

# themelios

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

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<b>EDITORIAL: The Neglected Virtue of Contentment</b> <i>Brian J. Tabb</i>	1	<b>The Parting of the Way: A Survey of the Relationship between Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries CE</b> <i>Doosuk Kim</i>	79
<b>STRANGE TIMES: Coming to Our Senses: The Case for a Civil <i>Elenctics</i> and an <i>Elenctic</i> Civility</b> <i>Daniel Strange</i>	5	<b>The Nature and Task of Theology in John Owen's Forgotten Work</b> <i>John Kegley</i>	99
<b>Canonicity: A Theologian's Observations</b> <i>Henri A. G. Blocher</i>	18	<b>Trinity, Creation, and Re-creation: A Comparison of Karl Barth and Herman Bavinck's Trinitarian Doctrines of Creation</b> <i>Jarred Jung</i>	112
<b>Brains, Bodies, and the Task of Discipleship: Re-Aligning Anthropology and Ministry</b> <i>Matthew C. Bingham</i>	37	<b>Appeasement of a Monster God? A Historical and Biblical Analysis of Penal Substitutionary Atonement</b> <i>Geoffrey Butler</i>	130
<b>'I Call You Friends': Jesus as Patron in John 15</b> <i>Daniel K. Eng</i>	55	<b>Making Sense of Hell</b> <i>Robert D. Golding</i>	145
<b>Spirit-Anointing and New Testament Church Leadership: Are Our Church Leaders Uniquely "Anointed?"</b> <i>Scott MacDonald</i>	70	<b>Book Reviews</b>	163

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## 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

# The Neglected Virtue of Contentment

— Brian J. Tabb —

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Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11–13)

Contentment is not a virtue prized in contemporary society. In fact, the numerous marketing images that we see each day aim to make us discontent with our present situation and to increase our desire for material goods that hold out the promise of making us happy.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing public health crisis and deep political and social divisions of the past year have only compounded our fears, frustrations, and feelings of unhappiness. Months of mandated “social distancing,” online schooling, restaurant closures, and restrictions on travel and gatherings have accelerated what some have called a “loneliness pandemic.”<sup>2</sup> Screen time has soared during the pandemic, as have anxiety, alcoholism, and suicide rates. Many are stuck at home streaming Netflix and scrolling Facebook while longing to share a meal with true friends and return to some semblance of “normal.” However, people were anxious and lonely long before the present crisis, and it’s likely that most will continue to be unhappy as COVID-19 infections wane and restrictions are relaxed in the coming months. In short, contentment remains in short supply.

What is contentment? Dictionaries define contentment as “a state of happiness and satisfaction.”<sup>3</sup> This definition offers a starting point but prompts various follow up questions: What does it mean to be happy or satisfied? How do we achieve such contentment? Is contentment even possible in troubled times like these? This brief article offers a summons to Christian contentment amid crisis and controversy. Let’s examine the nature and necessity of true contentment, with help from ancient philosophers, the apostle Paul, and an English Puritan.

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<sup>1</sup> Marsha L. Richins, “Social Comparison, Advertising, and Consumer Discontent,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 38 (1995): 593–607; Nicole Torres, “Advertising Makes Us Unhappy,” *Harvard Business Review* (January–February 2020): <https://hbr.org/2020/01/advertising-makes-us-unhappy>.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Sweet, “The Loneliness Pandemic,” *Harvard Magazine*, January–February 2021, <https://harvardmagazine.com/2021/01/feature-the-loneliness-pandemic>.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford American Desk Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 163.

## 1. What Is Contentment?

Ancient philosophers frequently discussed contentment or self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια). Aristotle calls happiness “the most desirable of all good things,” since “happiness does not lack anything, but is self-sufficient [αὐτάρκης].”<sup>4</sup> He explains, “No supremely happy man can ever become miserable,” since he “will always act in the noblest manner that the circumstances allow.”<sup>5</sup> Epicurus writes that self-sufficiency or independence (αὐτάρκεια) is “a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much.”<sup>6</sup> Of course, people prefer good health to sickness, riches to poverty, freedom from pain to excruciating torture, and feasting to fasting, but the Stoics stress that circumstances are fickle and unrelated to one’s true happiness and enduring contentment. Seneca reasons, “Each one of us is able to make his own happiness.”<sup>7</sup> The truly happy person “is content [*contentus*] with his present lot, no matter what it is, and is reconciled to his circumstances.”<sup>8</sup> Yet Seneca laments that human beings are “all untrustworthy, discontented, ambitious,”<sup>9</sup> and he calls readers to be “content with virtue” rather than tethering one’s happiness to constantly changing circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

Contentment is a recurring theme in the NT. The book of Hebrews urges readers, “Be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb 13:5). Paul insists, “Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Tim 6:6–8). The apostle contrasts this godly contentment with the greedy craving for riches, which leads to ruin (6:9–10).

Paul’s most extended discussion of contentment comes in the final chapter of his letter to the Philippians:

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content [ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι]. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:10–13)

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7; 10.6, trans. H. Rackham, LCL 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934). See also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1e.3: “Let us then define happiness as well-being combined with virtue, or independence of life [αὐτάρκεια]” (trans. J. H. Freese, LCL 193 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926]).

<sup>5</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.10, trans. Rackham.

<sup>6</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.130 (Epicurus), ed. R. D. Hicks, LCL 185 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>7</sup> Seneca, *To Helvia on Consolation* 5.1, trans. John W. Basore, LCL 254 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932); cf. Brian J. Tabb, *Suffering in Ancient Worldview: Luke, Seneca, and 4 Maccabees in Dialogue*, LNTS 569 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 56–57.

<sup>8</sup> Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 6.2, trans. John W. Basore, LCL 254 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).

<sup>9</sup> *On Anger* 3.4, trans. John W. Basore, LCL 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

<sup>10</sup> *Firmness* 5.4, trans. John W. Basore, LCL 214 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

“Whatever situation” is no pious abstraction. Remember that Paul penned these reflections from a dark, dingy prison (Phil 1:7, 12–14). Prisoners in the ancient world often lacked basic necessities like bedding, clothing, and medical care.<sup>11</sup> They were also often shunned by friends due to the social stigma of incarceration.<sup>12</sup> Not only was Paul incarcerated multiple times, but he was also beaten with rods and flogged, stoned and left for dead, and shipwrecked three times (2 Cor 11:23–27). He was opposed and maligned in one city after another, taking heat from Jews and Gentiles alike. He endured sleepless nights and often lacked shelter and supper. Paul doesn’t need to remind his readers that he and Silas were falsely accused, attacked by a mob, beaten with rods, and locked up in the inner prison without due process when they first came to Philippi (Acts 16:19–24). Despite this laundry list of toils and trials, Paul does not descend into bitterness, complaining, or self-pity. Even though he is separated from his friends, criticized by his foes, and stuck in a lousy cell, Paul remembers that the Lord will never disappoint him and will surely deliver him (1:19–20; 3:20). Thus, he stresses that he is content even in “weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities” (2 Cor 12:10). The imprisoned apostle rejoices in Christ, resolves to work for other Christians’ progress and joy in the faith, and expresses his contentment in Christ, come what may (Phil 1:18, 25; 4:11–12).

## 2. The “Rare Jewel” of Christian Contentment

The English Puritan Richard Burroughs wrote a book-length meditation on contentment inspired by Philipians 4:11. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* was first published in 1648, two years after Burroughs’ premature death at age 47. Burroughs has been called “a prince of preachers,”<sup>13</sup> and he reflected a rare blend of “a fervent zeal for purity of doctrine and worship, and a peaceable spirit, which longed and labored for Christian unity.”<sup>14</sup>

Burroughs describes Christian contentment as “that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition” (p. 19). Contentment is rightly knowing and inwardly submitting one’s heart to God’s wise providence, according to Burroughs (pp. 20, 111).<sup>15</sup> It is opposed to “distracting, heart-consuming cares” and “sinking discouragements” (p. 23). We do not submit to God reluctantly but willingly, “taking pleasure in God’s disposal” (p. 31). This means that we not only submit to God’s sovereign hand but also “take pleasure in God’s wisdom” (p. 36). The apostle says that it is good to pray for “a peaceful and quiet life” (1 Tim 2:1), but true contentment involves a quiet heart whether our lives are calm or chaotic. Such inner tranquility is not the result of one’s natural temperament or a well-trained mind but comes “from principles beyond the strength of reason” (p. 31).

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, BAFCS 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 196–225.

<sup>12</sup> Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, 293. Cf. 2 Timothy 1:15–16; Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 9.8–9.

<sup>13</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 119, citing Thomas Watson.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Boland, “Biographical Introduction,” in Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, reprint ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964), 11. In the remainder of this article, I cite this edition of Burroughs’s work with in-text page references.

<sup>15</sup> John Piper defines God’s providence as his “purposeful sovereignty” in *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 18.

Contentment “in every condition” means that even in “sad and sinking times” we have the mysterious mixture of “gracious joy and gracious sorrow” (pp. 17, 41–42; cf. 2 Cor 6:10). Burroughs asks, “Where was there ever a man more afflicted than Paul was?” (p. 35). Yet the apostle astonishingly asserts, “I have all and abound” (Phil 4:18 NKJV).

Paul would agree with the philosophers that favorable circumstances like good health and material abundance cannot make us happy or content. But the apostle does not deny or downplay the real difficulties that he faces. He would prefer a comfortable guest room to an unpleasant prison cell. He would prefer freedom to confinement and would rather break bread with friends than sit alone with the ache of hunger. He hopes to travel to see the Philippian believers yet resolves to honor Christ with his bruised body, “whether by life or by death” (1:20, 26). But Paul does not simply make the best of it or resign himself to his substandard conditions. Rather, he can say, “I have all and abound” because he knows the sweet sufficiency of Christ.

The apostle shares his secret to true contentment in sad and sinking circumstances in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” It is knowing and experiencing the nearness, abundance, and power of Christ that brings Paul contentment in troubled times. The philosophers call people to show their own self-sufficiency and superior reason when enduring suffering, but the apostle claims that Christ’s power is perfected in his own weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Christian contentment is not self-sufficiency but *Christ-sufficiency* in any and every situation.

### 3. A Call for Contentment

So how might pastors and theological students heed this call for true contentment even in sad and sinking times? What does contentment look like when you receive unfair criticism online or from fellow church members? Is contentment possible when COVID cancels your graduation service or your vacation to Disneyland? What if you have to bury your baby boy,<sup>16</sup> if you receive a dreaded diagnosis from the doctor, or if your Facebook friends look so happy while your day-to-day life is just plain hard? The year 2020 was especially difficult for pastors for many reasons including COVID-related constraints on church gatherings, racial tensions, political divisions, and financial shortfalls. Many church leaders are weary and discouraged in the face of these pressures that have lingered into 2021. Meanwhile, seminarians and theological students have endured major disruptions to in-person classes and ministry internships and now face uncertain prospects for employment as many churches and ministries cut budgets and suspended hiring.

You might think, “If only I had \_\_\_, I’d be content,” or “If only \_\_\_ were different, I’d be happy.” But the ancient philosophers remind us that we do not find contentment in material abundance or desirable circumstances. The apostle affirms this truth but goes much further. Paul’s secret to contentment is recognizing and relishing the sweetness, sufficiency, and strength of Christ even in the most unsavory situations. In fact, it is precisely when we are sick, struggling, scared, slandered, or sad that we may recognize our true need for Jesus, experience his life-giving power at work in our weakness, and expectantly anticipate the coming day of Christ. So in whatever challenges we face in life and ministry, let’s heed Paul’s summons to be content in knowing the sweet, soul-satisfying sufficiency of Christ.

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<sup>16</sup> Adam Pohlman, “11 Days with My Dear Son,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 12 February 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/11-days-dear-son/>.

STRANGE TIMES

# Coming to Our Senses: The Case for a Civil *Elenctics* and an *Elenctic* Civility

— 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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There are occasions in one's life when an experience is so surreal and discombobulating that even years later you turn it over in your mind again and again. A few years ago I took part in an academic symposium within the theology and religious studies department of a British University. The purpose was a 'feasibility study' of Buddhist-Christian 'dual belonging'. Within the theology of religions/study of religion, dual-belonging or multiple-belonging is the growing phenomenon in which people identify with more than one 'religious' tradition. Rather than being a simplistic syncretism, proponents believe they are able to inhabit multiple traditions with integrity, recognising a liminality of identity, but a mutual cross-fertilization to be welcomed and explored. There were about twelve of us taking part in the symposium, Christians and Buddhist scholars, some of whom were dual-belongers, some whom weren't but who were sympathetic, and others who were more critical. We'd read papers beforehand and met to discuss and debate.<sup>1</sup> I was the only evangelical taking part and my paper was by far the most trenchantly critical of the dual belonging notion, arguing it not only to be impossible for the Christian, but moreover an act of idolatry and a spiritual adultery against Christ. Over those couple of days, getting to know and indeed getting on with the participants was both uncomfortable but also enjoyable. In particular I 'clicked' relationally with one of the dual-belongers in attendance. They were currently lecturing in Christian doctrine within a British theological training institution but had also recently taken Buddhist orders.<sup>2</sup>

The confusing bit was on the one hand, the genuine engaging conversation and bonhomie over our social interaction. I don't recall this being an outward and superficial veneer of courtesy underneath which lay a seething bed of animosity. And while I did regard the whole experience of the symposium as being a 'missional' and apologetic opportunity, I don't believe my social interactions were part of some crass and manipulative bait-and-switch tactic. However, on the other hand, was the implicit recognition of our deep theological differences, not simply at an 'academic' or 'professional' level, but at the level of

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<sup>1</sup> These papers were published subsequently in Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson, eds., *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016). My own chapter is entitled, "'There Can Be Only One': The Impossibility and Idolatry of 'Dual Belonging'".

<sup>2</sup> Out of a genuine inquisitiveness I did ask how this was possible institutionally. The response was that an agreement with the college leadership had been reached so that as long as the Buddhist belonging didn't conflict with the teaching of Christian doctrine, then it was permissible.

the personal and pastoral. Given the contents of my own paper and our subsequent interactions, this delegate knew I viewed them as an idolater and apostate; someone I would be unable to invite to lead, preach, or pray in my church; someone whom given my polity would come under church discipline and whom I would be unable to share the Lord's Supper; someone whom in love I believed (for both their own sake and for the sake of those whom they taught) needed to repent to return the pattern of sound teaching. The apotheosis of this incongruity was when an amiable exchange over dinner ended in a remark from this participant along the lines of 'you think I'm going to hell, can you pass me the salt please?'

There was a jarring dissonance in this encounter that even now is hard to disambiguate. Is what I have narrated here a faithful example of the 'tough' loving of one's enemies which this side of the eschaton is always going to entail an existential conflicted messiness? Maybe. But maybe I've got it all wrong. Maybe that inner turmoil is a Holy Spirit-prompted red-light warning that I'd taken a wrong-step somewhere. Maybe I was in fact being *unfaithful* to Christ. Such unfaithfulness could be spun out in a number of directions. Perhaps I should never have accepted the invitation in the first place and so not associated myself with such people? Perhaps I was fine to attend but I should have been more hostile and unfriendly displaying my zeal and righteous anger for Christ over the idolatry I was witnessing. Engagement in the formal symposium setting allowed, yes, but fraternization informally or socially, no. Or conversely, was I being unfaithful to Christ in my harsh and narrow theological categorization of them as idolaters and apostates, not seeing them as friends: children of God in whom I could discern the work of the Spirit and the face of Christ?

### *1. Christian Civility*

Recently, and quite rightly, the importance of Christian 'civility' has been emphasised by a number of evangelicals. In the 2010 introduction to the second edition of his book *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*, Richard Mouw (evangelicalism's pre-eminent civility campaigner), speaks of how people had been telling him that a revised edition of the book had been needed now more than ever.<sup>3</sup> I repeat, this is in 2010. Remember, that the *first* edition of this book in 1992 opens with Mouw quoting from W. B Yeats's poem 'The Second Coming': 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world etc.' I repeat, that's 1992. If things were falling apart in 1992, and the need for 'civility' needed to be heard all the more in 2010 ... well you know where this is going. Whether it's politics, protests or pandemics, 2020 could well be called the year of incivility, with fragmentation and fracturing exponentially exacerbated by the phenomena of 'cyberbalkanization' and the 'splinternet'. The temptation to talk past each other, to caricature and stereotype in our echo-chamber soundbites, is so strong. We feel squeezed, squeezed of the time needed for reasoned debate where we can discuss things properly, and squeezed of a space for fear of being threatened, abused and cancelled. That we're fearful is part of this vicious cycle. Commenting on the way he had been misrepresented, vilified and subsequently removed as chair of a British government commission of building and architecture (he was later re-instated), the late Sir Roger Scruton wrote in 2019,

We in Britain are entering a dangerous social condition in which the direct expression of opinions that conflict—or merely seem to conflict—with a narrow set of orthodoxies

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<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

is instantly punished by a band of self-appointed vigilantes. We are being cowed into abject conformity around a dubious set of official doctrines and told to adopt a world view that we cannot examine for fear of being publicly humiliated by the censors. This world view might lead to a new and liberated social order; or it might lead to the social and spiritual destruction of our country. How shall we know, if we are too afraid to discuss it?<sup>4</sup>

I believe the case for a Christian ‘convicted civility’ is strong. I have already mentioned the work of Richard Mouw, who defines civility as ‘public politeness’: ‘it means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners toward people who are different from us.’<sup>5</sup> Such displays are not merely external and superficial, but have an inner heartfelt commitment to those God identifies as our neighbours however different they are from us. Borrowing from Martin Marty, Mouw contends for a ‘convicted’ civility which combines a civil outlook with ‘a passionate intensity’.<sup>6</sup> Mouw’s primary theological tool to construct the case for civility comes from his Reformed heritage in terms ‘common grace’, a doctrine to which he has returned to again and again throughout his long professional career.<sup>7</sup>

Tim Keller argues that it is the gospel of Christ that will produce the virtues of humility, tolerance, patience and courage needed for Christian civility:

The gospel removes pride, probably the greatest barrier to a sensitive yet clear exchange of ideas.... It tells us that we must never think we are beyond sin and the need for repentance and renewal. There’s the humility we need. The gospel removes cynicism and pessimism as well.... We should, therefore, never think anyone is beyond hope of change. That gives us the patience we need, grounded in hope. The gospel removes indifference.... For Christians, the uncomfortable question is this: If we have been loved despite our flaws, and if we have discovered the greatest thing in the world in Christ, how can we be either abrasive or quiet about it? That knowledge produces the tolerance, but more than that, it produces the love we need. Lastly, the gospel removes fear. While we should be concerned to not needlessly offend people, the assurance of God’s love and acceptance should give us the courage to face criticism and disapproval.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, similar civic virtues emerge in James K. A Smith’s public theology, which draws heavily from Augustine’s *City of God* and the work of Oliver O’Donovan. In the *saeculum*—the age between Christ’s

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Scruton, ‘An Apology for Thinking,’ *The Spectator*, 11 April 2019, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/roger-scruton-an-apology-for-thinking>. For a perspective of where we are on this regarding British higher education, see the book by Claire Fox, director of the Academy of Ideas, *I (Still) Find that Offensive!* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2018). As I write this editorial (February 2020), the British Government have this week published their plan to produce tougher legal measures to strengthen free speech and academic freedom at universities including the appointment of a new Free Speech and Academic Freedom Champion. Unsurprisingly, reaction has been mixed.

<sup>5</sup> Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 13. See Martin E. Marty, *By Way of Response* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Mouw, *Adventures in Evangelical Civility: A Lifelong Quest for Common Ground* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Keller and John Inazu, *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 30.

first and second coming, we live *permixtum*—‘an age where church and world are thrown together, intermingled and mixed up in overlapping territory.’<sup>9</sup> The implications for this are first, the recognition that there is a creational desire for peace even within the disordered loves of the earthly city which means, second, Christian critique is *ad hoc* rather than total or absolute because of the ‘desire for an earthly peace—which is only the semblance of peace—is nonetheless preferred to its absence, so even the citizen of the city of God can rejoice when the juster triumphs over the (even) *less* just.’<sup>10</sup> Third, ‘the recognition of penultimate convergence even where there is ultimate divergence’<sup>11</sup> recognises the call to love our neighbours ‘both propels us into the shared territory our neighbours inhabit and compels us to affirm those goods that resonate with what God desires for our fellow citizens.’<sup>12</sup> Finally, as Christians we are not to lose our eschatology, but to patiently cultivate a teleological sensibility, ‘so we participate and collaborate in the *permixtum*, the contested but good space of our life in common, and do so in ways that hope to bend, if ever so slightly, the earthly city toward the city of God.’<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding some subtle differences from my position on public theology, I have benefitted greatly from the work of Mouw, Keller and Smith in their passionate pleas for a convicted civility in the public square. What I articulate now is intended primarily neither to be a caution nor a caveat, but rather a complement to their work. It is prompted by my continuing reflection upon my dual-belonging encounter narrated above, and also a recognition that the primary audience of *Themelios* is theological and religious studies students and pastors. What does a convicted civility mean for these callings?

In his book *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott writes,

the very concept of ‘elenctics’ is out of accord with the diffident, tolerant mood of today. But no Christian who accepts the biblical view of the evil of idolatry on the one hand and the finality of Jesus Christ on the other can escape it. Further, only those who see the need for elenctics can also see the need for dialogue and can understand its proper place.<sup>14</sup>

I want to suggest that the discursive framing of Christian civility is a passionate intensity that is not only ‘convicted’ but is ‘*elenctic*’ in its shape. *Elenctics* which derives from the Greek ἐλέγχω (to ‘convict’ or ‘unmask’), is a neglected theological term, indeed, it’s an entire ‘lost’ theological discipline which in previous eras had its own distinct place within the theological encyclopedia.<sup>15</sup> It can be defined in the words of its greatest twentieth century advocate, the missiologist J. H. Bavinck, as ‘the science which is concerned with the conviction of sin ... it is the science which unmasks to heathendom, all false religions as sin against God, and it calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God.’<sup>16</sup> *Elenctics*

<sup>9</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 49.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 217.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 218.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 219.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 220.

<sup>14</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1975), 107

<sup>15</sup> I should note that the late Harvie Conn taught *elenctics* at Westminster Theological Seminary. See also Cornelius J. Haak, ‘The Missional Approach: Reconsidering *Elenctics* Part 1,’ *CTJ* 44 (2009): 37–48; Haak, ‘The Missional Approach: Reconsidering *Elenctics* Part 2,’ *CTJ* 44 (2009): 288–304.

<sup>16</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1960), 222. The concept is older than Bavinck and reaches back into Reformed history being used by figures such as Gisbertus Voe-

has a missiological drive because it is not primarily concerned with an ‘on the back foot’ defence of the faith, but rather goes on the offensive, attacking unbelief. ‘*Elenctics* calls the non-Christian religions to a position of responsibility, and attempts to convince their adherents of sin and to move them to repentance and conversion.’<sup>17</sup>

At first sight, it might not seem that *elenctics* and civility would make a happy marriage. The *elenctic* stress captures the biblical mood of war: of antithesis, confrontation and difference. The civil stress captures the biblical mood of peace: of commonness, in terms of common grace, a common createdness, and common arena in terms of the *permixtum*. However, both *elenctics* and civility, belong together and helpfully qualify the other. *In other words, our elenctics needs to be civil and our civility needs to be elenctic*. There is peacefulness in our warring, and warring in our peacefulness.

Such a union is possible when we recognise that the heuristic tool of idolatry and false worship is understood to have elements of both discontinuity/difference and continuity/commonality, when compared to true worship. Bavinck’s own exposition of *elenctics*, brings this out beautifully. On the one hand, with a Pauline zeal and ‘provocation’ (Acts 17:16), there is a viscosity in Bavinck’s description of idolatry: ‘Idolatry is despicable, a terrible rebellion against the only true God; it is satanic pride, self-idolatry, self-deification, an attempt to pull God down to the world, and to make God a servant of one’s self.’<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Bavinck’s writings (and by all accounts his life too),<sup>19</sup> exude the adage *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*,<sup>20</sup> and what he himself calls the warm undertone of meeting-in-love: ‘the recognition of myself in the other person, a sympathetic feeling of his guilt and a sincere desire in Christ to do with this man what Christ has done with me.’<sup>21</sup> Bavinck says,

*Elenctics* receives the greatest support from its repeated awareness that the sharpest weapons must in the first place be turned against ourselves.... Anyone who knows himself to any extent knows the finesse with which a man can escape from God, and wrestle free from his grasp. To be really able to convict anyone in sin, a person must know himself, and the hidden corners of his heart very well. There is no more humbling work in the world that to engage in *elenctics*. For at each moment the person knows that

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tius, Francis Turretin and later, Abraham Kuyper. For a more detailed description of *elenctics* see Daniel Strange, ‘An Apology for *Elenctics*: The Unmasking of Sin in the Retrieval of a Theological Discipline’, in *Ruined Sinners to Reclaim: Human Corruption in Historical, Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 232. I note the monergistic and pneumocentric nature of Bavinck’s exposition of *elenctics*, ‘When we speak of *elenctics* we do well to understand it in the sense that it has in John 16:8. The Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin. The Holy Spirit is actually the only conceivable subject of the verb, for the conviction of sin exceeds all human ability. Only the Holy Spirit can do this, even though he can and will use us as instruments in his hand’ (*An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 222).

<sup>18</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 226.

<sup>19</sup> See Paul J. Visser, *Heart for the Gospel, Heart for the World: The Life and Thought of a Reformed Pioneer Missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck (1895–1964)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003). A shorter account of Bavinck’s life and work can be found in John Bolt, James D. Bratt and Paul J. Visser, eds., *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 1–92.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Gently in manner, bold in action.’

<sup>21</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 127.

the weapons which he turns against another have wounded himself. The Holy Spirit convicts us, and then through us he convicts the world.<sup>22</sup>

I would like to take this idea of a civil *elenctics* and an *elenctic* civility and offer an example of each, one in a more ecclesial setting, and one in a more educational setting.

## 2. A Civil Elenctics

While Bavinck's exposition of *elenctics* remains seminal, it is a curious omission that he does not reference Titus 1:9 in his New Testament survey of the occurrences of ἐλέγχω. For many years, and I presume paralleled in many evangelical seminaries and colleges, an exposition of Titus 1:5–9 has been a focal point in introducing students to the whys and wherefores of an evangelical theological education with an ecclesial context and telos.<sup>23</sup> The minister (the Presbyter) is someone who has the Word of God applied in their lives—in their lifestyle, in their thinking and beliefs, and in their teaching. Refutation and rebuke are part of the minister's calling. As Calvin puts it,

The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both; for he who is deeply skilled in it will be able both to govern those who are teachable, and to refute the enemies of the truth. This twofold use of Scripture Paul describes when he says, *That he may be able to exhort and to convince adversaries*. And hence, let us learn first, what is the true knowledge of a bishop, and, next, to what purpose it ought to be applied. That bishop is truly wise, who holds the right faith; and he makes a proper use of his knowledge, when he applies it to the edification of the people.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 272.

<sup>23</sup> It would be remiss of me not to mention at this point, Francis Turretin's monumental *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), no doubt the primary way Reformed evangelicals might have come across the term '*elenctic*'. Turretin's 'Preface to the Reader' (1:xl) is illuminating: 'Thus also as to the name, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Let no one think that a full and accurate system of theology is delivered here. For this was not indeed the design proposed to me, but only to explain the importance of the principal controversies which lie between us and our adversaries (ancient and modern) and supply to the young the thread of Ariadne, by the help of which they may more easily extricate themselves from their labyrinth. For since in this fond-of-wrangling age it becomes the man of God not only to be imbued with a deeper knowledge of truth for rightly dividing the word of God, but also to be equipped with the powerful armour of righteousness and especially with the shield of faith, to convict antagonists, to quench the fiery darts of Satan and destroy the fortification and reasonings opposed to the knowledge of God, so that every thought may be brought captive in obedience to Christ—the progress of the studious cannot be better provided for than by teaching them to handle the sword with the trowel (which sacred history tell us the Jerusalem builders formerly did); that is, with instruction (*paideia*) in the truth, upon which the faith may be built, to join the conviction (*elenchon*) of the false by which the errors (either directly or indirectly impugning it) may be solidly refuted, so that they can be successful in setting right the many and weighty controversies which at this day and to our grief prevail extensively among Christians and miserably lacerate the church of the Lord.'

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 296.

The ethical qualifications required of the elder (vv. 6–8) should be context enough to point to the manner of pastoral rebuke/refutation, one that is humble rather than arrogant. But arguably there is an inbuilt civility in true refutation.

What is refutation? Refutation is not just saying I disagree with you, or giving a contradictory opinion. It is demonstrating where and how those who disagree with sound teaching actually do disagree with it. One might break it down into a number constitutive parts: (1) to know what is being said; (2) to be able to compare that to real faith and sound teaching; (3) to see the difference between the two and how the difference has arisen; (4) to know what really is a matter of indifference (one doesn't want to cause unnecessary strife), or to say it's false doctrine unless it is; (5) to then persuasively, honestly and lovingly demonstrate that to others. The aim is not just to say you're wrong or correct an intellectual misapprehension, but it's to bring the person back because we love them and we believe what they're teaching is damaging people's souls.

All of a sudden that little 'and refute those who opposite it' becomes a complex and daunting task. This *elenctic* role is vital to the life of the pastor and the life of the healthy church, but there is a civility to it. Are we able to listen, *really* listen to a counterview? Are we able to describe without reverting to stereotype or caricature? Do I understand what a person is saying so that if I repeated it back to them, they would say, 'yes, that's it'? Oliver O'Donovan notes that 'to "communicate" is to hold something in common, to make it a common possession, to treat it as "ours," rather than "yours" or "mine"'.<sup>25</sup> A 'civil' listening is not only enshrined in the common law principle of *audi alteram partem* (listen to the other side),<sup>26</sup> but is surely an implication of Jesus's commands to love your neighbours as yourself (Mark 12:21); to do others what you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12); and to love your enemies (Matt 5:44).

In this regard, for many years I've led a discussion with successive seminary tutor groups around two pieces I have found stimulating and helpful. The first is a simple but profound piece by Roger Nicole on 'Dealing with Difference' where he encourages us to ask three questions when faced with difference.<sup>27</sup> First, what do I owe to the person who differs from me? We have obligations to people who differ from us. We want people to know what we are saying. We must attempt to understand what a person means. We must seek to understand their aims. Second, what can I learn from those who differ from me? I may be wrong. I may be failing to embody the truth in its entirety. I have not sufficiently perceived dangers to which my view is exposed. I may be being ambiguous. Finally, how can I cope with those who differ from me, in terms of defence (what Nicole calls 'protective') and offence (what Nicole calls 'constructive'). Nicole's conclusion is challenging:

Are we attempting to win an argument in order to manifest our own superior knowledge and debating ability? Or are we seeking to win another person who we perceive as enmeshed in error or inadequacy by exposing him or her to the truth and light that God has given to us. (2 Tim. 2:24–26).... A Christian in carrying on discussions with those who differ should not be subject to the psychology of the boxing ring where the

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<sup>25</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 242.

<sup>26</sup> *Audi alteram partem* is the 'motto' of Christopher Watkins trilogy of books on Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze in P&R's *Great Thinker* series. I believe these to be an exemplary model of what I am talking about.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Nicole, 'Polemic Theology—How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us', in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2002), 9–26. It can be found here: <https://www.monergism.com/polemic-theology-how-deal-those-who-differ-us>.

contestants are bent upon demolishing one another. Rather 'The Lord's servant must not quarrel: instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses...' (2 Tim. 2:24–26).<sup>28</sup>

The second discussion piece is the unpublished paper 'Dealing with False Teaching,' given by the late Reformed Baptist pastor, Robert Sheehan, at a 1980s meeting of the *British Evangelical Council*.<sup>29</sup> Sheehan notes,

The reasons why churches and individuals become ensnared in error are varied. The apostolic approach to error was not simplistic, enabling us to set out slick formula and rules of thumb. The apostolic approach to error was complex because it took all error seriously, but also took into account the nature of the error and the reasons why error had arisen....

The apostles recognised that not everyone who is in error is in a state of open rebellion against the truth. Not everyone in error is seeking to pervert the gospel and overthrow the faith. Other factors have to be taken into consideration when assessing why error occurs in any particular situation.

In short, there are different kinds of error, different people who are involved in them, and different ways of handling those errors and people. Sheehan offers a five-fold typology. First, are *the sincerely ignorant*. The example given here is Apollos in Acts 18:24–28. He was eloquent, competent in the Scriptures, and instructed in the way of the Lord. Luke says that he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. But there was something missing, and when Priscilla and Aquila heard him they explained to him the way of God more accurately. Apollos was in error but not denounced for it. He was teachable and this led into further usefulness in ministry. Second, are *the sincere misinterpreters*. Such people don't want to be in error but they have misunderstood the teaching of the Bible on a particular point. Sheehan cites 1 Corinthians 5:9–11 as an example of this. Paul removes all reason for misunderstanding by further clarification. Third, are *the temporarily inconsistent*. This is Peter at Antioch whom Paul had to oppose. Peter was not regarded as unregenerate, but his conduct (not his teaching) was not in step with the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:11–14). Peter's sin was public and because of his prominence, Paul rebukes him publicly. Paul realises Peter's inconsistency is not a desire to repudiate the gospel but is motivated by fear. Paul does not condemn him as a heretic in confrontation, shows him the serious implications of his teaching and gains his restoration. Fourth, are *the deceived*—the 'foolish Galatians' (Gal 3:1). Here Sheehan notes four strands of arguments in Paul's teaching: 'a positive teaching of truth, a negative denunciation of error, a forthright yet accurate exposure of the false teachers and a warning of the dire consequences of persistence in false teaching.' Fifth, and finally, are *the deceivers*. These people are enemies of the gospel who were fundamentally unwilling to be submissive to apostolic teaching even after an orderly and responsible process of investigation, testimony and decision (the dogmata of Acts 16:4): 'there should not doubt that the teaching of the Apostle with regard to these wilful, persistent,

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<sup>28</sup> Nicole, 'Polemic Theology', 26.

<sup>29</sup> A network of conservative evangelical churches and Christian agencies begun in 1952, closely associated with Martin Lloyd-Jones, and from 2004 re-named as 'Affinity'.

stubborn heretics is that they are to be rejected and avoided; that their excommunication from the church is necessary. There is to be no sort of contact with them for religious purposes.’

Sheehan notes that a great deal of discernment is required in these situations but ultimately there are only two types of errorists: ‘There are those who are in submission to the Apostles, yet for some reason are not doing what the Apostles had said, and there are those who are not in submission to the Apostles. Those who are biblically submissive, yet in error, and those who are biblically subversive and, therefore, in error.’

I think a typology like Sheehan’s is helpful and calls for a prayerful wisdom and discernment in the pastor’s *elenctic* task which I would hope promotes many of the characteristics of civility (listening, patience, love, tolerance, etc.) that I’ve already outlined. Of course there are questions that remain and that demand further reflection. Pointedly, as protective pastors, is there a ‘civil’ way of driving away wolves? Paul’s wish that the Galatian deceivers would go and emasculate themselves certainly demonstrates his passionate love of his flock but, in terms of his interaction with the false teachers, was he being ‘civil’? Does Paul’s apostolic authority and place in redemptive history make a difference in how we are to interpret and apply this utterance? Should we, and I would say we should, contextualise ‘civility’ in a way that takes into account one’s character and one’s culture such that there can be a legitimate diversity as to what a biblical civility might look like amongst God’s people across time and across the world?<sup>30</sup>

A civil *elenctics* is the closest I’ve come in trying to describe (and justify?) my ‘dual-belonging’ encounter. If one considers temperamental, socio-cultural and contextual factors, perhaps the “‘you think I’m going to hell, can you pass me the salt please?’ incident’ is not as incongruous as it first appeared. Perhaps. To be honest, for me it still continues to be a source of ponderment.

### 3. *An Elenctic Civility*

I move from the more pastoral ecclesial setting to the more public and civic setting. What I propose here is an admittedly more provocative thesis and proposal. As a society, if we are going to further civil discourse in society so we truly communicate and allow the free exchange of ideas, then we need both time and space for such interactions, and at the moment we are suffering from a lack of both. Could Christians be the ones to create and sustain such time and space? Can we be the ones who engender and model civil dialogue? Crucially, the time and space for such civil dialogue *cannot* be conducted on a neutral platform, but must always be Christian and, I would argue, must always be *elenctic*. The discipline of the study of religion is one area where Christians might evidence such an *elenctic* civility.

In recent years, Roman Catholic scholars such as Gavin D’Costa and Paul Griffiths have narrated a genealogy which charts the Oedipal nature of religious studies in parallel with theology’s ‘Babylonian captivity’ in the modern university.<sup>31</sup> Much religious studies has presupposed an alleged ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ scientific positivism which does not comport well with the theological task, and, in fact, can be shown to be as ideological or crypto-theological as any explicit ‘confessional’ approach to the study

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<sup>30</sup> For a helpful ‘compare and contrast’ exercise on some of these questions see Samuel James, ‘The Case for Civility’, *The Gospel Coalition*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/case-for-civility/>, and Allan Bever, ‘Are There Limits to Civility?’, *Jesus Creed*, 4 February 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/cbrhbryt>.

<sup>31</sup> Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Paul J. Griffiths, ‘On the Future of the Study of Religion in the Academy’, *JAAR* 74 (2006): 66–74.

of religion.<sup>32</sup> Unashamedly, the conservative Catholic D'Costa argues that contra modernity's construal of the academic study of 'religion,' the fullest understanding and interpreting of the religions are seen 'in the light of the triune God who is the fullness of truth. Only from this theological narrative can other religions be truly understood, simply because Christianity is true.'<sup>33</sup>

For those familiar with this discipline, such a statement by D'Costa raises a perennial question: Does such a position threaten civility in terms of dialogue and proper listening, in that a controlling 'outsider' theological interpretation is forced upon the religious 'insider' thus doing violence to their Otherness? Not necessarily, as 'understanding, to the best of one's ability, is a prerequisite to any form of judgement. Of course this understanding is not neutral, as it is structured by particular research questions, interests and methods.'<sup>34</sup> D'Costa continues, 'further, because Christianity calls for a critical engagement with *all* human culture, the world religious become a necessary object of theological interest, which requires understanding them as best as possible from the 'inside' as they understood or understand themselves, before outside interpretation can proceed.'<sup>35</sup>

Although D'Costa's own Catholic 'outside' interpretation is markedly different from my own Reformed 'outsider' interpretation, the insider/outsider distinction holds and is helpful in enabling a 'partisan objectivity'<sup>36</sup> that can respect the Other while allowing for a theological interpretation of the Other which will for a theological of religions like my own, have missional and *elenctic* presuppositions and motivations. Detailed and granular ethnographic and phenomenological 'listening' work can take place even if the *telos* of such work is the unmasking of idolatry and the call to repentance and faith in Christ as true worship. Bavinck notes this in his exposition of *elenctics*:

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Griffiths, 'On the Very Idea of Religion,' *First Things* 103 (May 2000): 30–35. Griffiths here draws on the influential work of Timothy Fitzgerald in his *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 91.

<sup>34</sup> D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 93.

<sup>35</sup> D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 93. It's worth listening to D'Costa as to how this is achieved: 'Insider reporting is a descriptive interpretation that would usually be agreed on by an insider or a well-informed and sympathetic outsider. Outsider reporting is an interpretation of the insider reporting, which may be entirely congruent with the insider account, or may diverge. If it diverges, a plausible explanatory framework within the outsider report needs to be provided. It is quite possible that an insider might learn constructively from an outsider reporting process, or indeed contest and argue against it. Or simply ignore it. The question of truth operates in both areas, insider and outsider reporting, but obviously in different ways. For insider reports to be true, they must be intra-systematically coherent with the beliefs and practices of the insider group, and the question of their referential ontology might be part of the insider report, or it might not. For outsider reports to be true, they must be intra-systematically coherent with the world of the outsider reporter, who is of course an insider to her own world, and their persuasiveness to the insider about whom they are reporting is entirely contingent on a whole range of factors. If, for example, a problem is located in the insider's world by both the insider and the outsider, the outsider may claim that it is best resolved by actually leaving that worldview, adapting it in a certain way consonant with an insider report, or adapting it in ways that would create intra-systematic dissonance. This process might happen through rational discussion, rhetorical persuasion, example of life lived, and in a whole range of explicit and implicit ways' (93–94).

<sup>36</sup> This phrase comes from Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland and Gerald R. McDermott's excellent book *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 4.

To be able to approach effectively, to be able to convince of sin, a certain knowledge of the phenomenon of non-Christian religions is indispensable ... *elenctics* must first of all begin with the precise and calm knowledge of the nature of the religion with which it is concerned. It must do this honestly and calmly; that is to say, it must not be too quick to interrupt, it must listen to this religion state its case.... In the very nature of the case *elenctics* makes thankful use of the data provided by the science of religion and by the history of religion. These two subjects constitute the building blocks with which it works.<sup>37</sup>

While I'm not holding my breath for the 'academic' study of religions to return and subsume itself under theology (let alone evangelical theology) anytime soon, it's important that evangelicals, and other co-belligerents, do not accept the current *status quo* or withdraw from this field, which is itself a mission field. However, there are other spaces where I think we can proactively and constructively offer a faithful *elenctic* civility setting the agenda on our own terms.

#### 4. Coming to Our Senses?

In formulating my own Reformed theological religious studies, I have drawn on the aforementioned J. H. Bavinck's proposal of a universal religious consciousness, which he describes morphologically in terms of 'magnetic points'.<sup>38</sup> In terms of theological anthropology, these magnetic points are a faithful yet creative restatement of Calvin's notions the *sensus divinitatis*, *semen religionis* and *fabrica idolorum*. The 'magnetic points' are aspects or perspectives to the one religious consciousness and while noting individual, cultural and religious variegation, are as perennial, fixed, and universal as both the *imago Dei* and the suppression and substitution of truth. I have renamed them as follows: *Totality* (a way to connect), *Norm* (a way to live), *Deliverance* (a way out), *Destiny* (a way we control) and *Higher Power* (a way beyond). Remember that these points are idolatrous responses to God's revelation, each of these points are subversively fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the object of true worship.

As I have been presenting this material in a variety of contexts, a very creative proposal was suggested to me following a presentation of the magnetic points. I offer this as an excellent example of what I have been calling an *elenctic* civility and worthy of further development. This proposal would rename 'the magnetic points' as the 'Five Senses' and deploy them in educational settings with the aim of reclaiming the diversity agenda, an agenda that we know is so powerful and prevalent at the moment. Would it be possible to use the 'Five Senses' as a framework for 'diversity committees' to seek to engage with everyone in the school: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Secularists, black, white, LGBTQ+, etc.? So, for example, the group could use these uniting "senses" to make commitment and drive a programme of inclusion action. A 'manifesto' for such a programme could look like this:

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<sup>37</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 241.

<sup>38</sup> See Daniel Strange, *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 250–54; Strange, *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About ... and How to Connect Them to Christ* (London: Good Book Company, 2021). Bavinck own description these magnetic points are found in two places using different orderings: 'Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith', in *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. John Bolt, James D. Bratt and Paul J. Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 151–98; J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 37–106. The same points are also described in a less schematic way in Bavinck's *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 247–72.

(1) An *understanding* of our place in the world—five uniting innate human ‘senses’:

- a. *Totality*: We have a desire to connect with others and belong to something bigger than ourselves.
- b. *Norm*: We believe there are moral standards and responsibilities for all people.
- c. *Deliverance*: We live in a world which suffers brokenness, pain and ultimately death, and we all crave solutions for these.
- d. *Destiny*: We recognise that we do not control our world and that whilst each wanting to control our individual destiny, we are part of something bigger than ourselves.
- e. *Higher Power*: We perceive that there is more to reality than just what we see around us, and we would like to explore each other’s understanding of what that is.

(2) A *commitment* to how we want to explore these ‘senses’:

- a. We commit to valuing every member of the school community equally and we want to apologise for where we have not done this in the past.
- b. We seek an inclusion which accepts each person for who they are and what they believe, and acknowledge that it is acceptable to disagree.
- c. We commit to speaking openly and to listening to each other so we better understand our different views of the world around us, our place within it, and what may lie beyond our immediate reality.
- d. We call on the school leadership to shape the curriculum and extra-curricular activities to enable us to explore these five human senses, and to shape the school discipline policy in line with these priorities.

(3) A possible *action* plan within the framework of the five ‘senses’:

- a. A school survey asking for each pupil’s view, so we can share an understanding of our community’s thinking and diversity;
- b. Forums at which we will listen and ask questions about each other’s understanding of our place within the world;
- c. Exploration of thinking and practices, addressing where we have got things wrong through prejudice and ignorance, and devising a plan for change.

