of God and dogmatic reasoning on divine goodness and faithfulness. His conceptual and exegetical insights inspire further reflection and exhortation. One only wishes these reflections extended further.

In sum, while the topic of God and his relation to creation is burgeoning, Wittman's book is worthy of critical engagement but also slightly disappointing. While Wittman's work offers numerous helpful insights, by not engaging wider literature and not expanding his own contemporary retrieval, it missed a real opportunity to become a required text for all on the topic. For graduate students, the book provides a welcome and an even-handed summary concerning how the Christian tradition has wrestled with the doctrine of God as he is in himself and how he relates to creation. However, it lacks the wider scholarly engagement many academics will desire.

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## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Sam Allberry. *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* London: Good Book, 2020. 128 pp. £7.99/\$14.99.

For a hypersexualized culture, in which sex and sexuality are flaunted, obsessed over, and constantly debated, Sam Allberry's book is a welcome breath of biblically based and pastorally relevant fresh air. By going back to first principles and outlining a theology of sex, Allberry communicates vital truths to everyday readers who are seeking to know why God cares about their sexuality. Written in order to be accessible to a broad audience, this short volume points to the beauty and purpose of sex, and the reality of unfulfillment and waiting, while engaging readers with a warm personal voice and sermonesque illustrations—features which help to make the communication of ideas clear and compelling.

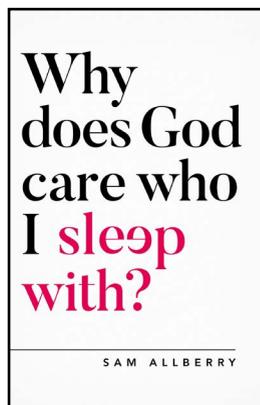
For those not familiar with his work, Allberry serves as a global speaker with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and has been a long-time pastor and preacher in the UK. He studied theology at Oxford, is an ordained minister of the Church of England and has ministered at St. Ebbe's Church, Oxford and St. Mary's Church, Maidenhead. What makes this book even more credible is the fact that Allberry is a single man, is attracted to the same sex, and is committed to celibacy (see Allberry's previous books, *Is God Anti-Gay?* [London: Good Book, 2013] and *7 Myths about Singleness* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019]).

Written as part of a series with the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, the title of the book is meant to capture the attention of those seeking an entry level understanding of Christian sexual ethics—both unbelieving seekers who are intrigued to know more about the Bible's teaching and believers who are wanting to (re)discover applied biblical sexuality. In a relatively short book (less than 130 pages), Allberry paints the storyline of biblical sexuality from creation to resurrection, while also holding in tension the current “now and not yet” of sexual and relational fulfillment.

Chapters 1–2 set the scene for the need to cherish the body, because there is intrinsic worth for humanity made in the image of God. Allberry highlights the #MeToo movement as a way in which secular society condemns abuse and values human sexuality. Similarly, Christians “should be the last people on earth to show indifference to abuse, let alone enabling or perpetrating it in any way” (p. 15), for Jesus too had a high view of the body. Yet, having a high view of the body does not mean that Christians undervalue sex. Rather, “being particularly careful about something is often a sign of its special worth. I'm particular about physical intimacy not because I value it *so little*, but because I value it *so much*” (p. 23, italics original). Ultimately, Christians understand that “sex matters to God because people do” (p. 33).

Chapters 3–4 explore the purpose and limits of sexual and romantic expression. Allberry suggests that the question is not whether there ought to be limits but where these limits ought to lie, for even secular society has boundaries for sexual expression. To understand the purpose and limits of sex, we have to refer to the creator of sex: God himself. For “sex was God's idea, not ours. It is not something we discovered behind God's back.... His first command to humanity in the Bible involves and necessitates sex” (p. 37).

Having established the need for a theo-ethical approach to sexuality, chapters 5–6 show why God's will for human sexual expression is radical yet beautiful. In a time when powerful men were allowed to



sexually dominate slaves and women were seen as objects for sexual gratification, the ethics of the New Testament were far from “old-fashioned” or “prudish”; rather they ushered in (what Kyle Harper has rightly called) “the first sexual revolution” (p. 59). Indeed, the countercultural ideas of mutuality, respect and consent derived from the fact that “Christian sexual ethics were not determined by a person’s status and social value in Roman society but by the unique and complementary dignity of men and women as God’s image-bearers” (p. 59). Allberry then bridges the historical landscapes of the Bible and our own time, arguing that the boundaries revealed in the New Testament are still relevant for us today. He writes, “The moral inconsistencies and blindspots of the Roman Empire are now all too apparent to us. And yet we today have our own equivalents, and the teaching of the Bible helps us to see them more clearly” (p. 70).

Allberry next provides a series of pastoral reflections on the gospel and its relation to sexual sin (ch. 7), desire and sexual fulfilment (ch. 8) and sexual freedom (ch. 9). He concludes with this wise exhortation: “Romantic or sexual love ... can be difficult to restrain or control once awakened.... God cares who we sleep with because he cares that we really do love each other well, and that might mean loving in a different way to how we feel” (pp. 119–20). In the final two chapters, Allberry situates sex within its biblical theological context, highlighting its place in the bigger and better story of God’s saving purposes.

*Why Does God care Who I Sleep With?* is highly recommended for believers and nonbelievers alike, and should be read alongside the author’s prior book, *7 Myths about Singleness*. With the publication of both titles, Allberry ably demonstrates that singleness does not preclude someone from exploring Scripture’s teaching on marriage, sexual ethics and matters relating to family life. Furthermore, as a writer, presenter and pastor who is committed to celibacy, Allberry is in a unique place not only to speak from a place of experience and conviction but to be a model for many who wish to live out faithful obedience. Perhaps, if the reader may allow some poetic license in reappropriating 1 Timothy 4:12, Allberry does not *let others look down upon him because he is single, celibate and same-sex attracted* but sets an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

Sam Wan

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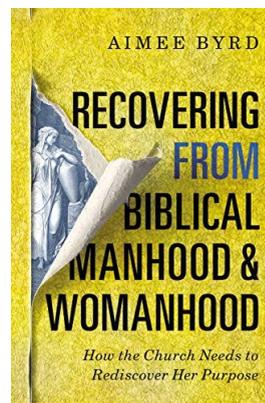
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Aimee Byrd. *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 240 pp. £12.99/\$18.99.

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The publication of Aimee Byrd's *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (RFBMW) created such a social media firestorm that the reaction to the book became the story rather than the book itself. Not here, however. This review is of the book.

The title is a play on the title of perhaps the most comprehensive work in the complementarian canon, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (RBMW), ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), and references the American organization, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and the cultural entity of "biblical manhood and womanhood." With the simple addition of a preposition, Byrd's title signals the nature of her book: it is both personal and polemical.



Byrd writes as a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a small Reformed denomination in the US, but her target extends beyond this. She describes a church culture where women are not able to hand out church bulletins, read the Bible, pray or lead singing in public worship or take up the collection; where women's desire to learn from God's word is not taken seriously by male pastors; where women's gifting for "coed" ministry is not acknowledged; and where a burgeoning market of women's Bible study resources is woefully thin on good theology (pp. 131, 145, 197, 202, 232–33). This culture, she claims, is due to the unbiblical and harmful teaching of biblical manhood and womanhood (pp. 19, 22–23, 27, 100).

As an evangelical Anglican living in Australia, I cannot know how accurate this description is or how widely it applies, particularly because little is provided by way of hard data. Certainly, as a "complementarian," who moves in complementarian circles, I do not personally know any complementarian church that fits this description. My point is that to assume all complementarian churches are like those Byrd describes—even in the US—would be to fall into stereotyping similar to the kind she is reacting so strongly against.

Byrd begins her book by introducing readers to an early feminist novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, where, in the unsettled mind of the first-person narrator, a woman is trapped behind the yellow wallpaper in the narrator's room and the narrator must remove the wallpaper in order to free the woman—who turns out to be the narrator herself. The wallpaper represents the oppressive patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes of the day that silence, entrap and disempower women. Byrd appropriates this metaphor, claiming the complementarian movement is "constructed with a lot of yellow wallpaper" (p. 100), and that her book "presents an alternative to all the resources marketed on biblical womanhood and biblical manhood today" (p. 25).

RFBMW presents two competing visions for women. The first is the yellow-wallpaper-like dystopian entrapment of biblical manhood and womanhood, which is referenced by somewhat labored repetition and allusion to Gilman's novella (e.g., "wallpaper" over 57 times). The second is drawn antithetically from a description, written by Jewish feminist scholar, Rachel Keren, of the effects on women of exclusion from Torah study in the centuries after the destruction of the temple. On the premise that Jesus overturned prevailing attitudes to women studying Torah (p. 186), Byrd believes this description can serve as a counterpoint to what we should find in the church today.

Thus, reappropriating Keren's words, Byrd claims that for Christian women to flourish we must "*participate in creative and spiritual life in the church. We contribute literary expression and spiritual creativity. We must be in the heart of existence. We pass on the heritage of the tradition to future generations.... We are to serve in roles that identify with knowledge of God's word. And this inclusion will affect our public image*" (p. 186, italics original). The appropriateness of using statements about the missed experience of Jewish women in the period beyond the close of the NT as the template for Christian women's flourishing is not addressed by Byrd.

At its best, *RFBMW* directs our attention to two important needs in the church today.

The first is for all God's children—male and female, ordained or lay—to contribute to the building of his church, using the gifts he gives by the power of his Spirit. If churches do not consider women (or laymen) worthy or capable of serious study of God's word or do not allow the mutual participation within the public gathering that we see in Paul's letters (1 Cor 11:4–5; 14:26–40; Col 3:16) or in the private instruction of Apollos by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26), then something has been lost of the Bible's complementary vision of women and men. *RFBMW* directs us to examine our church practice to ensure that all God's children are being nurtured, and our church practice is expressing the (ordered) interdependency and mutuality that are to exist in the body of Christ.

Secondly, *RFBMW* directs our attention to the need for further theological reflection on the Bible's teaching about personhood, sex, and gender. The initial impetus for *RBMW* was the rise of "evangelical feminism" (i.e., egalitarianism), and the new interpretations of Scripture it entailed. On both sides, the debate was focused on what the Bible said about submission and headship in marriage, and leadership in the church, and their application today. But the debate now—made more urgent by the rise of transgender ideology and subjectively-determined identity—is not about what women and men can *do*, or even how they are to *relate*, but about what a woman *is* and what a man *is*, and wherein lies the difference.