Such a framework might be accused of being an illegitimate ‘deck-stacking’ bait-and-switch ploy. Certainly this ‘five sense’ framework is explicitly theological but then what framework isn’t in terms of coming from some committed/crypto-theological stance? Within this framework there is the time and space for civil *conversation* and dialogue, but also the space for *conversion* given the *elenctic* nature of the theological task. Just as there is an intentional ambiguity in Paul’s use of the term ‘very religious’ in Acts 17:22b,<sup>39</sup> so I think there is a similar intentional ambiguity in how we are speaking of ‘diversity’ here. In a sense we can, and we must, affirm the ‘dignity of difference’,<sup>40</sup> by which I mean the difference of created human-beingness, which calls for a respectful civility and the free exchange of ideas. However, there is a sense, an older sense of the word, in which for the Christian, ‘diversity’ means opposing and

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<sup>39</sup> Within the context of the pericope, δεισιδαιμονέστερους (‘very religious’) neatly encapsulates the anthropological ambiguity and complexity of religious alterity of human beings both ‘knowing’ and not knowing God, and simultaneously running away from God and running to him.

<sup>40</sup> To use a phrase by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sachs.

contrary to the truth, and which, by the power of the Spirit, Christians are called to unmask and bring to shame.<sup>41</sup> ‘Conversational difference’ creates the space and the platform for ‘conversional difference’. For the Christian, both are needed, and both are mandated. The ‘five senses’ idea was suggested to me within a school setting, but could we not also consider such an ecclesial setting for such initiatives? Such an initiative would further *both* our opportunities for witness and evangelism, but also our responsibilities within civic society to create time and space for citizens to come together?

Post-pandemic, we are, or we will, slowly emerge staggering and blinking into a new landscape. A civil *elenctics* and an *elenctic* civility is what the world needs right now, a call for us to come to our senses rather than perpetuate a stifling ‘sense-orship’. We can be the ones to offer it.

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<sup>41</sup> See Daniel Barbu, “‘Idolatry’ and Religious Diversity: Thinking about the Other in Early Modern Europe,” *ASDIWAL. Revue genevoise d’anthropologie et d’histoire des religions* (2014): 39–50.

# Canonicity: A Theologian's Observations

— Henri A. G. Blocher —

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**Abstract:** The topic of the biblical canon raises a specific, twofold difficulty for evangelical systematic theologians: the appeal to the Spirit's testimony and a recognition of divine providence in history. It is crucial to recognize that "canon" entails both a *principle*—a body of teaching incorporating the word of God that binds the conscience of believers—and a *list* of books officially recognized as authoritative by the world-wide church. The principle of canon and specific canonical books are organically linked. While the validity of our confession of the canon of Scripture cannot be proven on any "neutral" ground, believers have sufficient clarity and confidence to confess the rule we need in radical dependence on God.

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The topic of the biblical canon raises a specific and twofold difficulty in the way of an "evangelical" systematic theologian. The principle *Sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone," would seem impossible to honor, since, in the words of the Jesuit theologian Bernard Sesboüé, "the Bible does not offer its own table of contents."<sup>1</sup> When appeal is made to the inner witness of the Spirit, it may be exposed, in David Friedrich Strauss's words, as "the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system."<sup>2</sup> Heirs of the Reformation face an acute, and maybe poisonous, form of the starting-point embarrassment: how does one justify first principles? The second special challenge relates to the role of historical research for dogmatic reflection on the issue. Few articles of faith so depend for defense and development on the way in which historians tell the story of the Bible's reception in the ancient church; the construction of historical "fact" and the adjustment of theological views intimately react on each other. Were one to underwrite, as the indisputable result of objective research, William J. Abraham's account of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Sesboüé, "La Canonisation des Ecritures et la reconnaissance de leur inspiration," *RSR* 92 (2004): 24 (my translation, as will be the case for all quotations from non-English works, unless otherwise indicated). He claims, "The canon of the Scriptures does not belong to the Scriptures [*n'est pas scripturaire*]?" The statement should be nuanced, inasmuch as one can find traces of final editorial work that imply a canonical intention, and such a verse as Luke 24:44 may be understood as a rudimentary "table of contents."

<sup>2</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und in Kampf mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt* (Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 1840), 1:136, as quoted by Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:243.

"Emergence of the Canonical Heritage of the Church," one would find it difficult to resist his critique of the classical view.<sup>3</sup> When Auguste Lecerf, a systematic theologian indeed, took up the cudgels against liberal views of the canon (those of his times, but there is little new under the sun), his article was almost entirely devoted to historical matters.<sup>4</sup> History and theology intertwined: complexity must be the word.

It would be foolhardy on my part, however, to enter the debate of historians. There has been a plethora of learned investigations in recent decades (without making earlier syntheses obsolete, which we inherited from Edouard Reuss, Adolf von Harnack, Brooke F. Westcott, Louis Gaussen, Theodor Zahn). I choose to rely on the work of such experts as Roger T. Beckwith, F. F. Bruce, Stephen Dempster, David G. Dunbar, Charles E. Hill, and others,<sup>5</sup> and I find reason to trust their command of primary sources. Just to illustrate which "technical" choices may be involved, I may mention the following: (1) I ascribe much weight to Josephus's statement of the case (*Against Apion* 1.8.37–42) and the suggestion of the TaNaK tripartition already in the prologue of Sirach; (2) I discard the myth of a Jamnia (Yavnè[h]) "Council" constituting the Hebrew canon, and the other myth of a different Alexandrian canon; (3) I underline the few but significant references to New Testament writings *as Scriptures* ("it is written") in orthodox and Gnostic texts before Marcion; (4) I stress Irenaeus's use of the Scriptures under the rubric "rule of faith"<sup>6</sup>; (5) I date the Muratorian Fragment c. 170–200, on the basis of its indication that the *Shepherd of Hermas* had been composed not long before its own time. Such decisions give privilege to "hard evidence" when available.

It is an open secret that the above-named scholars are of an evangelical persuasion, and theirs is a minority stance among generally recognized specialists. I protest in advance against any attempt to undermine their scientific authority *because* of their commitment of faith. On the contrary, their being in spiritual sympathy with the texts under scrutiny may sharpen and rightly guide their sensitivity when dealing with relevant data. Scholars of other persuasions are no less influenced by their religious (sometimes anti-religious) commitments: the illusion of a neutral "objectivity" in historiographical

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<sup>3</sup> I am quoting the title of the second chapter of William J. Abraham's important book *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology, from the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Auguste Lecerf, "Remarques sur le Canon des Saintes Ecritures," *RRef* 9 (1958): 1–18. This was posthumously published.

<sup>5</sup> I found help in the following works (in alphabetical order): Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985); "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 51–64; "The Canon of Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 27–34; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988); Stephen Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': *Torah* and *Temple* and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon, Part I," *TynB* 48 (1997): 23–56; "Canons on the Right and Canons on the Left: Finding a Solution in the Canon Debate," *JETS* 52 (2009): 47–77; "The Old Testament Canon, Josephus, and Cognitive Environment," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 321–61; David G. Dunbar, "The Biblical Canon," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 299–360; Charles E. Hill, "The New Testament Canon: *Deconstructio ad Absurdum?*," *JETS* 52 (2009): 101–19; "The Truth Above All Demonstration': Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 43–88.

<sup>6</sup> Against the beautiful, but, I think, finally misguided, treatment by Yves-Marie Blanchard, *Aux sources du canon, le témoignage d'Irénée*, *Cogitatio fidei* 175 (Paris: Cerf, 1993), especially 284ff.

endeavors has been exploded for a long time,<sup>7</sup> though the news, apparently, has not reached everyone! In the Christian world-view, an ultimate solidarity obtains between all levels of knowledge, however distinct they ought to remain, and it is proper to enrich the pursuit of truth in one dimension with insights drawn from others—even special revelation! An evangelical theologian may, therefore, reasonably capitalize on the conclusions and demonstrations of evangelical historians—without, of course, closing his or her eyes on solid arguments from the other side. At any rate, I will not canonize the present state of opinion in the academic microcosm, and I will consider the credentials of the “minority” narrative as impressive enough to warrant proceeding in its light.

Attention may be drawn to a kind of presuppositions which often escapes critical evaluation. Those are distinct from “metaphysical” axioms and postulates, from reference points and criteria vitally bound to faith; they do not belong to the “fiduciary framework” in Michael Polanyi’s sense. The presuppositions I point to are lower level assumptions—which, yet, determine to a large extent the perspectives many historians bring to their objects. They consist in general representations of what life was like, or in overall schemes of development. They embody preconceptions so common among the academic guild that one loses sight of their precarious character. If no serious objection arises, people tend to forget that these working hypotheses have very little evidence to back them up. I suggest: conclusions they induce should still be received as *conjectures*. The diversity of traditions among critical scholars from one nation to the next, in this respect, reveals the lack of compelling reasons for this one or that one. And the way one imagines the use of Scripture in second century churches is a case in point. In responsible awareness of what we know *and what we guess*, it is permissible to draw a picture that fits the elements which can be ascertained.

My systematic theology inquiry will presuppose the defensibility of the account evangelical historians offer, certainties and conjectures combined. Rather “independent” scholars ratify their judgment: W. C. van Unnik, for instance, estimated that “round about A.D. 140–150 a collection of writings was known at Rome and accepted as authoritative which was virtually identical with our New Testament.”<sup>8</sup> It will try to reflect on the facts thus identified and interpreted. It will move up one rung, up the ladder of abstraction: hence the choice of the word “canonicity” instead of “canon.” It cannot, of course, deal with too many aspects or ramifications, and will major on issues that have maximum relevance for an evangelical theologian as I am. It may cast an eye on distant, foreign horizons, but one eye only. In the very few lines he devotes to the Kuyperian “territory,” William J. Abraham depicts it as “this somewhat remote but fascinating epistemological planet.”<sup>9</sup> Planets remote from one another.... Some debates imply so little common faith between participants that they rather belong to apologetics than to systematic theology, or should come under inter-religious dialogue. I am not arguing here *contra Gentiles*.

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<sup>7</sup> Several essays bear on the issue in the stimulating book edited by Bruce Kuklick and D. G. Hart, *Religious Advocacy and American History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> W. C. van Unnik, “The ‘Gospel of Truth’ and the New Testament,” in *The Jung Codex*, ed. F. L. Cross (London, 1955), 124, as quoted by F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 147 (Bruce himself wishes to remain more cautious [n. 7]).

<sup>9</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 320 with n. 24.

### *1. Canon and Canon: The Reference of the Noun*

The central word of our quest stands in need of clarification: what do we mean when we say “canon”? More is at stake than preferences in vocabulary.

William J. Abraham makes, from the start, a fateful decision. In the preface to the paperback edition of his dazzling synthesis he stipulates, “On my revisionist analysis ‘canon’ is a much more modest notion [than that of criterion, applying to the Bible], meaning essentially a ‘list’; and ‘canon’ applies not just to the biblical canon, but to the canon of saints, the canon of doctrine, the canon of Fathers, and the like.”<sup>10</sup> “At one level,” he claims, “canon simply meant a list of books. Modern usage reflects this when it speaks of the canon of Western civilization and means by this a list of books.”<sup>11</sup> In what he terms “canonical,” he includes (with Reuss) “canons of cathedrals,” the sacraments, iconography, the episcopate.<sup>12</sup> This lexical orientation obviously serves Abraham’s project: to deconstruct the role Scripture has played, in the West, as the criterion of knowledge (“epistemic,” he says).

Whether κανών had been used for a “list of books” before it was applied to the Christian Scriptures<sup>13</sup> has been disputed. Roger Beckwith emphatically denies it:

The common idea that this language had earlier been used by the Alexandrian grammarians for the select lists (*pinakeis*) of classical writers and artists which they drew up is a mistake. Such lists did exist, both among the Greeks and perhaps among the Babylonians, but calling them a “canon” is a practice dating only from the 18th century, and was based upon the biblical canon, not the other way round.<sup>14</sup>

Dictionaries do mention that use, but it is hard to trace occurrences.<sup>15</sup> In any case, the use for lists was rather marginal if it ever happened. Even then, “canon” would not denote a mere list, but a list of models, of masters, of authorities; this still belongs to our canon of classics.<sup>16</sup> In all metaphorical uses,

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<sup>10</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, vii. Abraham’s revisionism implies being sharply critical of almost all others, but it is noteworthy, to his honor, that he does not belittle or caricature his opponents; Schleiermacher and the Princeton theologians receive a treatment fairer than usual.

<sup>11</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 14; cf. 413: “The canon of Scripture was simply a list of books to be read in worship and to be used for spiritual direction and instruction in the Church.”

<sup>12</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 14, 53, and elsewhere.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest occurrence on record seems to a letter by Athanasius c. 350, in his *Epistola de decretis Nicaeni Synodi* (before his famous Easter festal letter). In Rufinus’s translation of Origen’s *De Oratione* one finds *in canone est*; unfortunately Rufinus’s fidelity can be suspected. On both these sources, see Edward C. Butler, Walter A. Phillips, Samuel Davidson, “Canon” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: Britannica, 1961), 4:755.

<sup>14</sup> Beckwith, “The Canon of Scripture,” 27.

<sup>15</sup> I found no mention in the great Liddell-Scott-Jones dictionary. The Bailly-Séchan-Chantraine one (*Dictionnaire Grec-Français*) offers a reference to Quintilian’s *The Orator’s Education* 10.1.54, 59; Quintilian does speak of grammarians’ lists, but in the Latin text he does not use *canon* at all; in 10.1.54, the equivalent word is *ordo*. Harold Butler’s translation (LCL, [London: Heinemann, 1922]) uses “canon of style” in 10.1.25, but the Latin word there is simply *lex* (*legem dicendi*).

<sup>16</sup> Abraham’s quotation above (from *Canon and Criterion*, 14) adds that the “canon of Western civilization” is a list which represents, for the speaker “a particular set of cultural values and convictions”—not a mere list, therefore, but one invested with normative power. In the second quotation (from *Canon and Criterion*, 413), he speaks of “direction” and “instruction,” words with a similar connotation. This is typical of Abraham’s tactics: he often makes important concessions on his way, and yet disregards them as he goes on building his main argument.

κανών, above all a rule and yardstick, but extended to astronomical tables, grammatical paradigms, and the musical instrument *monochord* (determining the right pitch), retains the semantic trait of a norm and criterion. In the sense of the limit assigned, Paul paraphrases it by the word μέτρον (2 Cor 10:13). Krister Stendahl had these connotations of κανών in mind when he warned against reducing Scripture to the status of a literary classic: “what makes the bible the Bible is the canon.... It is as Holy Scripture that the Bible is a classic in our culture. Therefore there is something artificial in the idea of ‘the Bible as literature.’”<sup>17</sup>

Undoubtedly, κανών is not found for Scripture alone. This use specifies common talk of the rule of faith, of truth, of apostolic tradition, possibly of the fathers inasmuch as its reception implied a grateful recognition of the faithful service of transmitters. But the word was never used in this way of the sacraments and icons, and swamping creeds and the faith once delivered to the saints with all kinds of church practices in a rag-bag of a same category, under the name “canonical heritage,” is to dissolve what must be discerned. The real issue to be explored is the precise relationship between the rule of faith and the Scriptures in such a writer as Irenaeus. A good case can be set forth showing their near-identification, the rule of faith being considered the summary of the contents of Old Testament, Gospels, and apostolic testimony.

This correction of Abraham’s proposal leads to a further clarification. How precisely are we to articulate *rule* and *list* when thinking of the biblical canon? Gerald T. Sheppard distinguishes canon 1 from canon 2: canon 1 involves functioning in a normative fashion, be it tight or loose; canon 2 is a fixed collection of books.<sup>18</sup> I suggest the *principle* of canon, that there is a body of teaching incorporating the word of God that binds the conscience of the faithful, is not the same as the exact delineation of its *contours*. The latter issue was only settled in a definite and official manner, for the world-wide church, in the second part of the 4th century. It is a ruinous mistake then to assert that the canon itself was not recognized before that time. Actually, one can point to no time in the life of the church when the principle of canon was not represented and efficacious.

The main observation is this: we may distinguish the two issues but never separate them; there is a deep solidarity between the two. Not only does history picture a process, with a growing preoccupation among Christians with the principle of canon—in front of Judaism, heresy, divergent theologies—and growing assurance about its component parts, doubts gradually overcome about disputed writings (ἀντιλεγόμενα), but accepting the principle of canon naturally entails asking about its boundaries. If a given discourse is set apart as the norm of belief and behavior, sooner or later the question arises of its contours. The Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and jointly the words of the Lord himself (conveyed by his chosen witnesses under the Spirit’s guidance) meant Authority from the start in the Christian church. The question, then, of the canonical list could not be absent; it was inevitably present, in latent, germinal form.

<sup>17</sup> Krister Stendahl, “The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 6. He complains that the preoccupation with *story* “tends to obscure exactly the normative dimension” (p. 8) and speaks of “the normative nature of the Bible” (p. 9).

<sup>18</sup> Gerald T. Sheppard, “Canon,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), as cited in John C. Peckham, “The Canon and Biblical Authority: A Critical Comparison of Two Models of Canonicity,” *TJ* 28 (2007): 232.

Contrary to William Abraham, Abraham Kuyper majors on κανών as rule, model, and criterion (the meaning “list” is only metaphorical, *overdrachtelijk*).<sup>19</sup> With powerful eloquence, he “preaches” that God himself is our κανών, in whose image we were created: while we should have harbored this canon in our own constitution, sin has distorted everything, and God had to reveal his canon in the Law and in the Lord to straighten up what we have bent.<sup>20</sup> In order to approach the idea of canon, one should forget about the list of books, and “begin by going back to the mental picture [*denkbeeld*] of the power, of the authority, of the imposing and compelling ethical might, and here take one’s starting-point in God himself as above all *ho Kanôn*, since *kat’ eikona autou ektisthê*.”<sup>21</sup>

Such an admonition is of the sword of the Spirit. It has methodological relevance: it reminds us of the proper spiritual environment of our theological reflection—always the fear of the Lord first. I observe that the climate of our time causes us desperately to need it. Answers about authority by four famous theologians, not extreme modernists at all, illustrate the pervasive influence in churches of the late modern libertarian cult. Eberhard Jüngel only legitimizes the authority of the word of God if it is essential for freedom, and, hence “as being constituted by the *content* of this Word. The Word of God, and with it the Bible, cannot be justified as an authority in order that it may say something”; Gerhard Krobel rejects any appeal to the Bible “as law for doctrine and ethos and as judge in controversy”; René Marlé only justifies authority “which summons us ‘to freedom rather than to order’”; John D. Zizioulas will only accept an *anamnetic* authority: “Apart from this, its [the Bible’s] authority is only an externally imposed claim, which man’s freedom has every right to reject in the name of the freedom of the Spirit.”<sup>22</sup> “The fact is and remains,” Kuyper wrote, “that there are two canons facing each other: on the one side, the unjust and distorted *kanôn tou kosmou*, as the *kosmos* now *en tô ponerô keitai*; on the other side, the everlasting, unchanging, uniquely right and sure *kanôn*, as the one in which God, who created humankind in his image, has given himself to all children of men, and which is made manifest now in Christ through *ensarkôsis*, and still in Holy Scripture through *inscripturatio*.”<sup>23</sup>

Three adjacent remarks may dispel residual mist. One should notice, first, that the principle of canon, even expressed by means of a list of sacred texts, does not require logically that the canon be closed. Likely, the rabbis who had grown aware of the Spirit’s having “deserted Israel” did not rule out a renewal of official prophecy. The closure of the Christian canon constitutes a further claim, added to the notion itself. The recognition of canon is compatible with uncertainty about the edges: provided there is a consistent nucleus of writings universally accepted (ὁμολογούμενα). Hesitating on Hebrews and relying on Romans is not a contradiction. Canonical function, third, belongs to λόγοι, whether unwritten (ἀγράφοι) or written (ἐγγράφοι), to use classical terms<sup>24</sup>: to “texts” in the sense modern

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<sup>19</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894), 3:30. Kuyper offers remarkable quotations from Greek writers (pp. 30–31). The linguistic transfer to “list,” he observes, may be analyzed more as metonymy than metaphor.

<sup>20</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:31–32.

<sup>21</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:34.

<sup>22</sup> In *The Ecumenical Review* 21 (1969): 152, 153, 159, and 165, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:32–33.

<sup>24</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 2:197: “*verbum agraphon* is prior to *verbum engraphon*, in Turretin’s terms, not as a genus is prior to species but as a subject is prior to its accidents” (cf. 191: Bullinger highlighted in the Scriptures, functionally, the instrument of the *viva vox Dei*).

linguists use, in oral or written form (cf. 2 Thess 2:15). The import of Papias's words, as reported by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39), has been inflated beyond measure, as he expresses his preference for the living voice of those who had heard the apostles. One can argue that "Papias magnifies the importance of oral tradition for his *commentary* of the words of the Lord" and disparages books produced by heretics.<sup>25</sup> Papias's talk, also, does not breathe pure objectivity: it obviously enhances his personal status, there is a tinge of boasting in it which one should not miss. The written form was pre-eminently suited for a rule to be followed by generations, and the introductory form "it is written" (γέγραπται) is highly significant in this regard, but the act of writing down the divinely-given discourse did not essentially alter its status (this consideration, of course, helps to support the argument that the church from the start lived with the canon).

## 2. Canon and Rule: The Function for Faith

If we maintain the time-honored and well-established meaning of κανών, and cannot ignore the late modern aversion to anything of the kind, we must further explore the issue of Scripture's authority or rule in Christian life.

Against the older understanding, which is being felt as unbearably authoritarian, theologians have criticized the "formal" character of the norm ("formal" having very bad connotations), and tried to base "authority" (not seldom interpreted etymologically from *augere*, "cause to grow") on the *content* of the message, and its life-giving power. This emphasis already marks the great Berkouwer's treatment.<sup>26</sup> By far the most powerful attack was mounted by William J. Abraham, in *Canon and Criterion*. The fatal move, as he sees it, was, *in the West*, the construal of the "canonical heritage" as an "epistemic" criterion. Irenaeus, who came from Asia Minor, did speak of the rule of truth, but Abraham claims, "It is not a contribution to epistemology understood as a quest for some way of demarcating, say, knowledge from opinion. It is not a formal norm for measuring truth or falsehood."<sup>27</sup> One arch-villain was Thomas Aquinas, with his effort towards *scientia*, his emphasis on the literal sense of biblical texts.<sup>28</sup> He aggravated the tendency linked with the Western *filioque* clause, and "there is a striking similarity" between his positions and the Reformers,<sup>29</sup> who, of course, made matters even worse.<sup>30</sup> Liberals have grown more and more aware of the weakness of the traditional Western view, but they have not been able to remedy the situation. Abraham offers his panacea: "my favoured category is that of means of

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<sup>25</sup> D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 497, indicating that this line of interpretation originated with J. B. Lightfoot (n. 31).

<sup>26</sup> Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, trans. Jack B. Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 67–104 (ch. 3 on the Canon). This American version leaves out more than half of the original *De Heilige Schrift* (Kampen: Kok, 1966–1967), with 377 pages instead of 697 (I noticed some mistranslations).

<sup>27</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 86–110.

<sup>29</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 95 n. 22. Cf. 99: "The articles of faith for Aquinas are to be located first and foremost in the words of Scripture," an unfortunate restriction in Abraham's eyes.

<sup>30</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 117 (n. 8 in criticism of B. A. Gerrish). With rare honesty, Abraham does not try to draw Luther to his side. After quoting Luther, he writes: "It is a small step from this to a full-blown, exclusivist theological foundationalism..." (126).

grace.”<sup>31</sup> The authority of Scripture is part of soteriology. Under the label “canonical heritage” it is part of the many things the Holy Spirit introduces and uses to vivify and nurture the Church. In an important article, John Webster, with infinitely more self-restraint, also suggests giving priority to the category “means of grace” and a soteriological location.<sup>32</sup>

William Abraham's grand narrative lays itself open to criticism. How can he minimize Irenaeus's zeal against doctrinal falsehood? Most fathers spent an enormous amount of energy fighting for right opinion (orthodoxy!) against other teachings, and their supreme appeal was to the tradition embodied in the Scriptures. They differentiated levels of authority. The Lutheran patristic scholar Marc Lods has shown, with model rigor, that “tradition” and “traditions” were not rules of the same force (one could compare to Torah and halakah): “tradition is the transmission of Holy Scripture, not only the elaboration and conservation of the scriptural canon, but also the preaching in the church of the apostles' witness to Christ, and confessed as the very sign of the existence and unity of the church”; “traditions are the uses and customs which the church needs for her life.”<sup>33</sup> Augustine's clear confession of the absolute superiority of the Scriptures in his famous *Epistle* 82 (to Jerome) is by no means an extravagant idiosyncrasy.<sup>34</sup> Though we do admire his sober clarity, Thomas Aquinas was not the only one in the Middle Ages whom we find standing on the shores of William Abraham's dislike. Richard Muller refers to learned studies of that theological line and says, for instance, of Henry of Ghent that he “adumbrates what Oberman calls ‘Tradition I’ by indicating the priority of Scripture over church, if there were to be a disagreement.”<sup>35</sup> Muller considers that the (French) Jesuit George[s] Tavard (in *Holy Writ and Holy Church*) has been refuted:

Both the church fathers and major thirteenth-century scholastics like Aquinas make the distinction just as clearly [as the Reformation]—thus revealing (contra Tavard) that the assumption of the co-equality of Scripture and tradition held by the late medieval canonists and the Tridentine theologians is an un-catholic aberration over against the catholicity and conservatism of the Reformers.<sup>36</sup>

Why such a vocal disparagement of “form”? Is not form a feature of the real world? Have not Marxist attacks against “formal liberties” brought to light, *a contrario*, how precious “formal” realities may be? Since meaning does not depend on etymology, “authority” could be analyzed as formal indeed. It is the right to determine belief and behavior in others. If these base their decisions on *their* appreciation of the content, they determine themselves, they are not under authority. Authority becomes an empty notion. (The grounds on which authority is being ascribed to someone constitute a separate issue. I may

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<sup>31</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> John Webster, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 9–46, especially 25–29. The article was first published in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Lods, “Les deux niveaux de la tradition chez les Pères anciens,” in *Protestantisme et tradition de l'Eglise*, ed. J.-N. Pères and J.-D. Dubois, Patrimoines christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 64. Cf. his “La quadruple tension de l'ecclésiologie des Pères de l'Eglise ancienne. Ecclesia una, sancta, catholica, apostolica,” in *Protestantisme et tradition de l'Eglise*, 106–8.

<sup>34</sup> Abraham does mention it (*Canon and Criterion*, 95), but with little effect on his overall representation.

<sup>35</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:46.

<sup>36</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:53.

ascribe authority to Muller or Lods on the basis of *my* appreciation of their scientific achievements, but submitting to their authority means that I receive what they say because *they* say it, without pretending myself to assess the matter.)

Actually, I suspect that the form/content polarity slightly shifts the true issue. What is at stake is rather *origin*. When I submit to authority, I follow, or obey, or trust, somebody else, rather than myself. This is valid for the authority of witnesses: because they were there, the testimony they bear, whose content judges cannot determine, plays the role of “epistemic criterion” in court. This is valid for all kinds of authority. Acknowledging authority, the rule of any canon, means renouncing one’s autonomy in the area concerned, renouncing sitting in the judge’s chair. As John Webster finely perceives, “Above all, faithful reading is an aspect of *mortificatio sui*, a repudiation of the desire to assemble all realities, including texts, including even the revelation of God, around the steady centre of my will.”<sup>37</sup>

The levels of authority vary, and so the proper degree of submission. The motives of that submission range from cold recognition of competence to loving trust. Justifications are relevant. *Mortificatio sui* has nothing to do with a foolish suicide. The problem of the canonical authority of Scripture is not its “formal” character, but whether the writers are trustworthy witnesses, whether they are truly (as they claim) the spokesmen of God, through whom we can hear our Lord himself speaking.

The question of trustworthiness and our motives leads us to the soteriological context of the divine speaking. Indeed the gift of Scripture is part and parcel of the economy of our salvation, and cannot be correctly appreciated if we forget its bonds with the total history of redemption. There is no objection to its being included among the “means of grace,” as long as one does not use this inclusion as a pretext for dissolving canonical authority.<sup>38</sup> If the specific “moment” of trusting obedience is preserved, its motive cannot be separated from the encounter of the gracious God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, and this encounter and growing knowledge happen through the contents of Scripture. In this, I gladly concur.

The unfortunate turn occurs when “means of grace” and criterion for knowledge are set against each other. It is a gift of grace *indeed* if a sure Word from God frees us from the darkness of ignorance, from the deceitful winds of teaching which are blowing from every quarter, from the captivity of devilish lies and wordly στοιχεῖα (the Germans could call them the *Zeitgeist*)! William Abraham shows himself strangely blind to this emphasis in the New Testament (and even in the Old, with the fight against false prophecy). Our predicament is enmity towards God τῇ διανοίᾳ, “in our thinking” (Col 1:21)! The apostles never tire of opposing the ἐπίγνωσις of the truth to the γνῶσις falsely so-called of heterodox teachers, already antichrists! Knowledge, as summed up in a “model of sound words” and a “pattern of teaching,” is grace indeed. Conversely, the other gifts of grace, beyond knowledge, are to be appropriated in a conscious, informed, intelligent way: through the Word. The Word is not conceived as a blind force (in the manner of pagan religion, 1 Cor 12:2) but as didactic, and apologetic, discourse: it conveys information and invites responsible examination (Acts 17:11). The Life cannot be separated from the Light, the Light of the *Logos* (John 1:4).

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<sup>37</sup> Webster, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” 43–44.

<sup>38</sup> This, I am afraid, is the case in William Abraham’s treatment. As far as I can see, it is not in John Webster’s. He seems to preserve canonical authority, though his account of inspiration is, in my conviction, woefully insufficient. He explains that “the texts of the canon are human realities annexed by divine use” (“The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” 31), “the holiness of the biblical canon is acquired” (p. 32), and thus suggests that a mere human word pre-exists and is taken up by God’s use (as in Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*); I find in Scripture a powerful emphasis on God’s *initiative* and *production* of the divine-human word.

William Abraham brands the notion of the canon he engages under the phrase “epistemic criterion.” Rather early in his book, he can write, “Everything initially turns on how we construe epistemology.”<sup>39</sup> This concentration on a rather specialized philosophical field is a bit surprising. Abraham discloses that “the deep reason” for his strategic move is “simple: to construe an ecclesial canon, like Holy Scripture, as an epistemic norm is odd in the extreme. It is straightforwardly wrong.”<sup>40</sup> How does he argue so heavy a condemnation? He goes on:

Imagine taking a course in epistemology, where we are exploring what knowledge is and how it is to be related to truth, belief, evidence, justification, warrant, and rationality ... or suppose we are puzzled about the reliability of memory or of sense experience or of induction. Appealing to the canon will get us nowhere.<sup>41</sup>

Abraham’s “victory” is a bit too facile! Of course, Scripture does not deal with the issues discussed in an epistemology course as would be taught in a 21st century university (typically a U.S. one). It would be possible to explore the bearing of the biblical world-view on such issues, but I point here to what appears to be a confusion in Abraham’s argument: canon (the word of God as the rule of truth), sense experience, memory and induction are not factors of the same order, though he treats them as if they were. Whereas the canon of Scripture adjudicates between doctrines, would be normative expressions of Truth, the deliverances of sense perception, inductive reason, etc. are not *norms*, but simply *conditions* of knowledge. In our relationship to Scripture, the reliability of perception, of memory, etc., does not function as a yardstick to measure truthfulness, it merely serves our access to the meaning (we could not read without them). (The problem of that reliability having been affected by human sinfulness is a distinct one. The solution can be developed along the following lines: our fallen faculties can play their part, despite damages and corruption, because common grace safeguards their minimally reliable functioning. The underlying consideration is this: Special revelation presupposes general revelation; redemption presupposes creation, which the fall into sin was not able to cancel or abolish.) If “epistemic” is taken in its primary and etymological meaning, “relative to knowledge,” the Scriptures *have been given us* as the supreme and saving “epistemic criterion,” to lead us into the knowledge of Him Who Is True, while freeing us from the tyranny of the spirit of falsehood (1 John 5:20; 4:6). This pattern is consistent, and reflects the way Scripture has been the criterion for faith and life, and the vivifying *instruction* leading to the knowledge of God, throughout the history of the church.

### *3. Canon and Church: A Non-Symmetrical Correlation*

The history of the church.... The sphere of Scripture’s “rule” has primarily been the church, and the relationship between the two is a delicate but vital issue. John C. Peckham brings out the opposition of two fundamental models of canonicity: either canonical status is conferred by the community, extrinsically; or canonical status is merely recognized by the community, which may or may not make an official pronouncement.<sup>42</sup> One meets the community-based model today in two sharply different forms:

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<sup>39</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 13 (cf. 48–51).

<sup>42</sup> Peckham, “The Canon and Biblical Authority,” 230.

first, the Roman Catholic traditional theology of canon renovated as the times require (*aggiornata*); second, the late modern one (or hyper-modern, or postmodern, this slippery label).

I wish quickly to dispose of the late modern view.<sup>43</sup> The correlation of church and canon is conceived of with a relativistic twist: each community shapes its own identity by choosing, as it is free to do so, which writings will become the privileged reference in its life; there is no higher point of view, and the Holy Spirit is supposed to move happily through plurality and the “riches” of divergences. The late modern approach has been ably criticized by several authors, and I simply quote some names as my shield. David Wells has valiantly fought the good fight for decades; D. A. Carson has combined depth of competence with the ability to reach a wide readership; William L. Craig has sent fiery missiles on target; Anthony C. Thiselton has brought his academic prestige to bear on the issue in a thoroughly responsible way. Less well-known, I would add Ben F. Meyer, a New Testament scholar with philosophical acumen, in the wake of Bernard Lonergan.<sup>44</sup> I would specially draw attention to Vern S. Poythress’s handling of the topic (also because the book-title does not signal its presence): it is exceptional by the sympathy it shows in its listening of so-called postmodern thinkers and deconstructionists, and, at the same time, by the depth of his critique.<sup>45</sup> He can use their insights to unmask idolatries of the self, yet showing that they do not go deep enough; he even finds an unexpected kinship with Van Til.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the classic argument: skeptics and relativists are sawing off the branch on which they sit, I would insist on the unavowed presence of a “grand narrative” in postmodernism, even a message of redemption,<sup>47</sup> and hidden dogma—when one hits at the dogma or only threatens it, what an explosion of intolerance! Coming back to the correlation of canon and community, its *vanity* should be manifest. Submitting to a canon one has made resembles the worship mocked by Isaiah (44:9–20): one bows before the idol one has drawn and chiseled.

The Roman Catholic version has more dignity. The foremost Jesuit theologian Bernard Sesboué has offered, no too long ago, an updated defense, in the spirit of Karl Rahner.<sup>48</sup> He acknowledges a “circular” correlation between Scripture and Church and claims that “the Church constructs the New Testament in two successive stages: first, she writes, in apostolic times, the texts which compose the collection, and, then, she confers to these writings the character of Scriptures, that is, she constitutes

<sup>43</sup> See the excellent synthesis by Webster, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” 11–17.

<sup>44</sup> Ben F. Meyer, *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), especially 224–26 and 370–82. Responding to Rorty, Poythress writes, “a form a spiritual cruelty to others has already begun: postmodern rhetoric, through its picture of the limits of languages and cultures, endeavors to lead others into the conviction that their thirst for God cannot be satisfied. It throws people into a prison of the mind, where they must live in spiritual thirst all their lives, consoled only by the conviction that their thirst is vain. They do have one drop of water, namely, the godlike feeling that they have mastered the problem of life by perceiving that there is no problem (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.521). This water must be recycled interminably” (p. 226 n. 8).

<sup>46</sup> Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 372 n. 5; the idea, more tacitly, surfaces in other places.

<sup>47</sup> Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 224. In French, “Eglise” (Church) is feminine in grammatical gender (like ἐκκλησία in Greek): I chose to keep that gender when translating the pronoun (hence “she”) because of the part that female representations of the Church, first of all the Mother, plays in Catholic doctrine and piety.

<sup>48</sup> Sesboué, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 13–44.

them into a canonical corpus, that enjoys the same authority as the older Scriptures.”<sup>49</sup> But he allows, in one sense, that Scripture precedes the Church, because of the links with the Old Testament and the foundational event. He does not deny that “inspiration precedes and grounds canon.”<sup>50</sup> He does not stress, as older Catholics had done, the church’s authority as she selected the books and promulgated the list. He rather insists, after Rahner, on the ecclesial origin of the writings themselves. Inspiration represents the human mediation of the transcendental experience of God: God is *auctor* of Scripture as the transcendent cause, and the *auctor* of the church in its constitutive moment.<sup>51</sup> Sesboüé reaches this daring proposition: “We may legitimately say that inspiration is a positive and particular form of divine providence towards the early church [*Eglise primitive*].”<sup>52</sup> His stance on grace and free-will enables him to defend the paradox: “in a way, what is human decides on what is divine.”<sup>53</sup>

Sesboüé’s line is not the only one among Roman Catholic theologians. Yves Congar pointedly criticizes Rahner’s scheme and maintains that Scripture has authority *over* the church as well as within the church.<sup>54</sup> Though Sesboüé does mention the “*vis-à-vis*” of Bible and church,<sup>55</sup> his proposal undermines what John Webster calls the “over-againstness” between the two.<sup>56</sup> Ecumenical good manners should not mute our protest. With Webster, we maintain that the church’s part regarding the New Testament canon has been “an act of confession of that which precedes and imposes itself on the church (that is, the *viva vox Jesu Christi* mediated through the apostolic testimony) and which evokes a Spirit-guided assent.”<sup>57</sup> Karl Barth proclaims, “Not the church created the witness of prophets and apostles, but the witness of the prophets and apostles created the church—even before it was written.”<sup>58</sup> If we think we can decide about the Bible, we are in great danger: “this is the method which, to a large extent has been practiced by Catholicism, which, for that very reason, must be considered as the classical paradigm of all heresies.”<sup>59</sup> Fearless!

At the same time, Barth does not ignore the other Catholic line: Vatican I itself and such a representative *Dogmatiker* as Bernhard Bartmann have stated that the church’s decision about the canon was to *acknowledge* what God had previously inspired and decided.<sup>60</sup> As Oscar Cullmann argued long ago (highlighting the two senses of “tradition”), the ancient church bowed before the precedence of the Word as she was led *not* to call “apostles” the apostles’ successors. In effect, however, this non-

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<sup>49</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 14.

<sup>50</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 14 and 41 (“canonization does not institute nor constitute inspiration”).

<sup>51</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 33 (cf. 25).

<sup>52</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 42.

<sup>53</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 41 (“c’est l’humain qui décide du divin”). One “technical” weakness in Sesboüé’s article which may be mentioned is the reference to the (legendary) “Greek canon” (pp. 18, 43).

<sup>54</sup> Yves Congar, “Inspiration des Ecritures canoniques et apostolicité de l’Eglise,” *RSPT* 45 (1961): 32–42.

<sup>55</sup> Sesboüé, “La canonisation des Ecritures,” 14.

<sup>56</sup> Webster, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” 32.

<sup>57</sup> Webster, “The Dogmatic Location of the Canon,” 38–39.

<sup>58</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatique*, trans. Fernand Ryser (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 1955), I/2:96 (for convenience sake I am using the French translation; the passage is found in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2:614).

<sup>59</sup> Barth, *Dogmatique*, I/2:97 (615 in the German original).

<sup>60</sup> Barth, *Dogmatique*, I/2:17 (525 in the German original).

symmetrical relationship hardly works if interpretation falls under the institution's power—and this is justified by the Christ-church continuity. Berkouwer courageously maintains, “Any view of continuity that does not retain the possibility of calling the Church to order, because she is the ‘definitive’ reality of salvation, is illegitimate.”<sup>61</sup> He recalls the freedom of rebuke and threat of the Old Testament prophets, and convincingly comments, “There is no suggestion that the situation of the Church in the New Testament presents an entirely different structure of admonition. Rather, there is a striking continuity here in the call to faith and obedience.”<sup>62</sup> The church is the Body of Christ *as his Bride*, who humbly faces her Lord (the *vis-à-vis* pattern); he eliminates, through the Word, her too human wrinkles and blemishes (Eph 5:26–27; cf. 2 Tim 3:16).

What is decisive here is the role of the apostles. There is plenty of evidence that the ancient church used apostolic authorship or authorization as the primary criterion of canonicity: orthodoxy, antiquity, use in worship, attestation by churches that could boast apostolic foundation, were to a large extent means of confirming apostolic origin.<sup>63</sup> Marc Lods's summary is admirably firm:

At the end of the 1st century and at the beginning of the 2nd, the church decides to let herself be controlled by the written norm of the *canon*: she gives herself the “rule” of apostolicity which leads her to reject all tradition other than the written tradition and commits her, in the future, to follow this norm she assigned herself. We then encounter a real identity: canonicity = apostolicity.<sup>64</sup>

Kuyper plays the apostolic character down, and even (angrily?) labels the argument that Mark and Luke wrote under the responsibility of Peter and Paul an illusory “way of escape” (*uitvlucht*),<sup>65</sup> but this negative assessment has not found much acceptance among his disciples. Herman Ridderbos's perspective seems much better to agree with the data:

Christ established a *formal authority structure to be the source and the standard for all future preaching of the gospel....* By giving authority to His apostles, Christ himself has given a foundation to His church. This canon has an entirely unique, absolutely authoritative and closed character, and can be preserved only in written form.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, trans. James E. Davison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 175.

<sup>62</sup> Berkouwer, *The Church*, 175–76. Note 37 (p. 176) quotes from Luther's answer to Erasmus, who had invoked continuity: “what is hard and problematical is just this: ascertaining whether those whom you call the church were the church.”

<sup>63</sup> Bruce calls, for instance, antiquity and orthodoxy “aspects of the apostolic criterion,” which thus became “subsidiary criteria” (*The Canon of Scripture*, 259).

<sup>64</sup> Marc Lods, “Tradition et Canon des Ecritures,” in *Protestantisme et tradition de l'Eglise*, ed. J.-N. Pères and J.-D. Dubois, Patrimoines christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 52. He adds that, apparently, it was easily accepted, without opposition, and fighting heresy was not the main incentive. See also Ralph P. Martin, “Authority in the Light of the Apostolate, Tradition and the Canon,” *EvQ* 40 (1968): 66–82.

<sup>65</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:35.

<sup>66</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, revised ed., Biblical and Theological Studies (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988), 13 (italics his) and 30, as quoted by J. C. Peckham, “The Canon and Biblical Authority,” 235, 236 (n. 26).

This agrees with the mission of the apostles in the Synoptics and especially Luke-Acts; with the role assigned to them in the Johannine corpus (future believers will believe through their word, John 17:20);<sup>67</sup> and with Paul's emphasis on the foundation of prophets and apostles (Eph 2:20).

Now, the apostles stand by Christ's side *vis-à-vis* the church. In their private persons, indeed, they are members in the church (and this is significant), but *qua* apostles they must be seen, before the church, as sent into the world that the church may be born, and then, in charge of the infant church: once for all to deliver to the saints the faith (*fides quae*) by which they must live (Jude 3) and to lay among them the παραθήκη they will keep unaltered (2 Tim 1:14). This structure is implied by the simile of *foundation*, which is there once for all, and distinct from the house. Paul's illustration in 2 Corinthians 11:2 is very telling: the apostle's role is that of the Bridegroom's friend—on the Bridegroom's side, therefore. This brings the needed corrective to the Catholic emphasis on continuity.

The redemptive-historical viewpoint clarifies the closure of the Scriptural canon. The Word of Special revelation does not teach only timeless truths on God and rules of conduct valid at all times: it is part of the economy of redemption. It proclaims the once for all event of our salvation, it witnesses to the fact (apostles must be eyewitnesses), it discloses the meaning and corollaries. In accordance with the prologue of Hebrews, the New Testament canon represents the culmination "in the Son" of God's communication, and the message of the cross whereby believers appropriate its benefits. "The closed nature of the canon," Ridderbos writes, "thus rests ultimately on the once-for-all significance of the New Testament history of redemption itself, as that history is presented by the apostolic witness."<sup>68</sup>

The redemptive-historical perspective also helps to disentangle the ways canonical authority is exercised. Not all parts function in the same way, but as fits the development of God's plan in history. John Goldingay draws attention to Jesus's hermeneutics in Matthew 19:3–8: the authority of Moses's permission of divorce is interpreted by the authority of the foundational saying in Genesis 2; in that sense we might speak of a "canon within the canon"—Goldingay wisely adds, "This does not mean the outer canon ceases to be canon; we must not make the canon within the canon into the canon."<sup>69</sup> The principle may also be applied to the normative character of Old testament regulations for Christians.