*RFBMW* pushes us to ask these questions, but it does little to progress the conversation for several reasons:

- While Byrd rejects the visions of masculinity and femininity offered in *RBMW* and the Danvers Statement (pp. 21–22, 104–05, 120–22), she arguably misrepresents them in doing so (e.g., "all women are to submit to all men", p. 105, cf. *RBMW*, pp. 169, 493).
- While she rejects "the hyper-masculinity and femininity teaching taught in some conservative circles" (pp. 88, 172, also "hyperauthoritarian, hypermachismo"; "hypersubmissive"), she provides few details of what this entails.
- While she rejects androgyny (pp. 19, 104, 111), and acknowledges distinct relational responsibilities for men and women in the family (p. 116), as well as order in marriage and the church (p. 105), she gives almost no content to those differences.
- While Byrd rightly calls both sexes to a common pursuit of Christlikeness (pp. 109–14, 122), she creates a false dichotomy by rejecting gendered Christian discipleship.
- While she gives a nod to biological gender essentialism, she does not want to overgeneralise every man's or woman's disposition (pp. 124–26).
- While she claims to present a more robust concept of man and woman than what is on offer from either complementarians or egalitarians, both camps would broadly agree with the relational complementarity *RFBMW* presents, and readily affirm that "we are brothers

and sisters in Christ, placed in a dynamic, synergetic, fruit-bearing communion” (p. 130)—exactly because questions of order have been avoided.

In short, *RFBMW* shows that the task of understanding what Scripture has to say about personhood, sex and gender is a work-in-progress, but the book itself provides little fresh grist for the mill. Moreover, Byrd’s assertion that “I simply am feminine because I am female” (p. 114, cf. p. 120) just does not wash in a culture grappling with the challenge of transgenderism.

More significantly, *RFBMW* sets us back in two respects in its handling of Scripture.

First, at points the book uncritically accepts claims of feminist and egalitarian authors, which do not align with Scripture. Consider the following examples. Byrd accepts Christa McKirland’s claim that the prophetess Huldah is “arguably the first person to grant authoritative status” and canonize the Torah scroll, and that “the first person [in history] to authenticate the written Word might have been a woman” (pp. 46, 64). But Hilkiah the high priest and King Josiah knew the book found in the temple was God’s word before Huldah enters the story, which is why Josiah tore his clothes upon hearing it read, and said that “great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us” for not obeying it all (2 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chron 34:19–21). God’s authoritative self-authenticating word had cut him to the heart well before Huldah had spoken a word.

Further, she claims “women were even leaders of house churches,” listing Prisca, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Lydia, Junia, and Phoebe as examples (pp. 190–92). However, the closest these women get to that claim is that churches met in their homes (Prisca, Chloe, Nympha, and Lydia)—not that they *led* or “planted” churches—and in the case of Apphia, the house in question is Philemon’s alone, as the singular σοῦ makes clear (Philem 1–2). Byrd accepts Michael Bird’s claim that Phoebe not only carried Paul’s letter to Rome, which is probable on the basis of Paul’s commendation (Rom. 16:1–2), but was also entrusted by Paul to authoritatively teach the Roman Christians its contents (pp. 147–48)—about which the text says nothing, and other texts speak against (i.e., 1 Tim 2:12).

She also accepts Philip Payne’s claim that Paul’s use of “work hard” (κοπιᾶω) for his own ministry and the authoritative preaching and teaching of others indicates that the women listed in Romans 16:6 and 12 did likewise (pp. 149–50), when this wrongly reads into the meaning of κοπιᾶω in Romans 16 its connotation and collocation with terms of authority in other contexts (cf. Matt 6:28; Eph 4:28; 2 Tim 2:6).

Additionally, Byrd also builds on Richard Bauckham’s notion of “gynocentric interruptions”; i.e., places in Scripture where it is claimed that a female voice interrupts the dominant male voice (pp. 44, 51). For both authors the Book of Ruth is a key example, where they claim the main story is told in a feminine voice which is then cut off by the androcentric voice of the genealogy (Ruth 4:18–22)—“in order to be exposed by the female voice of the narrative as pitifully inadequate in its androcentric selectivity” (p. 51, citing Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], p. 11). While both authors reject radical feminist views of the Bible, the approach still uses a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion and, in Byrd’s hands, stresses the need for the gynocentric voice to *interrupt* (25x) the male voice. This undermines the unity of the text, and risks creating a pink-letter Bible. It also shows no obvious awareness of the risks of subjectivity, as there are no stated methodological controls for identifying the male and female voices or discerning their intent.

The use of arguments like these is regrettable, especially when they are not needed to make the important point Byrd wishes to make about the equal dignity and worth of women, and their gifted and valued contribution to the people of God. There is plenty in the Bible that affirms this without

the conjecture and overreach involved in some of the arguments she incorporates. Their weaknesses undermine her own argument. It is also no way to read Scripture.

But there is a second problem with the book's handling of Scripture: not all relevant Scripture is examined. This is no more evident than in its failure to consider 1 Timothy 2—an omission that has several negative flow-on effects.

It makes Byrd's insistence on male-only ordination (pp. 70, 119, 121, 228, 232) seem an unexpected outlier, especially in light of the feminist and egalitarian argumentation she otherwise embraces. It also means she must depend on more speculative arguments to explain this conviction (e.g., Adam's priestly function, p. 105 n. 17; Christ our Bridegroom being best represented by a man, p. 231), and leaves readers with no clear guidance as to *how* women should contribute to the fellowship (just that they *should*) or why, in Byrd's view, women might teach adult Sunday school (p. 233) but not hold a particular office.

Most importantly, this omission means that *RFBMW* fails to engage Scripture *at the very point* where God's word most clearly addresses the different ways that women and men are to participate in the authoritative teaching and oversight of God's household.

In a similar vein, while the book does a lot with the idea of Christ as Bridegroom, drawing from Ephesians 5, there is little discussion of what Paul means by ὑποτάσσω or κεφαλή in that text when applied to wives and husbands, and no discussion at all of similar texts (i.e., Col 3:18–19; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1–7, cf. 1 Cor 11:3).

It is disappointing that in a book that claims to offer an antidote to what it judges to be *unbiblical* teaching about men and women, there is very little engagement with the key *biblical* texts that address just those matters. This is not finding fault for not writing another sort of book. It is saying that, whatever else it might be doing, a book that stops short of considering *those* texts is not bringing *biblical* clarity to God's purposes for women and men as faithful servants of Christ, both in the church and in the home.

These misgivings notwithstanding, *RFBMW* is surely right to observe that an expression of “biblical manhood and womanhood isn't so biblical if women in the early church were able to contribute more than they may today” (p. 202), as it is to direct our attention to the rich complementarity between women and men that God has created—but which only a careful and comprehensive study of his Word can reveal.

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Tim Chester. *Enjoying God: Experience the Power and Love of God in Everyday Life*. London: Good Book, 2018. 189 pp. £8.99/\$16.99.

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The Westminster shorter catechism tells us that “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” *Enjoying God* by Tim Chester sets out to show us that we can experience more enjoyment of God in the nitty gritty of life through our relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit.

He begins with the problem of trying to relate to God, asking, “How can finite people know the infinite? ... We don’t have a relationship with ‘God’ in a general sense. We can’t know the essence of God—the ‘god-ness’ of God. His nature is beyond our comprehension.” “But,” he continues, “we can know the *Persons of God*” (p. 16, emphasis original). He suggests that while the concept of knowing God can seem beyond our grasp, a relationship with the three persons of God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—may seem more accessible.

Chester asks an interesting question to get readers thinking: “With which member of the Trinity do you have a strongest sense of a lived, experienced relationship?” (p. 14). Helpfully, in chapters 3 to 11, he spends three chapters on each of the Persons of the Trinity, drawing us in with enticing chapter headings:

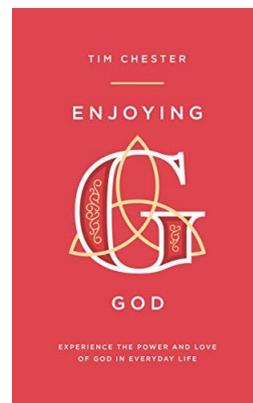
3. In every pleasure we can enjoy the Father’s generosity
4. In every hardship we can enjoy the Father’s formation
5. In every prayer we can enjoy the Father’s welcome
6. In every failure we can enjoy the Son’s grace
7. In every pain we can enjoy the Son’s presence
8. In every supper we can enjoy the Son’s touch
9. In every temptation we can enjoy the Spirit’s life
10. In every groan we can enjoy the Spirit’s hope
11. In every word we can enjoy the Spirit’s voice. (pp. 7–8)

But while each chapter brings to the fore the particular work of Father, Son or Spirit, the other two Persons are always right there. Indeed, one of the most helpful aspects of the book is the way in which Chester teases out how, as each divine Person relates to us, we are wonderfully caught up in their relating to each other.

*Enjoying God* is not only thought-provoking, it is also very practical. Each chapter ends with a “Putting into practice” section and suggests ways in which we can actively pursue our relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit. In one of the chapters in which we are encouraged to raise our expectations of the Spirit of God, the action point is to “take a risk for God this week. It might be inviting a neighbour to church, declaring your allegiance to Christ in the workplace, offering to pray with an unbeliever, being extravagantly generous with your time or money—something that makes you feel your dependence on the Spirit’s help” (p. 119). Each chapter also includes “Reflection Questions,” which thoughtfully apply the book’s insights to the believer’s relationship with the triune God.

Despite the book’s many strengths, a couple of areas raised questions for this reviewer.

First, in chapter 8, Chester speaks of the Son’s presence at communion. He rightly says that “Christ is present by the Holy Spirit” and not physically present, but then states that “the bread and wine are physical symbols of his spiritual presence” (p. 104). While the spiritual presence of Jesus with his



gathered people should not be in doubt, the bread and wine are first and foremost symbols of the body and blood of Christ, given to prompt our remembrance of the saving benefits of his death. Christ is present in and with believers by his Spirit at all times; the elements of the Lord's Supper, however, do not primarily signify that presence, but point to Christ's death for our sins.

Second, in chapter 14, Chester returns to the point he makes at the beginning of the book: "we can't relate to the nature of God because his nature is unknowable." And yet, "we can know God because God is known in and through the *Persons of God*" (p. 170, emphasis original). This distinction needed to be further explored and better explained, as such language seems to posit a split between the divine being and the divine relations. Presumably, this is not Chester's intention, but his language is, to my mind, problematic. God is a being-in-relation.

These questions notwithstanding, *Enjoying God* is an important book that reminds us that as we endeavour to glorify God, we also get to enjoy God! But it is not a self-indulgent, self-serving enjoyment. Rather, "if you want to find joy, you may need to stop looking for joy and instead start working for the joy of others. The strange fact is that you'll never really be happy while you're pursuing your own happiness" (p. 148).