In the debate with Roman Catholic theology, one may spot an underlying issue. The view of time (with probable roots in the view of eternity) may deeply influence the whole approach. One is struck by the emphasis on the continuity of time, as if all successive moments "stuck" to one another. One telling illustration would be the cult of relics. To many, it goes without saying that the prerogatives of an apostle who ministered in this or that church (guess which!) pass on to the later pastors of that church. The sacrifice of the Mass could also be considered. This contrasts with the atomistic dispersion of instants in existentialism, and, more generally, the "pluralization" of time in late modernity. Paul Ricoeur acknowledges the difficulty, and the absence of a solution (how can we affirm *one* history?).<sup>70</sup> The Bible does highlight events happening once-for-all, and the differences between epochs, but it grounds the unity of their diversity in the one purpose and sovereign rule of God: beyond the world. The distinction between the once for all gift of canon and the process of its reception is a distinction between times.

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<sup>67</sup> This was recently brought to my attention by Sylvain Romerowski.

<sup>68</sup> Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 25, as quoted by Peckham, "The Canon and Biblical Authority," 247.

<sup>69</sup> John Goldingay, "Old Testament Theology and the Canon," *TynB* 59 (2008):16.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 3: *le Temps raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 371–74. He does discern (p. 372 n. 1), that a "theology of history" could provide a solution, but he rejects the thought of a "univocal super-plot" (God's plan, πρόθεσις, in New Testament language).

#### 4. Canon and Reception: The Warrants of Identification

How does reception take place? How are writings which ought to be considered canonical identified?

I leave aside the case of the Old Testament canon. The principle enunciated in Romans 3:2 basically settles the matter. The oracles of God from the time of God's covenant with Israel were entrusted to Israel. Israel, during that preparatory period, had received institutions that did not frustrate the Lord's purpose: despite personal unfaithfulness, Israel's institutional pastors did fulfil their mandate, they did determine which books were holy ("defiling hands"), which books were within and which were without (*hîšônîm*) the sacred collection. We receive them from their hands. Jerome was right in calling back to the *hebraica veritas*. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (who had presided over Luther's graduation ceremony!) led the Protestant Reformation on the right track in his 1520 *De canonicis libris libellus*. Since it is not unreasonable to believe that the tripartite Hebrew canon was basically recognized before the 1st century AD, our Lord's sanction should be enough for us, his disciples.<sup>71</sup>

The several centuries needed for a broad consensus to emerge on the total list of New Testament books generates some anxiety when the question of this canon is asked. The late modern suspicion of power, even the power of candidates to martyrdom shepherding persecuted flocks, and the common sympathy for dissenters, for rebels of every stripe (conformism of non-conformism) render the question more pressing. For some, it may be dramatic: how were our books identified and selected? The Roman Catholic answer relies on the authority of the church; however, as we just saw, this distorts the relationship. The classical Protestant answer has been twofold: the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, and divine providence as evidenced in history. Kuyper speaks of an "historical-mystical fact."<sup>72</sup> His emphasis falls on the "mystical" component: his taste for the word is rather unusual in the Reformed tradition,<sup>73</sup> but recourse to the role of the Spirit as an answer to the question "How is canonicity recognized?" has been essential in Protestant orthodoxy.

Earlier Reformers introduced the theme (suggested by Rom 8:16), but it was given to John Calvin classically to formulate the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* (*Institutes* 1.7, especially §5). Later writers depend on him and differ only by nuances and technicalities. Despite his ambition of clarity, what he has in mind is not so easy to determine. One should proceed from what is surest to the less certain.

1. Calvin does not think of a *creative* event, which would make the word of Scripture into something it was not before; through the witness of the Spirit, Scripture is credited with the certainty *it deserves* (*Institutes* 1.7.5); if we say that through that event, it becomes the word of God, this must be understood only *quoad nos*.
2. Calvin does not imagine (or experience) an added, further, revelation from God, a voice from heaven resonating in his heart: "this book is fully inspired, that one is not"; this would have been illuministic, "enthusiasm" in the older sense (the Reformers charged

<sup>71</sup> I canvassed the debate on the books Catholics (since Sixtus of Siena) label "Deuterocanonical" in my article "Helpful or Harmful? The 'Apocrypha' and Evangelical Theology," *EuroJTh* 13 (2004): 81–90.

<sup>72</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:26, and several times in subsequent pages.

<sup>73</sup> I noticed the use of the word—several times "of his heart"—on pp. 25, 43, 45, 46, 48, 50, 55. I found it once in Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 590 (§ 152).

- the Roman Church with that betrayal of the rule of truth: one remembers Luther in the Smalkald Articles, "On Confession": *papatus simpliciter est merus enthusiasmus*).
3. Calvin probably means more than the healing of our spiritual blindness, the creation or restoration in us of a proper sensitivity, so that we are able to perceive the marks of Scripture's divinity; this illumination is not denied, but it does not amount properly to *witness*. Bavinck regrets that later Reformed theologians—he names Turretin, Amyraut and Du Moulin—were satisfied with this weakened construal of the *testimonium*.<sup>74</sup>
  4. Calvin does not separate the Spirit's witness from the saving effect of the Word; whereas the tendency among the Lutherans would identify the two—in order better to defend the *fides ex auditu*—Calvin seems only to conjoin them.<sup>75</sup>
  5. Calvin's interest is first of all to exalt the supreme authority of Scripture as the word of God, *autopistos*, and to avoid any "authorization" by a higher authority: God is the only witness adequate to himself (*Institutes* 1.13.21 and already 1.11.1, apart from 1.7.4; cf. 1.9.2). Could the inner witness simply represent the "x" factor which must be posited to safeguard this supremacy and the sovereignty of grace, knowing the total inability of the human heart? Calvin calls it "secret" (*Institutes* 1.7.4), and this adjective might suggest that there is nothing more to say. However, he also uses such an "experiential" language that the abstract interpretation is little likely.
  6. Calvin seems to interpret the effect of the Spirit's witness as a "feeling" (French: *sentiment*) compared to our immediate, and "infallible," perception of the difference of black and white, of sweet and bitter (*Institutes* 1.7.2). Is it a pure intuition? Does he allude to a more diversified inner experience? Some Calvin scholars of note, such as Emile Doumergue and Ronald Wallace, have spoken of him as a *mystic*.<sup>76</sup> Calvin was no extrovert, and it is difficult indeed to pinpoint the experience he enjoyed. There was a powerful existential core that filled him with indomitable assurance.

Appealing to a kind of mystical experience has not been typical among the Reformed orthodox. Liberals have valued mysticism, and authorized whatever was left of canonical authority on such a basis, but it was done in a theological framework deeply inimical to Calvin's most cherished convictions. Kuyper, however, may again be considered. Not only does he delight in repeating "mystical": he also sets the Spirit's testimony against scientific inquiry as Calvin would not have done.<sup>77</sup> He argues, not as the bare fact of history, but as a determination of the more adequate approach: "One should not forget here that Scripture came on the scene in a world which found force more in the *imaging* than in the *thinking*

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<sup>74</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1906), 1:628 (§ 151), with the three Latin names, Turretinus, Amyraldus, Molinaeus. The translation in *Reformed Dogmatics*, 584, renders: Turretin (which is correct, François is here in view), Amyrald (whereas the French name is Amyraut, Moyse), and, through an unfortunate confusion, Molina (whereas Luis Molina, the Jesuit father of Molinism, is not at all concerned, but Pierre Du Moulin is the name which was Latinized as Molinaeus).

<sup>75</sup> On this difference, Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1908), 1:179–80.

<sup>76</sup> Emile Doumergue, *Le Caractère de Calvin* (Paris: Foi & Vie, 1921), 58–59; Ronald S. Wallace, "A Christian Theologian: Calvin's Approach to Theology," in *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Approach and Method*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1987), 126–29, 136, 142–43.

<sup>77</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:55.

powers of our consciousness, and for this reason Scripture is much rather to be evaluated aesthetically as a work of art than critically as a work of thought.”<sup>78</sup> It would be worth tracing the possible roots of Kuyperianism in Romanticism! (Accordingly, the concept he brings to the fore on almost every page is the concept of *organism*!)

The advantage of the concept of organism, beloved of Romantic philosophers (the way had been opened by Kant’s *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*), is the possibility of bridging the gap that separates the principle of canon and the completion of the list. The testimony of the Spirit will seal certainty about Scripture as a whole; it hardly enables one to choose between Esther and Judith, or between the Epistle of Jude and 1 Clement! Kuyper so stresses the organic unity of Scripture, with his “special canonicity” devoted to the function which each book fulfills as a member in the “body,”<sup>79</sup> that he can hope to extend to each particular choice the certainty drawn from the mystical insight.

Is this an Achilles’ heel? In his *Open Letter to Protestants*, (Saint) François de Sales exclaims,

Now let us see what rule they have for discerning the canonical books from all the other ecclesiastical ones. “The witness,” they say, “and inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit.” Oh God, what a hiding place, what a fog, what a night! We are not in this way very enlightened in so important and grave a matter [*différend*: disagreement]. We ask how we can know the canonical books. We would very much like to have some rule for detecting them, and we are told of what takes place in the interior of the soul that no one sees, no one knows, except the soul itself and its Creator.<sup>80</sup>

François de Sales then raises the problem of discernment (which “spirit”?), of the precise content of the alleged experience, of its value. What are worth the individual certainties of Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin, compared to the work of the Spirit in Church Councils?

The most thorough treatment I have come across is the treatment by Herman Bavinck, who is less indebted to a Romantic inspiration than Kuyper (though he also uses “organic”). His response to Roman Catholic theologians shows that they face the same difficulty. If they are asked the ground of their trust in the church institutions or of what they maintain about Scripture when its primacy is not denied, they must answer as Protestants do. “Rome, with its infallible church and its infallible pope, has no advantage over the churches of the Reformation. Faith’s deepest ground, in Rome as in Protestantism, is located in the subject.”<sup>81</sup> The burden of his contribution is a theological analysis which demonstrates that knowledge in all fields depends on a witness of the *Logos*: even in the natural sciences; it corresponds to the first principles nobody can demonstrate.<sup>82</sup> He also, with Reformed predecessors, unfolds the breadth of the Spirit’s testimony, “in the church throughout the centuries.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:56. Cf. p. 32, where he recommends a “poetic standpoint.”

<sup>79</sup> Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 3:45.

<sup>80</sup> François de Sales, *Open Letter to Protestants* 6.6.5. I am using the translation quoted by Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 167, borrowed from a book by Popkin. The quotation led me to the *Lettre*, I found the references and accessed the text online.

<sup>81</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:582 (§150).

<sup>82</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:586–90 (§152).

<sup>83</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:596–98 (§154), phrase taken from p. 597. On the same page a passage from Spanheim is quoted, introduced and translated in this way: “The testimony of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is ‘the

The last argument corresponds to the appeal to *providence* in history. The fear of subjectivity in individual experience is counterbalanced by the communal dimension. A collective consciousness is less liable to be led astray by accidental circumstances, personality problems, and all the guiles of the devil.<sup>84</sup> Just as classics in literature are revealed as they endure, the qualitative difference of the books fully inspired has been tested by the passing of time, through the succession of different generations. We may even say that it has been a case “of the survival of the fittest.”<sup>85</sup>

The assurance one can draw from such a consideration, however, would be ruined if significantly divergent canons were competing. Almost incredibly, *this is not the case*. Whereas Christendom has been divided on so many issues, and not a few essential, the same New Testament (the Old Testament was entrusted to Israel, who had to identify the canonical books and did) is being received everywhere with the minor exceptions of Syrian and Copts. Roger Nicole writes of “the stunning near unanimity of Christian churches,” from Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox to Pentecostals and Adventists.<sup>86</sup> This *looks* like providential guidance.

There is no certainty of faith outside of faith. The validity of our confession of the canon of Scripture cannot be demonstrated on any “neutral” ground. Yet, in the Lord’s light, we see light, enough light for us to move on. When we realize that if the illuministic temptation is to be overcome and if the completion of doctrinal revelation is to be recognized (Heb 1:1), the only alternative is this: canonical recognition can only be a process showing human fallibility; when we discern that the inevitable subjectivity of individual faith is balanced by the effect of the Word of Scripture through generations; when we observe in the rare agreement of all branches of Christendom the sign of a providential leading; there are enough considerations to quell in our hearts unhealthy fears. We have not been duped by the tricks of our own spirit, or of other spirits not holy. We cannot control the situation, but we are at peace: no mastery, but a friendly, a fatherly, mystery.

The situation fits our relationship to God: radical dependence, even helplessness if we look to ourselves—and yet, the responsibility of partners of God, sons and daughters, able by his grace to hear his voice in human discourses, to identify his messengers, to confess the rule we need.

The situation fits God’s relationship to his creation. God is free to speak in his world through instruments he perfectly masters, and thereby making them truly free. God is free to create a discourse, or a collection of discourses that are 100% his word. As he was free to become this man, who spoke the words of God because he was 100% God. God’s sovereign control and immanence ensured that this man was really a man, an earthling, and it ensured that his word was written in books, in ordinary forms, without losing its divine quality. His transcendence entailed that this man and this word were different

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primary motive toward faith or the principle by which, or the argument on account of which, Scripture becomes regulative (*kanonikon*) and non-apodictic (*anapodeikton*).” That translation should be corrected. The passage in the original (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1:644) reads: “Het getuigenis des H. Geestes in de Schrift is het motivum *kurion* ad fidem seu principium, quo gignitur, vel argumentum propter quod, *kanonikon kai anapodeikton*.” I would therefore translate: “The testimony of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is the primary [or supreme] motive toward faith, or the principle by which faith is begotten, the argument on account of which, *kanonikon kai anapodeikton* [which means: normative and elevated above all need of proof].”

<sup>84</sup> E.g., Lecerf, “Remarques sur le Canon des Saintes Ecritures,” 18.

<sup>85</sup> A phrase from Bruce Metzger used by Eckhard Schnabel, “History, Theology and the Biblical Canon: An Introduction to Basic Issues,” *Themelios* 20.2 (1995): 19.

<sup>86</sup> Roger Nicole, “The Canon of the New Testament,” in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2002), 98.

from other men and from other texts: they had to be identified as God and as God-given. And the difference between special intervention and constant control, since this control includes the permission of evil and still the weakness of God's servants, accounts for the length of the process of identification, and the groping clumsiness of much of it. So with the Scriptural canon, so with Christ our Lord.

# Brains, Bodies, and the Task of Discipleship: Re-Aligning Anthropology and Ministry

— Matthew C. Bingham —

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**Abstract:** Exploring the intersection of anthropology and ministry, this article offers an appreciative critique of recent authors who suggest that effective Christian discipleship requires holistic, bodily engagement. James K. A. Smith and others have helpfully drawn attention to ways in which contemporary evangelical approaches to Christian formation can risk over-emphasizing the transfer of information while neglecting things like desire, love, and imagination. Having thus diagnosed the problem, these authors suggest that the solution lies in a turn towards “embodied rituals” that they believe can more effectively form the whole person. Through a critical evaluation of this proposal, the present article seeks to distinguish between its attractive aspects and those which would unhelpfully undermine the Reformation emphasis on the primacy of Word ministry. The article concludes by suggesting ways in which evangelicals might advance a more holistic approach to discipleship that is congruent with longstanding Reformation priorities.

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## *1. Introduction*

**T**he call to Christian ministry is a call to make disciples, a call to “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2) so that each believer might grow to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). *That* this is so seems clear enough in Scripture. Yet precisely *how* and *by what means* disciples are to be made has proven far more controversial throughout the history of Christianity. Whether debating the optimal balance between Word and Sacrament in corporate worship or querying the biblical warrant for everything from small groups to monastic orders, the means through which Christians might best “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18) has been a perpetual cause of controversy and debate, and a potential source of tension for church leaders who feel acutely the ministerial responsibility to “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).

And while such issues are often considered to be primarily matters of practice—more about what Christians *do* rather than what Christians *believe*—it is essential to recognize that practical questions about the means of discipleship are actually downstream from more fundamental questions about Christian anthropology. What we think people *are* will inevitably affect how we interact with them, how we minister to them, and how we disciple them. Or, to put it negatively, if we misunderstand what human beings *are* then we will inevitably misunderstand how to best help them grow. Thus, to successfully disciple the men and women in our churches, we must first correctly align our anthropological conviction with our ministerial practice.

Helpfully, this basic continuity between anthropological theory and ministerial praxis has been highlighted in recent years by a growing number of evangelical thinkers. Authors such as Justin Whitmel Earley, Tish Harrison Warren, and Dru Johnson all take seriously the need to correlate *who* we are with *how* we minister and are sensitive to the ways in which a persistent neglect in this area has done spiritual harm to many.<sup>1</sup> Leading the pack in terms of scholarly productivity, influence, and depth of vision is surely the theologian and philosopher James K. A. Smith. While Smith's thoughts on ministry and anthropology can be found spread throughout his substantial body of work, his most sustained vision for aligning anthropology and ministry appears in his *Desiring the Kingdom* and its more accessible follow-up, *You Are What You Love*.<sup>2</sup> Insightful, creative, and erudite, these books make the point that “every approach to discipleship and Christian formation assumes an implicit model of what human beings are,” and it is thus incumbent upon the church to pursue patterns of discipleship that conform to a biblical picture of the human person.<sup>3</sup> In other words, those who care about getting discipleship right must work hard to correctly align their ministry with their anthropology.

But it is at precisely this point where Smith and others worry that contemporary evangelicalism has failed. They argue that the “approach to discipleship and Christian formation” advanced by most evangelicals today conceals an impoverished anthropology that does not properly align with a more holistic and biblical understanding of the same. Namely, Smith claims that most evangelicals assume “an overly cognitivist picture of the human person” that “tends to foster an overly intellectualist account of what it means to be or become a Christian.” This misshapen faith, Smith contends, “is a talking-head version of Christianity that is fixated on doctrines and ideas” but neglects equally important aspects of being human, things like desire, love, and imagination.<sup>4</sup>

This is an important critique that all Christians—and especially those in ministry—cannot afford to ignore. My own experience of American and British evangelicalism, particularly in its Calvinistic and Reformed expressions, suggests that Smith's diagnosis of a “talking-head” Christianity that fails to really engage the hearts of its hearers is often worryingly accurate. Were critics like Smith to review my own past preaching efforts, for example, they would certainly find ample evidence to advance their

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016); Dru Johnson, *Human Rites: The Power of Rituals, Habits, and Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 42.

thesis. I cringe to recall one particular attempt to preach 1 Corinthians 15 on Easter Sunday in which I delivered up a 5,300 word treatise that featured many fine exegetical and theological comments but offered very few reasons why anyone should care. Looking back over the manuscript, I see that many concepts and key words were explained and defined, but little attempt was made to actually engage the hearts and imaginations of my hearers; there simply was not a lot there to draw them into the drama of the resurrection and kindle their desire to know and serve the resurrected Christ. Such preaching does indeed seem to betray precisely the sort of misalignment of ministry and anthropology that worries thinkers like Smith, a misalignment that implicitly “reduces human beings to brains-on-a-stick.”<sup>5</sup>

And yet, while one might affirm this diagnosis of the problem, serious questions can still be raised regarding the particular re-alignment being offered by Smith and company. Of particular interest is the increasingly popular claim that the road back from an overly intellectualized faith runs through the body. Evangelicals are being told that the best, or, perhaps, the *only* way to properly form disciples is to find modes of worship and reverence that engage bodies rather than just minds. At their most forceful, these authors seem to claim that real spiritual growth will be difficult, if not impossible, apart from holistic bodily engagement. As Smith has put it, the “way to the heart is through the body.”<sup>6</sup>

If such claims could be substantiated they would represent a major indictment of the typical evangelical worship service, small group meeting, or “quiet time,” all of which are word-heavy and body-light. These claims regarding the primacy of the body would also lend credibility to many longstanding critiques of the Protestant tradition as leveled by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Indeed, channeling the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor, Smith suggests that “one of the unintended consequences of the Protestant Reformation ... was a process of excarnation—of disembodiment of the Christian faith, turning it into a ‘heady’ affair that could be boiled down to a message and grasped with the mind.”<sup>7</sup> The charge that Protestant worship fails to holistically engage the whole person and all five senses is a standard point of contention between the representatives of Wittenberg and Geneva on the one hand and those of Rome and Constantinople on the other. Thus, one cannot help but notice some conspicuous continuities between, for example, James Smith’s rhetoric in *You Are What You Love* and Christian Smith’s account of his departure from evangelicalism and conversion to Roman Catholicism. When the latter Smith complains that Protestantism naively equates discipleship with “didactic learning,” one could be forgiven for confusing him with the former.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, while perhaps troubling to historically-minded Protestants, observing such continuities is not our purpose here. Rather, the present article wishes to consider a more practical question: namely, if I am an evangelical church leader, does my failure to promote embodied practices in worship and discipleship result in stunted spiritual growth for the people under my spiritual care? Have I badly misaligned my anthropology and my ministry? If evangelical church leaders are indeed operating with an implicit anthropology that is malformed and sub-biblical, an anthropology that regards men and

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 101; cf. Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Christian Smith, *How to Go from Being a Good Evangelical to a Committed Catholic in Ninety-Five Difficult Steps* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 100; on the appeal of Catholicism and Orthodoxy among evangelicals, see Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (London: Apollos, 2017), 253–73.

women made in God's image as little more than "brains-on-sticks," then we have serious work to do. But if, on the other hand, the charge rests upon faulty assumptions and fails to capture the richness of the Protestant tradition, then the rising popularity of such rhetoric among ostensibly Reformation-minded evangelicals is, itself, a cause for legitimate concern.

In what follows, this article will interact with this cluster of issues across four major sections. To begin, we will glance back to the Protestant Reformation to briefly consider how the Reformers themselves sought to align Christian ministry with a more biblical anthropology. Then we will shift our attention from the Reformers' re-alignment project to the contemporary proposals on offer from evangelicals like Smith, offering both an analysis followed by an appreciative critique. And, then, finally, we will build on that appreciative critique by exploring how those in ministry today might capitalize on some of the helpful insights advanced by the aforementioned authors, while also avoiding roads that may lead to unhelpful places.

## *2. Past Alignments: Anthropology, Ministry, and the Protestant Project*

The quest to successfully align anthropology and ministry is not new. One might even conceive of the Reformation itself as an attempt to do just that. Though we typically identify the Reformation's *raison d'être* with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, it is also worth noting that the recovery of that soteriological insight into how a person stands before a holy God was inseparable from the recovery of a vital anthropological insight about the kind of creatures God has made us to be. Namely, God made men and women as creatures who acquire that justifying faith through hearing God's word. The reformers recovered not only the centrality of faith, but also an apostolic anthropology that foregrounds the divinely-appointed means through which that faith is kindled: "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 14:17). Thus inspired by an understanding of the human person as the kind of creature who is spiritually transformed through hearing and understanding and appropriating the proclamation of God's word, the reformers "all, without exception, regarded preaching as fundamental to their duty as pastors, and to their evangelical mission."<sup>9</sup>

The reformers' enthusiasm for preaching is well appreciated, but what is perhaps less well appreciated is the way in which this privileging of word ministry represented a profound attempt to align anthropology with ministry. Think of what Protestants were rejecting when they did this: they were rejecting a religious world of late-medieval Catholicism in which the body was effectively privileged over the mind and heart, an observation best illustrated by considering the medieval mass. As the Roman Catholic historian Eamon Duffy has documented, "the liturgy lay at the heart of medieval religion, and the Mass lay at the heart of the liturgy."<sup>10</sup> But by what mechanism did the mass shape and form the people of God? Transformation was certainly not imagined as happening through hearing the words of life, meditating upon them, and being transformed thereby. The words of the mass, after all, were recited in a Latin which very few could understand, and were delivered with the priest facing *ad orientem* or with his back to the people. Thus, the late-medieval mass seemed signally unconcerned

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 91.

with how words and ideas might affect the faithful. Rather the mass achieved its desired effects through the proper arrangement of physical bodies.

For the mass to be efficacious, one required, in the first place, a proper *body* to officiate—that is, a priest’s body, a rightly ordained body, a body which, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, had been impressed with a special metaphysical character that differentiated it from other non-ordained bodies. Then one needed this proper body to be physically located in the proper place: in the church, at the altar, facing east. And then, while there, this particular body in this particular physical location needed to coordinate his lips and arms in a series of carefully prescribed movements, uttering the words of institution and elevating the consecrated host above his head, a choreographed liturgical dance that, if done correctly, effected necessarily the miracle of transubstantiation and the concomitant flow of divine grace.

At each step, this represented a privileging of the physical over the cognitive and the affective—right bodies, in right places, doing right things, and repeating right words. If the priest happened to be reflecting deeply upon sacred mysteries while raising the host above his head, that would be wonderful, but if, instead, he rushed, if he mumbled, if his thoughts wandered and were largely elsewhere, it did not compromise the efficacy of the mass performed because, ultimately, what mattered was that the proper physical things were properly coordinated in time and space. This basic logic was intrinsic to the system and it generated “a sort of ‘arithmetical piety’ that gave ‘almost a magical value to mere repetition of formulae.’”<sup>11</sup> It was just this sort of “arithmetical piety” that induced the wealthy to hire “mass priests,” clerics paid to perform these embodied actions over and over again for the exclusive benefit of their patrons. Henry VII (1485–1509) is said to have ensured that no fewer than 10,000 masses would be said on his behalf, and, according to the historian Francis Oakley, even an “ordinary merchant” might manage to finance several hundred.<sup>12</sup>

And while the priest enacted his ritualized movements, the people’s successful engagement with the mass was likewise predicated upon the proper configuration of their bodies. For the mass to achieve its intended spiritual effect, the people needed to be in the right place, at the right time, and looking in the right direction. Within medieval Christendom, the bread and the wine were not ordinarily given to the people directly. One would not receive the wine at all, lest it be scandalously spilled, and one would only receive the bread perhaps once a year at Easter. Instead, as Eamon Duffy explains, for “most people, most of the time the Host was something to be seen, not to be consumed.”<sup>13</sup> As the priest reached the moment of consecration and the point at which he elevated the host for all to see and adore, a bell was rung to signal to those present that it was time to look up and to be blessed in so doing. In this way, “seeing the Host became the high point of lay experience of the Mass.”<sup>14</sup> Duffy’s survey of Eucharist art in pre-Reformation England found that “it was the moment of elevation of the Host which they almost invariably depicted.”<sup>15</sup> Physically gazing upon the host ensured blessing in some real way, the viewer receiving grace, not only for the soul, but also for your body:

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 118.

<sup>12</sup> Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages*, 118.

<sup>13</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 95.

<sup>15</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 96.

Behind all was the sense that those cut off from the opportunity of hearing Mass devoutly and seeing the Host were being deprived of precious benefits for body and soul. Mothers in labor could secure safe delivery, travelers safe arrival, eaters and drinkers good digestion, by gazing on the Host at Mass.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, for priest and layperson alike, the ministry of medieval Christendom was a ministry finely attuned to the proper coordination of bodies—bodies located in particular physical spaces and rightly coordinated in their movements. If you were in the same physical space as the host properly consecrated and elevated and if you lifted up your gaze at the right moment, blessings would be yours; but if the right bodies were not arranged in the right ways in the right places at the right times then those blessing would be missed. Now, obviously, there was much more to late-medieval piety than this, and no one would wish to suggest otherwise. But while there was more to it than this, there was not less, and this emphasis on people as physical bodies in need of physically mediated remedies loomed large as the irreducible baseline of late medieval piety. If James Smith and others are worried that evangelicals often reduce people to “brains on sticks” then here was a nexus of ministry and anthropology that often seemed to treat people as nothing but the sticks—sticks to be stacked and arranged in configurations designed to produce maximum spiritual effect

This was the world out of which the Reformers emerged and into which they introduced an incredible realignment of anthropology and ministry. Into this world the Reformers brought an anthropology insistent upon the idea that a human is not just a body needing to be physically manipulated in just the right manner. The Reformers foregrounded the idea that a human being made in God’s image was deeply and profoundly a creature who listens for the word of God, who hears, who understands, who believes, and who is spiritually transformed thereby. If “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17), then when the faithful look to Christ they see the one who “loved [them] and gave themselves for [them]” so “that he might sanctify and cleanse [them] with the washing of water *by the word*” (Eph 5:25–27). In this way the Reformation, then, was a realignment—an attempt to realign anthropology and ministry by recognizing that people have minds and hearts, minds which need to be taught so that hearts might be moved to love and service.

We see this new Protestant culture of prioritizing mind and heart in the renewed enthusiasm for and priority given to preaching among the reformers. The Hungarian Lutheran scholar Vilmos Vajta has written on the incredible degree to which Luther equated right worship with the hearing and understanding of God’s word so that one might be transformed by the same. One of Luther’s favorite stories from the life of Jesus was that of Mary and Martha, a story in which the reformer saw the Lord commending not Martha and her whirlwind of activity, action, and service, but, instead, Mary, who sat at Jesus’s feet and heard his word (Luke 10:39). So, likewise for Christ’s people today, said Luther and the Reformers, only “one thing is needed” (Luke 10:42): they too must sit at the feet of their Lord and *listen* to him. Vajta concludes that for the Reformers and Luther, in particular, “to hear God’s Word and to believe it is worship at its highest.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in their attempt to realign ministry and anthropology, the Reformers prioritized the mind and heart over the body, the interior over the exterior, the word over any enacted practice. And though this realignment project announced itself first and most boldly in the Reformation emphasis on preaching,

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<sup>16</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Vilmos Vajta, quoted in Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4: The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 39–40.

as the Protestant tradition continued to develop, one sees the same basic logic emerging through a renewed emphasis upon personal piety as cultivated through reading and prayer—not memorized Latin prayers of which the speaker might have little sense, but prayers, whether set or extempore that were composed in the vernacular language and fully understood by the one offering them up to the Lord. Such tendencies were especially pronounced among English Protestants and the Puritans in particular. In his study of *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, Alec Ryrie concludes that the “intellectualism of early Protestantism is hard to overestimate.” By this, he does not mean intellectualism in the sense of elitism, but, rather he indicates a priority given to the mind and to learning that was meant to embrace the entire worshipping community. Ryrie continues,

Protestantism was a movement born and bred in universities, and it aspired to turn Christendom into a giant university, in which Christians would spend their time in private study or in attending the lectures and seminars which they called sermons, prophesyings, and conferences.... Protestants stressed learning because they believed that salvation came, not merely through faith, but through well-informed faith.<sup>18</sup>

The priority given to the mind by early modern Protestants is encapsulated nicely by the Puritan Jeremiah Dyke (1584–1639), who explained Christian growth as a movement from right knowing to right doing: “They must be first full of knowledge, that will be full of goodnesse. Full of knowledge, full of goodnesse, voyde of knowledge, voyde of goodnesse.”<sup>19</sup> Or consider the example of Lewis Bayly and his bestselling book *The Practice of Piety*. Incredibly popular throughout Britain, Europe, and North America, Bayly’s manual of practical divinity enjoyed at least sixty-nine printings between 1613 and 1743.<sup>20</sup> The book promised to instruct “a Christian how to walk that he may please God,” directions summarized by the frontispiece, which showed a “pious man” on his knees between a table on one side and an altar on the other. Upon the table was inscribed the directive, “Read,” and on the altar, “Pray.”<sup>21</sup> According to this logic, spiritual growth was initiated by stimulating the mind rather than manipulating the body. And by shifting emphasis away from bodies coordinated according to the rhythms of the mass, and on to a worship that prioritized hearing, thinking, meditating, feeling, and knowing, the Protestant project launched a realignment of ministry and anthropology that has proven extraordinarily fruitful.

### *3. Proposed Re-Alignments: Habits, Liturgies, and Embodied Rituals*

Yet whatever successes the traditional Protestant alignment of ministry and anthropology may have had in the past, influential voices within evangelical circles today are wondering whether the model has finally outlived its usefulness. As we have already observed, many are deliberately moving away from the word-centered piety that long characterized Protestant ministry and back toward a renewed interest in the role of the body in discipleship and spiritual formation. Focusing especially on the work of James K. A. Smith, we will now examine more closely this new proposed realignment of ministry and

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<sup>18</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 261–62.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah Dyke, *A Worthy Communicant* (London: Dawlman, 1636), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 243.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie: Directing a Christian How to Walke That He May Please God* (London: John Hodgets, 1613), frontispiece.

anthropology, and offer what I am calling an appreciative critique. Much that these authors have said is good, fresh, and helpful for church leaders looking to minister effectively in our twenty-first century context. But, at the same time, I worry that this literature also smuggles less helpful ideas in on the back of its more salutary insights.

We begin by recalling that Smith frames many of his big ideas in terms of the need to carefully align one's ministerial practice with one's anthropological conviction: "every approach to discipleship and Christian formation [i.e., ministry] assumes an implicit model of what human beings are [i.e., anthropology]."<sup>22</sup> And Smith's project, particularly in *Desiring the Kingdom* and *You Are What You Love*, speaks to both aspects of that realignment and advances two major premises. First, he puts forward the anthropological premise that human beings are primarily "lovers" rather than "thinkers"—what we will call "Big Premise #1" (BP1). And then, second, he builds upon BP1 to press home what we will call "Big Premise #2" (BP2): the idea that we can learn to love rightly through embodied ritualistic practices. In what follows, we will consider BP1 and BP2 in turn, and I will attempt to explain why I gladly embrace BP1 while raising serious concerns about BP2.

Smith's BP1 offers an anthropological vision: a theological account of what a human being is. Namely, Smith states that "human persons are not primarily or for the most part thinkers.... Instead, human persons are—fundamentally and primordially—lovers."<sup>23</sup> A human being, we are told, can be defined by what he or she *loves best*. The primary alternative to the model of human-as-lover, has historically been, at least in the West, the model of the human-as-thinker. This model of the human person as essentially a "thinking thing" or, as Smith has more memorably put it, a "brain on a stick," is "as old as Plato but rebirthed by Descartes and cultivated throughout modernity." It is a model that imagines people as needing above all else "a steady diet of ideas, fed somewhat intravenously into the mind through the lines of proposition and information."<sup>24</sup>

But, Smith warns, when Christians absorb this sort of anthropology, they unwittingly produce a "talking-head version of Christianity that is fixated on doctrines and ideas" rather than things like desire, love, and imagination.<sup>25</sup> Smith contends that precisely such an "intellectualist model of the human person" has dominated evangelical Christian ministry, reducing people "to mere intellect" and naively assuming that discipleship "is primarily a matter of depositing ideas and beliefs into mind-containers."<sup>26</sup> Dru Johnson raises a similar point when he observes that in Matthew 16 "Jesus didn't call people to take up their *minds* and follow him."<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Tish Harrison Warren has warned against "imagin[ing] the Christian life primary as a quest to get the right ideas in [one's] head." She recalls with regret a time in her own life when she "began to feel like the sort of Christianity that I gravitated toward only required my brain."<sup>28</sup>

What, then, is to be done? Rather than reducing the richness of human identity to something more like a fleshy super-computer, Smith, inspired by Augustine, insists that we must "attend to our loves."

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *Human Rites*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 41–42.

A strong sense of this thesis is neatly communicated through the titles of his books. The title, *You Are What You Love*—as opposed to, say, “You Are What You Think”—suggests a fundamental continuity between one’s core identity and that which one desires most deeply. Smith’s more academic treatment of these themes is titled, *Desiring the Kingdom*, as opposed to, perhaps, “Learning Information about the Kingdom,” or “Analyzing the Kingdom.” “To be human,” Smith explains, “is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life ... we *want* that. We crave it. We desire it. This is why our most fundamental mode of orientation to the world is love.”<sup>29</sup>

So, then, if that is what a human person is, then our goal in ministry and discipleship, should not be so much to fill the head as to train the heart, to fire the imagination, and to kindle desire for God and his glory. What is most important, on this account, is not, ultimately, whether you have your propositional ducks all in a tidy row, but whether your heart beats in time with the rhythms of Christ and his kingdom. As Smith summarizes, “Being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head ... rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who *loves* rightly—who loves God and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love.”<sup>30</sup>

This, then, is what I am calling Big Premise #1 (BP1). It strikes me as an undeniably attractive premise, one which, on balance, is in step with both Scripture and the spirit of the Reformation. The kind of “brains-on-sticks” anthropology that Smith is surely right to criticize, is one in which we assume, implicitly or explicitly, that if we can just get people to learn all the right things then we have done our job as pastors, as educators, as youth workers, etc. Instead, as Smith suggests, discipleship is holistic and involves shaping men and women into people who love God and love neighbor, who want what God wants, and who long to see his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is why, throughout the Bible, the blessed man or woman is one who does not merely *know* what God’s law says, but rather one who rejoices with the psalmist, “Oh how I *love* your law! It is my meditation all the day!” (Ps 119:97)

And indeed, a great deal of post-Reformation Protestantism, especially in its Puritan and pietistic manifestations, has been preoccupied with this very point, pressing home the reality that while salvation certainly entails coming “to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), for that knowledge to be saving knowledge and not *mere* knowledge the heart must be fundamentally re-oriented toward God. The English Puritans, despite being enthusiastic advocates of right *knowing* as we mentioned earlier, always insisted that this godly knowledge was ultimately the God-appointed means to stir up godly affections and God-honoring loves. One thinks of how the Puritan Richard Baxter (1615–1691), for example, could recall his younger years in just such categories:

I wondered at the senseless hardness of my heart, that could think and talk of Sin and Hell, and Christ and Grace, of God and Heaven, with no more feeling: I cried out from day to day to God for grace against this senseless deadness: I called my self the most hard hearted Sinner, that could *feel* nothing of all that I *knew* and talkt of.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, for Baxter, right *knowing* without right *feeling* was insufficient. Similarly, for the Puritan Thomas Watson (1620–1686), the key question to put before his hearers was not so much about their knowing or their doing, but ultimately about whether they were truly “lovers” of God. “It is not how much we

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32–33.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence, and J. Dunton, 1696), 5.

do,” Watson insisted, “but how much we love.”<sup>32</sup> The Dutch theologian Campegius Vitringa (1669–1722) nicely summarized the tradition when he wrote that the “source of the spiritual life is precisely this love for God. Where it reigns in a human heart, it absorbs and subordinates to itself all feelings and desires.”<sup>33</sup> Such examples could be endlessly multiplied, for even a cursory examination of Protestant piety demonstrates that thinkers from Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Chalmers to John Piper and J. I. Packer have taught that Christian maturity entails renewed hearts that are ever more inclined to delight in godly things and feel repulsed by sinful things.

Thus, it seems that if we would heed the call from Smith to avoid a “brains-on-sticks” Christianity, our personal piety and public ministries would be the better for it. However, many recent authors pressing this point do not stop there. Having established this first premise, they quickly move to a second one, namely, that God-honouring affections are best cultivated through embodied ritualistic practices. This “Big Premise #2” (BP2) is put most concisely by Smith when he writes that the “way to the heart is through the body.”<sup>34</sup> But what, exactly, does he mean by this?

The basic idea is that if love and desire are far more fundamental to a person’s identity than is their accumulated collection of facts and figures, then any attempt to shape or re-shape that love and desire through an appeal to more facts and figures is clearly wrong-headed and doomed to fail. The preacher expounding Matthew 6:33—“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”—typically addresses men and women who already know intellectually that God should be their first priority, but this does not mean that those same well-informed folks will actually *feel* the weight of that and desire to live it out. What is a pastor to do?

The answer provided by James Smith and others is that you need to train their hearts by engaging their bodies:

We learn to love ... not primarily by acquiring information about *what* we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of *how* we love. These sorts of practices are “pedagogies” of desire, not because they are like lectures that inform us, but because they are rituals that form and direct our affections.<sup>35</sup>

Embodied rituals, liturgies, and habits are “pedagogies of desire” that can, we are told, reach and redirect the wayward heart in ways that sermons, lectures, essays, and the like simply cannot. Smith explains that “disoriented heart-compasses requir[e] recalibration” and that “our loves need to be reordered (recalibrated) by ... embodied, communal practices that are ‘loaded’ with the gospel and indexed to God and his kingdom.”<sup>36</sup>

And for people in ministry it is especially important to employ such embodied “liturgies,” Smith says, because the world is full of its own “liturgies”—secular liturgies that are also operating on the heart level to turn people towards idolatrous loves. Christian formation means turning people back through our own embodied ritualistic counter-liturgies. As Smith puts it:

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm: Showing the Holy Violence a Christian Is to Put Forth in the Pursuit after Glory*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2019), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Campegius Vitringa, *The Spiritual Life*, trans. Charles K. Telfer (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 57–58.

You won't be liberated from deformation by new information. God doesn't deliver us from the deformative habit-forming power of tactile rival liturgies by merely giving us a book. Instead, he invites us into a different embodied liturgy that not only is suffused by the biblical story but also, via those practices, inscribes the story into our hearts.<sup>37</sup>

So, an obvious example that nearly anyone who advocates this position seems to bring up early and often is kneeling to pray. And, indeed, kneeling to pray is a widespread Christian practice in which the logic of a positive feedback loop between embodied practice and heart affection seems to make good sense. For example, in his book, *The Common Rule*, a book that openly acknowledges its intellectual debt to Smith, author Justin Earley talks about enhancing his prayer life through the embodied ritual of kneeling to pray: "Often one of the only ways to take hold of the mind is to take hold of the body." He goes on to note that if kneeling is impracticable in a given context, he will substitute some other physical posture or gesture because "I need something physical to mark the moment for my slippery mind."<sup>38</sup>

Or consider Dru Johnson, who, in his book *Human Rites* says that "rituals represent an embodied parable on our story of the world." He explains that embodied rituals do not merely *reflect* one's inner state of affairs, they also *effect* the state they represent; in addition to "symbolically reveal[ing] my thought life ... [embodied] rites also do something *to* me." As is typical of those making this argument, Johnson illustrates using the example of a person kneeling to pray, quoting the anthropologist Catherine Bell: "Kneeling does not merely *communicate* subordination ... For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself." To which Johnson comments, "So, not only can my outward actions express my inner thoughts, but my bodily actions can shape them too!"<sup>39</sup>

Now, of course, on one level, who could disagree with some of these comments? Might kneeling to pray bring about a pleasing congruity between one's actual bodily posture and one's intended spiritual posture, the outer and inner life coalescing as the forgiven sinner approaches a gracious God? Of course it could, and we would note in passing that Reformed Protestants, far from objecting to kneeling in prayer, often suggested that this was the ideal way to pray.<sup>40</sup> And thus if Smith and others were simply trying to draw attention to our embodied nature and offer a gentle reminder that our conception of the Christian life should not wholly ignore this fact, it would be difficult to find fault with them.

But, actually, Smith and company are not just saying that. Rather, they seem to be saying quite a bit more. When Smith repeatedly stresses that "the way to the heart is through the body," the clear implication is that if you are not reaching the body, then you are *not* reaching the heart. This amounts to a sweeping indictment of word-centered Reformation worship and piety and goes well beyond the suggestion that occasionally kneeling in prayer might be a helpful thing. If taken at face value, this logic suggests that Protestant parents and church leaders are guilty of serious spiritual negligence when they continue to emphasize things like catechesis and scripture memory while excluding the sort of sensory, embodied liturgical experiences more characteristic of worship in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. This raises the temperature of the discussion considerably and forces those in ministry to ask, and to ask with some urgency, should I accept Smith's "Big Premises 1 and 2"?

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<sup>37</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 83–84.

<sup>38</sup> Earley, *The Common Rule*, 37, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Human Rites*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., William Gouge, *The Whole-Armour of God* (London: John Beale, 1616 [RSTC 12122]), 341.

#### 4. Proposed Re-Alignments Reconsidered

BP1, as I have already suggested, seems a helpful corrective. Seeking to distance oneself from a “brains-on-sticks” Christianity accords with Scripture, the Reformed tradition, and common sense. But what about BP2? What about the idea that the best, or perhaps only, means to truly train the heart is through embodied ritual and sensory experience, the idea that “the way to the heart is through the body?”

Smith and other authors regularly suggest that acceptance of BP1 necessarily entails acceptance of BP2. BP1 is regularly elided with BP2, and as these authors seamlessly move from one to the other, the clear implication is that if you are nodding along with BP1 then you must inevitably also nod along with BP2 as well. Unfortunately, however, this implication is rarely made explicit and any logical connection between BP1 and BP2 is asserted rather than demonstrated. Consider, for example, the following passage from Smith:

To be conformed to the image of his Son is not only to think God’s thoughts after him but to desire what God desires. That requires the recalibration of our heart-habits and the recapturing of our imagination, which happens when God’s Word becomes the orienting centre of our social imaginary, shaping our very perception of things before we even *think* about them.<sup>41</sup>

This is an eloquent statement of BP1 to which I can only say, amen. But, notice what happens next:

So, like the secular liturgies of the mall or the stadium or the frat house, Christian liturgies can’t just target the intellect: they also work on the body, conscripting our desires through the senses. Christian worship that will be counterformative needs to be embodied, tangible, and visceral. The way to the heart is through the body.<sup>42</sup>

This is all BP2, but it is presented seamlessly as though it were an obvious and necessary implication of the preceding elucidation of BP1. Immediately after the paragraph cited above, Smith pivots back to BP1 to draw his conclusion: “That’s why counterformative Christian worship doesn’t just teach us how to think; it teaches us how to love, and it does so by inviting us into the biblical story and implanting that story into our bones.”<sup>43</sup> This concluding sentence intermingles BP1 and BP2 as though the two propositions were self-evidently inseparable and mutually reinforcing.