I have personally appreciated this reminder that a relationship with God is a relationship to be enjoyed. In every situation we face we have the active engagement of Father, Son, and Spirit, working in us, though us and for us. *Enjoying God* is a book that deserves to be read slowly and thoughtfully. It would also be a valuable book to read and discuss with others.

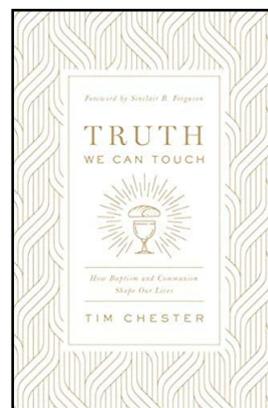
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Tim Chester. *Truth We Can Touch: How Baptism and Communion Shape Our Lives*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 174 pp. £14.13/\$17.99.

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Chester is a prolific author and has produced another title that is at once useful to the church, accessible to a wide-ranging audience, and academically reliable. In *Truth We Can Touch*, he is responding to dissonance between the common evangelical practice of Communion and baptism in the church and his growing sacramental instincts. He is pulled toward the sacraments because of the theological significance they played in the Reformation and their underlying importance as participatory actions (i.e., why we are called to "do" these things rather than merely "say" or "think" these things). As a result, he believes the sacraments are underappreciated as gifts of God to nurture the church's faith (pp. 21–22). His goal is to help us learn how to approach them with greater appreciation, thereby using them for their intended purpose. As Sinclair Ferguson notes in the foreword, the author is not trying to simply gratify the desire to have the "right" theological position on these topics but to receive from the sacraments their intended blessings (p. 12).



The first four chapters seek to explain how the sacraments embody the gospel and the last two demonstrate how these rituals shape the Christian life and community. Chapter 1 focuses mainly

on baptism and explains it as an enacted or embodied promise. That is, the promise which baptism embodies is the promise that saves. Using helpful analogies (e.g., wedding rings, a signature on a contract, etc.), Chester is careful to deny baptismal regeneration while still underscoring the significance of the embodied act. Baptism is not salvific on its own but, when received by faith, has a real effect. The reality of baptism is a visible sign of the gospel and a spiritual tether to the objective nature of salvation.

The second chapter focuses on the meal as the embodiment of grace (i.e., a means of grace). Chester traces meals in Scripture to show the significance of the Lord's Supper as the summary meal of Scripture. This embodied meal is a reminder of God's provision (i.e., he feeds us—*contra* the gods of the ancient world which require worshippers to feed them). Further, the meal is a moment of distinct participation in the grace of God.

Chapter 3 gets to a recurring theological point (already introduced in the preceding chapter); namely, the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. To underscore the argument, Chester helpfully explains philosophical categories and historical views regarding the Supper (e.g., transubstantiation, consubstantiation, etc.). He argues for the real, spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper (not simply a memorial), carefully placing this view within historic, Reformed theology. The Supper uses figurative language but embodies the actual presence of Christ.

Chapter 4 provides compelling exegetical and pastoral evidence for the sacraments as reminders in permanent, physical form. Having subtly deemphasized the memorial view, Chester does a marvelous job explaining the reason Christians need embodied reminders. As he summarizes, "The primary way we are to encourage, counsel, and exhort one another is through reminding one another of the gospel" (p. 109). The sacraments both call people back to the gospel and retell the story that shapes Christian identity. The story of the gospel unifies the church; despite many unique experiences and varying conversion stories, all believers enter the faith through the same baptism.

Building from the idea that stories shape us, chapter 5 explains baptism as a paradigm for the Christian life. Living the baptized life is a skill formed through community, imitation, and ritual. In Chester's persuasive explanation of the baptized life, there is room for further reflection on the role that ritual plays in shaping our affections and helping believers know God. While James K. A. Smith is mentioned helpfully (although briefly), I would have liked to see interaction with other scholars in this area, such as Dru Johnson and Peter Leithart.

Chapter 6 expands the focus to the larger Christian community reminding that baptism and the Lord's Supper are pathways of reconciliation and discipline. In the conclusion, Chester skillfully argues from the example of Luther that the medieval views of transubstantiation are, interestingly, too clever and modern. Similarly, our contemporary world struggles with the miraculous and transcendent. Rather than always trying to dissect the miracle, we should see the sacraments as an opportunity to enjoy God communing with his people.

If this work suffers from anything, it is the understandable difficulty the author has in determining a specific audience while maintaining broad appeal and applicability. Accompany this challenge with attempted brevity and one might find a few shortcomings. Chester helpfully wants to focus on the usefulness of the ordinances in Christian spirituality. Whether for broader appeal or to avoid distracting controversies, he intentionally neglects the topic of infant baptism. For all the talk of "means of grace" there is no discussion of the mode of either baptism or the Lord's Supper.

The tone can also be confusing. The illustrations and applications are aimed at a general audience, yet the reader is expected to have far-ranging understanding of the issues at hand. Other times the

audience is given simplistic explanations of well-known topics (e.g., transubstantiation). In some ways, the book assumes the reader understands the basics of Reformed thought concerning the sacraments and has clear convictions about their underlying theology, meaning, and mode.

Some scholarly debate is used to make a practical point at the expense of the original argument. For example, Chester uses Joachim Jeremias's complicated study of the Eucharist to make the point that God is the one remembering the sacrifice of Christ during the Supper (p. 122). Not only is Jeremias's original work dense and contested, it relies on a methodology that does not cohere with Chester's approach. More problematically, Chester initially affirms Jeremias's thesis, but then contradicts it in the next paragraph when he explains the act of remembrance is done by the participants of the Lord's Supper. To responsibly implement Jeremias's findings, the words of institution must either refer to the participant or God doing the remembering, not both. The average reader would not be expected to pick up on such a detail, but it could undermine confidence in other sources throughout.

The organization of the book is also not particularly straightforward. The thematic arrangement allows the author to quickly jump back and forth between baptism and the Lord's Supper, sometimes irregularly. The important discussion of "spiritual presence" (maybe the central theological retrieval consistently argued for by the author) is discussed separately in two chapters rather than as a single, sustained treatment.

Chester has accomplished a difficult task by writing a book that traverses important and complicated topics while not turning them into esoteric theological exercises. He has achieved what he set out to do, to emphasize the role of the sacraments in the Christian life to spiritually nourish faith. The receptive reader will consider the gospel more deeply because of its embodiment in the ordinances and will be challenged to drink more deeply of God's grace the next time they are observed.

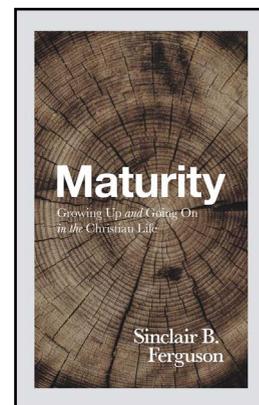
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Sinclair B. Ferguson. *Maturity: Growing Up and Going On in the Christian Life*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2019. 248 pp. £13.27/\$17.00.

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This attractively presented paperback is a systematic reworking of a book originally published in 1980 in the UK with the title *Add to Your Faith* (and subsequently, in the USA, as *Taking the Christian Life Seriously*)—the first of the many volumes Sinclair Ferguson has given to the church over the last 40 years. Out of print for a long time, the present book retains the original aim of helping new and younger Christians discover how much more there is to the Christian life than they at first imagine, while also serving as a refresher to believers at every stage. It certainly was that for me, taking me back to my student days where I too absorbed the same rich ministry under William Still that so shaped the author, and whose voice I could not help hearing so frequently throughout these chapters. So much of what enriched my formative years is encapsulated in these chapters where I learned, as the introduction puts it, that "true understanding is more than possessing information in the form of propositions and isolated texts. It involves breathing



in the atmosphere in which the truths of the gospel are presented and then breathing it out in our lives” (p. x). *Maturity* is a great example of a book that will help people do just that.

The book runs to 230 pages of content, in 12 chapters gathered under 5 key headings.

The first section, “Growing Up,” has three chapters, beginning with “The Importance of Maturity,” where Ferguson shows that we are both bound to the example of Christ and under the lordship of Christ. The next chapter, “Symptoms of Decay,” which deals realistically with the warnings in Hebrews of stopping going on, and slipping back. Chapter 3, “Abiding in Christ,” is particularly helpful in showing from both John’s Gospel and the Epistles how our union with Christ is cultivated and kept as we learn to let the word of God truly dwell in us richly. The next section, “Standing Firm,” has a particularly helpful chapter on “Full Assurance,” what it is and isn’t, and what can obscure assurance in our experience, as well as a balanced and practical look at “Clear Guidance” for believers.

The next and longest section is on “Facing Difficulties”—a mark of the book’s biblical realism. “The Problem of Sin” (ch. 6) deals very plainly with the reality of indwelling sin, and opposition from both within and without to Christian life and progress, drawing heavily on Psalm 119 for the constant remedy of listening to the Word and not the world. “Overcoming Temptation” (ch. 7) deals judiciously with the distinction between sin and temptation, tracing the spiritual outworking of temptation, if unchallenged, to destruction, while clearly showing, and urging, the way of deliverance. “Fighting the Enemy” (ch. 8) further elaborates on the reality and activity of Satan and is anchored in Ephesians 6, while also drawing on wide New Testament teaching and illustrations from biblical narrative. We must know our enemy—a need that is sometimes underplayed among Reformed evangelicals afraid of Pentecostalism’s excesses—but, even more importantly, we must know our resources in Christ who gives victory; this chapter eloquently teaches both. The final chapter in this section, “Coping with Suffering,” is a warmly helpful application of passages from the New Testament, Job and the Psalms showing how the heart of the believer’s suffering is rooted in our union with Christ, and our sharing in both his sufferings and glory.

The fourth section, “Pressing On,” is comprised of two chapters: “Serving Faithfully” and “Running Patiently.” Drawing heavily from Hebrews, these chapters focus on the nature of real saving faith as showing lifelong repentance, turning constantly from serving self to serving Christ, and on the need for perseverance, which comes from the greatness and certainty of our hope. Joyful encouragement is also found in understanding the goal of all God’s discipline in our lives; discipline which may seem ever so painful at the present time but is preparing us for the glory to be revealed in us one day. The section ends with reference to the author’s all-time favorite of William Still’s wayside pulpit messages which sums up so succinctly the Christian life: “WORKSHOP—INSIDE; SHOWROOM—UPSTAIRS!” (p. 189).

The final Section, “Maturity,” expounds the essence of “Living Maturely” (with the aid of Psalm 131), as finding humble contentment in the Lord himself as our only hope and only source of wisdom. The book concludes with a brief Appendix consisting of John Bunyan’s poem, “Caution to stir up to watch against sin.”

Overall, this is a work of rich gospel exposition: biblical theology of a systematic kind and systematic theology of a biblical kind, all applied warmly and wisely to real Christian experience. There are wide-ranging references to the Church Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, and more contemporary writers, as well as catechisms, confessions and hymnody—all honoring the great Christian tradition but all serving the chief aim of expounding Scripture and all very accessible. (Incidentally, the book contains none of the Latinisms which, to the chagrin of some of our staff when we have read them together, pepper some of the author’s more scholarly volumes!)

*Maturity* is a book I would warmly commend to any believer, but particularly the intelligent younger Christian for whom it will be a solid and rewarding study. It would also be an excellent resource for Growth Group study, perhaps the basis of a follow-on course from something like Discipleship Explored. For any pastor looking for inspiration for a preaching series on *Growing Up and Going On in the Christian Life*, here is something to get you going and give you plenty of material to draw from along the way. For preachers in training, too, a careful study of this book will offer a great deal of help in learning how to open up the word of God so as to do more than just “get it right” in terms of exegesis and theology, but rather to “get it across and get it in” to the real life and experience of frail human flesh and blood—the hungry sheep who need the sustenance of the living Word week in, week out, so that will might keep growing up and going on.

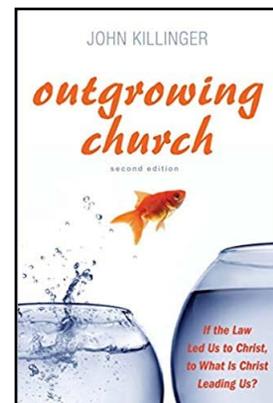
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John Killinger. *Outgrowing Church: If the Law Led Us to Christ, to What Is Christ Leading Us?* 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019. 140 pp. £15.00/\$19.00.

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John Killinger is a retired minister with two doctorates, who has pastored eight churches and taught for four major American theological seminaries and three Christian colleges. The second edition of *Outgrowing Church* is offered as a response to recent books about “church leaving” and the “emergent church,” which Killinger thinks do not go far enough. In his view, people are not going to church because “they have outgrown it” (p. xii). Consequently, instead of looking for a “quick fix” for the church, “Christianity may well need to *supercede itself*” (p. xix, emphasis original). In practice, this will mean transforming our churches so that people no longer “feel compelled to leave them” (p. xxiii). This will involve “some hard reconsiderations of the nature of God, in which we listen to voices from every land and culture” (p. xxiii).



In chapter 1, “Outgrowing a Particular Church,” Killinger describes how his early education led him into conflict with the views of his original church. As his views changed, he “began to feel simplistic and idolatrous” when singing many of the old hymns that he had always loved (p. 16). Killinger compares his outgrowing of the old doctrines and hymns to growing up: as adults no longer find pleasure in children’s games, so we outgrow our youthful faith.

In chapter 2, “Outgrowing a Denomination,” Killinger notes that people switch denominations more easily than in the past and argues that “in a way, we have *all* outgrown denominationalism” (p. 34, emphasis original). He discusses why many Baptist ministers become Episcopalians, arguing that over time the Baptist faith lost its emphasis on “the freedom of individual believers to think as they chose” and became “enclaves of conservative robots, people who never voiced any thought or opinion different from everybody else’s, as if they feared being caught out as different or heretical” (p. 31). Killinger argues that the old fault lines of denominations have been replaced by the battle between conservatism and liberalism. He also suggests that megachurch pastors “are creating a new mythology about what it means to be Christian, [using] the tenets of motivational psychology to fashion a religion that promises

success and comfort to all those ... who will buy into the sheen and glitter of its made-for-TV appeal” (pp. 33–34).

In chapter 3, “Outgrowing Church, Period,” Killinger notes the baggage the church carries from its history and suggests that the church should not exist “beyond its time of fulfillment” (pp. 36–37). Instead we should see Jesus and the church as *paidagogoi* “to bring us to some kind of world religion,” in which the finest in Christianity is merged with the finest in other religions (pp. 37–39). Just as parents expect children to move out when they have grown up, so it is not an offense to the church if we grow as a society and surrender “our need for church, depending only on God, *sans* church, *sans* preacher, *sans* Bible, *sans* everything. Even *sans* Jesus. For they are all only signposts indicating the way to go, and, when we have arrived, or are far enough along the road to know the rest of the way, we can give them up, trusting in God alone” (p. 44).

In chapter 4, “The Disconnect between Jesus and the Church,” Killinger argues that there is “a major disjunction between Jesus and the life of the church in our time” (p. 57). Jesus “gave little thought to trivial matters of sin and morality and seldom called others to account for anything more than hypocrisy” (p. 58). Today’s churches, by contrast, “behave precisely the way Jesus described the Pharisees as doing, straining gnats and swallowing camels” (p. 61). There is also a disjunction in the church’s materialism, in its lack of courage, and in its deficiency of love and compassion.

In chapter 5, “The Absence of Spirituality in the Church,” Killinger laments the lack of prayer in the church. We get discouraged because we are too practical in prayer, making prayer lists as if we were buying groceries and then “ticking off the answers as we see them,” not realizing “that answers don’t really matter to the person who is seeking the divine presence and not specific blessings at all” (p. 92).

In chapter 6, “Mr. Darwin Isn’t the Enemy,” Killinger challenges his readers to better synthesize faith and scientific knowledge “in a way that does not do unjustifiable harm to either” (p. 102). Unfortunately, Killinger says nothing about the role of our faith in shaping the way we do science but repeatedly speaks of “how we must amend our religious views in order to go on living in a world of real facts” (p. 113). In particular, our understanding of evolution should cause us to see God “as being much more totally and intimately involved in creation,” and we should embrace “the humbler Jesus of the synoptic Gospels, before the church magnified his role to portray him as ‘very God of very God’” (p. 107).

In chapter 7, “The Church’s Lack of Imagination—or Spirit!,” Killinger notes that though the church was at the forefront of most earlier cultural revolutions, we are “on the sideline” or even being “beaten and battered” by the current revolution (p. 121). Whereas the first Christians “invented new liturgies, new creeds, new hymns, new literary forms, new sacraments, new apocalypses, new ways of communicating, new theologies,” the church of today is “a dull, listless, backward generation incapable of making anything new or exciting, ... monuments to the past, not the present” (pp. 122–25). Killinger dreams of drawing together “the most talented, fantastic artists, musicians, writers, and architects, including as many rebels as possible,” and charging them with reconceiving the church (p. 130).

The book closes with “A Belated Afterthought,” in which Killinger notes that shortly after publishing the first edition of *Outgrowing Church*, he found a delightful small church that made him rethink the premise of the book. But after reflection he has realized that this sort of church is so rare that the book is still needed. He hopes that the witness of churches like this “can somehow become viral and infect all the others in Christendom” (p. 145). But he believes the book is still necessary to expose the flaws of the church at large.

As an evangelical, it is challenging to know what to do with this book, because at so many points Killinger has exposed genuine flaws in modern Christianity. His critique of many churches today as offering a “new mythology” informed by “motivational psychology” is not far off the mark. The same could be said of his critique of the church’s materialism, lack of courage, lack of compassion, lack of spirituality, and lack of imagination. But Killinger’s alternative is too untethered from the One in whom all things hold together. Killinger sees Christocentrism as a “stumbling-block” (p. xxi) and thinks the Synoptic Gospels contain a lower Christology (p. 107), but recent Synoptic research has gone in a different direction (Hurtado, Gathercole, Bauckham, Bird). Killinger’s fundamental thesis is that Jesus and the church are signposts pointing to something else, and here I am afraid he has badly missed the mark. Rather than moving beyond Jesus to find God, the true remedy is to reject our distortions of who Jesus is and to find God *in* Jesus. While there is often a great disconnect between Jesus and the modern church, I think Killinger has misjudged Jesus as little more than another John the Baptist, pointing to something beyond himself (p. 37), when in reality he is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” in whom “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2:3, 9). Killinger shows how ugly the bathwater can be, but he throws out the baby along with it, which causes this book to fall short of its potential to positively transform the church.

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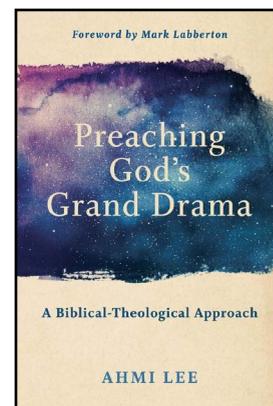
Ahmi Lee. *Preaching God’s Grand Drama: A Biblical-Theological Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 175 pp. £15.99/\$22.99.

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The German theologian Helmut Thielicke is reported to have once said, “The gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to every generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. The gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence.” In *Preaching God’s Grand Drama*, Ahmi Lee employs such a mindset as she surveys the major modern and post-modern interpretive methodological approaches to hermeneutics and their subsequent relationship to homiletics. Lee’s goal, however, is not simply to provide a comparison of a modern and postmodern approaches to preaching, but to offer a new and fresh model of biblical-theological engagement.

Lee’s purpose in writing the book is lucid. In her introduction she explains that her aim is “first, to describe and critique the two homiletical approaches that correspond to the present shift in epistemology; and second, given the pernicious contrariety of these models, to propose a centered third approach that builds on both their strengths” (p. 3). Based on this goal, the book can be broken down into two major sections. In chapters 1–3, Lee provides a lay of the land in regard to previous approaches to preaching, before moving into chapter 4–6 where she offers her contribution to the discussion of preaching methodology.

In the first half of the book Lee provides an overview and critique of the two major approaches to homiletics within the last century. Chapter 1 surveys what she describes at the “Traditional Homiletic.” This method of preaching seeks as its goal to “mine” the text for truth and then proclaim it. This approach



is largely proposition-based and appeals to the modern reader. In chapter 2, Lee provides a contrast to the Traditional Homiletic by looking at the largely postmodern approaches to preaching of Lucy Rose, John McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr. who represent a “Conversational” or “New Homiletic.” The Conversational Homiletic places emphasis on the communal reading of the text and is characterized by the sharing of truth through story, poem, and common experience.