This sort of conflation of BP1 and BP2 is typical of the way in which these arguments proceed. Rhetorically the effect is to use the obvious strength of BP1 to carry BP2 along in its wake. And yet upon closer examination, it is not at all obvious to me that BP2 flows from BP1, nor does it seem evident, whatever the relationship between the two premises, that BP2 is actually true. What reasons are we given to accept the truth of BP2?

The case Smith makes for why one should accept the claim that “the way to the heart is through the body” takes the form of argument by analogy. According to Paul Bartha, to advance one’s argument through analogy involves taking “accepted similarities between two systems to support the conclusion

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 85, emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 85.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 85.

that some further similarity exists.”<sup>44</sup> In Smith’s work the case for BP2 often employs such analogical reasoning: training the heart and cultivating godly affections is compared to some other kind of training—learning to play the piano, for instance—and the reader is invited to accept by the force of the analogy that certain principles governing, say, piano lessons, would also apply to heart lessons. But is this argument by analogy valid? As Bartha goes on to indicate, conclusions drawn from analogical arguments “do not follow with certainty but are only supported with varying degrees of strength.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, an analogical argument is only valid to the extent that the two things brought into analogical relationship actually share the similarities suggested. And I would argue that the analogies invoked to establish BP2 are not particularly convincing.

One notices rather quickly that when analogies are used to establish that “the way to the heart is through the body” they invariably draw upon examples of people trying to learn some sort of physical movement. In *Desiring the Kingdom*, for example, Smith explains the body-heart connection as follows:

Habits are inscribed in our heart through bodily practices and rituals that train the heart, as it were, to desire certain ends. This is a noncognitive sort of training.... Different kinds of material practices infuse noncognitive dispositions and skills in us through ritual and repetition precisely because our hearts (site of habits) are so closely tethered to our bodies. The senses are portals to the heart, and thus the body is a channel to our core dispositions and identity.<sup>46</sup>

This is straightforward enough in terms of what is being proposed, but it gives us very little reason to believe that the proposal advanced is, in fact, true. Why should I accept the assertion that “the body is a channel to [my] core dispositions and identity”? To establish his point, Smith turns to analogy. First he compares training the heart to learning to type: “how” he asks, “did your hands get to ‘know’” where the correct keys on the keyboard were? Smith’s answer is that your hands “learned” all of this “through rituals, routines, and exercises that trained your adaptive unconscious.”<sup>47</sup> He then provides a second example, that of learning to play baseball: as baseball players field endless grounders, “the bodily practices (drills) ... train the body (including the brain) to develop habits or dispositions to respond automatically in certain situations and environments. Our desire is trained in the same way.”<sup>48</sup> The analogy is clear enough, and there is certainly an inner logic to it, but the real question is not whether the analogy makes sense on its own terms, but, rather, whether the proposed congruities between the two essentially different worlds of discourse actually hold up to scrutiny. In this case, do the suggested correspondences between physical training and heart training actually correspond? Are the things drawn together into analogical relationship actually congruent at the points the author imagines them to be?

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Bartha, “Analogy and Analogical Reasoning,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/reasoning-analogy/>.

<sup>45</sup> Bartha, “Analogy and Analogical Reasoning.”

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58–59.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 60; for an example of a similar use of analogical reasoning to make a very similar point, though this time using basketball rather than baseball practice, see Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 210–11.

If no such congruity can actually be demonstrated, then the entire case for BP2 begins to look rather suspect. This is because such analogical moves are so heavily emphasized in the literature. In *You Are What You Love*, for example, Smith likens training the heart to, among other things: learning to play the piano, acquiring a great golf swing, learning to drive a car, learning to type, acquiring tastes for certain foods, learning to enjoy exercise, learning to ride a bicycle, learning to play tennis, and learning to physically navigate a town.<sup>49</sup>

All of these proposed analogies make sense on their own terms, but, I do not believe they are actually good analogies. The chief defect stems from the fact that in all of these scenarios, both the means of skill acquisition and the skill ultimately in view are physical. Typically, these means of skill acquisition involve breaking down some complex physical movement into its constituent parts and then working on each discrete part over and over again until the entire operation can be performed smoothly—think of perfecting one’s golf swing by first working on one’s stance, then the movement of one’s hips, then one’s elbow placement, etc. And thus in all of the analogies offered, the physical *means* of skill acquisition correspond perfectly to the very physical *end* in view, namely, rapid, consistent, smooth, physical execution. Thus, something like learning to play the piano—a physical end—requires a physical means—repeatedly firing one’s fingers according to specific drills.

But a serious problem arises when Smith and others then carry these physical activities into realms in which the ends in view are not physical but mental, emotional, and cognitive. When we are told that learning to love God is like learning to swing a golf club, the unstated premise is that because the latter is amenable to embodied, repeated practice, the former must be too. But what is never actually proven is why anyone would ever think that this was actually the case. By repeatedly likening the cultivation of godly affections to the acquisition of various physical skills these authors smuggle in the idea that the same physical means of skill acquisition applicable to things like riding a bicycle will also apply to spheres in which the end result is not physical at all. But this is very problematic. Analogies used in this way can clarify a relationship the author wishes to posit, but they cannot establish that the posited relationship actually exists. And thus because the analogies used by Smith and company inappropriately confuse very different arenas, they cannot carry the persuasive weight these authors would like them to.

Furthermore, as one begins to evaluate the assertion that “the way to the heart is through the body,” life seems to be brimming with very obvious counterexamples, examples of situations in which the body is not recruited in any way and yet the affections are stirred and shaped. One imagines, for example, a movie theatre full of people watching James Cameron’s *Titanic* and being moved right across the emotional spectrum all while their bodies are utterly motionless and inert. If one replies that the 1997 Best Picture is a sensory feast for the ears and eyes, I would remind you that the claim being made again and again in these books, the claim to which I am objecting, is that embodied practices, rituals that physically move and position the body, offer the essential key to unlocking heart change. And in the movie theatre, whatever sounds and sights are on offer, the bodies are not moving.

Similarly, anyone who has read a novel, listened to a piece of music, or sat silently before a painting will understand that affections are stirred, imaginations are kindled, and hearts are trained, more often than not, by the relatively *disembodied* appreciation of ideas, words, and images. Experience proves that the converse also holds true: embodied rituals often fail to ignite the hearts of those involved. One thinks, for example, of the many people raised in highly liturgical, embodied traditions like Orthodoxy and Catholicism whose hearts were left cold and unmoved by what they came to regard, fairly or unfairly,

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<sup>49</sup> Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 18, 19, 35, 36, 58–59, 62, 64, 107–8, 137–38.

as “mindless repetition.” When such obvious counter examples are combined with the confused quality of the analogical argumentation on offer, one is left wondering what reasons there might be to accept the premise that “the way to the heart is through the body.” Absent such cogent, compelling reasons to accept this premise, it does not seem at all obvious that ministers and parents and youth workers steeped in a logocentric Protestant religious culture should be urged to adopt new ministerial methods.

### *5. Finding a Settled Alignment: Word Ministry and Pastoral Imagination*

If, like me, you find yourself attracted to what I’ve described here as Big Premise #1, and yet you remain skeptical of Big Premise #2, then the foregoing reflections will perhaps leave you wondering where we might go from here. If, like me, you are convinced that the Reformers’ emphasis on word ministry and their resistance to the use of extra-biblical rituals and forms in worship was, in the main, wise and congruent with the spirit of the New Testament, then you are left to puzzle through how your ministry can both preserve those biblical insights while also not treating people made in God’s image as though they were mere “brains on sticks.” To that end, let us reflect in this final section on how recent books on embodiment and imagination might prompt us to think more carefully about how we can best minister to whole people.

First, without necessarily agreeing with the idea that the “way to the heart is through the body,” or, as I have been calling it, Big Premise #2, we can still, helpfully, take the reminder that God has, indeed, created us with bodies. Our embodiment is not an accident or a mistake or a mere concession to our finitude, but, rather, something that reflects the will of an infinitely wise, wonderfully good, and unimaginably creative God. Thus, the reality of embodiment can and should impinge upon the way we imagine our church life, the way we pastor people, the way we construct our sermons, and the way we think about what it means to live in a God-honoring way.

Giving more weight to embodiment could take any number of forms. For example, without attempting to invent new “embodied rituals,” we could give more careful consideration to how we approach those “embodied rituals” that scripture already gives us, namely, the Lord’s Supper and baptism. Do we treat these like optional add-ons to be rushed through every so often, or do we approach them as key components in the life of the church? We could also attend more carefully to the ways in which our physical worship spaces impinge upon our worship experience. It seems to me that one can be fully committed to the second commandment’s perpetual relevance without supposing that a lack of aesthetic sense is thereby something virtuous. We could also pay more attention to ways in which embodiment affects spirituality and then explicitly develop these lines of reflection in our preaching and teaching.<sup>50</sup>

Second, we can more intentionally embrace what I have called Big Premise #1, the idea that human beings are not primarily knowledge-receptacles, but rather image-bearers with imaginations that need to be fired and desires that need to be creatively led towards God-glorifying ends. By casting a vision for this sort of holistic ministry, authors like James Smith have done us all a tremendous service. But for those of us committed to a Reformation, word-centered ministry, the answer is not to sideline preaching

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<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Christopher Ash, *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to a Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice* (Epsom, Surrey: Good Book, 2016); David P. Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Shona Murray, *Refresh: Embracing a Grace-Paced Life in a World of Endless Demands* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

and catechesis in favor of new embodied rituals, but rather to recognize that word ministry is more than able to fulfill Smith's wise call in BP1 to speak to the *whole* person. If we are not doing that, and if our churches *do* sometimes resemble dry information distribution centers, then shame on us. But, where I would depart from some recent authors, is to strongly affirm that the answer to bad preaching is not less preaching and more ritual. Rather, the answer to bad preaching is good preaching.

I fear that a growing number of people in evangelical circles might be giving up on the sermon as the primary place where God shapes his people precisely because the preaching they have grown up hearing rarely if ever captivated their imaginations in the way Smith and others describe. I recently got to hear an accomplished evangelical Christian artist give a fine talk on creativity and the Christian life. This was a thoughtful, reflective, incredibly gifted individual who harnesses various artistic forms to make the Christian story vivid and captivating. But after being captivated myself for forty-five minutes by his lecture, I was dispirited by an exchange that took place during the Q&A: when asked if he had any advice for preachers on how they could improve their sermons in light of his foregoing comments on creativity and imagination, the speaker seemed slightly caught off guard. It was clear that preaching was not a topic to which he had given much thought. And while that in itself is fair enough—this gentleman was not a pastor and was not there to talk about preaching—he went on to make a comment which I found both telling and discouraging. The speaker said something to the effect of, “You know, to be honest, the preaching in my church isn’t that great and it rarely if ever moves me. But that’s OK because I’m not really looking for the sermon to do that anyway. I get that imaginative, heart-level engagement through the liturgy and especially at the communion table.”

That remark saddened me, not because I reject the premise that the Lord’s Table should be a powerful locus of Christian formation (to the contrary, I suspect we twenty-first-century evangelicals are sometimes guilty of neglecting the Supper as means of grace). But rather the remark made me feel sad because here was a thoughtful, engaged evangelical who seemed to have, in some basic way, given up on preaching. That is a scandal. The reason the Reformers foregrounded word ministry was not because they were stuffy or elitist or overly rationalistic, but rather because Paul tells Timothy that his chief ministerial duty is to “preach the word in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), and because Scripture continually describes the blessed person as one “whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Ps 1:1–2). So, if some of our most thoughtful and intellectually awake listeners are turning away from our preaching then that is a clear and urgent call to do better.

And that is precisely where books like *You Are What You Love* and *Desiring the Kingdom* can be so helpful to us, because they prod us and push us to remember that walking with the Lord is not, ultimately, about memorizing lists of facts and figures, but rather about being “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Rom 12:2). James Smith helps me see that and be excited about it. But, I do not think we need to deemphasize preaching or embrace embodied ritual to get there. Instead, we should be working to craft sermons that excite people’s imaginations and make them long for the kingdom of God. We need preachers who are not content simply to highlight an unusual verb tense, explain who the Amalekites were, and then sit down. We need preachers, rather, who do all of that explanatory work, but then go on to press the message home in surprising, exciting, imaginative ways, unfolding the manifold connections between the world of the Scriptures and the world of the hearers, drawing people into the story of God and his kingdom that they might long for communion with him as the deer longs for streams of cool water (Ps 42:1).

Doing that will require a commitment on our part to better cultivate our own imaginations. Drawing others into the story of God's redemptive work requires that we first be so drawn ourselves. As Richard Winter argues, "imagination, creativity and interest in life ... can either be cultivated, strengthened and developed or ignored, suppressed and allowed to wither and even die."<sup>51</sup> I do wonder whether much of the dissatisfaction with preaching today flows directly from the reality that too many would-be preachers are stepping into pulpits with imaginations that have been too long neglected. In pursuit of a corrective, let me conclude with four brief suggestions for how we might develop a word ministry that leads our hearers to not merely *know more about the kingdom*, but to actually *desire* it.

First, spend less time looking at screens and more time reading, praying, and thinking deeply. In recent years, both Christian and non-Christian authors have done fine work documenting the degree to which a more-or-less continuous engagement with screens is antithetical to the life of the mind.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, in my experience, the response to such arguments, even among those who broadly agree with them, is to nod, voice concern, and then proceed to make no meaningful changes whatsoever. Yet this cannot be our response if we wish to present a vital, creative ministry of the word for twenty-first century hearers. Whatever form it takes, I am increasingly persuaded that more radical approaches are required if pastors are to cultivate the sort of rich interiority that will be required to consistently engage the hearts of our hearers.

Second, read Scripture more attentively. For the digitally-overloaded, twenty-first century preacher, the besetting temptation will be to read the Bible, as T. David Gordon has put it, "only for the overt content," an approach that tends to flatten biblical passages and turn particular texts into opportunities for overly general remarks.<sup>53</sup> To move from dull generality to the sort of concrete specificity that can stimulate real interest, we must practice a slow, patient, meditative reading of scripture. Too often the pressure of ministry and the ever-present distraction of our digital devices combine to squeeze out any real leisurely stretches of silence before the biblical text. And yet, such periods of distraction-free, focused immersion in scripture seem absolutely imperative if we would craft sermons that are truly alive.

Third, read widely.<sup>54</sup> The most imaginative and interesting people I know are, without exception, people committed to reading both deeply and widely. They are curious about life and delight in exploring whatever happens to excite them. They are people who continually embody G. K. Chesterton's maxim that there are no uninteresting subjects, only uninterested people. Charles Spurgeon urged students at his Pastors' College to read right across the spectrum and "neglect no field of knowledge," suggesting that the spark to enliven one's sermon might come from "a naturalist's journal," a "traveler's narrative of his voyages," a work of history or botany or geology. "Yes, and even ... a manual of alchemy," said

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006); T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009); Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010); Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Penguin, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 46–47.

<sup>54</sup> This theme is helpfully explored in Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

Spurgeon, “may like Samson’s dead lion, yield you honey.”<sup>55</sup> To Spurgeon’s list of sources, I would be quick to add novels, poems, and plays. Serious literature, as the literary critic James Wood has observed, “makes us better noticers of life.”<sup>56</sup> As we attend more carefully to literature, we are taught how to attend more carefully to the small but telling details that together constitute our human condition. And by thus presenting a way of noticing, describing, and exploring what it means to be God’s image bearers living in God’s world, novels furnish would-be preachers with both a more finely tuned understanding of what their congregants are experiencing day-to-day and a model for how one might transform those experiences into words.

Fourth and finally, make sure that you are taking time each week for reading and reflection on God’s ways and God’s world that is wholly unrelated to that week’s sermon or Bible study. If our only intellectual and emotional input is too tightly tethered to a rapidly approaching deadline, our reading and thinking will inevitably be characterized by a utilitarian ethos that stands irrevocably opposed to a deep, creative, and generative interior life. Desperately scanning through a trusted volume in search of an apropos quotation for tomorrow morning’s sermon may sometimes be a necessary expedient, but if this is the only way we ever engage great books, then a dry and sterile imagination will be the sure result. Perhaps the well won’t run dry this month or even this year, but eventually the delight of discovery will yield to the press of meeting deadlines. Imaginative connections between God’s word and God’s world abound, but such links will only be drawn by those pastors who regularly give themselves the gifts of solitude, quietness, and a deep reading that has no immediate object but the glory of God and the growth of the minister.

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<sup>55</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 36–37.

<sup>56</sup> James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 53.

# ‘I Call You Friends’: Jesus as Patron in John 15

— Daniel K. Eng —

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**Abstract:** This article proposes that John 15:13–16 draws on the language of Roman patronage, which impacts the understanding of Jesus’s sayings regarding *friends*. We will suggest that φίλος conveys a regent obedient to a royal patron. Thus, the role of Jesus’s *friend* is one of *subordination*, not equality. After an introduction to patronage, this article makes the case that Jesus portrays himself as the greatest patron. First, John’s farewell discourse points to the disciples being subordinates. Second, Jesus makes a contrast between *slaves* and *friends*, which is consistent with many patronal relationships. Third, Jesus describes himself as a *broker*, mediating benefit from the Father. Fourth, inscriptions and provincial coinage contained terms like ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ (friend of Caesar), referring to regents of the emperor. Patronage best explains the saying, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (15:13).” Jesus’s ultimate sacrifice for *subordinates* makes his patronage greater than Caesar’s.<sup>1</sup>

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In the opening scene of Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather*, undertaker Amerigo Bonasera approaches the crime family boss Don Vito Corleone to ask for justice for his daughter, who was beaten by two young men. As Corleone considers his history with Bonasera, he laments aloud that Bonasera has not shown him due respect and honor. At the end of the scene, Corleone agrees to arrange for vengeance for Bonasera’s daughter, also mentioning that there will be a time when Bonasera will be called upon to reciprocate.

Remarkably, the Godfather uses the term “friendship” in a way inconsistent with a common modern understanding of *friends* as equals. His relationship with Bonasera is defined by inequality and obligation. Corleone demands subordination and offers Bonasera access to an otherwise unobtainable favor.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous versions of this paper were presented at the University of Cambridge Graduate New Testament Seminar, the British New Testament Conference, and the Evangelical Theological Society and Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings, all in 2019. The author thanks the participants in these conference sessions for their feedback, as well as Amber Dillon for assisting with a later version.

Likewise, this article will make the case that the term φίλος or *friend* in the farewell discourse of John conveys a relationship distinct from a modern western understanding of friends as equals. While the connections of the term *friend* in John 15 with similar Old Testament and Hellenistic Jewish language have been explored,<sup>2</sup> a thorough treatment of the friendship sayings in John 15:13–17 in light of patronage has largely eluded us.<sup>3</sup> This article will build on the work that Gail O’Day has done on the Greco-Roman background of John 15:13.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, we will contend that φίλος in John 15 describes a *subordinate* in a relationship defined by *obligation*. Drawing on the language of Roman patronage, the evangelist portrays Jesus as the patron par excellence, and urges loyalty to Jesus alone. In accordance, the role of “friend of Jesus” is one of subordination, not equality. Furthermore, we will suggest that these sayings in John 15:12–17 more specifically use φίλος to refer to a regent who is loyally obedient to a king. Finally, we will make the case that the concept of patronage best explains the saying, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15.13).

### *1. Patronage in the Ancient World*

Some have suggested that the prevalence of Roman patron-client relationships influences the Gospel of John. Martin Culy, pointing out that John 15:13–15 is the structural center of the upper room account, writes that “it would have been virtually impossible for the authorial audience to ... not interpret what follows (and what precedes) in light of Greco-Roman notions of friendship.”<sup>5</sup>

Patronal relationships were prevalent in the ancient Mediterranean world, to the point that Seneca called patronage “a practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.”<sup>6</sup> Ancient patronage involved three elements: (1) the unequal status of the parties involved, (2) the reciprocal exchange of goods and services, and (3) the establishment of a lasting relationship between the parties.<sup>7</sup> A related but unidentical term is *benefaction*, which describes the giving of goods or favors to another party. While benefaction could be used in a general sense and can refer to a relationship between parties of

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 521–23; Takaaki Haraguchi, “Philia as Agapē: The Theme of Friendship in the Gospel of John,” *AsJT* 28.2 (2014): 253–57.

<sup>3</sup> Both Martin Culy and Craig Keener dismiss an allusion to patronal friendship, but they do not consider the connections of manumission and brokerage to patronage. See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 2:1014; Martin M. Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, New Testament Monographs 30 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 162–66. Malina and Rohrbaugh, while pointing out the *brokerage* in v. 16, still insist that the friendship in vv. 13–15 is “fictive.” Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 235.

<sup>4</sup> Gail R. O’Day, “Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,” *Int* 58 (2004): 144–57. O’Day discusses patronage, but does not include the concepts of slavery, brokerage, and regency in connection with John 15:15–17.

<sup>5</sup> Culy points out that there are eighty-one verses between 13:1 and 15:13–15, and eighty-one verses between 15:13–15 and 17:26. Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, 157–58.

<sup>6</sup> Seneca, *On Benefits* 1.4.2, trans. John W. Basore, LCL 131 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935).

<sup>7</sup> Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

equal status, patronage was “ultimately a Roman phenomenon” and necessitated an exchange between unequal parties.<sup>8</sup> Thus, patronage was prominently used for high-ranking officials and their associates who were of lower social rank.

The relationship between a patron and a client was characterized by *reciprocity*.<sup>9</sup> Those of lower status had limited access to goods and services and often petitioned someone of higher status for their needs: commodities, advancement, and influence. If the person of higher status granted the petition, the two would enter into a patron-client relationship. In response, the client would reciprocate by promoting the patron’s reputation and vowing loyalty to perform services for the patron when a future opportunity arose.<sup>10</sup> Such reciprocity was not bound by law, but by societal expectations: abandoning the duties of the patron-client relationship would be considered dishonorable and undignified.<sup>11</sup> Seneca asserts that gratitude during that time did not exist apart from appropriate reciprocal action:

No man can be grateful unless he has learned to scorn the things which drive the common herd to distraction; if you wish to make a return for a favour, you must be willing to go into exile, or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty, or, ... even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, patron-client relationships were held together by “good will or faithfulness.”<sup>13</sup> Some have pointed out that Paul utilizes this culture of reciprocity to urge Philemon to forgive and free Onesimus, his runaway slave.<sup>14</sup>

A patron in the Greco-Roman world would often refer to a client as φίλος or *amicus*.<sup>15</sup> For example, Horace recalls how his literary patron Maecenas invited him to be numbered among his *friends*.<sup>16</sup> This designation of *friend* is associated with the nature of patron-client relationships being decidedly

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<sup>8</sup> Alicia Batten, “God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 262–63. Cf. Koenraad Verboven, *The Economy of Friends: Economic Aspects of Amicitia and Patronage in the Late Republic* (Bruxelles: Editions Latomus, 2002), 61.

<sup>9</sup> Stegemann and Stegemann call the exchange within patronage “general reciprocity,” to be distinguished from reciprocity between equals. See Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 34.

<sup>10</sup> The patron would thus gain political power and high esteem. See David A. deSilva, “Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relationships,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 92–93.

<sup>11</sup> Nicols calls such relationships “extralegal” or morally based. John Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire*, Mnemosyne Supplements 365 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2–3. Cf. Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 81.27, trans. Richard M. Gummere, LCL 76 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920). deSilva adds, “Seneca describes involves an intense loyalty to the person from whom one has received beneficence” (“Exchanging Favor for Wrath,” 104).

<sup>13</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, “God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 468.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see David A. deSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity: The Context of Grace in the New Testament,” *ATJ* 31 (1999): 50–51.

<sup>15</sup> Batten, “God in the Letter of James,” 259. For examples of φίλος, see Dio Chrysostom, *Kingship* 3.94–96; Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 1.52–54; Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 17.31.6; 17.39.2; 17.100.1; 18.55.1.

<sup>16</sup> Horace, *Satires* 1.6.62 (“in amicorum numero”).

asymmetrical: the client was permanently subservient in a relationship of loyalty.<sup>17</sup> The term *cliens* became degrading in nature, which led to the relative infrequency of the terms *patronus* and *cliens* in literature. Instead, with the range of the term *amicus* wide enough to describe both equals and unequals, patrons called their clients *friends*.<sup>18</sup> This practice of referring to clients as *friends* became so pervasive that it was disapproved by figures like Plutarch and Maximus of Tyre, who insisted on a distinction between true friends who speak boldly, and false friends who were flatterers.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Jesus As Patron

In what follows, we will contend that the language and principles surrounding the references to *friends* in John 15 are consistent with that of patron-client relationships. First, we will see how the farewell discourse conveys that the disciples are *subordinates* of Jesus. Second, we will examine the contrast Jesus makes between *slaves* and *friends* within the context of patron-client relationships. Third, we will examine a patron's frequent role as a *broker* in light of Jesus's promises about the disciples receiving from the Father. Fourth, we will make the case that Jesus takes on the role of a *royal patron* who has *regents*, or agents who act in his place.

### 2.1. Friends as Subordinates

In this section, we will examine how the farewell discourse communicates that the disciples are to be *subordinates* of Jesus, not equals. First, the *content* leading up to Jesus's sayings about friends support the notion that the disciples are his subordinates. While Jesus violates the expectations of teacher-disciple relations by washing his disciples' feet, his subsequent exhortations point to a persistently unequal relationship.<sup>20</sup> Jesus declares that it is right to call him διδάσκαλος (Teacher) and κύριος (Lord, 13:13) and that slaves are not greater than their master (13:16). He then charges them a new commandment to obey: love one another (13:35). As he promises the Spirit (14:16–17), Jesus declares numerous times that loving him is demonstrated by keeping his commands (14:15, 21, 23–24). In John 15, Jesus continues the exhortation to obedience through the imagery of the vine and the branches. The disciples are extensions of Jesus as branches off the vine; they are not his equals. Jesus reiterates the centrality of obedience by declaring that keeping his commands is abiding in his love. Viewing the usage of φίλοι on the lips of Jesus as referring to *equals* would contradict the repeated references to obedience and subordination throughout the content leading up to John 15:13–16.

Second, the content of John 15 points to *reciprocity* and *obligation*. In the imagery of the vine and branches, the disciples are dependent on Jesus: *apart from him they can do nothing* (15:5). Jesus declares that he will lay down his life for his friends (15:13) and that they are his friends if (ἐάν) they obey his commands. He assigns them a task—to bear fruit. In return, they will receive what they ask for from

<sup>17</sup> “A client was by definition unable to solve his debt of honour to his patron,” according to Verboven, *The Economy of Friends*, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 8–11.

<sup>19</sup> See Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*. David Konstan demonstrates that Plutarch and Maximus of Tyre appealed to pure friendship as a way to highlight the coercive nature of the patron-client custom. See David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” *CP* 90 (1995): 328–42.

<sup>20</sup> Contra Culy, who writes that Jesus “has levelled the playing field” (*Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, 161).

the Father (15:16). The conditional statement in verse 16 denotes a cause-and-effect relationship that signals reciprocity. Thus, the notion of friendship in John 15, while involving fondness, also involves roles and responsibilities between those in the relationship.<sup>21</sup>

Third, in John 15:14, Jesus states that *obedience* is required to be his friends: *You are my friends if you do what I command you*. While some attempt to dismiss the possibility that the disciples’ status as friends of Jesus is dependent on their obedience,<sup>22</sup> the syntax of the saying suggests that the designation is indeed conditional. The construction of the conjunction ἐάν with a verb in the present tense consistently communicates a conditional clause in the Gospel of John, regardless of the ordering of the clauses (see John 3:2; 5:19; 7:51).<sup>23</sup> Thus, in the context of John 15, Jesus defines friendship with obedience as a condition. Barrett declares about this passage, “It is clear that the status of friend is not one which precludes obedient service; this is rather demanded.”<sup>24</sup>

If the exegete can suspend the notion that friendship necessitates a relationship of equals, the use of φίλοι as *clients* better fits this context. The elements of an asymmetrical relationship and reciprocity are prominent in this passage. Indeed, Saller declares, “Where the term *amicus* occurs with respect to a friendship between men known to be of unequal status, we can assume a patronage relationship.”<sup>25</sup> When one is brought into a patron-client relationship as a result of an act of benefit, the recipients respond with loyalty, ready to carry out duties to the patron in gratitude.

While Aristotle’s teachings epitomized the Hellenistic ideal of friendship being characterized by social equals, the emergence of patron-client relationships in the Roman Empire shifted the public understanding of friendship.<sup>26</sup> As a whole, the farewell discourse paints a picture of *subordination*, not equality. Subordination is more consistent with the usage of φίλος in Roman patron-client relationships than with Greek or modern western ideals of friendship.

## 2.2. The Manumission of Slaves

In this section, we will examine the saying of Jesus in John 15:15, regarding *slaves* and *friends*. We will make the case that the contrast between δοῦλοι and φίλοι again suggests that a patron-client relationship is being portrayed.

Three elements of John 15:15 suggest that the *immediate* context of this saying should take precedence the interpretation of its key terms rather than their usage elsewhere in Johannine literature. First, it is curious that the saying makes a contrast between *slaves* and *friends*, making 15:15 stand out. One would naturally consider the antithesis of a *slave* to be a *freedman* and the antithesis of a *friend* to

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, 144–45.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Ridderbos writes, “Jesus does not mean that he makes his friendship with them dependent on their obedience to his commandments.” See Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 520. Carson asserts, “This obedience is not what *makes* them friends; it is what *characterizes* his friends.” Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 522.

<sup>23</sup> Contra Michaels, who attempts to appeal to word order to dismiss the conditional nature of this saying. See J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 813. Michael P. Theophilus correctly cites John 3:2; 5:19; 7:51 to support John 15:14 having a conditional clause with this word ordering; see “John 15.14 and the Φιλ- Lexeme in Light of Numismatic Evidence: Friendship or Obedience?,” *NTS* 64.1 (2018): 36.

<sup>24</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 477.

<sup>25</sup> Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> O’Day, “Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,” 146–47.

be an *enemy*. Keener cites Sallust, who wrote that a Roman would describe conquered people as “slaves” but allies as “friends.”<sup>27</sup> Second, as Leon Morris points out, the farewell discourse stands out as the first time in John’s Gospel that Jesus refers to his disciples as *slaves*.<sup>28</sup> Third, this is the only instance in John where Jesus refers to the twelve as *friends*.<sup>29</sup> This distinctiveness has led to the view that these friendship sayings do not fit with the rest of John’s message and were inserted later.<sup>30</sup> With the uniqueness of this saying, it follows that the immediate context in John 15, which suggests patron-client language, would be most elucidatory in interpreting this saying about friendship.

The oldest and most persistent patron-client relationships existed between a former master and his freedman. A slave could purchase their own freedom and that of their loved ones by accumulating wealth or be rewarded with freedom by exhibiting faithful and loyal service. Being manumitted, a former slave entered into a reciprocal relationship with his former master.<sup>31</sup> By granting freedom, the former master became a patron and could expect to receive honor and pledged loyalty from his clients.<sup>32</sup> Petronius, in the *Satyricon*, depicts the loyalty of a rich freedman, Trimalchio, to his former master, to whom he was a slave for forty years.<sup>33</sup>

The attachment of the freedman’s obligation to his former master was inseverable. This bond of loyalty persisted, and it was socially deplorable to leave one’s patron for another. While enjoying freedom, the freedman still depended on and honored the patron, and he often performed services for him. This relationship would be subject to inheritance for several subsequent generations.<sup>34</sup>

In John 15:15, Jesus’s declaration is consistent with the manumission of slaves leading to a patron-client relationship. After affirming his role as κύριος after washing his disciples’ feet (13:14–16), he states that they are *no longer* slaves. The transition of the disciples from δοῦλοι and φίλοι and the contrast between them is best explained by the language of Roman patron-client relationships.

This saying of Jesus in John 15:15 describes two characteristics of being his friend. First, as discussed above, a friend *does what he commands*. The disciples have free agency but are expected to obey, not bound by law but by social reciprocity. They are recipients of the greatest act of love, and their expected obedience is based on loyalty to a patron who has provided the gift of freedom.

Second, as it states in John 15:15, *a slave does not know what the master is doing*. In other words, the expressed distinction between slaves and friends is *disclosure*. Jesus gives them full disclosure of what he has heard from the Father, elevating them from slave status. While they are expected to obey, they do so with revelation. With an understanding of the affairs of Jesus and the Father, they are not

<sup>27</sup> Sallust, *The Jugurthine War* 102.6; see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:1013. Keener misses the connection between manumission of slaves and patron-client relationships.

<sup>28</sup> “He has not actually used this term of them previously, though 13:16 comes very near it, and 13:13 certainly implies it,” according to Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 675.

<sup>29</sup> Jan van der Watt points out that Jesus does call them *friends* in Luke 12:4, but this is a “passing” reference; see “Laying Down Your Life for Your Friends: Some Reflections on the Historicity of John 15: 13,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 4 (2014): 177–78. In addition, it is possible that he is addressing the crowd of thousands (12:1).

<sup>30</sup> Ernst Haenchen and Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 483.

<sup>31</sup> Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt and Luis Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 52–53.

<sup>33</sup> Petronius, *Satyricon* 101.

<sup>34</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends*, 54–55.

mere extensions of a master. In ancient Greece, slaves were considered “animated instruments,” bodies without reason.<sup>35</sup> This notion was epitomized by Aristotle’s view that the slave was a “living tool,” an extension of the master’s will. Jesus, in treating them as free agents with awareness of the masters’ dealing, effectively frees them from slavery.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Jesus’s facilitation of disclosure from the Father echoes a different facet of patronage, which we will discuss below.

The repeated command to *love one another*, which brackets the sayings regarding friendship in John 15 (vv. 12 and 17, also 13:34), further bolsters the case that Jesus is freeing slaves in 15:15. Paul Flesher demonstrates from the Mishnah that a slave was only defined by the vertical relationship with his owner: “the master prevents the bondman from holding any relationships apart from the property relationship between his slave and himself ... he cancels all the bondman’s kinship ties, and prevents him from forming new ones.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, the slave was incapable of having any horizontal relationships, as he was to be solely defined through a vertical relationship. Therefore, by pronouncing the command to love one another in horizontal relationships, Jesus figuratively moves his disciples through the experience of manumission, going from social *death* to social *life*, opening access to relationships with one another. In this way, he was granting them freedom, and they were to respond with grateful loyalty.

Susan Elliott’s work further bolsters the argument that Jesus is manumitting slaves by pointing out that a slave could not meaningfully perform an act of love. Since the slave’s life did not belong to him, he could not give it up. As an extension of the master’s will, any action would not be voluntary. Jesus’s command to show love (13:34) could only be meaningfully fulfilled by one who has the agency to choose. “The coercion inherent in slavery eliminates the possibility of authenticity in any action of service since the coercion means that the slave’s true intent cannot be known or shown.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, Jesus’s command to show love treats them as freedmen rather than slaves.

While Jesus’s declaration of friendship may have its background in the figures of Abraham and Moses relating to God as *friends*, Roman patronage has more points of contact with John 15:13–15. Philo makes the contrast between δούλος and φίλος in the context of Moses (*On the Migration of Abraham* 45) and Abraham (*On Sobriety* 55–56). Philo’s portrayal of Abraham is especially notable since it mentions confidence and revelation (cf. Sirach 27:17). However, these texts do not allude to a status of *slaves* that changes to that of *friends*. Abraham is called a *friend of God* in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8, but the LXX uses the verb ἀγαπάω rather than φιλέω in these places. He is frequently referred to as God’s *friend* in the *Testament of Abraham* (e.g., 1:6; 4:7; 8:2, 4; 9:7; 15:12–13; 16:5, 9; 20:14), but there is no contrast with being a slave. Exodus 33:11 tells of the Lord speaking with Moses face-to-face as one speaks to a friend (cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 2:245), but again, there is no contrast with a slave.

The best way to reconcile *manumission* in John 15:15 with the context of *subordination* is through viewing the sayings in the context of a patron-client relationship. As stated above, the most persistent form of patronage was the manumission of slaves, and patrons called their clients *friends*. The disciples,

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<sup>35</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Fitzgerald, “Christian Friendship: John, Paul, and the Philippians,” *Int* 61 (2007): 292.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, *Oxen, Women, or Citizens? Slaves in the System of the Mishnah*, Brown Judaic Studies 143 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 38. Cf. Susan M. Elliott, “John 15:15—Not Slaves but Friends,” *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 13 (1993): 34.

<sup>38</sup> Elliott, “John 15,” 39.

being freedmen, have a reciprocal relationship with Jesus characterized by loyalty and the carrying out of commands.

### 2.3. Brokerage

Another element of John 15:13–16 that reinforces a connection with patron-client language is Jesus's declaration that he acts as the *mediator* or *broker* to give his disciples access to the Father. It was common for a patron to give clients access to goods or services from another patron. The broker would intercede with the distant patron and serve as a go-between or middle-man for clients with whom he has personal contact. The broker would thus have a patron-client relationship with those he assisted.<sup>39</sup> The epistle of Philemon displays an example of brokerage, as Paul acts as the broker for Onesimus to gain benefit from Philemon.<sup>40</sup>

*Patron-brokerage* relationships in the Roman Empire enabled local figures to receive a following of clients through their mediating of services and goods from a more distant patron. Local politicians grew in power and influence by granting favors from the emperor to locals.<sup>41</sup> As a result of brokerage, senators were largely clients loyal to the emperor, and had their own clients.<sup>42</sup> As an illustration, deSilva cites Sophocles's fictional example of Creon serving as a broker for favor with king Oedipus.<sup>43</sup> The best broker was a person whom both the distant patron and the client trusted—one with “a foot in both worlds.”<sup>44</sup> Those closest to the emperor and most able to broker his favors would be male members of his immediate family—*sons* and *grandsons*.<sup>45</sup>

Sayings of Jesus in the farewell discourse are consistent with the language of brokerage. Jesus, the unique Son, affirms his oneness with the Father. This oneness is especially shown in Jesus's declarations that by knowing him, they also know the Father (14:7) and that he is in the Father and the Father is in him (14:10). As portrayed by John, Jesus was qualified as one with a foot in both worlds, and his status as the *Son* makes him the sole broker.<sup>46</sup> Jesus declares that he is the only broker to the Father, and that the Father would be otherwise inaccessible (14:6). He states that he will ask the Father, and the Father will give the Spirit (14:16–17; cf. 15:26), making Jesus the broker. Jesus declares that keeping his commands will open up access to the Father's love (14:21, 23). In the friendship sayings in John 15, Jesus declares that he makes known to his disciples everything he has heard from his Father (15:15), setting himself as

<sup>39</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 60.

<sup>40</sup> So deSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity,” 51.

<sup>41</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends*, 230.

<sup>42</sup> Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 771–74. He also cites examples from the letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Fronto, in David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 97–98.

<sup>44</sup> Neyrey, “God, Benefactor and Patron,” 476.

<sup>45</sup> Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 59.

<sup>46</sup> This understanding can be seen in the declared superiority of Christ, the son (Heb 1:2), as a mediator of God's benefits in the epistle of Hebrews. See deSilva, “Exchanging Favor for Wrath,” 95–96. Jesus is also portrayed as the one mediator of God's benefits in Matt 11:27; 1 Tim 2:5; and Eph 1:3–10, and the mediator of earthly petitions or doxologies (Rom 1:8; 7:25; 1 Cor 15:57; Heb 13:20–21; Jude 25). See Neyrey, “God, Benefactor and Patron,” 476.

the *broker of revelation*. In his commissioning of his disciples to bear fruit, he promises that the Father will give them whatever they ask (15:16). This promise comes with a qualification—they ask in the name of Jesus, the broker. Later in the farewell discourse, Jesus reiterates the promise that the Father will give anything they ask for in his name (16:23–27). Notably, it is the *Father* who grants the disciples’ requests in John 15–16, not Jesus himself as in 14:14.<sup>47</sup> As Jesus sets himself up as the sole broker of the Father’s benefits, he sets up a relationship of reciprocity with the disciples being dependent on him.

## 2.4. A Royal Patron with Client-Regents

In this section, we will make the case that the evangelist portrays Jesus in the farewell discourse as a *royal* patron with regents, or client-rulers, who act in his place. In other words, the disciples are brought into a particular relationship where they are called to carry out duties as his loyal representatives.

### 2.4.1. Context of John 15

The context of John 15 points to Jesus as a *royal patron* designating his disciples as friends. The farewell discourse comes directly after the pivotal demonstration that Jesus is the *king* of the Jews. After his anointing by Mary in Bethany, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem is met with shouts reserved for the king. “Hosanna” is a declaration of dependence and praise reserved only for the *king of Israel* (2 Kgs 6:26) and for the *Lord* in the Hebrew Bible. The crowd continues to shout, “king of Israel,” and Jesus mounts a donkey in accordance with the coming king prophesied in Zechariah 9:9 (John 12:12–15). This episode provides the context supporting the view that John 15 would have been understood as friendship with a king.<sup>48</sup>

A prevalent usage of the term *friend* refers to client with political dependence on a royal patron. This can be seen in ancient Israel, with Hushai being the first φίλος of the king (1 Chr 27:33 LXX). Inscriptional evidence demonstrates that *friend of the emperor* is an official title dating back to the successors of Alexander.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the LXX translation of Esther renders שׂר (prince or ruler) with φίλος of the king (Esth 1:3; 2:18; 3:1; 6:9).<sup>50</sup> From the classical period to Macedonia and Syria, a *friend* of the king is a loyal subordinate.<sup>51</sup> Instances in intertestamental literature also use *friend* in this way. In 1 Maccabees 10:20, Alexander Epiphanes writes to the high priest Jonathan, the brother of Judas Maccabeus, stating that he is appointed “friend of the king,” and to “keep friendship towards us” (cf. 1 Macc 15:28, 32; 2 Macc 7:24 for *friends* of Antiochus). Eleazar refers to his relationship with the king

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<sup>47</sup> Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 676.

<sup>48</sup> Contra Culy, who denies any contextual basis. See Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, 165 n. 146.

<sup>49</sup> So Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts from the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 378.

<sup>50</sup> G. Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity*, trans. Alexander Grieve (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 168.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Pisistratus and his friends in Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 1.52–54, friends of Alexander in Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 17.31.6; 17.39.2; 17.100.1, and Polyperchon and the advice of his friends in Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 18.55.1.

Ptolemy of Egypt as “friendship” in the *Letter of Aristeas* 40–41, 44 (cf. 190, 208, 225, 228). In the first century, Dio Chrysostom writes that kings must depend on the loyalty of their friends (φίλος) to rule.<sup>52</sup>

Of great interest to this particular study is the language of a *friend of Caesar* during the Roman imperial period. Clients of a political leader would be bestowed with the honorific title of *amicus* bearing the name of that leader. *Amici* would be granted political influence in exchange for loyal adherence.<sup>53</sup> Josephus, writing during the imperial period, referred to the political subordinates of Antiochus as *friends* (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.366–91; 13.145). Inscriptional evidence demonstrates the prevalence of terms like ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ (friend of Caesar), and to a lesser extent, ΦΙΛΟΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ (friend of Augustus), which referred to client kings and senators.<sup>54</sup> For Romans acting in an administrative role abroad, like provincial rulers, the honorific title *friend of Caesar* indicated that they represented Caesar’s authority.<sup>55</sup> A client-king with a special debt to the emperor would be especially expected to use the epithet φιλόκαισαρ or φιλοσεβαστος. Mannus VIII of Osroene, with his throne restored by Rome, issued coins that bore ΦΙΛΟΡΩΜΑΙΟΣ (friend of Rome).<sup>56</sup> This widespread usage of political friendship language in the Roman Empire is consistent with the Jewish religious leaders’ questioning of the governor Pilate as he attempted to release Jesus. They, aware of the political ramifications, declare that if Pilate releases the so-called king of Jews, he would not be a φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος (John 19:12).<sup>57</sup>

The patron-client dynamic provided people in the provinces with access to their ultimate patron in the imperial cult. Nicolaus of Damascus observed that people honored Augustus with temples and sacrifices in response to the benefits received from the emperor. They sought imperial aid through the priests of the imperial cult, sending the priests to Rome to honor the emperor and preserve favor.<sup>58</sup>

The widespread nature of the connection between a *friend of Caesar* and a *client* is further bolstered by numismatic evidence. Roman provincial coinage often displayed φίλ- terms publicizing the relationship of these local governors or cities to the emperor. A coin of King Agrippa I displays him clasping hands with Claudius, with the reverse inscription describing friendship, or φιλία between the two. A coin from Stratonicea describes the city as ΦΙΛΟΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ (friend of Augustus). Coins from Philadelphia (see Figure 1, with Caligula on the front) and Tripolis display the title ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ. Under Caligula, seven different coins displaying ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ were in circulation.<sup>59</sup> All of this evidence from coinage demonstrates that client kings or regents were called *friends*. This association of *friendship* with *regency* would be found in every purse, and would be reinforced every time people used coins.