In the second half of the book, Lee presents her own vision of preaching, which she describes as the “Theodramatic Homiletic.” In chapter 4, following the interpretive lead of other theologians like N. T. Wright, Nicholas Lash, and Kevin Vanhoozer, Lee seeks to integrate the objective strength or “epic” of the Traditional Homiletic with the subjective strength or “lyric” of the New Homiletic. The shape of this model is then developed in chapter 5. Lee writes,

Scripture provides the directions for the church’s “live-action” in the continuing drama of redemption that God graciously invites us to participate in. So our concern in preaching should not be strictly epic oriented because sermons should do more than accurately report God’s historical actions ... at the same time, sermons should not be purely lyrical because affections stirred by personal and communal experiences are not an end in themselves.... We need both epic and lyric in order to perfectly perform the biblical drama that makes God’s grace and truth known to the world. (p. 109)

In the final chapter, Lee outlines what this looks like by presenting not so much a paradigm to copy as much as an ethos to employ. To preach with a “Theodramatic Homiletic,” Lee suggests that the reader use “retrospection, introspection, extrospection, and prospection” (p. 150) as practice-shaping perspectives. The reader should show (1) “attentiveness to God’s historical actions” in retrospection (p. 152); (2) “attentiveness to God’s present action in us” in introspection (p. 156); (3) “attentiveness to God’s present action around us” in extrospection (p. 159); and (4) “attentiveness to God’s future action” in prospection (p. 164).

There are numerous strengths to Lee’s work in *Preaching God’s Drama*. First, by revisiting homiletic method Lee has sought to engage a discipline that has often grown stagnant. Frequently, “Traditional” and “New” homiletic models speak straight passed each other, or simply deny other views exists. By addressing the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach and by presenting an integrated view Lee genuinely forges new ground in the homiletic dialogue. Moreover, Lee does so with a humble tone that avoids pejorative caricatures that have often been present in the works of others. Such an irenic contribution in the field of homiletics should be warmly welcomed. Second, the book itself has a structural logic and coherence that enables the reader to easily follow the author’s argument. The book is clearly laid out and written in such a way that the second section builds naturally upon the first. Though there is technical depth, the flow of the book is easy to follow. Third, Lee’s work is highly nuanced. The engagement with the “New Homiletic,” for example, is thorough without being longwinded, judicious without being pretentious. Lee has clearly thought through questions of method and has provided a careful and balanced assessment of the issues in the book. This is to the reader’s benefit.

As for the book’s shortcomings, I would highlight two. First, while the book contains excellent material it may be out of reach to everyday preachers. There is an academic feel to the book which, though helpful, could potentially rule out those who most need to hear it. The book feels as though it would be more suited to those teaching and training preachers in the classroom, than being helpful to those in existing preaching ministries. Second, while not a weakness per se, the book contains a little more about the methodological disposition one should have in coming to the task, than it does about

concrete ways of applying skills to preaching. A sample sermon or other examples of what this looks like in the pulpit might have strengthened the book.

Ahmi Lee has provided a helpful contribution to the ongoing conversation between hermeneutics and homiletics. *Preaching God's Grand Drama* reminds the reader of the importance of appropriating God's timeless truth to our timebound cultural contexts as we participate in God's unfolding plan.

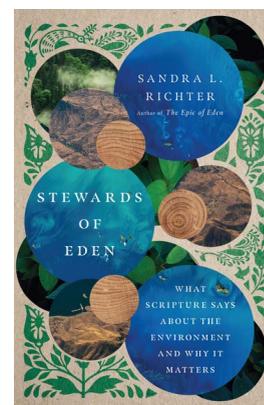
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Sandra L. Richter. *The Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says about the Environment and Why it Matters*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 168 pp. £16.99/\$22.00.

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Theological responses to environmental degradation from Christians began in earnest in the mid-twentieth century. Industrialization, implemented without appropriate concern for ecological consequences, was contributing to prosperity in the West but also to the degradation of the complex web of nature—a gift given by God to enable flourishing of human and non-human life. Various Christians called for a response, including thinkers like Joseph Sittler and Francis Schaeffer. Some non-Christians, most famously Lynn White, called for the revision of Christian doctrine around pagan ideals to create a more eco-centric religion designed to curb human impact on the environment. Intramural debates within Christianity regarding the place of humanity within the created order have raged unabated for the duration.



Due in part to the residual effects of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the early twentieth century (which sometimes pitted social action against doctrinal orthodoxy as competing concerns) the divisiveness of environmental ethics and the confusion of approaches to the topic among Christians has led to a rather tepid response to obvious environmental issues among many orthodox Christians. Over the past five decades, some orthodox responses to environmentalism have been pitched as resistance to syncretism, offering little positive doctrinal witness to creation care. Other treatments of ecological responsibility by Christians have focused on the debates around the issue in a way that sometimes crowds out more constructive articulations of solutions.

Sandra Richter's recent volume, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says about the Environment and Why it Matters*, is a refreshing approach to environmental ethics that articulates a clearly orthodox Christian perspective on creation care by focusing on the biblical witness to the issue, rather than on the controversies surrounding it. For those who wish to think deeply about environmental ethics, this is a book that deserves careful consideration.

Richter divides her short book into seven concise chapters with a separate introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, she asks the basic question: Can Christians be environmentalists? Answering in the affirmative, Richter moves to the focus of the first chapter, which connects the biblical account of the creation of humanity with a responsibility to steward creation wisely. Chapter 2 explores the relationship between ancient Israel and the land, demonstrating that the Pentateuch treats God as the landlord of creation to whom the people of Israel are responsible as renters.

In the third chapter, the author explores what Scripture teaches about proper care for domestic animals, setting this in contrast to many of the modern factory farming methods. Chapter 4 makes a similar argument related to human responsibility for wild animals. The fifth chapter contains Richter's outline of the limits on warfare related to the environment drawn from the Old Testament, comparing these to the way the U.S. prosecuted its defoliation campaign in the Vietnam war. Chapter 6 discusses the disproportionate impact environmental degradation has on marginalized populations, connecting concern for the widow and orphan to creation care. In the seventh chapter, having spent the bulk of her short volume exploring evidence from the Pentateuch, Richter shows the unity of the new covenant revelation on the environment with the evidence from the Hebrew Bible discussed in previous chapters. Following the conclusion, there is also an appendix with suggestions for concrete actions that Christians can take in order to be wise stewards of creation.

Richter is an Old Testament scholar, which shows in her strong emphasis on the teaching of the Pentateuch on environment. As such, *Stewards of Eden* reflects her own focus of study. It is, therefore, not a comprehensive handbook of Scripture's teaching on the subject, but an argument that focuses on one portion of Scripture and relates the consistent witness of Scripture to that anchor.

Each chapter provides practical case studies related to the theological content. Richter uses clear evidence of environmental degradation in the treatment of animals in factory farms, overuse of land for agriculture, and excessive extraction of resources through practices like mountain top removal as foils to the biblical call to responsible stewardship. She seems to intentionally avoid debates about the validity of climate change data and resists conflation of controversial economic systems with the question of creation care. This helps the volume stay on topic and to be usable for an audience with varied theological and political leanings.

One of the more intriguing aspects of Richter's volume is that in a highly politicized debate, there is almost no treatment of ongoing controversies. This is a text that simply picks up Scripture, reads it along orthodox lines, and seeks to apply it to contemporary questions using the best available data. By simply making a clear, positive case for stewardship from the Bible without addressing objections, Richter bypasses the usual taking of sides that can discourage honest consideration of ideas. Those who have studied Christian environmental ethics and its history will find this volume a delightful change from the common formula for books on the topic. Those who are new to the issue will skip some non-essential prolegomena to get straight to the meat of the matter.

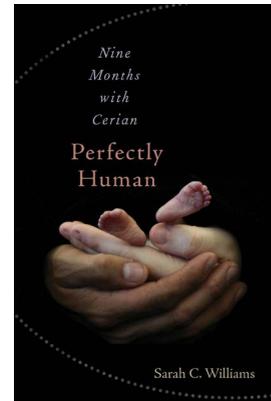
*Stewards of Eden* is a pleasantly readable volume. Richter's prose is clear, her arguments are carefully explained, and she focuses on a positive case for environmentalism drawn from Scripture. It is clear from her approach that the author's intent is not to change Christianity, but to use the central source for all Christian doctrine and practice to call believers to live a life of greater integrity. By avoiding the history of the ecological debate, *Stewards of Eden* presents a winsome invitation to a deeper interest in ecological stewardship among Christians.

This is a rich work of biblical research and theological application. It would be useful as a teaching tool or as an introductory text, but it presumes some background in biblical studies from the audience or the instructor. It is a model for future volumes on a vitally important topic.

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Sarah C. Williams. *Perfectly Human: Nine Months with Cerian*. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2018. 160pp. £11.99/\$16.00.

This deeply personal narrative of loving an unborn child takes us to the heart of what it means to be “perfectly human” in a society grappling with issues of personhood and identity. Sarah Williams, Research Professor in the History of Christianity at Regent College, Vancouver, takes us on her and her family’s journey through her third pregnancy with their daughter, Cerian (meaning “loved one” in Welsh). Along the way, she offers compelling reflections on the preciousness of all human life. The book is both a microcosmic reflection of the author’s world at this time, and a macrocosmic commentary on humanity at large. It is narrative meets pedagogy, and its story and message could not be more poignant and powerful for a world that so often ignores or denies the rights of the unborn.



The book opens with the “day of trouble,” when Williams was told at a routine, 20-week ultrasound that her baby had a condition (thanatophoric dysplasia) that would result in the death of the child soon after birth. She then takes us back to the story so far—the intentional prayers she prayed with her husband for this child, and the gruelling nausea of the early weeks of pregnancy. Williams’s mother also had a vivid picture of the child in these early weeks before the diagnosis, telling her, “Maybe this baby is like an amethyst. Perhaps the beauty is not easy to see at first but inside there will be something unexpected and intensely beautiful but also fragile. The beauty may need to be carefully honed before it is apparent to others” (p. 15). This is the path the book takes from here on, exposing the unexpected beauty of this fragile, unborn child not only to Sarah and her family, but to the people her pregnancy touches along the way.

As the story unfolds, the author draws us into her sphere: her household, her circle of friends, her church, her workplace, the waiting rooms, the doctor’s offices, the birth suite. To read this book is to feel like you are living with Williams, for she recounts her journey in an intimate and unguarded way, even including extracts from her journal and recording personal prayers from the time. This intimate portrait also gives us a picture of what it is to walk as a faithful friend, a caring husband, a prayerful mother and grandmother, a loving sister to this baby. Of particular note is Williams’s horror at the exclusion of her husband from the prenatal “system” in which they find themselves. To remedy this, she gives voice to her husband, including his own words along the way, to give a picture of his protective love for his child, his grief, and his hope. As well as providing an intimate portrait of living with Cerian, Williams offers God-centered reflections throughout her narrative, including her experience of God’s love for her and her baby. She concludes with a focused section on the ethical implications implicit in her story. In Sarah’s own description of the book to a group of bioethicists she meets in Oxford by chance, this book is “not really bioethics as such, more a personal story addressing cultural themes” (p. 148).

Originally published as *The Shaming of the Strong: The Challenge of an Unborn Life* (Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2017), this updated work makes additional comment on the impact her story has had on those who have heard it and the importance of the narrative for our current cultural moment. She writes, “It is not only the personal resonance of Cerian’s story that prompts me to write about her again; it is also a deep and enduring conviction that Cerian—along with thousands like her whose physical bodies and mental capacities have never allowed them to live a so-called “normal life”—

has something vital to say to a world that is restless and frantic, anxious and lonely” (p. 151). Indeed it does. This short little book packs a punch and is a precious contribution to not only the Christian world but the world at large.

In terms of providing a contribution to the Christian church, there are several points worth dwelling on. This book breeds empathy, and helps the reader think about how to care for a person and a family engulfed by difficulty and grief. By reflecting on the interactions she had with Christians along the way, we are able to observe helpful and not so helpful responses to the news of her baby, and see a model of faithful friends and family members who choose to grieve with her, pray with her and support her in thoroughly practical and loving ways. In this way the book forces us to consider the impact of our own words and actions, and gently encourages us to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom 12:15). Williams reflects on how this was embodied in her relationship with her closest friend, Janet, who was also pregnant at this time: “Janet chose to grieve with me. Later I would choose to celebrate with her. Both choices were costly” (p. 32).

There are spiritual practices highlighted in the book that will also prove to be an encouragement to Christians. By drawing attention to her own prayerful practices, as well as those of Christians around her, including her own mother, Williams offers a pattern of dependence on God to emulate in our own lives. She also highlights the important place of lament in Christian spirituality—an often-neglected aspect of Christian practice, although one that is being addressed of late (see G. Geoffrey Harper and Kit Barker, eds., *Finding Lost Words: The Church’s Right to Lament* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017]; Scott Harrower and Sean M. McDonough, eds., *A Time For Sorrow: Recovering the Practice of Lament in the Life of the Church* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019]). Indeed, the book shows in a very practical way how lament not only gave Williams a way to grieve, but also gave her relief: “relief that ... provided me with a theological structure through which I was able to meditate and interpret my experience” (p. 73). Ultimately, this book gives us a model of faithful discipleship in the deepest valleys of life.

In terms of its contribution to the world at large, *Perfectly Human* has much to offer. Any reader of the book is forced to consider the question, “What is it to be human?” Absent a proper understanding of the God who makes people in his image, the essence of humanity is often distilled down to pragmatic considerations of autonomy and functionality. Value of life centers around quality of life; avoiding a “suboptimal life” becomes the moral imperative in a system where ethics is purely utilitarian (p. 36). Williams gently pushes back against this thinking throughout the book, while also pushing the reader forward to consider the ethical issues surrounding beginning and end of life. Among other topics, she offers compelling reflections on assisted dying once life is considered “suboptimal,” and the ethics and impact of pre-natal screening on mothers.

Williams sums up this winsome, tender and compelling story in her reaction to a doctor who struggled to understand their decision not to terminate. “*Cerian is not a strong religious principle or a rule that compels me to make hard and fast ethical decisions. She is a beautiful person who is teaching me to love the vulnerable, treasure the unlovely, and face fear with dignity and hope*” (p. 80, italics original). Williams replaces a narrow vision of what it is to be normal with a grander, fuller vision of what it is to be human, perfectly human. It is a book to be read and given away to others—whether they hold a similar worldview or not. A note to readers: plan where you will read this book—you need to prepare

for its impact, as it will likely illicit strong emotions, even tears. But take comfort: to read this book is an act of healing in itself.

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N. T. Wright. *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. xii + 76 pp. £7.99/\$11.99.

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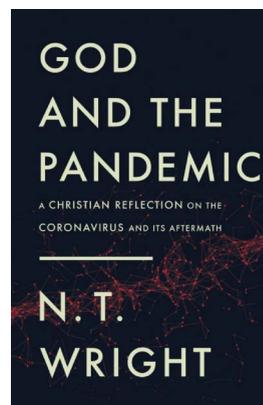
N. T. Wright is a research professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews and senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. In *God and the Pandemic*, Wright aims to help his readers to avoid a reactionary response to “questions raised by the pandemic” (p. xi). Instead, he prods us to pause, pray and lament in search of “solutions.”

In the book’s opening chapter, Wright entertains the question that everyone is asking regarding the pandemic: “Why?” He notes that in the past, people have tried to answer the “why?” in three different ways when faced with pandemic-like calamities: it is predestined (Stoicism); it is random (Epicureanism); and “the present life is just a shadow of reality” (Platonism) (p. 2). Similarly, in response to COVID-19, some blame China or America and others are promulgating the idea that it is the end of the world. Wright singles out the Platonic response to the pandemic as one that has often deluded Christians but, in fact, misconstrues the Bible and “is simply escapist” (p. 24). Others are taking the pandemic as a *kairos* moment for the evangelization of non-Christians. Others still, by gleaning from some Old Testament passages, believe that the pandemic is a sign that God “is angry with us for some reason” (p. 6).

In chapter 2, Wright then turns his attention to the Old Testament, focusing on the fact that the Babylonian exile came upon Israel as a result of idolatry. Thus, sin caused exile. At the same time, calamity also happened to individuals who had not necessarily sinned or disobeyed God, Job being a prime example. Wright argues that events like coronavirus make it clear that one’s piety does not prevent disaster from occurring in Christians’ lives.

In chapter 3, Wright contends that Jesus—according to the Gospels—was not so much looking “backward to sins which might bring about judgment, but forward to the new thing that was happening: the kingdom of God” (p. 16). Moreover, given that Jesus is the final prophet through whom God has spoken, the son sent to the vineyard to call the tenants to account, “there can be no other signs, no other warning events, to compare with this one” (p. 22). Those who reject this fact, Wright argues, end up with an erroneous interpretation of the Bible—one that “screens Jesus out of the picture” (p. 20). He also claims that many western Christians tend to divorce God’s sovereignty from Christ’s atonement. His point is this: “*If you want to know what it means to talk about God being ‘in charge of’ the world, or being ‘in control,’ or being ‘sovereign,’ then Jesus himself instructs you to rethink the notion of ‘kingdom,’ ‘control’ and ‘sovereignty’ themselves, around his death on the cross*” (p. 25, italics original).

In the following chapter, Wright further argues that the New Testament does not associate calamities like famine with the signs of Jesus’s second coming or use them to call people to repent of



their sin to avert disaster. “Jesus himself is the reason why people should turn from idolatry, injustice and all wickedness” (p. 20). Rather, when faced with such calamities, the early church put its energy into assisting those at risk by meeting their needs. For example, following Agabus’s prediction of a great famine coming upon the whole world (Acts 11), the early church engaged in identifying those in need and sent help to Jerusalem instead of blaming others or telling those at risk to repent of their sins.

Gleaning from Romans 8, Wright proposes that the church should see its vocation as one of praying as she groans with the rest of creation. This prayer, Wright posits, should perhaps be wordless as the Spirit is in times like a global pandemic. Indeed, for him the “redefinition of ‘control,’ of ‘kingdom,’ of ‘sovereignty,’ which we find in the rest of the New Testament and particularly with Jesus himself, here reaches its true depth” (p. 45).

In the book’s final chapter, Wright maintains that precisely because we are living through “a time of acute crisis,” this is not a time for reading the riot act; rather, “this is a time for lament” (p. 53). Like Jesus and the early Christians, we need to attend to the victims of the pandemic. In other words, lament should be followed by action, emulating, for instance, the pattern of response outlined in Psalm 72 (p. 73).

Wright’s brief book is timely as the global church is scrambling to make sense of the global pandemic. The main strength of this book is the advice to Christians to avoid simplistic “knee-jerk reactions” to explain the reason for the coronavirus pandemic. He urges the church to adopt a lament and prayer stance as our primary response to the pandemic and then to go out and help those at risk.

Although Wright is correct that “wordless prayer” and meeting physical needs are essential, he seems to downplay the place of verbal proclamation. He does not explicitly deny the necessity of evangelism. However, in reaction to those who do it badly, he appears to believe that silence is the better way. However, at some point Christians need to explain why they are showing mercy and compassion, whether in hospices or homeless shelters. The verbal utterance of the gospel is vital as there is a far worse danger afoot than COVID-19—dying without a relationship with Jesus. Curiously, the only time that Wright seems to encourage believers to speak during the pandemic is to Western leaders (p. 71).

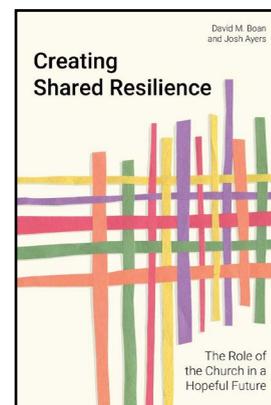
Nonetheless, *God and the Pandemic* should be commended for its attempt to correct those who “make the basic theological mistake of trying to deduce something about God while going behind Jesus’ back” (p. 22), those who attempt to profit from end times entrepreneurship and those who do not care for the whole person.

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## — MISSION AND CULTURE —

David M. Boan and Josh Ayers. *Creating Shared Resilience: The Role of the Church in a Hopeful Future*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2020. 154. pp. £9.99/\$14.99.

In *Creating Shared Resilience: The Role of the Church in a Hopeful Future*, David Boan and Josh Ayers propose a model of engagement to help local churches play a role in building resilience in communities. Resilience has been a crucial area of study in recent years as global disasters have increased and the ability of communities to rebuild lies on the forefront of the minds of community developers. Boan and Ayers explain, “As disasters increase, resilience has taken on greater importance as a possible way to reduce harm to individuals and communities. If greater resilience means less harm and quicker, more effective recovery, then, clearly we should find ways to increase resilience” (p. 2). This book helps define resilience and gives data and measurement to prove why resilience is a crucial piece in community flourishing. It also provides a theological basis for engagement and resilience so that local faith communities can play a role in developing and increasing resilience.



In defining resilience, Boan and Ayers use the example of a rubber band, which is able to “absorb” the stress from an external force without losing its integrity or changing its internal properties, [yet] it can return to its original condition without long-term harm” (p. 9). To put it another way, resilience is “the ability of a person, household, community or system to recover from shocks and stresses” (p. 9). Relief is often thought of only from the perspective of communities needing physical goods and services in order to recover from disasters. While those things are important, many times the ability of a community to recover is much more dependent on the emotional, spiritual, and psychological forces that are present. Because “faith ... is central to resilience insofar as it shapes our worldview” (p. 14) in communities that have been studied, when a local church is healthy and functioning as God intends, they contribute to the building up of resilience through everyday experiences. This building up then plays a crucial role in communities being able to bounce back or return to flourishing after a crisis or traumatic experience. When the local faith community is healthy, their responding to crisis is not a “special case”; it is “the ongoing role of the church in the community” (p. 13).