<sup>52</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *On Kingship* 3.94–96.

<sup>53</sup> Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends*, 61–62.

<sup>54</sup> For example, see *CIG* 2.3499, *SEG* 17 (1960) 381. See Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Greg H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1978* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1983), 87–88.

<sup>56</sup> David Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of the Client Kingship* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 107.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 89.

<sup>58</sup> deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 102.

<sup>59</sup> Theophilus, “John 15.14 and the ΦΙΛ- Lexeme in Light of Numismatic Evidence,” 38–41.



**Figure 1: Coin from Philadelphia.** *Roman Provincial Coinage*, 3031.4<sup>60</sup>

#### 2.4.2. *Jesus Commissions His Disciples to Act in His Absence*

The content of the farewell discourse points to Jesus commissioning his disciples *to act in his place* during his absence. Jesus speaks of his departure, gives the new command to love one another (13:31–14:17), and promises to broker the benefits from the Father. He then appoints them to bear fruit as they abide in him (15:1–11, 16). The notion of a *friend* as an honorific title bestowed by the king to his client governors fits with Jesus's commissioning of his disciples. They are no longer slaves, but friends. The disciples are expected to respond by fulfilling their commission to love one another and bear fruit. Their loyalty is to Jesus in his absence, in the same way that Pilate's loyalty is expected by Caesar in his absence.

Jesus's assertion in John 15:16 points to him being the ultimate patron. While patrons could choose whom to call friends, clients of the day had to seek out their assistance, cultivating the relationship themselves.<sup>61</sup> Jesus's declaration, "you did not choose me, but I chose you" turns the tables on this convention. In language that echoes the chosen-ness of Israel,<sup>62</sup> the kingly Jesus himself seeks out and appoints those who will be the recipients of his benefits, appointing them to do his work. With his declaration that they will bear fruit that will *remain* and that they will receive anything they ask the Father in his name, Jesus guarantees the certainty that his brokerage will be effective.<sup>63</sup> They act in place of Jesus, with the assurance of the spirit and other benefits from the Father.

Jesus's call to keep his commands as he is departing highlights the value of *loyalty* in the absence of an important figure, which was expected from clients and friends. While a client could have multiple patrons, having two patrons who were enemies of one another would be unthinkable.<sup>64</sup> This concept is illustrated by Jesus's teaching that *no one can have two masters, for he will hate one and love the other*

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<sup>60</sup> Copyright CNG. Used with Permission.

<sup>61</sup> See Horace, *Satires* 1.6.62; Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:1015.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 521.

<sup>64</sup> After Cicero, the conflict between loyalty to a friend and loyalty to the state became a significant issue when Rome came to power. See Alicia J. Batten, *Friendship and Benefaction in James*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 15 (Dorset: Deo, 2010), 67–68.

(Matt 6:24).<sup>65</sup> James 4:4 appeals to this concept using the term *φιλία*: calling them adulteresses, James affirms to the apparently common knowledge that *friendship with the world is enmity towards God*. Likewise, a client king would have a responsibility and commitment to their patron in allegiance and fidelity.<sup>66</sup> The Jewish leaders' manipulation of Pilate illustrates this value of loyalty. In calling for Jesus's crucifixion, the Jews declare loyalty to the emperor—"we have no king but Caesar" (19:15).<sup>67</sup>

Amid this political climate, it follows that Jesus draws on the language of *friends* to solidify loyalty from his disciples, and to commission them to do his work in his absence. Rensberger maintains,

The Fourth Gospel...does not offer a mere retreat from political and social relationships, though it does offer an approach to them that is as radical as its Christology ... by calling for adherence to the king who is not of this world, whose servants do not fight, but remain in the world bearing witness to the truth before the rulers of both synagogue and Empire.<sup>68</sup>

While the concept of agency in the Mishnah has relevance as background to John 15, the activity of patron-client relationships more has more points of contact. Elliott defines an agent as "someone who carries out a task at the request of a superior, referred to as the 'principal.'"<sup>69</sup> The agent acts in the place of the principal and is considered an extension of the principal's will.<sup>70</sup> In this way, an Israelite can transfer legal powers to an agent and assumes responsibility for the agent's actions. To be sure, some overlap exists between a slave and an agent. However, while a slave is a 'living tool,' a free man acts by his own will on behalf of the principal.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, while agency in Judaism has some overlap with patronage, the patron-client relationship is an even better fit for John 15, with the language of *friendship*, *brokerage*, and manumission of slaves. Thus, even if we recognize the framework provided by the Mishnah for the content of John,<sup>72</sup> patronage has a greater influence on the friendship sayings in John 15.

In John 15, Jesus declares the disciples to act as his loyal client-kings or emissaries.<sup>73</sup> His prediction of his departure and commissioning of his disciples to obedience point to the same type of relationship that Pilate has with Caesar. They are to act in place of Jesus, not as slaves, but as honored friends.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. deSilva, "Patronage and Reciprocity," 46.

<sup>66</sup> Theophilus, "John 15.14 and the *ΦΙΛΑ*- Lexeme in Light of Numismatic Evidence," 38.

<sup>67</sup> Brian E. Messner argues that Pilate was under immense pressure to demonstrate loyalty to Tiberius, as the alternative would be loyalty to Sejanus; see "'No Friend of Caesar': Jesus, Pilate, Sejanus, and Tiberius," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 11 (2008): 47–57.

<sup>68</sup> David Rensberger, "The Politics of John: The Trial of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 103 (1984): 411.

<sup>69</sup> Elliott, "John 15," 36.

<sup>70</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Human Will in Judaism: The Mishnah's Philosophy of Intention* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 108–10.

<sup>71</sup> Flesher, *Oxen, Women, or Citizens?*, 130.

<sup>72</sup> This is the argument of Peder Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 83–96.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 676.

### 3. *The Greatest Love*

Having established that the friendship sayings in John 15:13–16 are saturated with imagery of Roman patron-client relationships, we now return to the issue posed at the beginning of this article: *How does Jesus demonstrate the greatest love?* Carson articulates a common objection to Jesus’s statement: “surely life-sacrificing love for *enemies* is greater yet.”<sup>74</sup> While Carson and others are correct that Jesus is indeed addressing friends without contrast to enemies,<sup>75</sup> one cannot ignore the fact that this is the first time that Jesus calls them *friends*. The background of patronage has implications for the saying about the greatest act of love. In this concluding section, I will contend that patronal relationships are the key to understanding the saying about the greatest act of love. This greatest love is not only shown when one lays down his life, but when it is done for *subordinates*.

The notion that one would die for one’s friends was not unfamiliar; the Greek ideal of friendship included this motif of true friends.<sup>76</sup> In *The Symposium*, Plato writes that “Only those in love are prepared to die for one another.”<sup>77</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle affirms that a virtuous man, if necessary, will lay down his life for his friends.<sup>78</sup> However, this ideal of friendship involved seeing friends as *equals*. Aristotle taught perfect friendship is between equals,<sup>79</sup> as both parties render the same benefit in friendship.<sup>80</sup> When princes have friends below their stature, Aristotle writes, the friendship does not remain.<sup>81</sup> When the Romans gained power and influence, the concept of *friendship* transformed. Friendship was “no longer viewed primarily through the lens of democratic citizenship.” This frustrated Hellenistic figures like Plutarch and Cicero, and they publicly addressed what “true” friendship entails.<sup>82</sup>

While a declaration of dying for one’s friends would have been expected given the Hellenistic concept of friendship as between equals, the concept of friendship in connection with Roman patronage would be much more remarkable. The concept of friends as *subordinates* associated with Roman patronage fits better as the background of Jesus’s saying regarding the *greatest* love. This love goes beyond that of dying for one’s equals.

An account from Seneca is relevant to our discussion of Jesus laying down his life for subordinates. Seneca describes a slave concealing his master during a civil war, dressing in his master’s clothes. The

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<sup>74</sup> Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 522, emphasis original.

<sup>75</sup> Morris, *Gospel According to John*, 674; Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 522.

<sup>76</sup> In addition to Plato and Aristotle, others wrote about dying for friends. Lucian spoke of blood and death and war for the sake of friendship’s (*Toxaris* 36). Epictetus wrote that it was one’s duty to die for a friend (*Discourses* 2.7.3).

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 179b, ed. Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, trans. M. C. Howatson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10. The love in view is φιλία. Cf. *Symposium* 208d.

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.9. Notably, the verb that Aristotle uses is ὑπεραποθνήσκειν, not τίθημι with the preposition ὑπέρ.

<sup>79</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51–57. Pangle writes, “Aristotle has stressed repeatedly that the perfect friendship of virtue will be a friendship of equals” (p. 57).

<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 8.6.7. Aristotle does go on to recognize friendship between unequals, but he considers this type less valuable and “less truly” friendship. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 8.6.7, trans. H. Rackham, LCL 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>81</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 8.7.5–6.

<sup>82</sup> O’Day, “Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,” 146–47.

slave offers his own neck to the swords of his master's enemies, being willing to die in his place. Seneca calls this "a rare show of loyalty."<sup>83</sup> If the slave's willingness to die for his superior was rare, it follows that one dying for subordinates would be even rarer. To lay down one's life for subordinates would indeed prove to be the greatest love.

The saying about the greatest love in John 15:13 echoes Jesus's earlier saying in John regarding the good shepherd, where the relationship is also between unequals. After Jesus affirms that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (10:11), he declares that he himself is the good shepherd who lays down his life, moving from a maxim to a promise (10:15).<sup>84</sup> No longer in the hypothetical third-person terms often employed by philosophers, Jesus declares that he cares for the sheep so much that he will lay down his life for them. One cannot ignore that the sheep are the *subordinates* of the shepherd, and they follow him (10:27). This subordination makes remarkable the shepherd's willingness to sacrifice his life, especially in contrast with the hired hand.

Further supporting the case that these friends are subordinates, Jesus does not call himself a *friend* to his disciples. They are *his* friends, not necessarily the other way around. While Jesus has offered his slaves manumission, he does not place them on equal ground. This inequality is consistent with the later designation of Pilate as the friend of Caesar. It reflects the *Roman* rather than Greek understanding of friendship, as Aristotle excluded the idea of a superior being a φίλος to an inferior.<sup>85</sup>

Culy claims that this language of laying down one's life for friends would "imply that something more than" patron-client relationships is in view here.<sup>86</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh state that the friendship in 15:13–15 is "fictive kinship" in light of the saying about greatest love—they insist that this kind of love is only reserved for family members.<sup>87</sup> However, their objection ends up proving the point of this article. Jesus declares that there is *no greater love*, implying a comparison with other acts of benefit. His act of love shows him to be the greatest within a certain sort of role. Culy is right that this love appears *outside what was customary* for patrons and clients. He explains why there is no greater love: no patron would do this for a client. With the elements of *inequality, reciprocity, manumission of slaves, and brokerage* in view, the friendship sayings in John 15 point to *patronage*. Jesus, then, declares that he is like no patron who ever lived.

In his saying about the greatest love, Jesus foretells his death. He has set into motion the events that will lead to the cross, as the religious leaders have plotted to put him to death. In this way, Jesus moves from a maxim in hypothetical terms to an actual act of love. His death for his subordinates fulfills John 10:11: he, as the good shepherd, lays down his life for the sheep.

Ultimately, patron-client relationships make the most sense out of Jesus's declaration that laying down one's life for friends is the greatest act of love.<sup>88</sup> While clients would be expected to undergo affliction for their patrons, a patron would not lay down his life for his subordinate clients. Patrons

<sup>83</sup> Seneca, *On Benefits*, 3.25 (trans. Basore).

<sup>84</sup> O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," 150.

<sup>85</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 7.4.1–2.

<sup>86</sup> Culy, *Echoes of Friendship in the Gospel of John*, 162.

<sup>87</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 235.

<sup>88</sup> Indeed, van der Watt writes, "It does not take much imagination to see how the death of Jesus on a cross could have been interwoven with the Greco-Roman thought of 'laying down your life for others/friends'... Jesus's words and deeds are remembered in the terms of a Greco-Roman maxim which signifies a movement from a traditional Jewish to a more Hellenized situation" ("Laying Down Your Life for Your Friends," 173–74).

offered goods and services to those of lower status so that they would receive honor and influence. In other words, they had something to gain afterward. The reciprocal culture led clients to seek to repay these debts, a practice that frustrated Plutarch and other writers. The declaration of the greatest love demonstrates Jesus to be the patron *par excellence*. He chooses his friends, lays down his life for them, and in doing so, offers an act of patronage that cannot be repaid.

#### 4. *Implications for Further Research*

With the friendship sayings of Jesus saturated with the language of patron-client relationships, this study raises questions that would be worthy of further research.

First, does the patronage language suggest that Jesus foretells his resurrection and ascension? Given the saying about the greatest love and the commissioning of the disciples, Jesus’s sayings come with an underlying assumption that he will be able to receive their reciprocal acts of loyalty. After all, the greatest act of love for his friends elicits the response of gratitude. They pledge to serve the patron with acts of service, to the point of undergoing affliction. Jesus commissions his friends to bear fruit, and it follows that he would later be alive to be served. He has declared his intent to depart, and they are to serve a *living* patron. In this way, Jesus appears to hint towards his resurrection and his ascension.

Second, does this usage of φίλος inform our understanding of John’s use of the cognate verb φιλέω? While it has been pointed out that the evangelist uses the terms φιλέω and ἀγαπάω interchangeably in some places (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7),<sup>89</sup> the account of Jesus’s reinstatement of Peter (John 21:15–19) is relevant here. With Jesus asking, “do you love me?,” using ἀγαπάω and Peter affirming using φιλέω, it may be possible that Peter pledges loyal obedience to Jesus in response to his question. This would make fitting Jesus’s reply to *feed my sheep*, as it is a commission to a task after Peter pledged loyalty.

#### 5. *Conclusion*

The distinctiveness of John 15:13–16 and its points of contact with Roman patron-client relationships suggest that Jesus’s sayings draw from this imagery. As discussed above, John 15:13–16 is the only place in the Gospel where Jesus refers to his disciples as *slaves*, and also the only place where he calls them *friends*. Also, it introduces the concept that the disciples can ask anything through the broker Jesus, and the *Father* will grant their request. The sayings’ parallels with patronal relationships include the concepts of friends as subordinates, the manumission of slaves, brokerage to another patron, and client-regents who act in a king’s place.

Jesus’s ultimate act of love is the greatest in one sense because he pays the ultimate price, but it is also the greatest in a different sense because it is done for subordinates. This sacrifice is a love for which the Greek understanding of friendship as equals does not account. The evangelist, following his purpose (John 20:31), urges his hearers to choose between loyalty to Jesus and loyalty to Caesar, as a person could not have two patrons who were rivals of one another.<sup>90</sup> With Caesar being the greatest patron in the world, Jesus declares himself to be an even greater patron than he.

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<sup>89</sup> Sean Winter, “Friendship Traditions in the New Testament: An Overview,” *Pacifica* 29 (2016): 202.

<sup>90</sup> With Jesus affirming his oneness with the Father, having both the Father and Son as patrons would not be a problem of conflicting loyalties.

# Spirit-Anointing and New Testament Church Leadership: Are Our Church Leaders Uniquely “Anointed?”

— Scott MacDonald —

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**Abstract:** Does the church need Spirit-anointed leadership? “Anointing” is an increasingly common topic in relation to Christian leaders. This article aims to clarify the role of Spirit-anointing in the Old and New Testaments, with special attention to texts that are explicitly relevant to the church’s experience (i.e., 2 Cor 1:21–22; 1 John 2:20, 26–27). The misuse of the term “anointing” arises from a recast of Old Testament pneumatology as post-Pentecost. This misapplication of Old Testament texts denigrates the Holy Spirit’s expanded role of inhabitation in the New Testament era. Furthermore, the obfuscation of Spirit-anointing has incurred significant harm to the practices and doctrines that relate to local church leadership.

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“Your church needs more than *called* leadership; it needs *anointed* leadership!” Such catchphrases are proliferating throughout contemporary Christian circles.<sup>1</sup> Innumerable church leaders have staked their claim to the anointing, which supposedly sets them apart from lesser leaders. For instance, The Potter’s House North Dallas (affiliated with T. D. Jakes) boasts concerning one of their leaders, “The fresh anointing on Bishop Joby Brady, complemented with an insight in the revelation of God’s word, is touching the hearts of people around the world.”<sup>2</sup> If someone is not sure if they have received anointing, they do not need to worry since articles like “5 Things Anointed Leaders Have” are

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the example from The Potter’s House mentioned above, here are some other articles that reflect the present clamor to seek and produce “anointed” leaders: Brad Long, “5 Principles of Growing Anointed Leaders,” *Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International*, <https://www.primi.org/5-principles-of-growing-anointed-leaders/>; Stephen Mayers, “What’s Your Leadership Anointing?” *Healthy Leaders*, <https://healthyleaders.com/whats-leadership-anointing/>; Christopher Peppler, “Anointed Leadership: The Church Jesus Would Attend Series,” *Truth is The Word*, <http://www.truthistheword.com/anointed-leadership-the-church-jesus-would-attend-series/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tphnd.org/our-leaders/>.

aplenty online.<sup>3</sup>

As a seminary instructor in the Global South, I have observed this pursuit of anointing firsthand. Evangelical seminarians, thanks to the encroachment and infiltration of Neo-Pentecostal teachings, have embraced these new pneumatological terms and ideas. The rest of the visible church around the world is not immune to this inclination. Appeals and references to anointed men of God are aplenty. Anyone like myself who would dare to voice caution is silently branded at best “stuck in his ways” or at worst “anti-Spirit.”

But is the clamor for anointed leadership a biblical concept? In the pages ahead, let us recall the Old Testament background and the New Testament concept of Spirit-anointing. We need to correctly diagnose the misunderstandings which undergird our proclivity for “anointing” and warn against the consequences from such a misuse of terminology.<sup>4</sup>

### *1. Old Testament Spirit-Anointing*

Throughout the Old Testament, anointing primarily pertains to leadership over God’s people, in some formal capacity. The act of anointing with oil consecrated specific people for service. The Hebrew verb itself (מָשַׁח, the origin of the word “Messiah”) initially appears in Genesis 31:13 concerning the rock which Jacob covered with oil, meaning literally to “smear” or “anoint.”<sup>5</sup> The first biblical examples of the anointing of persons are Moses and Aaron. Moses’s anointing, though no oil is used, is implied from the wording of Numbers 11:17 where it is said that “the Spirit was on him” and that this anointing would be spread to the seventy elders.<sup>6</sup> This incident inaugurated the formal prophetic role in Israel, as evidenced by Moses’s exclamation in verse 29, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” The anointing of the prophetic office is also evidenced through other instances like Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16).

In contrast with Moses’s reception of the Spirit, the role of anointing with oil is more explicit and literal in the initiation of the Aaronic priesthood. The consecration scene is depicted in Leviticus 8:10–13:

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. And he

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<sup>3</sup> Artie Davis, “5 Things Anointed Leaders Have,” *Church Planting*, <https://www.churchplanting.com/5-things-anointed-leaders-have/>.

<sup>4</sup> We are differentiating between anointing for consecrated leadership and other anointings like healing (e.g., Mark 6:13, Jas 5:14) and burial (e.g., Mark 14:8). While these other anointings are related, we are focusing on the specific issue of leadership. For more on New Testament anointing narratives, see S. Miller’s helpful article “Anointing,” *DJG*, 17–18.

<sup>5</sup> BDB 602, s.v. “מָשַׁח.” The event of setting apart Bethel is described in Genesis 28:18.

<sup>6</sup> Cole explains, “Moses’ role was to gather ... the seventy elders and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the standard place for revelatory activity from the Lord and where priests and Levites were anointed and commissioned for service. The Lord would then descend in the cloud and speak to Moses, the key individual in the revelatory activity of Yahweh. In the process he would impart to them some of his spirit, which heretofore had been endowed only upon Moses.” R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 189.

poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. And Moses brought Aaron's sons and clothed them with coats and tied sashes around their waists and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.<sup>7</sup>

While the Spirit is not mentioned in the immediate context, his involvement is implicit, since the priests were commissioned to serve the Lord in his presence (and the Spirit would come upon their line in cases like 2 Chr 24:20).<sup>8</sup> The Holy One consecrated them as holy for their ministry.

The post of king, especially in the early years as the Israelite kingdom solidified, exhibits the importance of anointing.<sup>9</sup> Saul, David, and Solomon are all anointed with oil. The description of David's anointing is one of the clearest expressions of Old Testament Spirit-anointing: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah" (1 Sam 16:13).<sup>10</sup>

While David did not seize the royal office at that time, he is set apart and spiritually equipped for the role. In contrast to his older and more respectable brothers, God uniquely qualifies David by the presence of the Spirit whom the others did not possess. First Samuel provides little commentary, but the picture of the oil flowing down David's head speaks more than anything else! Bergen expounds, "The shapeless, invasive fluid used in the ceremony served fittingly as a symbol of the mystical presence of God. As the oil worked its way into the individual's hair and pores, it symbolized the divine presence entering into the one being anointed."<sup>11</sup> Anointing is the physical expression of the spiritual event of the covering or inhabitation of the Holy Spirit of God.

However, while anointing pertains to kings like David, it also applies to disreputable ones such as Jehu, who did not "walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart."<sup>12</sup> According to the will of God, the installation of this ordained dynasty appears to demand such a procedure. Thus, the spiritually deficient leader was anointed.

So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel"... Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put

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<sup>7</sup> All Scripture citations in this article follow the ESV.

<sup>8</sup> Wenham connects the anointing of Aaron with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, commenting, "Since the Spirit brings unity and blessing, this may explain the reference to this ceremony in Ps. 133." Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 141.

<sup>9</sup> Judges were also presumably anointed in some sense (e.g., Gideon is "clothed" by the Spirit in Judg 6:34), though not literally anointed with oil like Aaron the priest or David the king.

<sup>10</sup> "For both Saul and David, after they were anointed king, the spirit of the Lord came upon them to equip them to carry out their commission," according to David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 423.

<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 180.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Kings 10:31. Jehu's anointing and commission is quite specific. He is not only elevated from commander to king, but he is selected to fulfill the prophesies of God. "Jehu takes the prophet to a private place, where the messenger anoints him. Instead of running as soon as he declares him king, as Elisha has instructed him, the anointer tells Jehu that his rise to power will occur so that Elijah's predictions about Ahab's lineage and about Jezebel can come true. Indeed, this language in 9:10 sounds very much like 1 Kgs 21:23" according to Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, NAC 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 287

it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, “Jehu is king.” (2 Kgs 9:6, 13)

The concept of anointed leadership is even flexible enough to encompass a foreign ruler like Cyrus, as the Lord calls him “anointed” in Isaiah 45:1! Especially considering his “deliverer” role in relationship to the nation of Israel, the title is warranted. Thus, moral standards are not a prerequisite for anointing in this basic sense. This understanding also accounts for the Holy Spirit’s use of the ethically suspect judges.

In general, the Old Testament context establishes a bifurcated pattern for the people of God—the Spirit-anointed who are elected and equipped for leadership and the rest of God’s people who lack the same influence of the Spirit of God. While one could debate whether some leaders were more anointed than others, this comparison is not prioritized from the text. Instead, the natural juxtaposition is that the Holy Spirit accompanies and utilizes a few, while the remainder are not so blessed.

## *2. The Spirit-Anointing of the Messiah*

The broader Old Testament context leads us into the Messianic concept of anointing, relating to Jesus. Cyrus is not the only anointed figure in Isaiah! Isaiah 61 speaks of another anointed one (i.e., the Messiah). This prophetic text which Jesus claims for himself in Luke 4:18–19 declares:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor.<sup>13</sup>

The presence and power of the Spirit is uniquely associated with the Greek word “anointed” (related to *χρίω*, the origin of the word “Christ”).<sup>14</sup> However, the quality of this Anointed One, the Messiah, is extraordinary. In the moral sense, he is unquestioned, as framed in Hebrews 1:8–9, where the Son always loves righteousness (setting Jesus apart from the anointings of Cyrus, Saul, and even David).<sup>15</sup> The Messianic role extends beyond a single office, enveloping prophet (Luke 4:18), priest (Heb 7:11–28), and king (Heb 1:8). In the chronological sense, he reigns “forever and ever.” In Jesus, we behold the culmination of Spirit-anointing.

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<sup>13</sup> While a reading of Isaiah alone might lead a student of the Scripture to assume that the anointed one was purely prophetic, Luke has a broader concept in mind. Nolland adds, “Luke thinks in both prophetic and messianic terms ..., though in the immediate pericope the prophetic thought is predominant. In any case, the stress is on Jesus as anointed by the Spirit.” John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, WBC 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 196.

<sup>14</sup> William D. Mounce, *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Accordance Electronic Edition, 2011), s.v. “Χριστός,” “χρίω.”

<sup>15</sup> The author of Hebrews is contrasting the Son and the angelic host. The anointed Son’s superiority is evident, as he stands above the heavenly powers. “God has assigned to him a superior office. Their [the angels’] function is to serve; his is to rule,” according to William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Nashville: Nelson, 1991), 30.

While entirely and eternally divine even in his incarnation, Jesus follows and fulfills the pattern of Spirit-anointing in his baptism.<sup>16</sup> No physical oil is used, but the Spirit descends upon him and guides the initiation of the Messianic ministry.<sup>17</sup> This includes both the wilderness temptation and the public fulfillment of the Isaiah 61 prophecy. Jesus then ministers in the power of the Spirit, as Peter testified in Acts 10:38, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising that Jesus considers the Pharisees’ objections to his ministry as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:24–32)!<sup>19</sup>

### 3. New Testament Spirit-Anointing

What about the New Testament church and us today? Should we apply the Old Testament anointing or the Messianic anointing motifs to the church? We must examine the texts which expound on the Spirit’s role of anointing in the church.

First, Paul raises the subject in 2 Corinthians 1:21–22, stating, “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”<sup>20</sup> As an extension of his introduction to the epistle, the apostle is discussing travel intentions. And in the midst of this pericope, he unearths a theological nugget about the Holy Spirit. Despite changes of plans, the church at Corinth and Paul are united in Christ by the “anointing, sealing, and giving” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Christ is “the Anointed One,” and since Paul and the Corinthians are united in Christ, they too are anointed.

Second, John mentions Spirit-anointing in his first letter:

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<sup>16</sup> Jesus rightfully receives worship from the Magi (Matt 2:11) before his public ministry. No narrative room exists to permit that Jesus was emptied of divinity prior to birth or that Jesus was adopted as divine at the baptism.

<sup>17</sup> “Messiah” is a “rendering of a Hebrew term meaning ‘anointed one,’ equivalent to the original sense of the Greek term translated ‘Christ,’” according to Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 783.

<sup>18</sup> Peter understood what was obvious to Jesus’s followers after the resurrection—that Jesus represented Himself as the Son of God and the Messiah in one person. Bruce mentions, “It was at his baptism that Jesus was thus anointed, for then the Holy Spirit descended on him from above, while the voice from heaven acclaimed him as God’s Son and chosen one Messiah and Servant in one. Part of the force of Peter’s words will come home to us if for a moment we render ‘God anointed him’ as ‘God made him Messiah.’” F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 214.

<sup>19</sup> Hagner comments, “The gravity of the blasphemy against the Spirit, however, depends upon the Holy Spirit as the fundamental dynamic that stands behind and makes possible the entire messianic ministry of Jesus itself.” Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), 348.

<sup>20</sup> Harris confirms that Paul is intending to apply anointing broadly in this text, not merely to himself or other church leadership. “Rather, σὺν ὑμῖν after ἡμᾶς alerts the readers that in the further two uses of ἡμεῖς in this sentence, the pronoun refers not to Paul alone (as in v. 18) or to Paul and his colleagues (as in v. 19) but to Paul and the Corinthians as typical of all believers (as in the transitional v. 20). And just as ‘anointing’ is a universal Christian privilege (1 John 2:20, 27), so too are ‘sealing’ and receipt of the Spirit (v. 22).” Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 206–207

<sup>21</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 105.

But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.... I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:20, 26–27)<sup>22</sup>

Again, the extent of this anointing is broad.<sup>23</sup> In verse 18, John employs the familial term “children” “to show that he is addressing the community as a whole.”<sup>24</sup> In light of their struggles with antichrists (2:18) and false prophets (4:1), the beloved disciple is reminding them of the anointing they have all received through the Spirit who guides them into the truth and protects them from the deceptions of the age.

Beyond these explicit references, Spirit-anointing is primarily assumed throughout the New Testament. The canonical progression is straightforward. In the Old Testament, a few are anointed by the Spirit. The Messiah comes as the “Anointed One,” whom the Spirit of God leads and empowers to fulfill the mission of the Son as determined by the Father. Then, springing from our union with Christ, all of God’s people receive the anointing by the Spirit of God to carry out the mission of the church. In most cases, the anointing ministry of the Spirit is incorporated within his baptizing and inhabitation of all Christians. Just as the Spirit baptism of all members of the church is standard (1 Cor 12:13), so too the Spirit-anointing of all believers is normative. Thiselton virtually shouts down any misunderstandings about Spirit baptism in 1 Corinthians 12, admonishing, “Any theology that might imply that this one baptism in 13a in which believers were baptized by [or in] one Spirit might mark off some post-conversion experience or status enjoyed only by some Christians attacks and undermines Paul’s entire argument and emphasis.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the apostle insists that “it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us” (2 Cor 1:21). Thus, the New Testament is emphatically clear concerning Spirit-anointing: the very fabric of apostolic doctrine disintegrates with the notion that Spirit-anointing graces an exclusive few instead of uniting and empowering the corporate body.

#### *4. Spirit-Anointing for a Few?*

What about those “receiving the Holy Spirit” narratives in the New Testament? Do these stories provoke us to reevaluate and allow for the possibility of unique anointings for church leadership?

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<sup>22</sup> Interpreters debate the precise meaning of the Holy One in verse 20. Some suggest different members of the Trinity, but with trinitarian cooperation in mind, the answer to the question is not terribly relevant, since “there is really no contradiction between the two possible interpretations, for the divinely effected anointing has the same function as that which the Fourth Gospel attributes to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete: teaching the Christian community in order that it may know the truth, follow the way of truth, and abide in God.” Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 64–65.

<sup>23</sup> “When it is now said of the readers of 1 John, in contrast to the false teachers, that they have been anointed, it seems that anointing is attributed only to the true community. They alone possess the chrism, the oil of anointing, to the extent that they have true knowledge. What is meant is therefore the possession of the spirit of truth, which is not automatically bestowed in the sacramental action but is a gift of God requiring faith. This is precisely what the author presupposes regarding all the readers, in contrast to the opponents who threaten the community.” Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel L. Akin, 1, 2, 3 John, NAC 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 113.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 998.

Beyond the hermeneutical issues of defining a doctrine by pitting narrative example against didactic instruction, the texts involved do not support Spirit-anointing as a special grace upon church leaders.

In John 20:22, the resurrected Christ visits his disciples. John recounts, “And when he [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” But does this passage refer to Spirit-anointing, and is this anointing only for the apostles? One hurdle in trying to fashion this event as a special anointing for leaders is the timing. The pre-Pentecost event is early and necessarily narrow. Most persons do not receive the Holy Spirit by the breath of the incarnate Christ! The overall event is a figurative demonstration of what was to become universal among God’s people—the reception of the Holy Spirit. Beasley-Murray wisely summarizes,

The significance of this act [i.e., the giving of the Spirit], accordingly, is not to be limited as though it were solely for the disciples in relation to vv 21 and 23. All three sentences [i.e., the sending of the disciples, the giving of the Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins] have to do with the whole church, like the promises of the Spirit earlier in the Gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus is not instituting a special anointing for his disciples which the rest of the church would never experience. Instead, the disciples are the first recipients of the promise of the Holy Spirit—he who would rest upon the entire community of faith.

During the transition from the Spirit’s Old Testament ministry to the Spirit’s New Testament ministry, other unusual times of unevenness in the dispersal of the Spirit occur, where the Spirit is not automatically provided (e.g., the converts of Samaria in Acts 8:14–17).<sup>27</sup> But again, these cases do not involve leaders lacking a unique anointing for ministry. The Spirit’s inhabitation ministry is widening, even as he works in partnership with the message and mission of the Apostles.

### *5. The Cost of Confusing the Anointing of the Spirit*

Therefore, should we look for “anointed leadership” in the church today? The Scripture does *not* support such language or the theology behind it. We will encounter the following four consequences when we obfuscate the biblical terminology.

First, leadership offices are arbitrarily safeguarded for a privileged status (i.e., anointed) that is not biblically delineated as a unique leadership quality. The requirements for holding New Testament

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<sup>26</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 381.

<sup>27</sup> While this text always provokes debate, it cannot be interpreted apart from the epistolary doctrine on the ministry of the Spirit. Understanding the unusual timing and circumstances, Bruce harmonizes accordingly, “It is not suggested by Paul when he speaks in 2 Cor. 1:21–22 of Christians’ being anointed, sealed, and given the Spirit in their hearts as a guarantee; he does not include the power of thus imparting the Spirit among the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:4–11, and when he thanks God that he did not baptize more than a handful of his Corinthian converts (1 Cor. 1:14–16) the whole force of his argument would disappear if we had to suppose that, even so, he confirmed them all. In other places in Acts, too, there is no hint that apostolic hands were laid on converts before they received the Spirit. Nothing is said about this being done to the Pentecostal believers at Jerusalem (2:38–42) or, later, to the household of Cornelius at Caesarea (10:44–48). The only near parallel to the present occasion is the exceptional case of the Ephesian disciples in 19:1–7. In general, it seems to be assumed throughout the New Testament that those who believe and are baptized have also the Spirit of God. In the present instance, some special evidence may have been necessary to assure the Samaritans, so accustomed to being despised as outsiders by the people of Jerusalem, that they were fully incorporated into the new community of the people of God.” Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 169.

offices are stated (apostle: 1 Cor 9:1, 15:7–9; elder/overseer: 1 Tim 3:1–7, Titus 1:5–9; deacon: 1 Tim 3:8–13), and possessing an additional anointing is not included, as that is an Old Testament concept of leadership. Instead, when churches foist “anointing” into their leadership requirements, it can function as shorthand for “someone who is uniquely or spectacularly called, beyond the usual gifting” or “someone who has a unique relationship with God and his divine power.” This hodgepodge boils down into Gnosticism, personality cults, and legalism.

Second, Christians misunderstand the importance and role of Spirit-filling. While the Bible contains no imperative to “be anointed,” Ephesians 5:18 commands, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Although “anointed” is a trait of the entire church in the New Testament, filling is not, and thus Christians are commanded to pursue it, which results in wisdom, knowledge of the will of God, heartfelt worship, and thankfulness.<sup>28</sup> It would then follow that we would expect our leaders to exhibit Spirit-filling in their roles before the body. And the Spirit does occasionally use such filled persons in powerful ways, but this occurrence does not mean that we should misuse the biblical term “anointed” in the description of those persons.

If we post the placard “you must be anointed” to hold a certain office in the church, consider the misunderstanding in the hearts of aspiring ministers. “Am I anointed?” “How can I be anointed?” “Who will anoint me with the Spirit of God?” Of course, the search for extraordinary “anointing” can be well-intentioned, but the example of Simon offers a cautionary tale (Acts 8:18). Furthermore, instead of potential Christian leaders pursuing the filling of the Spirit by faith in Christ, the pursuit of anointing can lead to a misused Old Testament example (e.g., Elijah and Elisha) that does not represent the Spirit’s present anointing work in the church.

Third, the “anointing” label for church leaders only deepens the divide between laity and clergy. Like the Old Testament where Moses stood before God while the people trembled at a distance, classes of Christians also form today when it should not be this way! Ironically, the apostle Paul referenced the anointing of the Spirit as a source of unity and commonality, even as the usage of “anointed” by many modern leaders implies the opposite. Laity are led to believe that levels of the Spirit’s ministry are inaccessible, requiring that they rely upon the anointed clergy class.

We bemoan the atrophy of many pew-dwellers, those who muster mere overtures concerning the mission of the church in the world. Yet as long as we embrace concepts like Spirit-anointing for a few privileged leaders, should they not be apathetic? They supposedly lack the full commission of the Spirit, and the spiritually rich can surely accomplish the work of the ministry without the minute contributions of the spiritually poor. What an error! Does not the body need all of its parts anointed for service? Let the church unite in our Spirit-anointing, that we may realize our common standing before God and our joint mission in the world. Our pastors and leaders are not our “Moseses.” As we are partakers of a greater covenant in Christ, the Spirit has come upon the entire people of God, whom he has permanently anointed and set apart for ministry.

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<sup>28</sup> While New Testament narratives associate the filling of the Spirit with miraculous events and public preaching, the essence of Spirit-filling is explained here by Paul. Persons filled with Spirit by faith understand the will of God and act wisely in carrying it out. Lincoln frames the passage well: “The command to be filled with the Spirit stands in the center of the passage and has links with what precedes—wisdom—as well as with what follows—worship. The Spirit provides the power for both aspects of Christ living. Believers ... are now exhorted to allow the Spirit to have the fullest control that they are conscious of in their lives and to open themselves continually to the one who can enable them to walk wisely and to understand Christ’s will and who can inspire their worship and thanksgiving.” Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 345.

Fourth, when “anointed” is a title reserved for a privileged class, the doctrine of the priesthood of believers suffers. First Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:9–10 depict the totality of God’s people as a priesthood.<sup>29</sup> But how could this be possible apart from anointing (figuratively or literally)? In a contemporary church culture that overlooks or diminishes the universality of the anointing within the body of Christ, the anointed class also becomes the priestly class, to the exclusion of others. But by virtue of our union with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, we also are anointed by the Spirit as prophets, priests, and kings under the rule of Jesus—the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.

The contemporary use of the title “anointed” conflates the operation of the Holy Spirit’s anointing ministry in the Old Testament with his broader anointing work in the New Testament. The offices and gifts of the church all require and flow from the anointing of the Spirit! No special sense of anointed leadership is outlined in the New Testament, and when we finagle that language into our churches, we are downplaying the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the church, while anachronistically disseminating the Old Testament divide wherein some are anointed and some are not anointing among God’s people. For the health of the church, let us fervently oppose such misguided terminology.

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<sup>29</sup> What is Peter indicating by applying “royal priesthood” to the church? “This means both that they are a priesthood and that they belong to the king. In the ancient world it was not unusual for the king to have his own group of priests. In our writing surely the kingdom of God is referred to, which indicates that they serve, not the earthly cult of Israel or any other such cult, but that which belongs to the inbreaking kingdom whose king is Christ. Their priestly duties have already been indicated in 2:5, namely, the offering of spiritual sacrifices. The priest has the privilege of serving in the presence of the deity, of ‘coming near’ where no one else dares (cf. Heb. 9:1–10:25). Thus together the words indicate the privileged position of the Christians before God: belonging to the king and in the presence of God.” Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 91–92.

# The Parting of the Way: A Survey of the Relationship between Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries CE

— Doosuk Kim —

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**Abstract:** People today clearly view Judaism and Christianity as different religions. Undisputedly, however, Jesus and his followers were Jews in the first century. When did the parting of the way between Jews and Christians take place? What are the decisive factors that made the two ended up so far from each other? This essay examines this relationship in its social, theological, historical, and political context. The evidence suggests that though the exact time and impetus for the parting remain elusive, the parting of the way began in the first century and gradually became clearer in the second century.

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To begin with undisputed matters: Jesus was a Jew; the disciples were Jews; Paul was a Jew; and most of the New Testament writers were Jews. In other words, the Jesus movement in the first century was initiated by Jews. The major Jesus-movement figures in the New Testament themselves testify that they were Jews and had not opposed Jewish traditions. For instance, Peter hesitated (multiple times!) to take unlawful foods which are banned in Torah and regarded having fellowship with the Gentile as prohibited by Jewish laws (Acts 10:14, 28). Also, Paul, seen in retrospect as one of the founders of Christianity, claims that he is a Jew, still believing in the same God (Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22). Moreover, Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), and when Paul came back to Jerusalem, in Acts 21, he committed himself to Jewish purification.

Then, when did the parting of the way between the two beliefs initiate in the first place? What are the decisive factors that made the two end up so far from each other? To answer these questions, this article assesses the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first two centuries CE, with

specific focus on the social, theological, historical, and political context of this relationship.<sup>1</sup> First, I explore the nature of Jewish identity: who is a Jew? Next, I consider Jewish hostility towards followers of Christ and the theological ramifications of the early church's pneumatology. Third, I examine the Jewish revolts in 66–70 CE and 132–136 CE, which played an important historical role in the parting of the way. Fourth, I investigate the political implications of the new tax policy for the Jews (*Fiscus Judaicus*) begun by the emperor Vespasian. Through these areas of research, I suggest that though the exact time and impetus for the parting remain elusive, the parting of the way initiated in the first century CE and gradually became clearer in the second century CE.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Social Context for the Parting of the Way: Jewish Identity, Who Is a Jew?

Why is Jewish identity significant? It is because social identities function as boundary markers between in-group and out-group. In other words, the question that speaks of *who we are* could be rephrased to *who are those not belonging to us*. For the Jews of what we now view as the first and second century, ethnicity is the overriding identity factor here, though there were other factors such as circumcision, dietary custom, monotheism, Sabbath observance, purity laws, and festivals. An interesting point is that although Jews began to distance themselves to varying extents from other customs such as purity, dietary custom, and festivals, they would still be described by themselves and others as Jews. Even if some Jews observed other Jews who did not observe Jewish customs and traditions as renegades, lawless, and impious, they would never regard them as Gentiles, because ethnicity was the first step by which they recognized someone as a Jew.<sup>3</sup> This might result from the presence of diaspora Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Jews were not only settled in the Palestine region but all over the

<sup>1</sup> To employ the term *Christianity* in the first century setting would be anachronistic since Christianity was not established as a religion at that time. Hence, scholars usually adopt the term *Jesus movement* instead of Christianity. This paper, however, uses Christianity (or Christians), not indicating it as an official and established religion but to distinguish Jesus-followers/believers from Jews.

<sup>2</sup> However, to identify when the parting of the way took place and what made the parting explicit is not a simple task. There are at least three difficulties involved here. First, some scholars are not satisfied with the phrase *the parting of the way*. Reed and Becker, suggest that though there are some overt clues indicating the parting, “Judaism and Christianity had remained meaningfully intertwined long after the second century, and they repeated the parting and converging over and over.” Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Introduction: Traditional Models and New Directions,” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 23. For other scholarly views, opposing the term *the parting of the way*, see pp. 16–21. Second, though one may be able to provide some evidence for the parting of the way, one should not presume that the parting took place at the same time throughout the Roman Empire. Due to the geographical scale and the contextual differences that this implies, the parting would hardly happen everywhere simultaneously. See, Eric M. Meyers, “Living Side by Side in Galilee,” in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 133–50. Third, we ought to consider that there were already different types of Judaism and Christianity prevalent in the early period of the Roman Empire. In the Second Temple period, diverse types of Judaism emerged such as Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Also, many types and/or offshoots of Christianity existed such as the Gnostics, the Ebionites, the Manicheans, and what we refer to retrospectively as the Ethiopian Orthodox church community. James H. Charlesworth, “Did They Ever Part?” in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 281–300.

<sup>3</sup> Jews used different types of terms to indicate Gentiles who wanted to follow Jewish customs. Such terms are proselytes, Judaizers, God-fearers, and half-Jewish. But they never acknowledged them as people who can share

empire. Thus, they had a high potential to be assimilated with Gentile life and pagan cults.<sup>4</sup> Though they all shared the same identity, we would expect to find that their practices—and their perspectives on those practices—would be different. The variations between Philo's writings and Qumran's literature may support such a view.

Also, subtle theological dissonances among Jews would have not been a “deal breaker” in defining who a Jew is. The fractionalization noted above indicates, among other things, that Judaism in the Second Temple period was not uniform but diverse in terms of understandings and theologies of Judaism (i.e., Acts 23:6–8).<sup>5</sup> Though there were several types of Jews, they all would have considered all of themselves as Jews. For instance, Pharisees would have considered Sadducees Jews, and vice versa. Interestingly enough, Jews regard even Jewish heretics as Jews, despite their deviant theology and idiosyncratic religious practice.<sup>6</sup> Schremer explains that “even Jews, who are socially and theologically *minim*, are introduced under the heading of Jews who separated from the ways of the community.”<sup>7</sup>

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the identity as Jews. P. Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: Clarke, 1991), 15.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, some Jews married with non-Jews and their children did not necessarily get circumcised or follow Jewish laws. Timothy is an example of this. His mother was a Jew, but his father was a Gentile. He had not been circumcised until he got to Jerusalem with Paul.