In discussing resilience, it is important to understand its theological foundations and how these foundations lead to the integration of word and deed or, as Rene Padilla puts it, “the ecclesiology of integral mission” (p. 41). Boan and Ayers rely heavily on Padilla’s work to give a framework for understanding integral mission that is committed to (1) Christ as the Lord of everything, (2) discipleship as an incarnational lifestyle that participates in God’s mission, and (3) the utilizing of the gifts and ministries of the church to change society. A local faith community will have an impact on a community’s resilience, both for the positive or negative, depending on their understanding of integral mission. “Integral mission is a call to awareness that our lives are created socially and have social consequences ... We have a choice as to whether that impact [on resilience] is negative or positive, but the impact is unavoidable” (p. 43). Boan and Ayers reflect theologically on the topics of advocacy, civic engagement, shalom, and creation care as ways that local churches should engage in the community in the pursuit of creating resilience.

After understanding what resilience is as well as its importance and theological underpinnings, Boan and Ayers put forth their model. They also suggest applications for how churches can begin (or continue) to contribute to resilience in their local communities. The author then gives a warning for possible negative actions on the part of local faith communities that can destroy resilience. Their model, called “Shared Resilience”, incorporates aspects of many other models discussed in the book. It is dependent on a local church’s commitment to four essential practices: seeking justice, building social capital, creating restoration, and practicing engagement. If practiced faithfully, these four practices strengthen both the church and local community resulting in increased resilience and holistic community movements.

On the flipside, there are four negative practices that break down the ability of a local church to contribute to community resilience: (1) increasing separation and barriers between people, (2) misuse of resources, (3) disavowing justice, and (4) confabulation or syncretism of theology with political, cultural or other schools of thought. Boan and Ayers conclude by providing “stories of shared resilience” that highlight the global impact of local faith communities as they live out the practices of shared resilience. They share the specific ways that communities have become more resilient (i.e., conflict resolution, care for women and children, refugee integration in societies).

As someone that regularly interacts with global church leaders, who is involved in my own local church and studying to one day participate in leading a local faith community, this book is encouraging, hopeful and challenging. It provides useful data that corroborates what we have believed to be true when a church has a healthy theology of engagement in a community and how that engagement leads to resilience and flourishing. While the content is constructive, the book’s structure and layout make it hard to follow. It sometimes lacks clear organization. However, if one can follow the progression of thought, it is well worth the effort. I believe it will give churches the tools to engage and participate in creating communities that are resilient and flourishing.

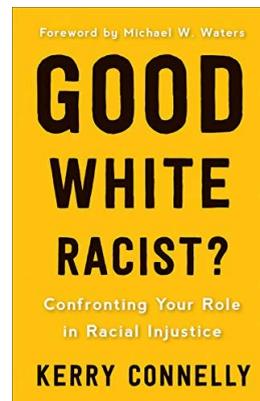
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Kerry Connelly. *Good White Racist?: Confronting Your Role in Racial Injustice*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2020. 161 pp. £13.00/\$17.00.

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The title of Kerry Connelly’s *Good White Racist?* poses a serious question; it is no mere provocation. And, yes, Connelly suggests that someone can be both good and racist. Not recognizing this tension, she says, is one reason why racism persists. She laments, “As much as I’d like it not to be true, it’s totally possible that I’m a really good person, and a really big racist all at the same time” (p. 1). Her thesis depends on the meaning of key words, which she defines clearly. For example, Connelly says racism is “a system of hierarchy based on the belief that one race is superior to all others” (p. 14). As a white woman, she suggests that racism in “good” people typically is implicit, unconscious bias. The book explains how this leads to “institutional racism,” “individual racism,” and “systemic racism.”



Connelly writes in a candid but not condescending tone. In fact, she likens racism among whites to an alcoholic in recovery. She empathizes with the defensiveness of white people who want to be good and feel they don't have a racist bone in their body. When speaking of good white racists, she says, "I'm referring to the majority of white people who intellectually believe that racism is evil, that being 'color-blind' is good, and get so uncomfortable talking about race that they will tell activists to shut up about it because 'it's just making it worse'" (p. 1). Connelly contends that the fear of discomfort and the longing to be "good" are major obstacles to white people recognizing the ways they have been socialized to think in subtly racist ways.

The book goes beyond political ranting; Connelly offers several practical insights and suggestions. She identifies a common pattern of responses by white people when confronted with the topic of racism. One often begins by denying or minimizing the problem. A good white racist might then distract from the main subject at hand. Also, the person will disclaim responsibility. Finally, (s)he disappears from conversations related to race. She gives many examples of these reactions and reflects on controversies like the Take a Knee Movement. In addition, every chapter ends with action items to help readers learn, think, and act.

Although a relatively short work, *Good White Racist?* examines a wide spectrum of issues and objections. Different chapters look at the power of language, how schools attempt to prepare minority students for "white culture," and racial inequities that plague the justice system. Connelly shines a light on the ways that white people see other racial groups as having a culture, overlook their own white culture. Connelly does not try to lash readers with "white shame." She sees that approach as unproductive. Rather, she suggests that shame and the silence about racism are intertwined. Her book attempts to break that cycle of silence and shame.

Certainly, most readers will find something in the book that they find misguided or flat out wrong. This reviewer objected to several of the author's points. However, many of her more contentious claims are stated in passing and do not undermine her main arguments. For instance, she briefly raises the subject of reparations. Most interesting, however, is her concept of "emotional reparations," whereby one "stays in room" and faces the discomfort that comes with the intense emotions that surround race discussions. She urges us to remember that "peacemaking is not peacekeeping" (p. 151).

The most significant criticism of Connelly's book is the degree to which her work may be influenced too strongly by critical theory, a perspective that pits society into two groups, the privileged and the oppressed. Readers can judge for themselves how much her thesis depends on critical race theory. Much of what she says could be framed in terms of implicit biases rather than entrenched social hostilities.

For those who want to engage the topic of racism, this book is an excellent resource. Connelly presents her case with succinct clarity. Her tone strikes a good balance between winsome and challenging. She does not devolve into partisanship. *Good White Racist?* is written with Christians in mind. Connelly periodically interacts with theological works, such as William James Jennings's *The Christian Imagination: Theology and Origins of Race* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010]. However, her objective is not to write an exhaustive treatment on race nor a theology of racism. Readers interested in further study have many options. Noteworthy mainstream works include Ibram X. Kindi's *How to be an Antiracist* [New York: One World, 2019], Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists* [Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010], and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* [Boston: Beacon Press, 2018]. These works overwhelmingly reflect the sentiments of critical race theorists. From Christian publishers,

recent noteworthy books include David Swanson's *Redisciplining the White Church* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020] and Daniel Hill's *White Awake* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017].

Connelly writes as a white person for white people. This enables her to anticipate the defensiveness of potential readers. For example, she says, "If you're a white guy, it's probably even harder for you, because you're really tired of being held up as the epitome of all evil in America by progressives like me. I get it" (p. 3). While *Good White Racist?* can help any reader, it is especially helpful for people who have only marginally engaged books focused on racism. I recommend this book to any good person willing to do the hard work of introspection and dismantling latent racism.

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Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong. *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 187 pp. £14.50/\$17.99.

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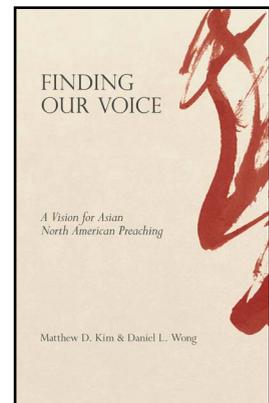
Pastors of Asian North Americans (ANA) face the daily reality wherein they tread between multiple cultural and generational contexts. In *Finding Our Voice*, Matthew Kim and Daniel Wong provide clarity and propose a way forward so that the ANA church can develop a "unique homiletical voice akin to other minority groups" (p. 12).

The first chapter explores distinctive aspects of ANA identity. Here, Wong "contend(s) that the ANA experience is unique and different from both the white experience and the immigrant Asian experience" (p. 22). Immigration history, parental expectations, and experiences of marginalization are factors to which ANA ministers should be attuned. "Sermons in an ANA context cannot remain generic and culture free" (p. 45).

Chapter 2 argues that the in-betweenness of the ANA experience necessitates a hybridizing hermeneutic through which ANA ministers read and interpret Scripture. From a Western standpoint, the ANA context often involves a familiarity with redemptive-historical or law/gospel frameworks of biblical interpretation. An Eastern standpoint might involve Confucian, pilgrimage-marginalization-liberation, postcolonial, or blessing focuses. ANA preachers need to be sensitive to this background as they move from exegesis to application.

In chapter 3, Kim outlines the common influences on ANA theology and proposes his own model as a way forward. In the ANA context, identity formation is often a pressing issue, necessitating a more developed understanding of the image of God. Living between cultures also exacerbates the experience of liminality, leading to focuses on pilgrimage and finding a home in Christ. Kim then sets forth his model of "incarnational duality," analogous to Jesus possessing two full natures in one person, ANA individuals experience the "dual reality of being Asian and North American" (p. 95). Understanding the tension between these two aspects will open the door for the preacher to powerfully bring Scripture to bear on the ANA experience.

Chapter 4 presents common features of ANA preaching. He begins by exhorting the ANA preacher to conduct the threefold exegesis of Scripture, the ANA congregation, and oneself. Effective ministry



requires dedicated study and continual reflection upon each of these objects of exegesis. Wong then observes seven characteristics of ANA preaching: (1) contextual, (2) incarnational, (3) intercultural, (4) Holy Spirit-led, (5) transformational, (6) narrational, and (7) collaborative. Common themes in ANA preaching include the relationship between law and grace, leadership (especially intergenerational), familial relationships, culture and identity, self-esteem, and social justice.

Kim and Wong conclude *Finding Our Voice* in chapter 5 by presenting their closing recommendations and a joint vision for the future of ANA preaching. Hermeneutically, ANA preaching should be aware of nuances in differing cultures and generations. Illustrations should speak to the ANA experience engaging the congregation in diverse ways. Drawing helpful sermon applications will involve wrestling with the text on one's own and exploring a variety of applications. Sermon delivery should be developed as a skill while also allowing one's personality to shine through. In preaching, ANA ministers should consistently revisit topics like identity, shame and pain, God as Father, reconciliation and healing, and social justice. To close the chapter, Kim and Wong propose some avenues of development for ANA preachers: prophetic voice against injustice, sensitivity to multicultural settings, distinct ANA-style worship, racial and ethnic bridge-building, and vision-casting.

The strengths of *Finding Our Voice* can be summed up in one word: clarity. Throughout the work, Matthew Kim and Daniel Wong display a clear-eyed view of the ANA context, which reflects their many fruitful years of ministry. This clarity is most evident in their focus, sourcing, and succinctness.