<sup>5</sup> Defining first-century Judaism is an ongoing debate among scholars. Some scholars elucidate that Judaism is a homogeneous religious group. They suggest that Pharisaism that developed toward rabbinic Judaism in the late first and second century is the normative form of Judaism. See e.g., Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, ed. Géza Vermès et al., trans. T. A. Burkill, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973); William David, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Harper Torchbooks; New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2nd ed., trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols., Publications of the Perry Foundation in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979); E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992). Others attempt to distinguish Palestinian Judaism from that of diaspora Jews. These scholars argue that due to the remoteness from Jerusalem and temple, diaspora Jews are less genuine, and their Judaism is more syncretic, adopting different kinds of pagan religions and Hellenistic influences. A last group of scholars assert that even Palestine Judaism was Hellenized. Put differently, Judaisms in the first century present various ways and degrees of being Jewish. See e.g., Stanley E. Porter, “Was Paul a Good Jew? Fundamental Issues in a Current Debate,” in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 159; E. J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Avigdor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum, Temple Book T22 (New York: Atheneum, 1975); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century After Christ* (London: Philadelphia: SCM, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> See Adiel Schremer, “Wayward Jews: Minim in Early Rabbinic Literature,” *JJS* 64 (2013): 242–63. Here, the concept of a heretic is different from an apostate. Whereas a heretic is the one who is off the mainstream of the orthodox, an apostate is the one who declines the fundamental system of a religion.

<sup>7</sup> Schremer, “Wayward Jews,” 259. The concept of *minim* and *minut* appears in Tannaitic literature. The term *minim* refers to heretics, and *minut* is about “the social existence of the Jewish community” rather than a pure theological apologetics. See also Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

In his recent monograph, Thiessen attempts to answer a question, “who is a Jew?” Opposing predominant scholarly perspectives,<sup>8</sup> Thiessen argues that “Jewishness is not a matter of choice but of descent.”<sup>9</sup> By stating this, Thiessen asserts that, for Jews, there is no opportunity for conversion, but Jewishness is determined by birth. To elaborate his thesis, Thiessen investigates from the Old Testament to the Second Temple period and asserts that even circumcision is not an unquestionable Jewish identity badge. Circumcision was not a wild card, so to speak, to confirm one’s identity as a Jew.<sup>10</sup> Thus, though a Gentile proposed that he had been circumcised, it would not guarantee his Jewishness. Thiessen contends that circumcision does not qualify a Gentile to be a Jew. Rather, “circumcision is a custom only intended for and of value to Jews.”<sup>11</sup>

Probing Tannaitic literature, Schiffman comes up with the same conclusion as Thiessen’s, namely that Jewishness is determined by descent.<sup>12</sup> Schiffman draws attention to a Mishnaic text about betrothal, particularly Qiddushin 3:12–4:14.<sup>13</sup> Then, he contends that “the offspring of the union of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man was certainly considered a Jew.”<sup>14</sup> Also, in Sotah 7:8 in the Mishnah, Agrippa read the Torah, and when he came to Deuteronomy 17:15—the king of Israel should be one of the brothers—

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<sup>8</sup> Thiessen introduces two predominant scholarly perspectives on Jewish identity. First, the identity of the Jew was not static but fluctuating during the time of the Second Temple period. Second, because of this dynamic identity, becoming a Jew is a matter of choice. In other words, Jewishness is not indigenous but gainable by being circumcised, observing Torah, and following Jewish customs; no longer could ethnic, biological, and genealogical foundation alone determine the Jewish identity, such that religious, cultic and customary practice became another pillar of Jewish identity. To elaborate the majority scholarly assessment, Thiessen introduces some rationales. First, there is an inconsistent standard between Deuteronomy 23:3 and Judith 14:10 regarding the Gentiles. Second, during the time of the Hasmoneans, Idumeans were incorporated in Jewish community. Third, in the time of the Maccabean revolt, the term “Jews” is reckoned as religious and political in meaning rather than in an ethnic sense. Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> In spite of the same conclusion that the identity of Jews is determined by descent, there is a critical difference between Schiffman and Thiessen. Whereas Thiessen contends that even conversion by circumcision and observing Torah was not possible, Schiffman suggests that in the Tannaitic period, if four prerequisites are achieved, namely acceptance of the Torah, circumcision for males, immersion, and sacrifice, one may convert to Judaism and may be reckoned as a proselyte to a Jew. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1985), 19–32. This difference would be prompted by the different periods to which the two scholars pay primary attention. Whereas Thiessen mostly focuses on the Second Temple period literature (particularly literature from LXX, 3rd to 2nd century BCE), Schiffman investigates Tannaim-period literature (2nd century CE).

<sup>13</sup> There are instructions for marriage such as the cases of valid and invalid marriage in Qiddushin 3:12–4:14 of the Mishnah. According to this text, marriage between Israelites is valid, but intermarriage between a Jew and a non-Jew is invalid. In terms of the offspring’s legitimacy as a Jew, however, Qiddushin says that if a Jewish woman got married to a non-Jew, their children would be regarded as Jews. For the translations of Qiddushin 3:12–4:14, see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women*, SJLA 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 249–56; Herbert Danby, ed. *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 327–29.

<sup>14</sup> Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*, 11.

he wept because of the fact that only one of his parents, likely his mother, was a Jew. The sages, however, admitted Agrippa as a Jew.<sup>15</sup>

The New Testament also exhibits different customs of Judaism and Jewish identities in many places. In Galatians 2, when Paul rebuked Peter, they were in Antioch. Peter was having table fellowship with Gentiles—a point on which he himself had struggled, as was noted earlier. Here we see that a Palestinian Jew, Peter, as well as other Jews, shared this table fellowship (Gal 2:13). As soon as Jews from James, another Palestinian Jew, came, however, Peter was afraid of them and abandoned the fellowship. Then (the timing is critical) Paul rebuked Peter, saying “if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews? We ourselves are Jews by birth (ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι) and not Gentile sinners.” Through this statement, we may surmise that though there were certain Jewish customs, some Jews did not strictly observe all customs. Also, though some Jews had different perspectives on their customs, in their mind, there was still a different identity between Jews and Gentiles by their birth.

The book of Romans offers further hints for understanding Jewish identities and how Jews defined themselves. The recipients of Romans are (diaspora) Jews and Gentiles in the city of Rome who have come to faith in Christ. In chapter 2, we may glimpse that diaspora Jews in the city of Rome evidently separate themselves from Gentiles. They think that they are guides for the blind, lights for those who are in darkness, and teachers of the foolish (Rom 2:19–20). Also, in Romans 9–11, although Paul expounds that there is no partiality to those who believe in God (Rom 10:12), the entire section constantly shows the difference in social identity between Jews who are descendants of Israel, on the one hand, and Gentiles on the other.<sup>16</sup> The olive tree metaphor represents this identity difference (Rom 11:17, 24). Paul metaphorically expresses that Gentiles are a grafted tree while Jews are natural branches.

## 2. Theological Context for the Parting of the Way

Given that biological and genealogical ethnicity is the overriding factor in defining who a Jew is, at least one further question would arise.<sup>17</sup> According to the above identity classification, Jews who pursue Jesus’s teaching and believe in Jesus should be found as Jews since they were born as such. If Jewish Christians believed that they did not disparage Jewish traditions and the law of God but still regarded themselves as Jews, why did fellow Jews exhibit hostility toward them? It is interesting to notice that in the New Testament, all different types of Jews such as diaspora Jews, Palestinian Jews, Pharisees, and Sadducees gather together and stand against a specific type of Jewish group. As Schiffman recounts, “Whereas all the other Jewish sects and ideologies of the Second Commonwealth remained within the Jewish fold regardless of how radical they may have been, this one group [followers of *Jesus*] eventually

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<sup>15</sup> Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 9:24, 30–31; 10:19; 11:1–2, 11–12.

<sup>17</sup> Here, I do not perfectly agree with the two scholars’ claim, because Qiddushin 3:12–4:14 itself is controversial. It includes different voices from different rabbis. Also, the text mentions that proselytes were existing in the time of Tannaim, and even marriage with proselytes is allowed. Besides, some rabbis said that children of proselytes would be able to intermarry with priestly stock. See, Danby, ed., *Mishnah*, 327–28. In spite of such questionable points, and whether this assumption—that Jewish identity is determined only by descent—is justifiable or not, the present paper aims to only provide a brief sketch of the partings of the way as beginning from the first and second century CE.

diverged and became a separate ‘religion.’”<sup>18</sup> It seems that Jews define another Jews who believe in Jesus and bring Gentiles into their boundaries as apostates.

Thus, what made Jesus-believing Jews part from other Jewish sects and Judaism in general? Jesus-believing Jews’ perspectives on Gentiles according to their pneumatology and Christology would have accelerated the parting. If genealogy is the only boundary marker putting all Jews in the same category, most of the Jews would be uncomfortable with including Gentiles to share their privileges as the people of God. Jesus-believing Jews, however, identify themselves as Jews and encourage Gentiles to believe in Jesus. Then, they define Gentiles and themselves as the same righteous people in Christ (i.e., Rom 3:29–30; Gal 2:16). This would be very uncomfortable and unacceptable to other Jews of the time. Thus, in the eyes of Jews, the influx of Gentiles within the boundary of the people of God was not acceptable (i.e., Acts 21:27–30). Schiffman explains that “the ultimate parting of the ways for Judaism and Christianity took place when the adherents to Christianity no longer conformed to the halakic definitions of a Jew because Christianity had become predominantly Gentile.”<sup>19</sup> Here, pneumatology and Christology play an important role for Jesus-believing Jews to include Gentiles to share in the privileges and inheritance of God.

## 2.1. Jewish and Christian Pneumatology

The early church’s perspectives on the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles could be a source of the parting. The Old Testament and the literature of Second Temple Judaism predominantly present that the Spirit is only for the Israelite communities who inherit the covenant of God. Many scholars suggest that in the Old Testament, the Spirit is understood as the prophetic Spirit of revelation and as a source of supernatural power, wisdom, and faith.<sup>20</sup> Speaking differently, in the Old Testament, the Spirit comes to an individual messianic figure to give prophecy, power, and/or revelation. In addition to this, scholars conclude that in the Old Testament, the endowment of the Spirit is only for those in the Jewish community, often in order to reorient them toward the law of God, to regenerate and to restore from their past failures.

Ezekiel 36:26–27, for example, relates the promise of the Spirit to the restoration of Israel. In its context, God says that he will gather the exiles and sprinkle them with clean water in order to purify them so that they would be sanctified from idolatry and all defilements (36:24–25). Alongside this, Ezekiel 36:26–27 tells readers that God puts the Spirit in Israel and makes their hearts tender. The purpose of giving a new and tender heart is to obey the law of God. Also, in Isaiah 44:1–5, the promise

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<sup>18</sup> Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Otto Pfleiderer, *Exposition of Paul's Doctrine*, Vol 1 of *Paulinism: A Contribution to the History of Primitive Christian Theology*, trans. Edward Peters (London: Williams & Norgate, 1891), 200–15; Hermann Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit: The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 32–38; Eduard Schweizer, “Spirit of Power: Uniformity and Diversity of the Concept of the Holy Spirit in the NT,” *Int* 6 (1952): 259–78; Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1981), 56; Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology: With Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, JSNT 54 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 303.

of outpouring the Spirit is the sign of regeneration and recreation, and the recipients of the Spirit are restricted to Israel.<sup>21</sup>

Joel 2:28–32 is another significant passage in the Old Testament indicating outpouring of the Spirit. Here, due to the phrase “all flesh” (כָּל־בָּשָׂר) and inclusive words such as the young, old, children, male and female slaves, there has been an argument that the outpouring of the Spirit is to all people.<sup>22</sup> If we pay attention to the context, however, we may find evidence to claim that the recipient of the Spirit is to be taken in the narrower sense, which is Israel.<sup>23</sup> Through the prophecy of Joel, God warns all kinds of his people, such as the old (Joel 1:2), children (1:3), workers (1:11) and priests (1:13) to face the day of Yahweh (2:1). Then, God requires repentance and the returning of Israelites to their God (2:12–13). When Israel returns to God, they will have God’s compassion (2:18), recreation (2:22), and restoration (2:23–24). Thus, here in the discourse, Israel is the dialogue partner and God is the one who addresses his warnings and the promise of the restoration. In this regard, one may conclude that the phrase “all flesh” is not referring to all human beings in general but all kinds of people *among the Israelites*. As God warns, he also promises the restoration through the Spirit to all people (children, the old and young, and male and female slaves). Hence, as Philip rightly interprets, “it is more plausible that the phrase indicates inclusiveness across different degrees of kinship within society, and particularly the relationship within Israelite/Judahite society.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the Old Testament confines the coming of the Spirit to Israel’s communities, and outpourings of the Spirit upon Gentiles are barely hinted at in the Old Testament.

The coming of the Spirit to Israel also appears in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. Post-biblical literature maintains a view similar to that of the exilic texts noted from the Old Testament. Through an investigation of the literature in this period, Philip elucidates that “several important witnesses are silent with respect to the expectation of the Spirit upon Gentiles.”<sup>25</sup> The book of Jubilees exhibits an especially strong echo of the noted exilic texts’ views. The book begins with the scene of Moses receiving the law of God at Mount Sinai. Then, God predicts the rebellion of Israel (1:7–15). What is a particularly noticeable point is that the role of the Spirit here in this book is tantamount to that of the exilic texts’ portrayal in the Old Testament. Jubilees 1:22–24 says,

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<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Koch explores exilic texts such as Isa 4:2–6; 28:5; 32:15–20; 44:1–5; 59:21; Ezek 37:1–14, and argues that the endowment of the Spirit appears in the context of the promise of restoration, particularly God’s proclamation of salvation to his people. See, Robert Koch, *Der Geist Gottes im Alten Testament* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), 109–37.

<sup>22</sup> Julius August Bewer, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), 2:123.

<sup>23</sup> Many recent scholars advocate the view that the recipient of the Spirit in this passage is in the more restrictive sense, that is, Israel. See, e.g., Hans Walter Wolff and S. Dean McBride, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Herm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 67; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 98; David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 25 (Leicester: IVP, 1989), 69; John D. W. Watts, ed. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 39.

<sup>24</sup> Finny Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology: The Eschatological Bestowal of the Spirit Upon Gentiles in Judaism and in the Early Development of Paul’s Theology*, WUNT 2/194 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 70.

<sup>25</sup> Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology*, 77. According to him, though Tobit, 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch and the Sibylline Oracles testify that even Gentiles will participate in the eschatological salvation, the outpouring of the Spirit does not explicitly occur in the literature.

The Lord said unto Moses, “I know their contrariness and their thoughts and their stiffneckedness, and they will not be obedient till they confess their own sin and the sin of their fathers. And after this they will turn to Me in all uprightness and with all (their) heart and with all (their) soul, and I will circumcise the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their seed, and I will create in them a holy spirit, and I will cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from me from that day unto eternity. And their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments, and they will fulfil my commandments, and I will be their Father and they shall be my children.”<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein with Ezekiel 36:26–27, here God says to Moses that he will recreate the rebellious people in the Spirit and will purify them so that they may keep all God’s commandments. Thus, fundamentally, the book of Jubilees presents that the primary intent of the coming of the Spirit is the restoration of Israel. As Philip concludes, “The future anticipation of the Holy Spirit is promised only to Israel. The Gentiles are not part of the author’s eschatological perspective.”<sup>27</sup>

Some manuscripts from the Qumran community provide further interpretations of Ezekiel 36:25–27, Joel 2:28–32, and Isaiah 44:3. According to Philip, the literature maintains the same perspectives as exilic and post-exilic prophets: the Spirit comes to Israel for the purpose of restoration. The purpose of the bestowal of the Spirit is obedience to the law of God. Philip offers this assessment of the Qumran writings:

What is noticeable in the usage of the term Spirit is that the community is consistently reminded of the purging and cleansing role of the Holy Spirit.... The Qumran writings do not tell us anything about the procedure for the conversion of Gentiles.... We may argue that the proselytes, who are purified from all transgressions of law (1QS 5:14), could possibly have entered the community and thus experienced the Spirit. However, even such a possibility would not help in our quest for any anticipation of the Spirit upon the Gentiles apart from their becoming members of the covenant.... In sum, the promise of the Spirit upon the entire community is limited to the members of the covenant community.<sup>28</sup>

We now briefly consider Second Temple Jewish texts from the diaspora, particularly the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo’s works. Interestingly enough, unlike other post-biblical texts such as the Qumran literature, Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha, the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo present that the Spirit is a present reality and is expected imminently.<sup>29</sup> Put differently, diaspora Jewish writers imagine the coming of the Spirit to the present, while Qumran literature, Jubilees, and 4 Ezra maintain future eschatological aspects of the Spirit, focusing on the purification, restoration, rebuilding, and returning of Israel. Philo’s use of the term “the Spirit” is surprisingly more extensive than in other Jewish literature. To Philo, the

<sup>26</sup> The translation is quoted from R. H. Charles, “The Book of Jubilee,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English: With Introductions and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:12.

<sup>27</sup> Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology*, 86–87. For the Qumran literature, this paper is indebted to Philip’s reading of the manuscripts. He examines key texts including CD, 1QH, 1QS, and 4Q504–6.

<sup>29</sup> Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology*, 90.

Spirit is not something that humans should anticipate to come in the future; rather, Philo focuses on a present reality of the Spirit. Philip scrutinizes Philo's work and concludes,

It is important to note that there are only few passages in the whole of Philonic literature that refer to any eschatological anticipation at all (Philo. *Praem* 164–72). Philo mentions the eschatological redemption of Israel, the deliverance from Gentile oppressors, the pilgrimage of exiles to Zion and prosperity in the land. There is no reference to Gentiles being part of the restoration by God in the future. For Philo, since the Spirit is now already available to all, it is not related to the coming Gentile pilgrimage.<sup>30</sup>

The above sketch provides some idea as to how the exilic prophets and post-biblical Judaism understand the bestowal of the Spirit. The majority of the sources presented the coming of the Spirit as limited to the covenantal community, which is Israel, and the Spirit produces gifts to Israel such as restoration, recreation, rejuvenation, and being faithful to God's commandments. However, there is no unambiguous statement regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles. Therefore, having the Spirit would still be recognized as an exclusive privilege for Jews.

How, then, does the early church understand the coming of the Spirit to Gentiles? In the New Testament, there are three accounts, by my reckoning, indicating such a bestowal.<sup>31</sup> One is the Peter and Cornelius experience in Acts 10, another is Peter's address at Jerusalem's council in Acts 15, and the last is in Paul's letter to the Galatians (Gal 3:1–5). Notwithstanding the scholarly debate on the historicity of Acts 15 and chronology of Paul,<sup>32</sup> an overt fact is that all three accounts suggest that receiving the Spirit is the determinative factor for full affiliation in the new community. In Acts 10:44–48, while Peter is preaching, the Spirit comes to Gentiles. Peter and other circumcised believers (10:45), indicating Jesus-believing Jews, are amazed; as Peter concludes on the Jews' collective behalf (without, of course, dissolving the us-and-them, Jew/Gentile distinction), “surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (10:47).

In Acts 15, based on what he has already experienced, Peter stands and proclaims that “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (15:8–9). Interestingly, here we may see that Peter exhibits a similar perspective with the exilic prophets in terms of the expected function of the Spirit. However, unlike Ezekiel, who proclaims that the Spirit purify Israel, Peter includes Gentiles among those so purified. James also advocates Peter's new perspective

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<sup>30</sup> Philip, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 10:44.

<sup>32</sup> For the debate on the historicity of Jerusalem council and chronology of Paul, see, e.g., Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings*, trans. A. Menzies (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003); Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950); Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Karl Paul Donfried, “Chronology: The Apostolic and Pauline Period,” in *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 99–117; Paul W. Barnett, “Chronology for Paul and the Corinthians,” *RTR* 71 (2012): 109–27.

by enunciating that uncircumcised Gentiles should not be hindered in coming to the Lord.<sup>33</sup> Then, Peter, James and other apostles come up with the agreement that circumcision is not the qualification of being members of God's community, but faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Jerusalem church leaders reckon that Gentiles can receive full affiliation of their community through receiving the Spirit, though this resolution would prove revolutionary and even treacherous to the eyes of non-Jesus-believing Jews.

Paul's perspective on the coming of the Spirit to Gentiles is similarly novel. To Paul, the endowment of the Spirit is not only about giving the membership of the community, but it is a sign that Gentiles can be the part of the promise and blessing of Israel that God initiated in Abraham. Paul rebukes the Galatians since they quickly turned away from the gospel that Paul himself taught them. Then, Paul reminds them that they received the Spirit not by the law but by faith (Gal 3:1–2). Taking a further step, Paul equates the Gentiles' faith to Abraham's faith in the sense of being qualified as the righteous one. Finally, Paul concludes that "the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal 3:14). By stating this, Paul admits Gentiles not only to the membership of the contemporary community but also includes them into the blessing that God gave their ancestors (i.e., the Jews' ancestors, but now also the Gentiles' "new" ancestors!) throughout Jewish history. To put it mildly, this would not have been news that Paul's non-Jesus-believing contemporaries would have welcomed.

## 2.2. Christology and Jewish Monotheism

Early Christians' perception of Jesus was also problematic in the eyes of Jews.<sup>34</sup> They admitted Jesus as the divine entity who deserves to be worshipped. In addition to this, Jesus-believing Jews identified Jesus as the descendant of David who is the singular messianic figure (i.e., Acts 2:29–36) and thus view Jesus as Christ and the Son of God. Finally, they regard Gentiles as among those who deserve to be righteous through faith in Jesus (i.e., Rom 3–4; 1 Cor 1:24; Gal 2:16; 3:14). Thus, to the other Jews, what Jesus-believing Jews proclaimed would be blaspheming their God and a threat to their identity.

From the Old Testament to the Second Temple period and afterward, monotheism is one of the pillars of the people of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Thus, if some Jews worshiped other gods than Yahweh, they would not be appreciated by other Jews. In other words, in the eyes of such monotheists, Jewish Christians'

<sup>33</sup> Richard Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13–21)," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–84; Edward W. Glenny, "The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15," *BBR* 22 (2012): 1–26.

<sup>34</sup> Though this article suggests Christology as a potential source of the parting, I am aware of the opposition to this view. Some scholars allege that this perspective is biased by Christian literature, particularly early Christian writings in the New Testament. The rationale behind this is that rabbinic literature does not support this view. Talmudic texts and Tosefta do not agree that the theological dissonance between Judaism and Christianity begets the partings of the way. Instead, the early Christians' Christology is derived from the Roman imperial cult. Though the rabbinic literature shows an opposition to such concepts as the Son of God, it is not initially anti-Christian but anti-imperial cult, since the Roman Empire regarded the emperors as sons of the gods. Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 102–5.

<sup>35</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 26–29; Richard Bauckham, "The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman et al., *JSJSup* 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 43–44.

Christology would be reckoned as idolatry. Of course, there is a debate among scholars regarding Jewish monotheism. Many scholars agree that Jewish monotheism does not insist on the impossibility of the existence of other gods. Horbury classifies Jewish monotheism into two types. One is exclusive or rigorous monotheism, and the other is inclusive monotheism.<sup>36</sup> The former type of monotheism believes that no other gods exist, but only Yahweh. The latter type of monotheism believes that supernatural beings and other gods may exist, but that Yahweh is the most supreme and superlative God among all gods.

Fredriksen argues that due to the cultural diversity and geographical vastness of the areas to which they had spread, Jews acknowledged the existence of other gods and even attended to the pagan cult as a necessary social and cultural interaction with Gentiles.<sup>37</sup> According to him, there were two concepts of pagan gods for the western diaspora. One is that Jews regarded the pagan gods as the lower and visible gods, while Yahweh is the highest and invisible God, dwelling in the firmament. The other concept is that Jews treated pagan gods as demons. They regarded pagan gods as nugatory.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, diaspora Jews in the west of the empire admitted the existence of pagan gods. They showed their respect to pagan gods and ritual ceremonies. However, they mitigated that existence either by seeing the gods as on a lower level than their supreme God (Yahweh) or by seeing the gods as nugatory.

Bauckham also holds this view. He says that “traditional monotheism in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions has always accepted the existence of vast numbers of supernatural beings.”<sup>39</sup> Going one step further, Bauckham suggests a distinction even within the exclusive category of monotheism in terms of the degree of uniqueness. That is, unlike Horbury’s definition, Bauckham explains that the point of the more rigorous/exclusive monotheism is to separate God from other gods. For Jews, Yahweh is intrinsically a different kind of God. Yahweh is not just more powerful than other gods. Rather, Israel’s God is different by nature.<sup>40</sup>

The distinctions above, however, do not mean that Jews tolerated worshiping pagan gods. Though diaspora Jews had varying degrees of cultural intertwinement with Gentiles, the Shema (Deut 6:4) and the first commandment (Exod 20:3) were still ultimate principles of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>41</sup> This indicates that regardless of the cultural complexity, Jews would not tolerate worshiping other gods.<sup>42</sup> In this regard, the early Church’s Christology may be considered as idolatry to the Jews, and it would have facilitated the division between Judaism and Christianity.

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<sup>36</sup> William Horbury, “Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North, JSNTSup 263 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 16–44; Horbury, *Messianism Among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 12–19.

<sup>37</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “How Later Contexts Affect Pauline Content, or: Retrospect is the Mother of Anachronism,” in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Joshua Schwartz, CRINT 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Fredriksen, “How Later Contexts Affect Pauline Content,” 22.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 108.

<sup>40</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham substantiates this by drawing on Jewish literature in the Second Temple period and Hellenistic Jewish literature such as the works of Josephus and Philo. Bauckham, “Throne of God,” 46–48.

In the New Testament, Jesus's crucifixion, resurrection (1 Cor 15), relationship to heavenly beings (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:3; 5:5), and divine authority (Acts 2:33; 17:31) are fundamental to Jewish Christians' perceptions of Jesus. The early Christian thoughts on Christology, however, were not entirely new to the eyes of Judaism. As Dunn explains,

Within Second Temple Judaism there was nothing un-Jewish in thinking that a great man had been signally honored by God by being taken to heaven, whether without death or after death. There was nothing un-Jewish in claiming that such a one had been given share in such definitively divine roles as the exercise of final judgment over the world.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, one might surmise that early Christianity brought at least some of its initial Christological concepts over from the notion of messianic figure in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>44</sup> According to the early Christian writings in the New Testament, however, we may conjecture that Christian Christology is not a mere conceptual adoption. Rather, early Christianity developed the concepts differently and made Jesus an object of devotion.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, one may assert that the distinctiveness of Christian Christology from extant Jewish concepts would open the parting even further.<sup>46</sup>

In his letters to the earliest Christian communities, Paul affirms Jesus's divinity as Lord and even considers Jesus equivalent to God. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 (having just discussed some of the same monotheistic questions reviewed above), Paul says "yet for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Also in his letter to the Philippians, Paul claims that Jesus, who exists in the form of God, did not consider himself to be equal to God.<sup>47</sup> Every tongue is to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.<sup>48</sup> This Philippian hymn (Phil 2:5–11) is echoing Isaiah 45:23. Thus, in Paul's language, κύριος refers to Yahweh in Hebrew, which indicates Israel's God.<sup>49</sup> Alongside such support from Paul, John's Gospel is one of the clearest sources of evidence. John overtly expresses Jesus's deity. In John's Gospel, Jesus depicts himself as the same as God (John 10:30), and the author clearly shows that one of the principal reasons Jews wanted to kill Jesus is that Jesus equates himself to God (John 5:18). Another noticeable point is that John describes "the Jews" as Jesus's major opponents. For

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<sup>43</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 246–47. Dunn provides sources, entailing the same concepts, to demonstrate that Christology of early Christianity did not threaten Judaism since Second Temple Judaism shares the same perceptions. Such sources are Wisdom 5:5; 4 Ezra 14:9; 2 Baruch 13:3; 1 Enoch 71:14; 90:31; Sirach 45:2; Apocalypse of Elijah 24:11–15; Testament of Abraham 11 and 13.

<sup>44</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 94.

<sup>45</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Hurtado also adheres to the Jewish origin of the Christians' Christology, and he defines the uniqueness of Christians' Christology as a mutation. In his view, Jewish Christians still remained in Jewish tradition but presented idiosyncratic concepts.

<sup>47</sup> Phil 2:6: ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ.

<sup>48</sup> Phil 2:11: καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἑξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.

<sup>49</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 250. Interestingly, though Hurtado holds the same view that Phil 2:11 represents the classic Jewish monotheistic passage of Isa 45:23, he argues that this does not indicate Jesus's divinity but Jesus's divine agency. Hurtado, *One God*, 97.

instance, expelling Jesus-believers from the synagogue (John 9:22) is often seen among some scholars as representing John's view on Jews' enmity toward Christians in his own time.<sup>50</sup>

Alongside divinization, New Testament writers describe Jesus as the one who deserves to receive hymns, prayers, and confessions of faith.<sup>51</sup> As Bauckham suggests, prayers to Jesus and doxologies in the early Christian writings indicate that the early Christian community worshiped Jesus as Lord. Bauckham spells out that "ritual use of Jesus's name reflects an explicit identification of Jesus as an appropriate recipient of such cultic devotion ... it represents the inclusion of Jesus with God as recipient of public, corporate cultic reverence."<sup>52</sup> Also, Christians evidently adopted Jewish origin doxologies and used them for Jesus.<sup>53</sup> The doxology to Jesus becomes even more vivid in the second and the third century CE.<sup>54</sup> But the first-century New Testament writings already present believers as rightly worshiping Jesus (e.g., Rom 9:5; 16:25–27; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 1:5–6).

Hurtado expounds that early Christian hymns are "mainly devoted to celebrating the work and significance of Christ.... These Christological hymns exhibit the earliest observable stages of Christian reflection on the significance of Jesus.... The hymns in Revelation indicate an intensification of cultic devotion to Christ taking place in the latter half of the first century."<sup>55</sup> Bauckham also argues that though it is not fully clear in the New Testament, "Christian hymns are forms of narrative praise recounting the history of Jesus in the third person."<sup>56</sup>

The practice of confessing Jesus is another important proof that the early Christians worshiped Jesus. In Romans 10:9–13, Paul makes the confession as the source by which to be saved. In Philippians 2:11, confessing that Jesus is Lord is glorifying God the Father. This is an idiosyncratic feature that the early Christians presented in comparison to other Jewish sects. For instance, according to Hurtado, though the Qumran community regarded Melchizedek as a heavenly figure, they did not revere or worship him and did not require a confession of faith in Melchizedek to be a part of the community.<sup>57</sup>

The Jewish intolerance to idolatry occurs in the rabbinic literature as well. One of the representative pieces of literature regarding the Jewish halakah over idolatry is the Avodah Zarah in the Mishnah. Rabbi

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<sup>50</sup> Casey, *From Jewish Prophet*, 23–24. Martyn is the most significant figure for this reading. He initiated the debate of Johannine community through reading John 9 and attempted to depict a feasible situation of the community, particularly the relationship between Jews and the early Christians. See J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 24–63.

<sup>51</sup> Hurtado suggests that there are six features of the mutation he describes: hymnic practices, prayer and related practices, use of the name of Christ, the Lord's supper, confession of faith in Jesus, and prophetic pronouncements of the risen Christ. Hurtado, *One God*, 100–14.

<sup>52</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 198–99.

<sup>53</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus*, 133. References are 2 Tim 4:18; 1 Pet 4:11; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 1:5–6; Heb 13:21.

<sup>54</sup> Bauckham provides some documents of the second and third century CE. Such sources are Acts of John 77; Acts of Paul and Thecla 42; Acts of Peter. 20; 39; Melito's *Peri Pascha* 10, 45, 65, 105; Martyrdom of *Perpetua* 1:6; Tertullian's *De oratione* 29; Hippolytus's *Commentarium in Danielelem* 1:33; 4:60; Origen's *De principiis* 4.1.7; 4.3.14. Bauckham, *Jesus*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Hurtado, *One God*, 101–3. Hurtado provides hymns in the New Testament: John 1:1–18; Colossians 1:15–20; Philippians 2:5–11; Ephesians 2:14–16; 5:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18–22; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 4:8, 11; 5:9–10; 15:3–4.

<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus*, 137.

<sup>57</sup> Hurtado, *One God*, 113.

Meir prohibited all kinds of images (*m. Avod.* 3:1–3).<sup>58</sup> This tractate also forbids any involvement in idol worship, drawing on Deuteronomy 7:25 and 12:2 (*m. Avod.* 3:5).<sup>59</sup> Even one step further, the Mishnah prohibits being in the environment of idol worship (*m. Avod.* 4:1–3).<sup>60</sup> The Tosefta also strictly bans any contact with pagan idolatry. Though having business with Gentiles was permitted, having business with Gentiles who so indulged was prohibited (see *t. Avod.* 1:15), for there it is tantamount to honoring the idols or at least those who worshiped them.<sup>61</sup> Also, Jewish artisans are prohibited entering the house of idolaters, and from the marketplace, which is in the village of the idolaters (*t. Avod.* 1:3–5).<sup>62</sup> Though Avodah Zarah in the Mishnah and Tosefta reveals Jewish halakah regarding the Roman imperial cult, it is not irrelevant to the early Christians' Christology.<sup>63</sup> To exalt a human to the position of deity is seen as a representative trait of emperor worship. Thus, Christians' confession of Jesus as *the* deity may be considered to the eyes of rabbinic Judaism as functionally the same as the emperor cult, and it would accelerate the separation between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In the same text, however, the degree of the image prohibition is not tantamount among sages. Sages suggest that only the staff, bird, or sphere held by the images defile Jews. But Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says "any which has anything at all in its hand" are prohibited. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 664.

<sup>59</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 665.

<sup>60</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 667.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:1264.

<sup>62</sup> Neusner, *Tosefta*, 2:1261–62.

<sup>63</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St Andrew's Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman et al., JSJSup 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 234–57; Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 105; Yair Furstenberg, "The Rabbinic View of Idolatry and the Roman Political Conception of Divinity," *JR* 90 (2010): 335–66.

<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, whereas scholars who focus on the Second Temple literature typically argue that the early Christians' Christology originated from Second Temple Judaism, those who pay attention to the rabbinic literature allege that this Christology has nothing to do with Judaism. However, scholars who investigate rabbinic Judaism have not come up with any consensus for this matter. Urbach and Hayes propose that rabbinic literature does not present a particularly harsh reaction toward idol worship. Throughout the investigation of social situations of the Roman Empire, Urbach and Hayes argue that even Gentiles disputed the efficacy of idols. Moreover, both Jews and Gentiles used idols for the purposes of trade and decoration. Thus, rabbis did not need to urge Jews to eradicate idols. Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62; Efraim Elimelech Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts," *IEJ* 9 (1959): 229–45.

### 3. *Historical Context for the Parting of the Way: Jewish Revolts*

Scholars generally agree that two times of Jewish revolts, taking place 66–70 CE and 132–136 CE,<sup>65</sup> played an important role for the parting.<sup>66</sup> As Cohen explains, the fall of Jerusalem forms a demarcation between Second Temple Judaism and rabbinic Judaism.<sup>67</sup> During the first Jewish War, not only the temple but also the institutional foundation was swept away by the Roman Empire. But, Yohanan ben Zakkai and the Yavneh school commenced a new era of Judaism. Yohanan ben Zakkai did not advocate the Jewish War but urged Jews to surrender. He admitted Vespasian as the one designated to destroy the temple and deserving to become an emperor.<sup>68</sup> Then, he requested Vespasian to make special allowances for the Yavneh school, reinstituting Torah largely as Yohanan conceived of it. Consequently, the entirety of Judaism “began to reformulate and redefine” according to the Yavneh school.<sup>69</sup> The Yavneh school inclined itself toward Pharisaic traditions, focused on Torah, and developed the halakah, which regulated Jewish lifestyle.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, while the first Jewish war was a tragedy to Jews, it generated rabbinic Judaism and its literature that reframed the concept of Judaism.

The second Jewish revolt resulted in a drastic reduction of the Jewish population in the land of Judea. This demographic change occurred possibly for two reasons. The first possible reason is that the suppression of Jews by the Roman Empire caused the population reduction. Dio Cassius noted,

Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by

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<sup>65</sup> This section will deal with two Jewish revolts, the Jewish war in 66–70 CE and Bar Kokhba revolt in 132–136 CE. However, this section mostly focuses on the implications of the revolts rather than the procedure and historical events of the revolts. For such details, see Menahem Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132–136 CE*, BRLA 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*; Alon, *Jews in Their Land*, 2:592–637.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 312. In spite of the general consensus, I should admit the limitation of this view. The biggest concern is the question of how a regional and relatively minor people’s revolt affects the parting between Jews and Christians throughout the empire. As Mor rightly points out, since the second Jewish war took place in the district of Judea, the suppression by the empire is limited in the area. Even nearby Galilee was a relatively safe place for refuge during the war. Mor, *Second Jewish Revolt*, 480. Therefore, the following section does not argue that the Jewish war takes a decisive role for the parting. Rather, I would like to propose that through the Jewish revolts, we may surmise that the parting of the way began sprouting in the limited regions affected and began in an embryonic stage in the first and the second century CE.

<sup>67</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 205.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 303.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn, *Partings*, 303. Unlike the Second Temple period which includes diverse, major Jewish groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots/Qumran), rabbinic Judaism is rooted among only the Pharisees, and its literature is a “remarkably homogeneous corpus.” Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 205. This is likely because the Pharisees became the dominant Jewish group after the destruction of Jerusalem. Of course, as Dunn spells out, “the Yavnean authorities did not establish their authority over the rest of Judaism overnight” (*The Partings of the Ways*, 304). Also, Cohen acknowledges that even in the homogeneous corpus, there are different methods at work in various rabbinic literature owing to geographical, chronological, and literary diversity (*From the Maccabees*, 206). Notwithstanding, it would be probable to contend that the Pharisaic traditions and teaching would be very influential in the post-70s era.

famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus, nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, a result of which the people had had forewarning before the war.<sup>71</sup>

Though his account that “the whole of Judaea was made desolate” seems hyperbolic, the reduction of Jews’ population in the region of Judea was inevitable. The second probable reason for the demographic change is Hadrian’s policy to “integrate Judaea and the Jewish population within Pan-Hellenic policy for the unification of the whole empire.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, Hadrian let Gentiles reside in the region of Judea and banished Jews (including Jewish Christians) so that Gentiles were dominant in Judea. Eusebius noted that “it was then that the church there first consisted of Gentiles, who took the place of converts from the circumcision and were headed by the first Gentile bishop, Mark, as already explained.”<sup>73</sup> Alongside this, and also resulting from the second Jewish revolt, Hadrian promulgated decrees forbidding circumcision, the Jewish juridical system, public gatherings, and Torah study.<sup>74</sup>

What then are the feasible implications of the two Jewish revolts? By the end of the two instances of Jewish war, Jews were dispersed out of Jerusalem and Judea. Being disseminated, both Jews and Christians would interface with diverse belief systems such as those of Jewish Christians, Hellenistic Christians, Palestinian Judaism, diaspora Judaism, pagans, and so on. Conceivably, by interacting with other types of belief and conduct, rabbinic Judaism gradually built up its parameters to distinguish Jewish orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>75</sup> One may discover some evidence for this through rabbinic literature. According to *t. Shab.* 13:5, “the book of the Evangelist and the books of the *minim* they do not save from a fire. But they are allowed to burn where they are ... and Rabbi Tarfon says that may I burn my sons if such things come into my hands.”<sup>76</sup> In *t. Yad.* 2:13–14, rabbis consider that “the Gospels and books of heretics do not impart uncleanness to hands while the Song of Songs does since it was written by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>77</sup> By these texts from the Tosefta, we may have a glimpse of how rabbinic Judaism viewed Christian writings. To rabbinic Judaism, not all Christian writings were regarded as unsanctified literature, but some of them were considered as defiling their purity. Besides this, rabbis evidently regarded the Gospels the same as the writing of *minim* (heretics).

Not only rabbinic literature but also second-century Christian writings underpin the parting of the way. Trypho, the Jewish interlocutor of Justin, says,

It would be better for us to have obeyed our teachers, who warned us not to listen to you Christians, nor to converse with you on these subjects, for you have blasphemed many times in your attempt to convince us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke with them in the pillar of the cloud; that he became man, was

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<sup>71</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 69:14, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, LCL 176 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

<sup>72</sup> Mor, *Second Jewish Revolt*, 473.

<sup>73</sup> Original source is Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5:12. Also see G. A. Williamson, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (New York: New York University Press, 1966), 215.

<sup>74</sup> Mor, *Second Jewish Revolt*, 475; Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 312.

<sup>76</sup> Neusner, *Tosefta*, 1:405.

<sup>77</sup> Neusner, *Tosefta*, 2:1907–8.

crucified, and ascended into heaven, and will return again to this earth; and that he should be worshipped.<sup>78</sup>

By this statement of Trypho, we may conjecture that rabbis banned communication with Christians. To rabbis, Christians blasphemed against God by divinizing Jesus and by worshiping him. Alongside this, in terms of the relationship between observing Torah and salvation, Justin reveals his view that salvation is valid for those who believe in Jesus yet still observe Torah.<sup>79</sup> In answering, Trypho states that there are some other Christians who do not agree with Justin.<sup>80</sup> Thus, one may conjecture that some Christians repudiated the fact that law-observance did not qualify salvation. In view of this, even religious and theological concepts had evidently begun to differ.

#### *4. Political Context for the Parting of the Way: Fiscus Judaicus in the Flavian Dynasty*

From the rise of the Roman Empire—and even before Rome identified itself as imperial—the empire had shown special favor to the Jewish community, providing protection.<sup>81</sup> The empire allowed Jewish synagogues to retain their culture so that the Jews could learn and maintain their religious tradition there.<sup>82</sup> Alongside this, the Jews could collect the tax for the temple in Jerusalem, and they could avoid some obligations and restrictions from the Roman society to which they technically belonged.<sup>83</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Slusser, ed., *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas P. Halton (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 58.

<sup>79</sup> Slusser, *St. Justin Martyr*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Slusser, *St. Justin Martyr*, 71.

<sup>81</sup> Judge expounds that Judas Maccabaeus made an alliance with Rome and that they fought against the Seleucid threat together. Thus, from even before the beginning of the Roman Empire *per se*, Jews were privileged. Edwin A. Judge, “Synagogue and Church in the Roman Empire: The Insoluble Problem of Toleration,” *RTR* 68 (2009): 34. Smallwood explains that “by the time of Julius Caesar’s dictatorship the diaspora synagogues were classified by the Roman authorities as collegia.” E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*, *SJLA* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 133. According to Richardson, “in 64 BCE, the Senate prohibited all collegia on principle because of the danger they posed to the state as private institutions; in 58 BCE, collegia were permitted again; in 56 BCE, the Senate again dissolved one specific class of collegia, political clubs. Sometime between 49 and 44 BCE, Julius Caesar prohibited all collegia empire-wide except Judaism.” Peter Richardson, “Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 18. According to Philo, Augustus showed a further favor to the Jewish communities: if a distribution (of food, for example) took place on the day of the Jewish Sabbath, the emperor ordered a distributor to reserve the Jews’ share of the universal largesse until the next day (*On the Embassy to Gaius* 158).

<sup>82</sup> Judge, “Synagogue and Church,” 33–35.

<sup>83</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 124–27. The synagogue is not just a building, but is primarily an organized group, which met for worship. The fundamental features of the synagogue are gathering for the service on the Sabbath, educational purposes, caring for the needs of the community, and collecting the temple tax. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 133. Though the synagogue had functioned as a life center amid the diaspora, the Jewish communities had various types of synagogue-related tradition. The relevant inscriptions, discovered in catacombs, reveal an intriguing point that though there were strict groups who followed their Jewish tradition such as Sabbath, festivals, dietary laws, and circumcision, some of the Jewish communities were more Romanized. They have chambers, the walls and vaulted ceilings of which are adorned with frescoes in spite of the fact that Judaism had forbidden such images. No matter whether they so compromised their traditions or strictly kept them, one certainty is that they had their own communities in the Roman Empire, centered around the

atmosphere started changing in the mid-first century, however. A new taxation of Jews is one of the clues that the empire was becoming more hostile toward Jews, and many scholars agree that this is another important factor to the parting of the way.<sup>84</sup>

As a result of the Jewish revolt at the end of the 60s, the Flavian dynasty was hostile toward the Jews. Vespasian (who reigned as emperor 69–79 CE and had begun the siege of Jerusalem) pronounced the *Fiscus Judaicus* as a new tax policy for the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem's temple. His predecessors did not impose such taxes on Jews, thus Jews had annually paid a half shekel only for the Jerusalem temple.<sup>85</sup> To restore the temple of Jupiter, Vespasian started collecting these new additional taxes from Jews.<sup>86</sup> According to the account of Josephus, Vespasian charged Jews two drachma per year, wherever they were in the empire.<sup>87</sup> Dio Cassius recalled this even more specifically, stating that the tax applied to the Jews "who continued to observe their ancestral customs."<sup>88</sup>

The taxation became even heavier under the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE). According to Suetonius, Domitian harshly imposed further taxes, expanding the range of liable Jews to two classes: "One is those who were living as Jews without admitting it. The other is those who had concealed their Jewish origin and not paid the tax."<sup>89</sup> Scholars have largely debated what kinds of Jews fit in those categories. Williams alleges that the former category indicates pagan God-fearers and Gentile Christians, and the latter category denotes apostates, Jewish Christians, and proselytes.<sup>90</sup> Heemstra explains that the first type of Jews were Gentile Christians and the second type were Jewish Christians.<sup>91</sup> Though one cannot conclusively identify the Jews who belonged to those categories, scholars include God-fearers, Gentile Christians, proselytes, apostate Jews, circumcised non-Jews, and Jewish Christians in the two categories. Through this, we may surmise that in the eyes of Domitian, Christians and Jews were in the same categories as different sects of Judaism. As a result of this, both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians were held responsible for the *Fiscus Judaicus*.

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synagogues. H. J. Leon, "The Jews of Rome in the First Centuries of Christianity," in *The Teacher's Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham*, ed. Jerry Vardaman, James Leo Garrett, and J. B. Adair (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1964), 160–61.

<sup>84</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, "In Between: Jewish-Christians and the Curse of the Heretics," in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks and Géza Vermès (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 211; Margaret H. Williams, "Jews and Christians at Rome: An Early Parting of the Ways," in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2013), 160–66; Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways*, WUNT 2/277 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 196.

<sup>85</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 124–25.

<sup>86</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> "On all Jews, wheresoever resident, he imposed a poll-tax of two drachms [δύο δραχμας], to be paid annually into the Capitol as formerly contributed by them to the temple at Jerusalem." Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.218, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL 210 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

<sup>88</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 65.7.2, trans. Cary and Foster.

<sup>89</sup> Cohen, "In Between," 211; Williams, "Jews and Christians," 164; Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, "Jews and Christians," 164.

<sup>91</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 34–63. However, the subject of *Fiscus Judaicus* is controversial among scholars. They offer different voices regarding the victims of the Domitian-era taxation. Heemstra has accordingly arranged scholarly debate on the victims of *Fiscus Judaicus*.

Nerva, the successor of Domitian, reformed the *Fiscus Judaicus*. According to Dio Cassius, he prohibited “the unjust accusation to anybody of adopting the Jewish mode of life.”<sup>92</sup> During the regime of Domitian, those who followed Jewish life were required to pay the tax.<sup>93</sup> On the contrary, Nerva forbade the accusation of people because of the fact that they followed the Jewish mode of life. This reformation was even reflected in a new coin, *Fisci Ivdaici Calvmnia Svblata* (removal of the false accusation of living a Jewish life).<sup>94</sup>



**Figure 1: Roman Coin Featuring the Emperor Nerva and Fiscus Judaicus (Jewish Tax)**

Heemstra suggests that non-Jewish God-fearers and Gentile Christians would be favored by Nerva’s reformation.<sup>95</sup> It released Gentiles, who were not Jews but followed Jewish modes of life, from the burden of the tax. But, to the Jews “who continued to observe their ancestral customs,”<sup>96</sup> the burden of *Fiscus Judaicus* still remained. In light of this, Nerva’s reformation would accelerate the parting of the way by the fact that non-Jewish God-fearers and Gentile Christians began to separate themselves from synagogues, and that Jewish Christians would be free from the tax, since Jewish Christians were not faithfully observing ancestral customs in the eyes of the Romans.<sup>97</sup>

### 5. Conclusion

This short essay has attempted to explore social, theological, historical, and political aspects of the Jewish-Christian partings of the first and second century CE. First, Jews had a rigid identity parameter, which is ethnicity. Jewishness was ultimately determined by birth. Regardless of how rigorously Gentiles might observe Jewish traditions, they were not counted as Jews unless they were born Jews. Therefore, Christians’ embracing of Gentiles as the people of God seemed to be very offensive to Jews.

Second, a theological dissonance takes an important role for the parting. Although in the Second Temple period there were different types of Judaism, they all agreed on monotheism and largely banned idolatry. However, early Christians worshiped Jesus as divine, equivalent with God. They prayed to

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<sup>92</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 68.1.2, trans. Cary and Foster.

<sup>93</sup> This people group is composed of ethnic non-Jews and non-circumcised people who adopted Jewish traditions and ethics.

<sup>94</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 73 (coin image on p. 69); Williams, “Jews and Christians,” 166.

<sup>95</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 71–72.

<sup>96</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 65.7.2, trans. Cary and Foster.

<sup>97</sup> Williams, “Jews and Christians,” 166; Heemstra, *Fiscus Judaicus*, 80.

Jesus, composed and offered hymns to Jesus, and required faith in Jesus to be saved. To say the least, this would have been unpleasant to non-Christian Jews. On top of that, whereas Second Temple literature does not indicate that God endows the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, the New Testament clearly shows that the Spirit is bestowed upon those who believe in Jesus regardless of their ethnicity.

Third, two times of Jewish revolts are germane to the historical aspect of the parting. The first Jewish revolt was effectively the beginning of rabbinic Judaism. Rabbis reformulated the concept of Judaism, and rabbinic literature encapsulated this process. As we have seen above, in Tosefta, rabbis were distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews, particularly *minim*. Also, they precluded Christian writings. In addition to this, these historical incidents resulted in a demographic shift in Judea. Even if it is uncertain when and to exactly what extent the Roman Empire acknowledged the differences between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews, because of these incidents both Jews and Jewish Christians were moved out of Judea. Thus, Gentile Christians would become dominant in Judea. As Schiffman spells out, the Gentile-dominant Christian community gradually strayed from Jewish halakah.

Finally, politically, *Fiscus Judaicus* would foster the parting. Since Vespasian and Domitian did not dissociate Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, and non-Christian Jews from one another, but regarded them all as Jews, they imposed a harsh tax policy to all Jews and Christians. This would be a great burden to Christians. Through Nerva's reform, however, Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians were able to be released from the burden, and they began to part politically and socially from Jews as well.

To conclude, the parting did not take place overnight. Besides, even before the clear distinction between Judaism and Christianity, there was inner diversity within each group. In this regard, it would be untenable if one were to propose a specific date and incident that caused the parting. However, one may conjecture that the historical, social, political, and theological factors considered in this article contributed to the widening gulf and eventual parting of the way between Judaism and Christianity.

# The Nature and Task of Theology in John Owen's Forgotten Work

— John Kegley —

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**Abstract:** *Theologoumena Pantodapa* may be John Owen's most comprehensive theological work and his greatest contribution to the Reformed tradition. However, this work was not translated into English until 1994. Since its translation, it has received a noticeable lack of scholarly attention. This essay seeks to fill a part of the void in scholarship by examining *Theologoumena Pantodapa's* historical context, structure, and key themes. This examination is profitable and pertinent for pastors, students of theology, and all Christians as it includes an analysis of Owen's hermeneutical method, understanding of the relationship between theology and practice, and comments on the character of the gospel theologian.

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John Owen was one of the most prolific and theologically sophisticated writers of Puritanism. The great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, called Owen the “prince of divines” and said that anyone who mastered his works was a “profound theologian.”<sup>1</sup> Contemporary pastors and theologians may be familiar with John Owen and some of his works such as the *Mortification of Sin* and *The Glory of Christ*. However, most are likely unacquainted with what Owen considered his most significant theological work, *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. An examination of this work will therefore greatly benefit pastors and students of theology as it provides a window into how one of the greatest theological minds of Puritanism, perhaps even of Reformed Protestantism, approached and engaged in the discipline of theology.

## *1. Historical Background and Introduction*

Before engaging with the contents of *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, it is first necessary to understand the historical context in which Owen produced this work, how this work has been received and evaluated since its original publication, and finally, how Owen decided to structure and arrange this work.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1876), 151.

### 1.1. Owen's Historical Context

In the summer of 1657, Oliver Cromwell resigned from his position as Chancellor of Oxford University and recommended his son, Richard, to succeed him. John Owen who served as vice chancellor of Oxford University alongside Oliver was dismissed six weeks later.<sup>2</sup> Only months earlier, Owen drafted a petition against the House of Commons's proposal to make Oliver king. This petition likely contributed to Owen's dismissal as vice chancellor. The following year on 3 September 3 1658 Oliver Cromwell died, and a month after his death Owen participated in the development of the Savoy Declaration, an amended version of the Westminster Confession of Faith that included provisions for congregational polity. In this same year, John Owen wrote his magnum opus, *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, which he finished at home in Stadham only months before the Restoration of the monarchy.<sup>3</sup> Stephen Westcott argues that if Owen did not have this year of "retirement" before the Restoration of the monarchy and the "Act of Uniformity" thrust him back into political and public life, then "this volume would probably never have seen the light of day, and his insights might have passed away with the voice that uttered them."<sup>4</sup>

By God's grace and providence, Owen wrote *Theologoumena Pantodapa* and I believe modern pastors and students of theology can benefit from an examination of its contents in at least three ways. First, pastors often struggle to interpret the Old Testament in light of Christ. They struggle to preach sermons from the Old Testament which do not devolve into moralism. An examination of *Theologoumena Pantodapa's* covenantal structure reveals a hermeneutical method for pastors to interpret the Old Testament in a way that is eminently Christo-centric. Second, pastors and students of theology often feel a divide between theology and practice in the church. Sometimes pastors feel pressured to spend less time in the study and more time visiting members of the congregation. Owen pushes back against the simplistic division between theology and practice in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. Finally, Owen's remarks in *Theologoumena Pantodapa* on the character of the gospel theologian offer significant encouragement to the many pastors and students of theology who find it hard to maintain a devotional life amidst their theological reflection. Owen challenges gospel theologians to be fervent not just in their reading of systematic theologies, but also in their reading of Scripture—the source of all theology—and in prayer.

### 1.2. *Theologoumena Pantodapa's* History of Reception

*Theologoumena Pantodapa* is arguably one of Owen's most significant works as it contains the most exhaustive exhibition of his unique theological emphases and contributions. Carl Trueman calls this work "Owen's most comprehensive statement of theology."<sup>5</sup> William Goold notes that an international audience received Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa* with great eagerness. It was reprinted in 1684

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Toon, *God's Statesman* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 77.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," in *The Glory of Christ*, ed. William H. Goold, The Works of John Owen 1 (1850–1853; repr., East Peoria, IL: Vera Press, 1965), lxxvii. The full title of this work in Latin is *Theologoumena Pantodapa, sive, De Natura, Ortu, Progressu, et Studio, Verae Theologiae*; in English, the title is *Theological Affirmation of All Sorts, Or, Of the Nature, Rise, Progress, and Study, of True Theology ... with Digressions on Universal Grace, the Rise of the Sciences, Marks of the Roman Church, the Origin of Writing, Ancient Hebrew Script, Hebrew Punctuation, Jewish Versions and Forms of Worship, and Other Things*.

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 725.

<sup>5</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 49.

at Bremen and in 1700 at Franeker.<sup>6</sup> Sebastian Rehnman also points out that the covenantal Dutch theologian Herman Wistius also strongly commended this work.<sup>7</sup> In the "General Preface" to *The Works of John Owen*, Goold also notes the strong commendation of Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa* by John Ryland, the founder of the Baptist missionary society. His approbation indicates how highly many regarded this work:

This book bears the same rank, and has the same relation to the study of divinity, which the "Principia" of Sir Isaac Newton bears to the true system of the world, in the study of natural philosophy; and it is of equal importance to all young divines which that great man's work is to young philosophers.... I am ashamed of my countrymen for their ignorance of this incomparable work,—perhaps the very greatest of the kind that ever was written by a British divine; and it now lies buried in dust, amidst the lumber of a book-seller's garret, whilst a thousand volumes of wretched trash in divinity, with their pompous bindings, stand as monuments of human folly in our book-cases and libraries.<sup>8</sup>

While Goold indicates that Ryland's appraisal of the work is obviously exaggerated, he himself gives great praise to the *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. He states "no work of Dr. Owen, in his native tongues, leaves such an impression of the extent and variety of its erudition; and, to judge from it, no contemporary name bears away the palm of decided superiority to our author, either in respect of spiritual wisdom or general learning."<sup>9</sup> In his sketch of Owen's life, Thomson also comments on the significance of this work: "There is no book in the English language that occupies the wide field over which Owen travels with his usual power, and scatters around him his learned stones."<sup>10</sup> Finally, Stephen Westcott claims that Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa* is "the most erudite work of Britain's greatest ever theologian" and he argues that Owen himself considered it "his greatest and most enduring contribution to the advancement of Reformational theology."<sup>11</sup>

Despite the aforementioned praise of Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa* by many learned scholars, it was not translated into English until 1994 by Stephen Westcott under the title *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*. John Ryland would have certainly been dismayed that Owen's great and monumental work lay dormant and unavailable to a popular audience for so long. From 1850 to 1855 Goold edited the works of Owen in a definitive 24-volume set. At this time, Goold and his publishers contemplated translating the *Theologoumena Pantodapa* into English. However, they opted against this translation because they lived in a time when Latin was still the language of scholarship and the academy. They assumed anyone who wanted to read this type of book would more than likely be well versed in Latin. Nevertheless, because they chose not to translate this work into English, it was unavailable to an English audience since its original publication in 1661. Westcott aptly summarizes the

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<sup>6</sup> William Goold, "General Preface," in *The Glory of Christ*, ed. William H. Goold, The Works of John Owen 1 (1850–1853; repr., East Peoria, IL: Vera Press, 1965), x.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Goold, "General Preface," x (n. 1).

<sup>9</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xv.

<sup>10</sup> Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," lxxviii.

<sup>11</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xvii.

neglect of Owen's work when he writes, "Like a stranded treasure ship, it has been beached and left high and dry by the receding tide of Classical scholarship."<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. Theologoumena Pantodapa's Structure and Method

Before analyzing the specific contents of *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, it is necessary first to reflect on the structure and method of the book as a whole. Westcott's decision to alter the title of Owen's work in his English edition to *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* reveals his opinions about the structure of the work. Although the category of biblical theology did not develop until after Owen's time, along with J. I. Packer I think it is appropriate to call this book a "proto-Biblical Theology" because it does attempt to trace a common theme (theology) throughout the distinct historical stages of biblical history.<sup>13</sup> However, while *Theologoumena Pantodapa* roughly fits into the modern category of biblical theology, "Biblical Theology" is still not the best title for the book. Packer argues that the name biblical theology is not actually helpful because one "cannot tell from the name that the study has a distinctive historical focus, and second because it seems to imply that other disciplines within the organism of theology are not biblical."<sup>14</sup>

If I were to alter Westcott's title, I would title it *Covenant Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*. The Puritans strongly embraced a covenantal reading of Scripture. Their embrace of the covenantal schema is most clearly seen in their chief confessional document, the Westminster Confession, which is itself organized around the biblical covenants. With this covenantal structure Scripture is understood and interpreted in light of God's covenants with humanity. These covenants include the Adamic covenant, the covenant of grace, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. These covenants do not nullify each other as they progress, but they add to and expand upon one another and find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Owen's embrace of a covenantal reading of Scripture is evident in one of his most significant projects, the Savoy Declaration of 1658, which is essentially a congregational version of the Westminster Confession of Faith from 1649. Owen's indebtedness to the covenantal tradition of the Westminster Confession likely influenced him to organize the *Theologoumena Pantodapa* around the covenantal schema.

Additionally, Owen was likely influenced by Augustine's *The City of God*, in his arrangement of the *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. In his works, he references Augustine more than any other author, and his personal library contained Augustine's complete works.<sup>15</sup> Like Augustine, Owen writes extensively about the history and development of idolatry in the world. Also, just as Augustine traces the development of a central theme—the city of God—through sequential books of Scripture, Owen also traces a central theme, evangelical theology, through the sequential covenants of Scripture. Finally, Owen discloses his debt to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* as he refers to it frequently throughout the *Theologoumena Pantodapa*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xiii. J. I. Packer points out in his "Foreword" to the work that the discipline of biblical theology did not develop until the eighteenth century, when J. P. Gabler distinguished it from dogmatic theology.

<sup>14</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 4, 45, 126, 183, 185, 201, 240, 380, 385, 541.

In the *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, he traces the development of theology through the Adamic covenant, Noahic covenant, Mosaic covenant, and new covenant. Interestingly, Owen excludes the Davidic covenant in the discussion. He likely omits it because of his historical situation. Before publishing this work in 1661, Owen not only refused to support the move to make Cromwell king in 1658, but the monarchy was restored in 1660 under Charles II to his dismay. Thus, Owen may intentionally exclude this covenant because it could have been used as a justification for the restored monarchy.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that many puritans like Owen championed the covenantal reading of Scripture and method of theology, some chose to follow the scholastic method which was prominent among the continental Reformed theologians like Francis Turretin. The scholastic methodology seeks to arrange the truths of Scripture under certain loci or headings instead of arranging them in a covenantal framework. Richard Baxter's *Methodus Theologiae* and William Perkins's *A Golden Chain* reveal the influence of the scholastic method of the continental Reformed theologians upon the English puritans. Furthermore, in some of his works, Owen himself appears to have adopted scholastic methodology. For instance, Toon comments that Owen's *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu: Or the Death of Death in the Death of Christ* contains a "heavy style and Aristotelian methodology."<sup>18</sup> Carl Trueman also asserts that "Owen's theology exhibits some distinctly scholastic traits: for example, a passion for topical subdivision, and the use of questions and objections as a way of refuting his opponents and drawing out the full implications of his theology."<sup>19</sup> Owen also would have been very well trained in the scholastic model by his tutor Thomas Barlow, who was regarded as prominent Aristotelian scholar at Oxford. He would have read Lombard's *Sententiae* and Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* among other medieval scholastic works. According to Sebastian Rehnman, Barlow "would evidently have provided Owen with a formidable instruction in the revived Aristotelianism of the Renaissance."<sup>20</sup>

Despite Owen's obvious training in, familiarity with, and use of the scholastic method, he chooses to write his magnum opus, *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, using a covenantal framework instead of the scholastic framework. Trueman argues that Owen chooses to write in this framework because of his "fundamental belief that theology is relational."<sup>21</sup> To Owen, Scripture describes the relationship between God and humanity throughout history. The covenantal model is therefore an appropriate method of theology because the covenants highlight the moments within biblical history where God most clearly and explicitly elucidated his relationship with mankind.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Owen believes that "all theology ... is based on a covenant."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Owen utilizes the covenantal framework because he believes Scripture not only normatively determines the content of theology but also the method of theology. The form of theology should conform to the form by which theology is revealed in Scripture. Just as biblical truth "has absolutely nothing in common with secular philosophy" so too "the method of expounding and interpreting it is also through and by the Holy Spirit, making it quite unique and divine, a different species from and,

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<sup>17</sup> This insight comes from Gerald Bray, personal correspondence.

<sup>18</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 32, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 28.

therefore, in total disagreement with all merely human teaching and transmission of knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> To arrange the truths of Scripture using human methods and not the method revealed in Scripture is to mix theology and philosophy. Owen bewails the mixture of philosophical methods and biblical methods and comments upon the negative result of their union. He asserts,

To this is owed almost all of the theological systems—farragoes of odd theological propositions strung together with generalized arguments, sections lifted out of divine truth and context, plausible statements and propositions derived from them, all well mixed with philosophical terms and notions, cemented with overall and rigid formulas, and dished up as Christian theology!<sup>25</sup>

Not only does the mixture of philosophical methods and biblical truth produce aberrant theological systems, it also turns the perspicuity of Scripture into the obscurity of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

## ***2. The Study of Theology: Preliminary Considerations***

Owen does not think that the study of theology can be divorced from the character of the theologian himself. On the contrary, he believes that the specific motivations of the theologian greatly impact how he will engage in the task of theology. Additionally, although Owen does not address many of the questions of scholastic prolegomena, he provides some preliminary remarks about the etymology of the word “theology,” the difference between archetypal and ectypal theology, and the definition of theology.

### **2.1. Hinderances to the Study of Theology**

Before discussing the development of theology through the divine covenants, Owen explores various hinderances to the study of theology. This reveals Owen’s understanding that theology is an essentially practical discipline. The theologian does not study theology abstractly like a scientist examining a specimen under a microscope. To Owen, the study of theology cannot be divorced from the personality and experience of the theologian himself.

The first hinderance to the study of theology is studying it for the wrong reasons. Many study theology as a means to wealth or other worldly ends. They use theology as a cloak and a guise so that they might pursue other activities which interest them more. Of course, these people do not seriously study Scripture or pursue theology with the necessary diligence and care.<sup>27</sup>

Sloth also hinders the study of theology. According to Owen, sloth finds its origin in indwelling sin. Indwelling sin distracts the mind from the study of theology with various other pleasures. The enslaved mind prevents a man from studying theology with zeal. As a result, many who set out to study theology “finally grow weary and fall into the ways of negligence and sloth.”<sup>28</sup> Factions and sects also hinder the study of theology. Students devote themselves to a certain group with great zeal and spend their lives condemning other groups for matters of secondary importance. Owen believes nothing hinders the

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 670.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 671.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xxv–xxvi.

<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xxvii–xxviii.

study of theology more than for the student "to be ensnared into a vigorous sect before he has had the chance to develop independent, candid, and mature judgment of his own."<sup>29</sup> Finally, Owen also finds that teaching Classical literature to students beginning in theology is a great danger. He was not anti-Classical learning as his extensive references to the Classical authors indicate, but he did think exposing young students to the immorality espoused in Classical literature was not a good foundation for the study of theology.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2. Prolegomena: Theology Defined

While the *Theologoumena Pantodapa* is not organized around the scholastic loci method, it does contain certain characteristics of scholasticism, particularly in the first three chapters. Here Owen devotes significant attention to matters of theological prolegomena, beyond what was typical for his English Puritan contemporaries.<sup>31</sup>

In the first chapter, Owen surveys the etymology of the word "theology." In doing this Owen stands in the tradition of both the Reformed scholastics and their medieval antecedents, who often opened their theological works by defining certain terms.<sup>32</sup> Owen urges caution to those who use theological nomenclature foreign to the language of Scripture because "much of the confusion which is evident in the teaching of the Christian religion is due to the introduction of alien terms into theological use."<sup>33</sup> The use of terms not found in Scripture should primarily be for purpose of refuting heretics. However, there are certain terms not found within Scripture such as "theology" that are commonly accepted and which must be allowed.<sup>34</sup>

Owen first examines how the Hebrews understood the word "theology." While there is no Hebrew word which can be translated as "theology," the Jews understood theology as the study of the Torah. The Greeks used the word theology to refer to instruction about the gods and understood the theologian as someone who talks about the gods. Many Greek authors wrote "theologoumena" or written works which discussed the gods. They also wrote "theogonies" or stories about the birth and origin of the gods. Hesiod's *Theogony* was the most popular of these. Owen traces the use of the term "theologian" in Christianity to the Montanus fragment's reference to the apostle John as "the theologian." In sum, while the terms "theology" and "theologian" themselves are foreign to Scripture, Owen accepts the use of these words cautiously, and he prefers to call the topic of theology "Ecclesiastical Theology" following the lead of the early church historian, Eusebius.<sup>35</sup>

In chapter two, Owen decisively distances himself from scholastic prolegomena by avoiding "the disputes in which many scholars indulge over the so-called abstract and technical notion of theology."<sup>36</sup> Owen argues that the consideration of these questions are frivolous and amount to nothing more than

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<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xxxi.

<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xxxiii–xxxviii.

<sup>31</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 48–49.

<sup>32</sup> Rehman, *Divine Discourse*, 50, 52.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 3–6.

<sup>36</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

the mixing of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian revelation.<sup>37</sup> It is irrelevant to discuss whether theology is a “science” or “art” because these categories are arbitrary and humanly constructed. To categorize theology as a “science” is especially fatal because whereas science rests upon common natural truths, theology rests upon divine revelation with God as the subject matter. Subsequently, theology is “as infinitely far removed from the methodology of science as the sciences themselves are from nonexistence.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite the fact that he intentionally avoids the common scholastic conversation of whether theology is a science or an art, Owen reverts to positively employing distinctions common among scholastic prolegomena in his third chapter. He utilizes the scholastic distinction between archetypal knowledge and ectypal knowledge, following Fransiscus Junius’s *De theologia vera*.<sup>39</sup> His work was the first work which separated archetypal theology from ectypal theology.<sup>40</sup> Archetypal knowledge is the infinite knowledge by which God knows himself perfectly. God alone possesses this knowledge because God alone can know himself infinitely.<sup>41</sup> Ectypal knowledge then is the knowledge of God which humanity possesses. This knowledge is mediated and dependent upon God’s “own intervention in power and grace and the free exercise of His own will and design.”<sup>42</sup> Owen asserts that ectypal knowledge finds its supreme expression in the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

Finally, Owen concludes his prolegomena with a summative definition of theology. To Owen, theology is “the doctrine of God with regard to Himself, His works, His will, His worship, as well as our required obedience, our future rewards and punishments, all as revealed by God Himself to the glory of his name.”<sup>43</sup>

### ***3. The Development of Theology through the Divine Covenants***

John Owen’s primary aim in *Theologoumena Pantodapa* is to trace the development of theology through the biblical covenants. He considers the extent of Adam’s natural and supernatural theology before the fall and then explains the supernatural theology revealed to Adam after the fall in the covenant of grace. All of the subsequent biblical covenants expand upon the supernatural theology of the covenant of grace until theology is fully revealed in the evangelical theology of the new covenant.

#### **3.1. Natural Theology vs. Supernatural Theology**

After three chapters of introductory matters, Owen focuses the body of his work on tracing the development of theology throughout the biblical covenants. Owen argues that before the fall Adam possessed natural theology which was true and pure. By this natural knowledge, Adam could know God as Creator, Lawgiver, and Rewarder. Even though Adam possessed this knowledge naturally, he

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<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 57. Rehnman recognizes that in applying this distinction Owen is in company with Reformed scholastic theologians like Polanus, Turretin, Mastricht, Coffejeus, and Braunius.

<sup>40</sup> Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 17.

could increase this knowledge by “following the precepts of the divine will, and by prayerful meditation upon the works of the Creator.”<sup>44</sup> Further, Adam’s knowledge was natural in so far as he was created with inborn knowledge of God and his character, yet it was supernatural in so far as it contained matters which could only be revealed by God such as the knowledge of God’s will for Adam and the requirements of his obedience. The purpose of Adam’s natural knowledge was “to render him wise and qualified to demonstrate obedience to God in accord with the covenant of works under which he had been placed.”<sup>45</sup> By obeying God’s revealed law in the covenant of works, Adam would have arrived at the eternal enjoyment of God.

When Adam fell, his natural theology was corrupted and vitiated by sin. In Owen’s words, “the health-giving light of the first theology was extinguished through sin, and that creation-theology suffered annihilation.”<sup>46</sup> With the loss of knowledge, man also lost the ability to obey God’s commands. After the fall, man still possesses a shadow and vestige of Adam’s pure natural knowledge and can still glean knowledge about God through creation, yet this knowledge is not profitable for salvation and cannot lead to the eternal enjoyment of God. Man recognizes God as a Creator, Ruler, and Judge, retains a conscience by which he discerns good from evil, and is aware of his need for moral obedience. He also retains a *sensus divinitatis*—an innate sense by which he is compelled to know God and to please him through worship.<sup>47</sup> Owen marshals a host of examples from pagan authors to support these statements and concludes that “so much of natural theology remains despite our fallen and corrupted state, that no one who would stay human can help being a theologian deep within himself.”<sup>48</sup> Yet again, this natural knowledge is insufficient for salvation which can only come through the revelation of Christ. It is “but a tiny particle of knowledge enjoyed by the newly created man in his first state of innocence.”<sup>49</sup>

When natural theology was corrupted by sin, it continued to spiral downward throughout subsequent ages of mankind. Owen argues that philosophy arose as men attempted to build upon the remains of their defective natural theology. They sought to regain the primeval natural knowledge of Adam by using reason to rid the mind of its corruption and sin.<sup>50</sup>

Next, Owen considers the rise and content of supernatural theology after the fall. According to Owen, supernatural theology began with the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:16. Because this was a development in theology, it must have been rooted in a divine covenant. While Scripture does not use the language of covenant, Owen argues that God instituted the covenant of grace with Adam and contends that it can properly be called a covenant because it contains both divine promises and requirements for obedience. In the *protoevangelium*, Owen locates the source of all subsequent supernatural revelation. God’s covenant of grace with Adam was “the very marrow and core of the new theology.... From this time onward, it was revealed that righteousness and, in righteousness, gracious acceptance with God

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<sup>44</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 20–21.

<sup>46</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 30–33.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 85.

could never be sought at home by acceptable performance or inborn strength, but must be received from another who alone could overcome the danger of eternal death.”<sup>51</sup>

While the covenant of grace held forth the promise of the forgiveness of sins in Christ, it also maintained the need for moral obedience. Though God had yet to give the written law, those who embraced the promise of the covenant by faith were empowered to obey God’s moral commands. Finally, Owen claims that at this time God instituted sacrifice as a means by which man might exercise and test his faith in the divine promises.<sup>52</sup> The covenant of grace therefore consists of three parts: (1) the promise of the forgiveness of sins through the coming Mediator, (2) requirements of obedience, and (3) instructions for the true worship of God.<sup>53</sup> All successive Old Testament covenants develop and expand upon these three principles of theology until they are fulfilled in Christ and the new covenant. Pastors can therefore confidently read and interpret the Old Testament in light of the covenants and the complete development and fulfillment of their principles in the gospel.

### **3.2. Evangelical Theology: The Complete Revelation of Theology in the New Covenant**

From simply observing the “Contents” of Owen’s book, it is obvious that he believes the period from the fall of Adam to the advent of Christ as a period largely characterized by idolatrous corruption and decline. Of course, the covenants were high moments in the development of theology as they further revealed and expanded upon the three principles of theology given in the covenant of grace. However, Owen writes relatively little about the development of theology within the covenants themselves. On the contrary, he focuses more about Israel’s failure to keep the covenants and their long decline into idolatry. For instance, whereas he considers the theology of the Noahic covenant in twenty-five pages, he maps “The Origin and Progress of Idolatry” in one hundred and fourteen pages. Additionally, he gives twelve pages to the theology of the Abrahamic covenant and sixteen pages to the theology of the Mosaic covenant. He writes about “The Corruption and Solemn Restoration of Mosaic Theology” in forty-five pages. It is not until Owen arrives at the new covenant and the culmination of theology in Christ that he focuses more on the content of theology than the aberration and corruption of that theology.

Owen distinctly calls the theology of the new covenant “evangelical theology.” Importantly, Owen does not think the theology of the new covenant nullifies the theology of the divine previous covenants. On the contrary, he sees new covenant theology as the perfection and culmination of the theology of the previous covenants.<sup>54</sup> Christ is the supreme author and subject of evangelical theology. He chose to reveal this theology at a time when both idolatry and philosophy had reached their highest pitches. He reiterates that by virtue of his divine nature Christ possessed an infinite knowledge of all things, but when he assumed human nature in his role as mediator, he only knew what was revealed to him by the Father. Thus,

[Christ] was perfectly endued with knowledge of all that pertains to the obedience required by God from men, and, by His presence, He brought to light those things hidden in the Divine mind from eternity concerning the revelation of the glory of God, the setting up of the kingdom, the institutions of worship, the gathering of the church,

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<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 170–71.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 176–77.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 183, 185.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 593.

the calling, training and the consoling of the elect. In all this, He was the medium for the revelation of God's will to mankind.<sup>55</sup>

According to Owen the existential reality necessary for the evangelical theologian is "the rebirth of the human personality by the operation of the Holy Spirit."<sup>56</sup> Only those who have been reborn by the Holy Spirit can receive and obey evangelical theology. Having been reborn by the Holy Spirit, believers receive evangelical theology as a spiritual gift from the ascended Christ. Once they have received this evangelical theology, they are "made wise, prudent, and capable of understanding the mystery of holiness, of God and His will as revealed in Christ through the gospel."<sup>57</sup> Owen also writes about evangelical theology as spiritual wisdom. This wisdom consists of a saving knowledge of Christ and transforms believers into the image of Christ. It does this by kindling spiritual emotions commensurate with evangelical theology which then propels believers to long for communion with Christ.<sup>58</sup> Spiritual wisdom also produces godliness so that in a dialectical relationship they "mutually and lovingly foster, promote, increase and strengthen each other continually."<sup>59</sup> There is no distinction between spiritual wisdom and practice. Spiritual wisdom always and necessarily produces godliness in the person to whom it is gifted. Finally, following the Westminster Confession, Owen argues that the chief end of all theology is the enjoyment of God and "the celebration of the praise of God, and His glory and grace in the eternal salvation of sinners."<sup>60</sup>

#### *4. Further Considerations on Theology and the Theologian*

Owen ends *Theologoumena Pantodapa* by discussing two other matters related to the study of theology. First, Owen examines the mixture of philosophy and theology throughout church history and the relationship between philosophy and theology in the study of theology. Second, Owen practically describes what it means to be a gospel theologian seriously engaged in the study of theology.

##### **4.1. The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology**

Once he concludes the development of theology from Adam to Christ, Owen traces the development of the mixture of philosophy and theology. Shortly after the apostles proclaimed the simple truths of evangelical theology, the mixture of philosophy and theology led to errors concerning the person of Christ so that some believed he did not actually assume human flesh, but only appeared to do so. When these errors were expelled from evangelical theology, many Christian apologists began to fight the continued mixture of philosophy and theology by refuting their opponents with borrowed terms and concepts from philosophy. However, over time these terms and concepts were considered to be essential aspects of evangelical theology.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 600–2.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 636.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 640.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 643–46.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 648.

<sup>60</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 176, 617–18.

<sup>61</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 673–74.

When philosophy firmly established itself within the theology of the church, the scholastic theologians adopted Aristotelian philosophy and effectually “replaced the norm and faith of evangelical theology with a barbarous and philosophical pseudo-scientific ‘learning.’”<sup>62</sup> By this mixture simple evangelical truth became so obscure and convoluted that “the Apostle Paul himself would struggle in vain to grasp or understand it—unless, that is he was given the clue by Aristotelian learning.”<sup>63</sup> At the time of the Reformation, philosophy was expelled from evangelical theology and the purity and simplicity of the gospel was preached once again. Yet Owen argues that since the Reformation Aristotelian philosophy again began to infiltrate the theology of the Reformed churches.<sup>64</sup> This infiltration generates a multitude of unnecessary disputes and controversies and causes theology to “become a thorny and confused subject of study which men think to pursue exactly as they would any other art or science; that is, without any spiritual light or the assistance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>65</sup> Rhenman provides a helpful summary of Owen’s understanding of reason and philosophy in the *Theologoumena Pantodapa*:

It is exceedingly difficult to find the distinction between the excessive and insubordinate use and the ordered and subordinate use of reason in theology in this work. The constructive activity of sound and restored reason in pursuing the logical implications of the teaching of Scripture and in inventing theological terms is gone, and the relationship between faith and reason is disharmonious. One of the central concepts of the *Theologoumena* is thus the distortion of Christianity by philosophy, and the latter is virtually reduced to one very negative sense.<sup>66</sup>

Owen’s negative comments on philosophy and Aristotle come as a surprise. As noted earlier, Owen was tutored by Thomas Barlow, a recognized Aristotelian scholar at Oxford. Owen himself uses Aristotelian categories and concepts in many of his works like *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Rhenman argues that Owen’s negative comments on philosophy in the *Theologoumena Pantodapa* do not accurately reflect his understanding of the instrumental use of philosophy in theology.<sup>67</sup> According to Rhenman, Owen’s comments are a reaction against “a prevailing rationalistic and naturalistic tendency” in Reformed theology and are especially negative because of his “personal disaster of becoming a *persona non grata* in the Cromwellian establishment” and “the defeat of his ideals in the Restoration.”<sup>68</sup>

#### 4.2. The Character of the Gospel Theologian

Throughout the *Theologoumena Pantodapa* Owen considers what it means to be a gospel theologian. His consideration remains profitable for modern pastors and students of theology. Owen asserts that the theologian must not simply comprehend the mysteries of the gospel, but he must also be affected by them with passionate love. He bluntly exclaims “the man who is not inflamed with divine love is

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<sup>62</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 676.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 672.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 678–79.

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 684.

<sup>66</sup> Rhenman, *Divine Discourse*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Rhenman, *Divine Discourse*, 116–23.

<sup>68</sup> Rhenman, *Divine Discourse*, 182–83.

an outsider to all theology.”<sup>69</sup> Owen also claims that just as “a keen study of Cicero’s *Laws* and Plato’s *Republic* [does not] automatically produce good citizens,” so too a knowledge of the truths of Scripture does not make someone a theologian.<sup>70</sup> On the contrary, the gospel theologian is someone who both has been deeply instructed by the Holy Spirit in the mysteries of Scripture and also practices the truths in which he has been instructed.

Owen also urges the gospel theologian to be diligent in the reading of and meditation upon the Scriptures knowing that “in His Holy Scriptures God speaks to the sinner no less directly than if He chose to employ a voice resounding from the heavens.”<sup>71</sup> Owen then advises that the gospel theologian be diligent in prayer throughout all of his studies as it “is the most effectual means ordained of God for discovering that heavenly wisdom for which we are seeking, and for meeting with Himself who is that Wisdom.”<sup>72</sup> Finally, Owen instructs the gospel theologian to be in fellowship with others who study evangelical theology and seek to live in holiness. Through fellowship, the gospel theologian is encouraged to put into practice the gift of wisdom which he has received.<sup>73</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Owen’s *Theologoumena Pantodapa* is largely unknown to an English-speaking audience. However, this work is extremely important not only within Owen’s own corpus but also within the tradition of Reformed theology as a whole. While Owen entertains many scholastic discussions, especially in the first three chapters, he does so within a covenantal framework. Moreover, his covenantal method is unique because he does not simply expound each of the divine covenants in succession, but traces a single theme—theology—throughout each of these covenants. In this way, Owen’s *Theologoumena Pantodapa* can be understood as a proto-Biblical Theology.

Moreover, Owen’s discussion of theology throughout this book is eminently practical and informative for all Christians, especially pastors and students of theology. Owen provides a framework for interpreting the Old Testament which places the person and work of Christ, his worship, and his requirements for obedience at the center. He also pushes back against the false dichotomy between theology and practice, explaining how the Holy Spirit has graced all Christians with a renewed mind and the gift of evangelical theology, which inevitably leads to their growth in godliness, holiness, and communion with God. Additionally, Owen’s description of the gospel theologian reminds modern pastors and students of theology to study theology devotionally, not merely intellectually. Finally, Thomson’s remark on the entirety of Owen’s works especially applies to *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. It is like “like a soil which is literally impregnated with gold, and in which burnished masses of the virgin ore are sure to reward him who patiently labours in it.”<sup>74</sup> May modern pastors and students of theology heed Thomson’s remark and labor over Owen’s *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, for they will be richly rewarded.

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<sup>69</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xlv.

<sup>70</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 619.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 699.

<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 701.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 702.

<sup>74</sup> Thomson, “Life of Dr Owen,” cxi.

# Trinity, Creation, and Re-creation: A Comparison of Karl Barth and Herman Bavinck's Trinitarian Doctrines of Creation

— Jarred Jung —

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**Abstract:** Karl Barth's doctrine of creation, while rooted in his doctrine of the Trinity, errs in the way that creation is conflated into re-creation, resulting in a diminished doctrine of creation at the expense of his christological Trinitarianism. By comparing Barth's doctrine of creation with that of Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck, this article argues that Bavinck offers a doctrine of creation that is as equally grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity as Barth's and yet avoids the shortcomings of Barth's doctrine by appropriately distinguishing between creation and re-creation. As such, Bavinck serves as an appropriate example of doctrinal emphasis for theologians and pastors.

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Karl Barth (1886–1968) has long been considered the giant standing at the headwaters of renewed theological interest in the Trinity. Stanley Grenz comments, “Barth was by no means the first theologian in the wake of Schleiermacher and Hegel to pay attention to the doctrine of the Trinity.... Yet Barth's efforts have predominated, almost to the point of consigning the work of his immediate predecessors to the dustbin of theological history.”<sup>1</sup> Barth's theological vision was rooted in a robust Trinitarian doctrine that allowed for the flourishing of all antecedent Trinitarian discussion.

Among the theological doctrines that have been reshaped in the wake of this Trinitarian revival is the doctrine of creation. Following the broader revival in Trinitarian studies, Barth is largely held to be the theologian who restored the Trinity to the doctrine of creation. For example, in his work *The Triune*

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 34.

*Creator*, Colin Gunton writes, “To Karl Barth (1886–1968) must go much credit for the restoration of a Trinitarian mediation of creation, to be witnessed both in his determinedly credal construing of the doctrine and in his attempt to integrate creation and salvation christologically.”<sup>2</sup> As Barth stands at the headwaters of the renewed Trinitarian interest, so he stands at the headwaters of current efforts to reshape discussion about the doctrine of creation in light of the Trinity.

While theologians might look to Barth as the source of a Trinitarian doctrine of creation, Barth’s theological construction is not without its difficulties.<sup>3</sup> One particular weakness in Barth’s doctrine of creation is the way that he conflates creation and re-creation. The result is a lessening of the importance of creation in order to sustain Barth’s Trinitarian emphasis. In Barth’s case, one theological doctrine is consigned to the service of another. Is it possible that one of those theologians relegated to Grenz’s “dustbin” might also offer a doctrine of creation that holds out the appropriate Trinitarian strengths of Barth’s doctrine of creation while avoiding the swallowing of creation by re-creation, and therefore the swallowing of one doctrine by another? Perhaps such a theologian might offer a better example for theologians and pastors who desire to demonstrate the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in a way that does not diminish the importance of the other core doctrines of the Christian faith. This article argues that Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) is one such example. Like Barth, Bavinck sought to develop a doctrine of creation anchored in a robust Trinitarian theology. However, Bavinck went about developing a Trinitarian-rooted doctrine of creation very differently than Barth. The aim of this study is to compare Barth’s Trinitarian doctrine of creation with that of Bavinck in order to demonstrate that Bavinck’s doctrine of creation offers the same promise of a Trinitarian foundation as Barth’s while also avoiding the conflation of creation and re-creation apparent in Barth’s doctrine of creation.

### *1. Definitions and Delimitations*

Before proceeding, it is necessary to draw boundaries on this discussion and clarify some of the terminology that will be employed. First, both Barth and Bavinck’s doctrines of creation are expansive, treating creation, anthropology, and providence.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, the assessment and comparison of each of their respective doctrines of creation will be confined to the points where each theologian connects their doctrine of Trinity to creation apart from their theological anthropology or doctrine of providence. Second, when discussing the nature of the covenant concepts in both Barth and Bavinck, the terms “prelapsarian” and “postlapsarian” will be used rather than the terms “supralapsarian” and “infralapsarian” to avoid confusion with the traditional use of the latter two terms in historical debates within Reformed theology over the *ordo salutis*. Finally, by comparing Barth’s and Bavinck’s respective doctrines of creation in terms of “creation” and “re-creation,” the position presented

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<sup>2</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 157. Another example is seen in Jonathan R. Wilson, *God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 71.

<sup>3</sup> A helpful survey of critiques of Barth’s doctrine of creation is provided by Andrew K. Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation: Creation, Nature, Jesus, and the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 84–101.

<sup>4</sup> Barth’s doctrine of creation fills one four-part volume to his massive *Church Dogmatics*. Bavinck’s doctrine of creation, though not as voluminous as Barth’s, consumes fourteen chapters in the second volume of his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

confessedly uses Dutch Neo-Calvinist terms and by doing so is, in a way, bringing Barth to play on Bavinck's field. However, doing so is appropriate for two reasons. First, though he does not explicitly use the terms "creation" and "re-creation" like Bavinck, Barth's famous debate with Emil Brunner over natural theology demonstrates that he is clearly concerned with the relationship between what Bavinck calls "creation" and "re-creation."<sup>5</sup> Second, the terms "creation" and "re-creation" are appropriate for this discussion as it concerns not only the initial act of creation as presented in Genesis, but also sin's impact on that creation, Christ's subsequent impact on sin-stained creation, and most importantly, the foundational nature of Trinitarian doctrine to these impacts. Thus, the article refers to initial creation as "creation" and to Christ's impact on that creation as "re-creation."

## *2. Karl Barth's Trinitarian Doctrine of Creation*

Karl Barth calls for a foundational separation from the scientific inquiry surrounding assessments of the doctrine of creation in his day. He accomplishes this turn from science by positing the doctrine of creation as an act of faith. He writes,

The following argument ought first to have been adduced against all science both ancient and modern. If the world is not created by God, it is not. If we do not recognise that it has been created by God, we do not recognise that it is. But we know that it has been created by God only on the ground of God's self-witness and therefore in faith.<sup>6</sup>

That is to say, for Barth, the very belief in the existence of the cosmos is an act of faith. Geoffrey Bromiley summarizes Barth's thought well: "Christian faith, he concluded, does not endorse random scientific findings or hypotheses. It views the creature relative to the Creator."<sup>7</sup> But how is it that Barth establishes a faith-driven doctrine of creation?