The clarity of focus in *Finding Our Voice* is apparent from the outset. Kim and Wong immediately establish their audience and aims, both of which are successfully addressed throughout the book. This laser-focus continues throughout the following pages, especially in cases where Kim and Wong are careful not to overstate their general categories and observations.

Kim and Wong richly source their respective chapters, displaying a clarity regarding the resources already available to ANA audiences. This work would be worthwhile for the paper trail alone, providing many helpful avenues for further study and investigation. However, this does not discount the contributions made in the book, as both authors' awareness engenders confidence that the reader is being guided not merely by isolated observations but by years of research and reflection.

Finally, the succinctness of *Finding Our Voice* is refreshing. Kim and Wong set about their task with pin-pointed efficiency, never wavering from the clear course they set in the opening pages. They move at a brisk pace and address every topic with enough generality, casting a large umbrella and enough specificity to provide helpful observations. The downside is that this book may leave readers wanting more. So many topics are left to explore further (which, admittedly, was not the stated purpose). The discussion questions at the end of each chapter and the appendix materials provide helpful guidance for group conversation and personal sermon preparation.

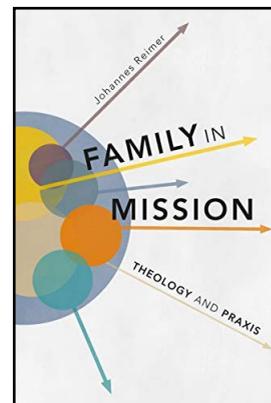
For anyone ministering in the ANA context or even seeking to understand this sphere better, I heartily recommend *Finding Our Voice*. It naturally fits in a seminary's pastoral ministry/homiletics curriculum and would be particularly fruitful in pastoral cohorts. Even so, its accessible and engaging prose allows a layperson to pick it up, read comfortably, and become much more aware of the dynamics at play in a typical ANA congregation. As a survey, it whets the appetite for what else may come from these authors, other ANA writers, and ANA preachers as this genre continues to grow.

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Johannes Reimer. *Family in Mission: Theology and Praxis*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020. pp. 268. £14.99/\$24.99.

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“Most often we are told to simply *tell* people the truth about God; thus conventional churches focus on preaching and proclaiming the gospel, whereas missional churches seek to *demonstrate* the gospel and *manifest* God’s truth to the world” (p. 82). This dichotomy between proclamation versus incarnation forms the backbone of Johannes Reimer’s *Family in Mission*. Reimer is the Global Director of the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the World Evangelical Alliance. He unpacks this idea as it relates both to the church and families. Missional churches and families live out their faith with intentionality among the community. For churches to remain missional, they would need to train and engage families at a missional level as well, “proclaiming the gospel *to*, *in*, and *through* our families” (p. 172). He emphasizes the need for churches to come alongside families and minister *with* them, not just *to* them. And this type of fluidity should happen with both believing families within the church and non-believing families.



Born and raised in the Soviet Union, Reimer gives helpful insights into how to be missional in both church and family life. Few books on evangelism start with and include the family. Western forms of evangelism focus more on the individual than the family unit. For many non-Western contexts, this can actually be a barrier to belief because the family unit is what keeps that culture together. He includes voices from all over the world as they share how this plays out in their lives.

With America becoming increasingly fractured and independent, his ideas of communal synergy are timely. Moms sharing in childcare with their neighbors or doing taxes for a friend are kingdom tasks as we remain connected to one another. There’s a sense of serving *with* them (unbelievers) instead of just ministering *to* them. I appreciate this perspective of church ministry. Thinking this way helps us see the unbelieving world not as a project to complete but a community with whom to link arms. Families can lead the way in other areas, such as casual language concerning Jesus, contextualized gospel message, and providing a comfortable place for the nonbelieving friends to ask questions.

While his emphasis on missional family life and how to develop a church’s missional vision are insightful, Reimer belabors his points. He seemingly pulls together in all his thoughts about families and the church into one book. Certain sections feel more like fillers, an aside to his thesis that the family is at the center of mission. He tries to tie all of it together by saying that a family “is missional when it has these two factors: connected to God and reaching out to the world” (p. 72). He states this over and over again in previous chapters, so it seems unnecessary to take such a deep dive into the Beatitudes. The section probably fits better in a parenting book than this one. If his emphasis is truly on the family being a mode for evangelism, he goes off track several times.

He also dichotomizes the way a conventional church and missional churches approach new believers. The former has the goal of integrating them into their church; a missional congregation looks to bring people in and involved in God’s kingdom. While some find it helpful to break down churches a neat, two-party system. I think most churches would argue that they want to get people into their congregation *and* bring them into partnership with God’s kingdom work. While one church might emphasize church membership more than another, I’m not sure categorizing a church in this way is actually helpful. I concede that there are churches at the extreme ends of each spectrum. For them, it

would be helpful for a church to have some self-reflection and evaluation to make sure they are balanced in serving their communities.

In striving to become a missional family and church, Reimer does talk through what this would look like on the ground level. He suggests mapping, recording the culture, environment, and resources available in varying sections of town. He also unpacks what it means reach out to people as they are. Knowing and growing in the Lord is slow. His emphasis on slow, deliberate, gracious, intentional living is helpful. In an age where ministry success is measured by one's number of converts, I appreciate his slower, well-rounded approach to evangelism. He wants believers to be active in the community, not hiding from the non-believing world, even partnering up with another church family to volunteer or serve the community together. Such activities could include neighborhood parties, games, or life coaching. So often these times together lead to deep conversations about marriage, family, and Jesus.

Reimer concludes with suggestions for missional families. He gives advice for things to do before fulfilling the call to move overseas for missions. For example, find people in your community that are similar in culture to where you want to go. Likewise, do research on world issues and have discussions together.

Overall, he raises important concerns about the role of families in evangelism and how they can be missional. Unfortunately, his presentation feels unorganized and, at times, tangential. The book would have been better if it were trimmed into a mere primer. This would have kept the conversation more focused and better help families live more intentionally on mission.

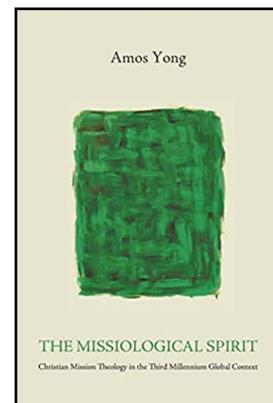
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Amos Yong. *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology in the Third Millennium Global Context*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. xvi + 231 pp. £25.00/\$41.00.

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Amos Yong is an extraordinarily productive author, with more than twenty published and edited works to his name. He is Professor of Theology and Mission and Director of the Center for Missiological Research at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Perhaps more importantly than his prodigiousness and energy in publication, Yong is arguably one of the most creative minds in 21st century missiology. This compendium of twelve previously published essays demonstrates clearly how this is the case. The book is divided into four main sections. Yong, originally trained in systematic theology, arranges these sections and essays in an autobiographical fashion to illustrate his own personal engagement with the issues of mission, theology, Pentecostal faith, and religious pluralism.



Section 1 (“Reluctant Missiology: Indirect Missiological Reflection”) provides three essays that reflect in various ways on how, as Yong notes, his “theological imagination kept getting interrupted by missiological interventions” (p. 5). All essays in this section serve as important reminders of the essentially missional quality of all theological reflection. In section 2 (“Pentecostal Missiology: Missiological Praxis”), Yong extends the trajectory of section 1 with a decidedly Pentecostal flavor. These three chapters are provocative as they lay out an agenda of reframing traditional

Pentecostal postures toward witness and interreligious engagement. Yong here argues eloquently and persuasively for a theology of religion that is pneumatologically grounded in distinctly Pentecostal commitments. Thus, he affirms that the Spirit poured out on all flesh that creates a space for hospitality, a Pentecostal inclusivism, and a move beyond aggressive and inflammatory types of evangelism and various practices of “spiritual warfare” that often demonize the other to a form of witness that maintains central commitments but views others as lesser opponents to defeat and more as friends to invite into transformation).

In section 3, titled “North American Missiology: Theology of Mission Post-Christendom,” Yong considers how to rethink missions in the North American context (i.e., post-Christian, post-Constantinian, postcolonial). Particularly important in this section is chapter 9, which draws upon the work of Stuart Murray, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Howard Yoder. Yong argues for a shift from a *colonial* missiology to a *colony* missiology, one that is more clearly in tension with the surrounding dominant culture. This is a critical challenge to Christianity in emerging contexts, which are just beginning to struggle with issues of institutional and cultural power. The volume ends with section 4 (“Systematic Missiology: Notes for a Christian Missiological Theology”), detailing a Trinitarian missiology with special attention to how a pneumatologically driven approach engages issues of Christology, Trinity, and theology of religions. Of these chapters, chapter 10 (“Primed for the Spirit”) helpfully lays out a succinct pneumatological foundation for mission.

This volume is ecumenical, Pentecostal, evangelical, and global. One claim that is foundational for the entire book is that “Pentecostal spirituality and experience generates a distinctive hermeneutic, method, and imagination revolving around encountering the living God of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, and this spirituality of encounter has the potential to revitalize and renew Christian theology for the third millennium” (pp. 3–4). Yong certainly demonstrates how this is the case.

I do have questions, however, regarding Yong’s pneumatologically-grounded approach to religious encounter, dialogue, and ecumenism. Yong argues that his robust pneumatology is *both* christological and Trinitarian, a robust pneumatologically-driven theology *both* points to the particularity of Jesus Christ on the one hand and to the eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God on the other. This is excellent in theory, but in practice how should we navigate this theological tension? Such presents one of the overarching challenges of the entire collection of essays. As Yong notes, his pneumatologically driven approach authorizes both proclamation of Jesus as Lord and a robust dialogue. I wish Yong had provided more details on how to carry this out in practice. This is because it seems to me a challenge to Pentecostal theology in general and Yong’s pneumatologically-grounded missiology in particular, to navigate successfully this theological tension *in practice*. Yong does not make clear how to keep a strong christological commitment and norm (the Holy Spirit’s work of pointing to the particularity and centrality of Christ) in the midst of the work of the Spirit, present at some level in other religious traditions, and bringing about a shared grounding for dialogue and interreligious encounter. If Christians in the past (and non-Pentecostals in the present!) have tended to downplay the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of the Trinity in the church and the world, one wonders if it is possible to overplay the Holy Spirit “card” to counteract the unfortunate functional binitarianism of much traditional theology.

Despite this question, Yong represents, along with other leading Pentecostal scholars such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, the emerging power of Pentecostal scholarship for the broader missiological world.

With publication of *The Missiological Spirit*, Yong clearly demonstrates how Pentecostal missiology demands a hearing and a central place at the global missiological table.

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