In order to develop his doctrine of creation in terms of faith, Barth roots creation in the Trinity. Barth derives his Trinitarian doctrine of creation christologically, writing,

In view of the person of Jesus Christ we definitely cannot maintain or even suspect that there is nothing outside God, that the existence and being of the creature is only an appearance, and that God has not created heaven and earth. It is just as certain that God created them as that His eternal Word, without ceasing to be God, became something else, namely flesh—and therefore not nothing.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in Christ's divinity and humanity, one gains knowledge of both Creator and creature. Robert Sherman explains that for Barth, "one cannot develop even the notion of the world and cosmos as creation, let alone a full-blown doctrine of creation, without having first acknowledged God's revelation

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" By Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, study ed. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), III/1:6.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:25–26.

of the Creator-creature union in Christ.”<sup>9</sup> In line with Barth’s christological theological vision, he believes that faith in the reality of creation can only come through faith in the Creator, which only comes through faith in the Son of God incarnate. Thus, Barth makes Jesus the object of faith that presupposes the existence of the cosmos, and as such, also presupposes his doctrine of creation.

The christological nature of Barth’s doctrine of creation means that the triune Godhead’s work in creating the world is salvific in nature. For Barth, creation brings about a history where the covenant between the Trinitarian economy and creation can unfold. John Webster explains, “the created order can be understood only in light of God’s purposes for creation enacted in Jesus Christ and made real in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> In a Trinitarian summary of the purpose of creation, Barth proclaims,

The aim of creation is history. This follows decisively from the fact that God the Creator is the triune God who acts and who reveals Himself in history. God wills and God creates the creature for the sake of His Son or Word and therefore in harmony with Himself; and for His own supreme glory and therefore in the Holy Spirit. He wills and creates it for the sake of that which in His grace He wills to do to it and with it by His Son or Word in the Holy Spirit. The execution of this activity is history.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, Barth’s understanding of “history” bears explaining. Barth stands against the idea that the creation could have ever existed outside of the intention of the triune God to love it. He explains, “As the divine Creator he cannot have created a remote and alien sphere abandoned to itself or to its own teleology.... In this case we can understand the positing of this reality—which otherwise is incomprehensible—only as the work of His love.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Creation has its *telos* in the covenant. In other words, the entire history of creation is the history of God’s covenant with mankind where, “creation does not precede reconciliation but follows it.”<sup>13</sup> Kathryn Tanner explains Barth’s thought thusly: “God’s decision to be for us in Jesus is not a reaction to previous events in the history of God’s relations with us, but has a reality in its own right preceding the whole of that history.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, for Barth, “history” refers to the location for the acting out of the covenant.

Barth’s recognition that creation is the historical location for the covenant forms the foundation for his exposition of the first two chapters of Genesis. The idea of creation as the “external basis of this covenant” frames his interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3.<sup>15</sup> Tanner explains that by “external basis,” Barth means, “God’s being for us in Christ requires the existence of the world as a theatre or space for its occurrence and requires the existence of created subjects who are to be God’s partners made over in

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 62.

<sup>10</sup> John Webster, *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 97–98.

<sup>11</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:59.

<sup>12</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:95.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:76.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, Cambridge Companions to Religion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 111–26, 114. Similarly, Gabriel explains, “Barth often presents the covenant as pre-history, whereas creation is part of history.” Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:96.

that special way by him.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Barth expositis the creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3 as God forming the stage by which he will enact the covenant in history.

This understanding of creation as the external basis of the covenant leads to Barth’s exposition of the remainder of Genesis 2, which he holds to be “neither a supplement to Gen. 1 nor a commentary on it, but a new and different history of creation.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, in Genesis 2, “the covenant is the internal basis of creation.”<sup>18</sup> Barth explains, “Hence what God has created was not just any reality—however perfect or wonderful—but that which is intrinsically determined as the exponent of His glory and for the corresponding service.”<sup>19</sup> For Barth, Genesis 2 demonstrates that the covenant is the reason for creation’s existence. Hence, Barth holds Jesus to be both the beginning and *telos* of creation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, creation is the historical landscape in which the covenant can take place, while the covenant is the goal of creation’s existence.<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, Barth’s interpretation of Scripture regarding creation is determined by his judgment of the nature of the relationship between God and man. God freely chooses to love mankind and to reconcile mankind to himself by means of his incarnate Son, and it is this decision that leads him to create. This free choice of God is the core of Barth’s doctrine of creation. In this way, creation is rooted in the triune God’s work of reconciliation. If not for God’s free choice to love man, there would be no creation. As such, creation provides the historical stage in which God’s reconciling drama can be played out. Furthermore, this reconciliation is the very reason for creation. It is because of God’s covenant—not because of scientific proofs or philosophical treatises—that creation exists. Thus, for Barth, the doctrine of creation itself is rooted in faith in the reconciling God through Jesus Christ his incarnate Son.

### ***3. Creation and Re-creation in Barth’s Trinitarian Doctrine of Creation***

Having summarized Barth’s Trinitarian doctrine of creation, it is now possible to assess Barth’s understanding of the relationship between creation and re-creation. This assessment will focus on three aspects of Barth’s doctrine of creation: creation’s foundation in the covenant, Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:2, and Barth’s presentation of the second person of the Trinity in his doctrine of creation. An assessment of these aspects of creation will demonstrate that Barth’s doctrine of creation conflates creation and re-creation.

#### **3.1. Creation Rooted in Covenant**

Since creation serves as the historical landscape for the covenant, and the covenant serves as the purpose of creation, Barth’s doctrine of creation is closely related to the soteriological aspect of the covenant. Sherman explains that in Barth’s thinking, “God undertakes the work of creation not as an

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<sup>16</sup> Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” 118; cf. *Church Dogmatics* III/1:97.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:229. Barth’s separation of Genesis 1 and 2 as distinct creation narratives is helped along by his acceptance of the Documentary Hypothesis.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:231.

<sup>19</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:231.

<sup>20</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:232.

<sup>21</sup> This linking of creation and covenant also explains why Barth confines creation almost solely to humanity (*Church Dogmatics*, III/2:13).

activity independent of the work of reconciliation, but as the most fundamental prerequisite for it.”<sup>22</sup> For this reason, Barth’s covenant is prelapsarian. The connectedness of Barth’s theological system is admirable here. In the third volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth retains the emphasis that he sets forth in the first two volumes: God’s free choice to be for man in Christ. He does this by making the covenant both the prerequisite and reason for creation itself. Nonetheless, the prelapsarian nature of Barth’s concept of the covenant also results in the covenant’s universal nature. The covenant Barth sets forth is a covenant for all humanity that will infallibly take place in history. Webster points out, “The creation *is* (and therefore is known as) that reality which God destines for fellowship with Jesus Christ. And, because of this, ‘creation’ and ‘covenant’ are correlative terms.”<sup>23</sup> To Barth “election ... is more a way of articulating the teleological aspect of created human nature.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, Barth’s covenant is not only prelapsarian, but also universal in nature.

Furthermore, the prelapsarian and universal nature of Barth’s concept of the covenant determines his notion of creation’s goodness. When viewed as the historical setting for the covenant, creation becomes “the process whose fundamental purpose, as we have learnt from the biblical testimony to creation, is the history of salvation which culminates in Jesus Christ,” and thus it “cannot itself be hostile or indifferent, but can only be a benefit and can only be understood as such.”<sup>25</sup> For Barth, creation is good because the covenant has predetermined its goodness in God’s decision for reconciliation. In his view, God, through Christ, solved the problem of creation before the problem ever existed in history because of his freely chosen covenant with all humanity.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, humanity’s prelapsarian goodness lies in the covenant more than in God’s declaration of its goodness.

Therefore, one must ask in response to this prelapsarian covenantal basis of creation if Barth has left any place for differentiation between creation and re-creation. If the creation is created good based on the pre-historical covenant freely made by God in Christ, then Barth does not conceive the covenant as something that takes place in order to redeem a fallen humanity that has marred the goodness of creation. Rather, it is the historical unfolding of what is already true of creation because of God’s free choice to love in Christ. Or in other words, for Barth, “God created the world so that he could send his son to give us grace.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, in Barth’s concept of the covenant and its foundational nature to his doctrine of creation, creation can only exist as re-creation.

### 3.2 Barth’s Interpretation of Genesis 1:2

Barth’s conceptualization of the covenant also brings into question his hamartiology. To explain this, some detailed explanation of Barth’s biblical exegesis is in order. Before Barth approaches the question of sin in his doctrine of creation, he lays the foundation for its answer in his unique interpretation of the תָּהוּ וָבֶהוּ of Genesis 1:2.<sup>28</sup> Barth points out two common interpretations of this verse. The first is that the

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<sup>22</sup> Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 98, emphasis original.

<sup>24</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:330.

<sup>26</sup> Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, 119–20.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Riley Ashford and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 84.

<sup>28</sup> NIV renders this Hebrew phrase “formless and empty.”

chaotic *תהו ובהו* is a state of nothingness that is separate from creation and thus separate from God.<sup>29</sup> The second is that the chaotic state was created by God as the primeval state prior to God's creative activity in Genesis 1:3.<sup>30</sup> Barth rejects both of these options. For Barth, Genesis 1:2 tells of "a world-state over which the Word of God had not been uttered."<sup>31</sup> Barth's interpretation of Genesis 1:2 centers on an antithesis between the Word-less creation in 1:2 and what follows. Hence, he concludes, "Our only option is to consider v. 2 as a portrait, deliberately taken from myth, of the world which according to His revelation was negated, rejected, ignored and left behind."<sup>32</sup> Thus, the chaotic emptiness of Genesis 1:2 "is that which is excluded from all present and future existence, i.e., chaos, the world fashioned otherwise than according to the divine purpose, and therefore formless and intrinsically impossible."<sup>33</sup> As such, Barth brings the covenant to bear on the *תהו ובהו*. For Barth, that which is Word-less is that which is, "ungodly and anti-godly" and, "can have reality only as that which by God's decision and operation has been rejected and has disappeared, and therefore only as a frontier of that which is and will be according to God's decision and action."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the chaos exists apart from the covenant and therefore ought not to be included in reality. Gunton explains, "Karl Barth attempted an account, not entirely successfully, with his conception of Nothingness (*das Nichtige*), which he conceived as a kind of negative force resisting the good purposes of the creator."<sup>35</sup> As such, Barth concludes, "He saw the threatening curse and the threatening misery. He rejected the reality of creation that might be neutral or hostile to Him. He pushed it back and outside the limit of the world willed and determined by Him."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the chaos is the creation rejected by God in his free decision to choose what would exist for the purpose of reconciliation.

So, what of man's sin? Barth sees sin as a looking backwards to the past and seeking to return to the Word-less chaotic state.<sup>37</sup> As man's sin occurs in covenant history, the rescue for man's sin also occurs in covenant history with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Christ's work in covenant history ensures that the chaos outside of the covenant can never be reality. Tanner summarizes the issue as follows:

More fully stated, the unmerited acceptance of human beings and the rejection of chaos, sin, and death on the cross of Christ—the Yes and No of God's act in Christ—are mirrored by God's acceptance of only some things for creation and the rejection of others.... Moreover, the subordination of God's No to God's Yes, that is clear in Christ—the destruction of sin on the cross for the sake of righteousness—finds a correspondence in the way darkness or nothingness forms around what God creates as a quite secondary consequence of God's creative affirmation—the divine Yes—that

<sup>29</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:102.

<sup>30</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:102.

<sup>31</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:108.

<sup>32</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:108.

<sup>33</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:102.

<sup>34</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:102

<sup>35</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:102.

<sup>37</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:109.

brings the world to be.... What God rejects in Christ is not a mere neutral non-being, and therefore creation too suggests deliverance.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the struggle against sin and subsequent victory on the cross mirrors the rejection of the chaos of Genesis 1:2. But Barth's language suggests the cross was more than only a "mirroring" of Genesis 1:2. He writes, "As this Word is spoken and repeated in the history of the covenant which begins immediately after the fall of man, it is thereby constantly decided that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the *hay'thah* of chaos is final—this world *was*."<sup>39</sup> Here, Barth appears to suggest that the cross in some way retroactively deals with the chaos. Thus, it appears that if there is a fall for Barth, it takes place in Genesis 1:2 rather than in Genesis 3.

Barth's exposition of Genesis 1:2 is a brilliant move by which he retains the primacy of the covenant in his doctrine of creation. However, it serves to add to the suspicion that his doctrine of creation conflates creation and re-creation. Tanner suggests that Barth's understanding of Genesis 1:2 serves to mirror what Christ does on the cross against sin. However, Barth's language suggests more than a mere mirroring, as if the chaos of Genesis 1:2 was only a foreshadow of a drama to come. Rather, Barth seems to suggest that the issue of sin is rooted in Genesis 1:2 and was dealt with on the cross, as if the cross was more about the chaos than the sin of man. This allows for a universal understanding of creation as that which is freed from the chaos. Additionally, as Ashford and Bartholomew point out, "Indeed, in our view Barth's reading raises the unhelpful possibility of a dualism of evil and good present in the beginning."<sup>40</sup> Barth speaks directly to the issue, writing, "Gen. 1:2 speaks of the 'old things' which according to 2 Cor. 5:17 have radically passed away in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It tells us that even from the standpoint of the first creation, let alone the new, chaos is really 'old things,' the past and superseded essence of this world."<sup>41</sup> Man's sin, for Barth, is not the world's great problem as much as the threat to return to chaos. However, this threat is empty because it is dealt with in covenant history by Jesus. In other words, the covenant concerns God reconciling himself to man. Thus, it is the incarnate Christ who serves as the ontological lens through which man should be viewed.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, sin for man is not a reality because it has been dealt with in *the* man through the covenant.<sup>43</sup> So, all that is created from Genesis 1:3 forward—namely humanity—is the beneficiary of the covenant determined before creation. In light of this outlook, creation and re-creation look the same. The reality of sin is removed, and re-creation swallows creation.

### 3.3. The Son in Creation

A third area where Barth appears to conflate creation and re-creation is in his account of the role of the second person of the Trinity in creation. Jesus serves as the fundamental point for a scriptural understanding of creation because of his divine and human nature. Therefore, Barth nowhere allows for the activity of a pre-incarnate eternal Son of the Father, or a λόγος ἄσαρκος (*logos asarkos* or Word without flesh), in his Trinitarian conception of creation. Indeed, Barth admits to this. He answers, "It

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<sup>38</sup> Tanner, "Creation and Providence," 119.

<sup>39</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:109.

<sup>40</sup> Ashford and Bartholomew, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 153.

<sup>41</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:110.

<sup>42</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2:135–36.

<sup>43</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2:31.

has to be kept in mind that the whole conception of the λόγος ἄσαρκος, the ‘second person’ of the Trinity as such, is an abstraction.”<sup>44</sup> For Barth, when speaking of the second person of the Trinity, the only reality one can speak of is the incarnate Christ. John 1:1–3 should be read through the lens of John 1:14.<sup>45</sup> Andrew Gabriel comments, “In contrast, he wants to affirm that *Jesus* (not some abstract idea of the *logos*) is the Creator—Jesus, through whom the kingdom of God comes near and Jesus as the one who is the fulfillment of the covenant.”<sup>46</sup> David Fergusson sums up the difficulty with Barth’s viewpoint when he writes, “it coincides with anxieties around Barth’s universalism which is viewed as an inevitable outcome of this pre-temporal location of creation and redemption within the divine being itself.”<sup>47</sup> Barth’s refusal to consider the creative activity of the second person of the Trinity apart from the incarnation means that creation cannot be conceived apart from Christ’s salvific work. In this way, creation can only be viewed in light of re-creation. Christ the incarnate redeemer is Christ the incarnate Creator. As such, re-creation is merged into creation.

Gabriel defends Barth at this point by suggesting that in spite of his comments to the contrary, in different places Barth affirms the λόγος ἄσαρκος. He points out that Barth holds to the historicity of the incarnation, that he understands the λόγος ἄσαρκος to be a necessary part of Trinitarian doctrine, and that he believes Scripture to affirm a λόγος ἄσαρκος.<sup>48</sup> He concludes, “Barth affirms the *logos asarkos* as a means of affirming divine freedom, but he wants to emphasize that as God turns to creation there is no *logos asarkos* if that means a concept of a *logos* not shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ—a revelation that clarifies that God is eternally for us.”<sup>49</sup> Essentially, Gabriel argues that in his comments on the λόγος ἄσαρκος and the incarnate Son’s role in creation, Barth makes an epistemological rather than an ontological statement. However, while Gabriel’s defense protects Barth from accusations of conflating Creator and creature, it does not adequately handle the accusation that Barth’s refusal to epistemologically conceive of a λόγος ἄσαρκος only furthers the universal nature of his covenant in his doctrine of creation. In the end, even if Barth only wants to think of an incarnate Christ as the Creator without holding that Christ was really incarnate from eternity past, he still serves his theological system by sustaining that the incarnate Jesus, as the fulfiller of the covenant, is the one who ought to be conceived of as the Creator and the blueprint for creation. In doing so, he raises creation to the level of re-creation and removes any difference in the two.

### 3.4. Summary

The prelapsarian and universal nature of the covenant that lies at the foundation of Barth’s theology causes creation to exist as re-creation. Also, Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1:2 roots the problem of evil in the תְּהוֹ וְבָהוּ, a problem which is solved in history by the incarnate life, death, and resurrection

<sup>44</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:54.

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:54–55.

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation*, 93. One further critique at this point is that by not speaking of a pre-Incarnate Word, Barth loses the Creator-creature distinction. Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation*, 91–92; David Fergusson, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Creation: Church-Bells Beyond the Stars,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 18.4 (2016): 414–31, 420.

<sup>47</sup> Fergusson, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Creation,” 420.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation*, 93–94.

<sup>49</sup> Gabriel, *Barth’s Doctrine of Creation*, 94.

of Christ. In doing so, re-creation and creation are so closely related that the former seems to be collapsed into the latter. Finally, Barth's refusal to attribute the act of creation to the pre-incarnate λόγος ἁσάρκος means that the salvific incarnate Christ is the Word by which everything is created, thus elevating creation to re-creation. Therefore, while Barth formulates a Trinitarian doctrine of creation that fits naturally in the current of his theological vision, the way that he envisions the Trinity working towards creation conflates creation and re-creation. Furthermore, Barth's conflation leads to a doctrine of creation that seems to exist for the purpose of further emphasizing his christological Trinitarianism. Though a critique of Barth at this point is by no means novel, it bears restating in light of the renewed Trinitarian exploration spurred by Barth's theology as well as the overall importance of the doctrine of creation to the Christian faith. Is there a better way to construct a Trinitarian doctrine of creation that gives creation its due while not ignoring the importance of the Trinity?

#### 4. Herman Bavinck's Trinitarian Doctrine of Creation

Herman Bavinck did most of his theological writing prior to Barth's arrival on the stage of Reformed theology. Barth published his famous *The Epistle to the Romans* in 1919, just two years prior to Bavinck's death. John Vissers demonstrates that Barth actually relied on Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatik* for both his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* and his earlier *Göttingen Dogmatics* and that Barth's overall assessment of Bavinck's theology was positive.<sup>50</sup> However, there are important differences in the two theologians' doctrines of creation.<sup>51</sup> To further explore the similarities and differences between Barth and Bavinck's Trinitarian doctrines of creation, it is first necessary to explain Bavinck's doctrine of creation.

Much like Barth, it is difficult to understate the importance of the Trinity to Bavinck's theological vision. He does not mince words, writing, "Now in the confession of the Trinity we hear the heartbeat of the Christian religion; every error results from, or upon deeper reflection is traceable to, a departure in the doctrine in the Trinity.... All who value being called Christians continue to speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>52</sup> In other words, for Bavinck, any departure from the Trinity is a departure from Christianity. Indeed, Christians cannot think of God other than as Trinity.<sup>53</sup> This position impacts his doctrine of creation. For Bavinck, it is not enough for creation to stem from a vague idea of God. Rather, "The Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all existence is referred back to the triune God."<sup>54</sup> Thus, many of the theological *loci* that Bavinck discusses will have strong connections to the Trinity, including his doctrine of creation.

Bavinck's most extensive treatment of the doctrine of creation is found in the second volume of his *Reformed Dogmatics*. In his editorial introduction to this volume, John Bolt accurately describes

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<sup>50</sup> John Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*," *CTJ* 45 (2010): 79–86.

<sup>51</sup> While Barth holds Bavinck to be an admirable Trinitarian theologian, he also thinks Bavinck (along with Abraham Kuyper) is guilty of allowing worldview and philosophy into theology. See Vissers, "Karl Barth's Appreciative Use," 82–84.

<sup>52</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 2:288

<sup>53</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:330.

<sup>54</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:330.

Bavinck's doctrine of creation as "self-consciously rooted in his trinitarian doctrine of God."<sup>55</sup> Because of the importance of Bavinck's doctrine of the Trinity to his doctrine of creation, there is significant overlap of his discussion about creation in his treatment of both doctrines. For example, in his theology proper, Bavinck writes,

It [Scripture] teaches, first of all, that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The things we perceive 'were not made out of what is visible' (Heb. 11:3) but existed and exist eternally as ideas in the mind of God. They, therefore, derive their origin from God, are to a greater or lesser extent related to him, and so also have the capacity to display his perfections before the eyes of his creatures. Because the universe is God's creation, it is also his revelation and self-manifestation. There is not an atom of the world that does not reflect his deity.<sup>56</sup>

This reflection naturally leads to Bavinck's emphasis on an archetypal-ectypal relationship between the Creator and his creation.<sup>57</sup> But this relationship is more than the creation's reflection of particular attributes of God. Rather, the creation reflects the Creator in his very being.

When the archetypal-ectypal relationship between Creator and creation is seen in light of Bavinck's insistence that the Creator must only be viewed as triune, it follows that the creation reflects the triune nature of God. Bavinck does not see this reflection in numerical descriptions of creation. Rather, the creation reflects the Trinity in its simultaneous unity and diversity. He writes, "In God, too, there is unity in diversity, diversity in unity. Indeed, this order and this harmony is present in him absolutely. In the case of creatures, we see only a faint analogy of it."<sup>58</sup> In spite of the faintness of the analogy, creation nonetheless reflects the Creator in the way of unity and diversity. The result of this understanding is what has become known as Bavinck's organic motif.<sup>59</sup> Creation functions as an organism, a unified body with differing parts. Nathaniel Sutanto explains, "Unity and diversity is the particular expression of the triune shape of creation as an organism, both in its parts and as a whole simply because creation *comes from* an archetypal One-in-three."<sup>60</sup> For Bavinck, the creation's unity in its various parts serves as the ectype to God's triune archetype. The perspective of creation as an organism which reflects the unity and diversity of God is of critical importance to how Bavinck derives his doctrine of creation.

In addition, Bavinck's doctrines of Trinity and creation have an interdependent relationship to one another. He goes as far as to say, "all opposition to the Trinitarian work of creation is proof of deviation in the doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>61</sup> The significance of this statement is astounding. For Bavinck, Trinity and creation are so closely related that separating the two not only results in a truncated doctrine

<sup>55</sup> John Bolt, introduction to Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:20.

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:109.

<sup>57</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:110.

<sup>58</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:331.

<sup>59</sup> James Eglinton has written extensively on Bavinck's organic motif. See James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2012). Nathaniel Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18 (2016): 174–90, esp. 175–78.

<sup>60</sup> Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin," 177.

<sup>61</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:422.

of creation, but also results in a deviation from Nicene orthodoxy. Therefore, Bavinck is careful to correctly formulate the activity of the three persons in creation:

Scripture left no doubt on this point. God created all things through the Son ... and through the Spirit.... In this context the Son and the Spirit are not viewed as secondary forces, but as independent agents or ‘principles’ (*principia*), as authors (*auctores*) who with the Father carry out the work of creation, as with him they also constitute the one true God.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Bavinck agrees with Irenaeus that contra Gnosticism, God created without a mediating agent, but with Son and Holy Spirit, “his own hands.”<sup>63</sup> From here, Bavinck can begin to discuss the roles of the three persons of the Trinity, each performing his own task in unity with the other two.<sup>64</sup> He writes,

The Father is the first cause; the initiative of creation proceeds from him.... The Son is not an instrument but the personal wisdom, the Logos, by whom everything is created.... And the Holy Spirit is the personal immanent cause by which all things live and move and have their being, receive their own form and configuration, and are led to their destination, in God.<sup>65</sup>

Bavinck gives significant space to discussing the particular role of the Son in creation because he holds that a wrong comprehension of the Son’s role in creation leads to significant Trinitarian errors. Specifically, he focuses on a gnostic perception of the Logos, whereby the Son is an intermediate agent of the Father and thus becomes the Creator apart from the Father.<sup>66</sup> Against this view, Bavinck emphasizes that creation cannot be attributed to the Son only, but also to the Father and Spirit as one Creator God.<sup>67</sup> So how is the Son’s role distinguished in the act of creation? Here Bavinck relies on Augustine:

Accordingly, the Logos can be called ‘a certain kind of form, a form which is not itself formed but the form of all things that have been formed’ (*forma quaedam, forma non format sed forma omnium formatorum*). By this line of thought the significance of the Son for the creation can be established. First, there is the Father, from whom the initiative for creation proceeds, who thinks the idea of the world; but all that the Father is and has and thinks he imparts to, and expresses in, the Son. In him the Father contemplates the idea of the world itself, not as though it were identical with the Son, but so that he envisions and meets it in the Son in whom his fullness dwells.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the Father is the initiator of creation who thinks of it in the Son, who serves as a type of form for the creation. The result, Bavinck explains, is that the Father is not “merely the ‘exemplary cause’; he is also the ‘creating agent’ (*arche demiourgike*). The word that God speaks is not a sound without content;

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<sup>62</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:421.

<sup>63</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:421.

<sup>64</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:422–23.

<sup>65</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:423.

<sup>66</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:424.

<sup>67</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:424–25.

<sup>68</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

it is forceful and living [performative].”<sup>69</sup> It is the Son who makes the Father’s word of creation effective and gives the world its purpose as the head of all creation.<sup>70</sup> The Spirit serves as the one who “vivifies and beautifies it all.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, when the Trinitarian work of creation is rightly conceived in the unity and diversity of the three persons, one avoids Trinitarian errors.

In summary, Bavinck’s doctrine of creation is rooted in his doctrine of the Trinity. As the creation serves as an ectype of the archetypal Creator, so the creation reflects this Trinity in its unity and diversity. This view of the creation as organism leads Bavinck to draw an interdependent relationship between Trinity and creation to the extent that errors in comprehending one leads to errors in comprehending the other. Thus, Bavinck’s doctrine of creation is built upon his doctrine of the Trinity.

### ***5. Creation and Re-creation in Bavinck’s Trinitarian Doctrine of Creation: A Comparison to Barth***

Having summarized Bavinck’s Trinitarian doctrine of creation, one can now better understand how his doctrine deals with creation and re-creation. This understanding allows one to compare Bavinck’s doctrine of creation to Barth’s at the level of the relationship between creation and re-creation. This comparison demonstrates that where Barth conflates creation and re-creation in his doctrine, Bavinck sustains a division between the two. This conclusion can be drawn through discussing differences in the two theologians’ respective views of the covenant, laying out the differences in their respective understandings of the role of the Son in creation, looking at Bavinck’s emphasis on the unity of creation, and explaining their differing understandings of creation and revelation.

#### **5.1. Creation Rooted in Trinity, but not in Covenant**

First, like Barth, Bavinck’s doctrine of creation is rooted in the triune nature of God. Furthermore, Bavinck is equally concerned with Barth to sustain God’s independence and freedom in creation, thus sustaining the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>72</sup> He holds that this perspective distinguishes a Christian doctrine of creation from that of pantheism and materialism.<sup>73</sup> However, nowhere does Bavinck mention the covenant in order to sustain God’s freedom and independence from creation. While Bavinck believes in a pre-creation (and thus prelapsarian) *pactum salutis*, this is not held as the foundational reason for creation.<sup>74</sup> Contrarily, Bavinck’s first mention of the covenant in his doctrine of creation is the covenant of works made between God and Adam in his treatment of anthropology.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, Bavinck’s treatment of covenant does not lead to the universalism of Barth’s. Bavinck treats God’s salvation as

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<sup>69</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

<sup>70</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

<sup>71</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:262.

<sup>72</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:407.

<sup>73</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:408–15. Pantheism for Bavinck includes the Hegelian panentheism prominent in the German theology of his contemporaries.

<sup>74</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:212–16. The *pactum salutis*, or covenant of redemption, refers to the inter-trinitarian agreement between the Father and the Son in eternity past to save the elect through the Father’s sending of the Son in time and history and the Son’s willingness to be incarnate in time and history.

<sup>75</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:567–71.

a postlapsarian need for man as opposed to Barth's prelapsarian understanding of the covenant and salvation which lie at the root of his doctrine of creation.<sup>76</sup> In this way, where Barth conflates creation and re-creation, Bavinck sustains the difference between the two.

## 5.2. The Importance of the Son to Creation

Second, like Barth, Bavinck holds that an appropriate grasp of the relationship between the Father and the Son is necessary for an appropriate doctrine of creation. Also, like Barth, Bavinck's treatment of Trinity and creation contains more discussion about the role of the Son in creation than that of the Spirit.<sup>77</sup> This bears particular importance to Bavinck's stance on creation and re-creation, which he often expresses in terms of nature and grace. In the same way that a wrong view of creation results in Trinitarian errors, so Trinitarian errors lead to a wrong view of creation. Bavinck stands opposed to all dualism in the relationship of nature and grace. He holds that these sorts of views result from a wrong perception of the role of the Logos as a mediating Creator for the Father. When the Son is seen in this light, the result is that "re-creation swallows up creation and grace nullifies nature."<sup>78</sup> Bavinck holds that such views lead to the minimalizing of creation at the hands of re-creation. He concludes, "Creation as a work of God is not inferior to re-creation; nature is not of a lower order than grace; the world is not profane itself. Consequently, there is no need for an inferior divine being to enable the Father to create the world."<sup>79</sup> Here Bavinck connects Trinity to the relationship between creation and re-creation. To view the Son as a creating demiurge for the Father means that creation is swallowed up by re-creation and that re-creation is superior to creation. This view is one that Bavinck wants to avoid in his insistence that re-creation does not replace creation. Rather, for Bavinck, re-creation restores creation in such a way that the two remain distinct parts of one ongoing work.

Furthermore, in Bavinck's formulation of the Son's role in creation, he does not speak of an incarnate Son in the fashion of Barth. Rather, Bavinck sustains a clear distinction between the Son in his pre-incarnate form and the incarnate Son Jesus. When speaking in terms of creation, the Son is referred to as the "Son" or "Logos," never the incarnate Son.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, Bavinck differentiates the two in terms of creation and re-creation. For Bavinck, the Son is both the beginning of creation and its *telos*, both the head of creation as the pre-incarnate Logos and of re-creation as Jesus the God-man.<sup>81</sup> Thus, he concludes, "Summed up in the Son, gathered under him as head, all creatures again return to the Father, from whom all things originate."<sup>82</sup> Here he differentiates from Barth, who, though he locates the incarnation in history, holds the incarnate Christ to be the foundational principle of creation.

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<sup>76</sup> This is perhaps why Barth includes hamartiology in the anthropological portion of his doctrine of creation while Bavinck treats hamartiology apart from creation as the beginning of his soteriology. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:24–190.

<sup>77</sup> Neither Barth nor Bavinck give much attention to the role of the Spirit in creation. Barth goes as far as to deny pneumatological significance to Genesis 1:2. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:108 and Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 160. Bavinck would disagree at this point and believes that the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 refers to the Holy Spirit. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:261–62.

<sup>78</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:424.

<sup>79</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:424.

<sup>80</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:420–26.

<sup>81</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

<sup>82</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

### 5.3. Unity in Creation

Third, Bavinck emphasizes that the unity of creation as organism reflects the unity of God. He writes, “There is a most profuse diversity and yet, in that diversity, there is also a superlative kind of unity.”<sup>83</sup> Eglinton comments, “in the relationship of unity to diversity, Bavinck claims that unity comes first.”<sup>84</sup> Bavinck believes that a misinterpretation of the unity of the Godhead results in a misinterpretation of creation and re-creation. He warns,

When the confession of the one true God weakens and is denied, and the unity sought in pantheism eventually satisfies neither the intellect nor the heart, the unity of the world and of humankind, or religion, morality, and truth can no longer be maintained. Nature and history fall apart in fragments, and along with consciously or unconsciously fostered polytheistic tendencies, every form of superstition and idolatry makes a comeback.<sup>85</sup>

Regarding this statement, Eglinton writes, “One must read his sentiment regarding ‘nature falling apart in fragments’ against the backdrop of his ‘grace restores nature’ *leitmotif*: the key to nature holding together, rather than splintering and losing its oneness, is found in the unity of the one true God.”<sup>86</sup> However, by maintaining this unity, Bavinck’s desire is to avoid elevating re-creation to a higher place than creation, not to conflate the two. Bavinck expounds on the relationship:

In virtue of this unity the world can, metaphorically, be called an organism, in which all the parts are connected with each other and influence each other reciprocally. Heaven and earth, man and animal, soul and body, truth and life, art and science, religion and morality, state and church, family and society, and so on, though they are all distinct, are not separated. There is a wide range of connections between them; an organic, or if you will, an ethical bond holds them all together.<sup>87</sup>

While sustaining the unity of creation in reflection of the unity of God, Bavinck also sustains the unity of every part of creation—both those parts that seem more related to creation and those parts that seem more related to re-creation. In doing so, he also maintains a distinction between the two. While sustaining that both are part of a unified creation of God, he still distinguishes creation from re-creation rather than conflating them.

### 5.4. Creation as Revelation

Bavinck departs significantly from Barth in his assertion that creation serves as God’s revelation. Barth desires to root his doctrine of creation in God alone, not wanting to engage questions of science or philosophy. In this way, one hears echoes of Barth’s wholesale rejection of natural theology. Thus, Barth also rejects the concept that aspects of the Trinity can be understood from observing the creation

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<sup>83</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:435–36.

<sup>84</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 68.

<sup>85</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:173.

<sup>86</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 111.

<sup>87</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:436.

for reflections, analogies, or vestiges of God's triunity, otherwise known as *vestigium trinitatis*.<sup>88</sup> Barth leaves no place for the creation to reflect the Creator. Bavinck, on the other hand, roots his doctrine of creation in his confidence in general revelation and the creation's ability to reflect the Creator, even in the triune economy.<sup>89</sup> In his 1908 Stone Lectures, Bavinck offers a philosophy of revelation—as antithetical a concept to Barth's theological vision as one could imagine—in which he draws connections between the Creator, creature, and revelation. He writes, “In this religion God is the creator of all things. The whole world is the work of his hands; matter itself is made by him, and before its making was the object of his thought. All being and becoming thus embody a revelation of God.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, creation serves as “the initial act and foundation of all divine revelation and therefore the foundation of all religious and ethical life as well.”<sup>91</sup> Because creation for Bavinck is general revelation, it must reflect the Creator.<sup>92</sup> Hence, this revelation explains the unity of all parts of creation, a unity Bavinck sees in the creation's order.<sup>93</sup> This order brings a unity to creation and re-creation because, “Nature and grace, culture and cultus, are built upon the same foundations.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, Bavinck holds that creation exists as a revelation of the Creator, reflecting God in its unity.

At the same time, Bavinck also holds that creation as general revelation cannot fully reveal God. For this revelation, one must see God not only as Creator, but also as reconciler.<sup>95</sup> Here he differentiates between creation and re-creation in terms of revelation. He explains, “The God who created and sustained us is also he who re-creates us in his image. Grace, though superior to nature, is not in conflict with it. While restoring what has been corrupted in it by sin, it also clarifies and perfects what is still left in it of God's revelation.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, creation and re-creation are connected as a single work of God's revelation yet differ in content and effectiveness.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the two are not conflated but held separate.

The difference between Barth and Bavinck could not be starker at this point. For Barth, revelation only occurs through the incarnate Word.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, there is no general revelation of creation. Creation can only reflect the Creator through the incarnate Word.<sup>99</sup> From Bavinck's viewpoint, while the Logos is

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<sup>88</sup> For Barth's rejection of the concept of *vestigium trinitatis*, see his *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thompson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), I/1:383–99. Interestingly, Vissers points out that Barth relies of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* to formulate his rejection (“Karl Barth's Appreciative Use,” 84); see Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 386.

<sup>89</sup> For Bavinck's formal treatment of general revelation, see *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:301–22.

<sup>90</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures for 1908–1909 Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 307.

<sup>91</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:407.

<sup>92</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 67.

<sup>93</sup> Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 307.

<sup>94</sup> Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 307.

<sup>95</sup> Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 307.

<sup>96</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:330.

<sup>97</sup> Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 308.

<sup>98</sup> See for example his discussion of the secularity of the Word of God in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1:168.

<sup>99</sup> Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity*, 62.

the prototype for creation, the creation itself reveals God apart from the incarnate Word.<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, Bavinck is more willing than Barth to interact with science and philosophy in his interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis.<sup>101</sup> For Bavinck, the incarnate Word serves as the foundation of re-creation and special revelation, but not creation.<sup>102</sup> Where Barth pushes re-creation into creation in confining revelation to the incarnate Word, Bavinck holds the two to be separate by differentiating between general and special revelation and holding creation to be God's general revelation.

## 6. Conclusion

Karl Barth receives credit for the revival in Trinitarian studies, and hence is considered the one to whom we should look for a Trinitarian appropriation of creation. However, as has been demonstrated, Barth's Trinitarian doctrine of creation has difficulties, namely in how he collapses re-creation into creation. Bavinck's doctrine of creation is as thoroughly Trinitarian as Barth's doctrine of creation. At the same time, Bavinck's doctrine appropriately separates creation and re-creation where Barth's doctrine conflates the two.

Returning to a question posed at the outset of this study, does Bavinck offer a better example than Barth to pastors and theologians seeking to instruct others on the importance of Trinitarian doctrine? This article would conclude that he does. Good theology shines forth the beauty of Christianity in each and every doctrine of the faith. The best theologians are able to bring these doctrines together in a unified system. These systems, like concert symphonies, repetitively bring to light certain themes and motifs in each doctrinal "movement." However, one must be careful that one movement does not come to dominate the rest, resulting in a theology that repeats a loud chorus so often that the other movements are never heard. Doctrines will naturally overlap and interact, and there are times to emphasize the importance of one particular doctrine over another. However, when seeking such a doctrinal emphasis, one must be careful that this emphasis does not diminish the necessity and importance of the other doctrines of the faith. Otherwise, one becomes like the preacher whose sermons funnel to the same conclusion each week no matter where the passage leads or what the specific pastoral needs of the congregation may be. By conflating creation and re-creation, Barth is guilty of such a theological funneling. Barth's doctrine of creation, voluminous as it may be, becomes lost in the christological Trinitarianism that dominates his theological vision. Bavinck, on the other hand, serves as a better example of a theologian who emphasizes Trinitarianism without losing the immense importance of creation to the theological storyline of Scripture.

While this study focuses on how Bavinck offers a corrective to Barth's doctrine of creation in the area of creation and re-creation, there are other areas of Bavinck's doctrine of creation that might serve as strengths to Barth's other weaknesses that bear further exploration, particularly in light of the recent increased interest in Bavinck in the English-speaking world.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, while this study briefly

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<sup>100</sup> Bavinck calls the Son the "fundamental form (*forma principalis*) of the world itself" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425).

<sup>101</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:485–500; 512–29.

<sup>102</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:425.

<sup>103</sup> Since the publication of the final volume of his *Reformed Dogmatics* in English in 2008, Bavinck scholars have published English translations of several works. These include the first volume of a previously unpublished manuscript of Bavinck's work on ethics: Herman Bavinck, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed.

touched on the importance of revelation to the difference in Barth's and Bavinck's respective doctrines of creation, this topic in particular is ripe for further study. As the Trinitarian revival continues and discussion surrounding the Trinity and creation expands, theologians who are tempted to join the chorus that holds Barth to be the restorer of all things Trinitarian should not overlook Bavinck's Trinitarian doctrine of creation. For those who desire to answer the recent calls in evangelical theology for a more robust "Trinitarian thinking" about God and for pastors who desire to call their congregants to think more deeply about God's triunity in all areas of theology and life, Herman Bavinck's theology is an excellent place to begin.

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John Bolt, vol. 1 of *Reformed Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019). Several compilations of his essays, speeches, and lectures have recently appeared: Herman Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, ed. and trans. James P. Eglinton, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017); and *On Theology: Herman Bavinck's Academic Orations*, ed. Bruce R. Pass, trans. Bruce R. Pass (Boston: Brill, 2020). Previously untranslated works include Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, ed. and trans. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Herman Bavinck, *A Sacrifice of Praise*, ed. and trans. Cameron Clausing and Gregory Parker Jr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019); and Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2012). There have also been recent updates to two translations: Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, ed. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018); and Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion According to the Reformed Confession* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019). Furthermore, James Eglinton recently published a major biography of the Dutch theologian: *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2020).

# Appeasement of a Monster God? A Historical and Biblical Analysis of Penal Substitutionary Atonement

— Geoffrey Butler —

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**Abstract:** Long considered a key tenet of evangelical theology, the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement has come under particularly intense scrutiny in recent years. Critics claim that it is a fairly recent innovation with little support prior to the Reformation, and that it depicts Yahweh as comparable with the pagan deities of the OT. This article makes the case that, on the contrary, the substance of penal substitutionary atonement has been taught from the church's earliest days, arguing that the doctrine stems directly from a careful, thoughtful engagement with Scripture, which from beginning to end points toward the sacrificial death of Israel's Messiah.

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The doctrine of the atonement has generated no shortage of controversy throughout Christian history. Perhaps as much is to be expected; what Christ accomplished on the cross cuts to the very heart of how believers are to understand the gospel. However, the penal substitutionary model has incurred particularly intense scrutiny. This view, alternatively labeled representative substitution, is defined by British theologian J. I. Packer as the conviction that the atonement involves “the innocent taking the place of the guilty, in the name and for the sake of the guilty, under the axe of God’s judicial retribution.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig, a staunch defender of penal substitution, has defined it as “the doctrine that God inflicted upon Christ the suffering which we deserved as the punishment for our sins, as a result of which we no longer deserve punishment.”<sup>2</sup>

Though its proponents argue the view to be thoroughly biblical and demonstrably historical, this understanding of Christ’s work has been attacked on both accounts, often quite vehemently, by its

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<sup>1</sup>J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, reprint ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 186. Packer makes this claim in chapter 18 (“The Heart of the Gospel”), in which he explains why the doctrine of penal substitution is essential to a biblical understanding of the Christian faith and how the scriptural idea of propitiation vastly differs from pagan conceptions of it.

<sup>2</sup>William Lane Craig, “Is Penal Substitution Unjust?” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 83 (2018): 231.

detractors. Some who reject the penal substitutionary model assert that it is a Reformation, or at best medieval, invention that finds no support throughout the first millennium of the church. For example, the former Anglican Archbishop of Perth, Peter Carnley, derides it as “inadequate” and charges that it “has been criticized in the course of history of Christian theology right from the moment it was first articulated by St. Anselm in the Middle Ages.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the doctrine has also been criticized as a distortion of Scripture, nowhere clearly taught in the Old or New Testaments. It has been blasted as a barbaric distortion of God’s character that places him in the category of pagan gods such as Molech,<sup>4</sup> depicting him as a “monster God” who is appeased only “through the barbarism of child sacrifice.”<sup>5</sup> Detractors have also claimed that it is irreconcilable with the teaching of Christ that his disciples must love their enemies.<sup>6</sup> If Christ did indeed pay the price for the sins of humanity, they charge, God has never truly forgiven any sinner as he expects believers to do when wronged.<sup>7</sup> In the Gospels, they argue, Jesus depicts the Father as simply forgiving individuals with no mention of a sacrifice. How, therefore, can one argue that he requires the substitutionary sacrifice of his son in sense order to accomplish redemption?<sup>8</sup> Even to the casual observer these are clearly serious charges.

The question is whether such charges are accurate. Is penal substitution a relatively recent invention? Does it truly depict God as some sort of violent, pagan deity? Is it incompatible with the loving God of the Bible as revealed through Jesus Christ? While such charges certainly merit consideration, ultimately this article will make the case that they are mistaken. It will argue that the penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement has, in substance, been believed and taught since the infancy of the church, demonstrating that it has held considerable influence throughout Christian history, and represents a thoroughly biblical depiction of Christ’s work on the cross.

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Carnley, *Reflections in Glass Trends and Tensions in the Contemporary Church* (Sydney: HarperCollins Australia, 2011), prologue. Carnley further derides penal substitution due to the “offensive view it projects of an uncompromisingly cruel and punishing God” and the “rough-and-ready kind of justice it depends on, given that the innocent Christ who suffers the required punishment to satisfy God instead of the guilty.”

<sup>4</sup>Brian Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God: The Scandalous Truth of the Very Good News* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2017), 82. Much of Zahnd’s work centers around his own move away from penal substitution, which he firmly held to in his early days of ministry. He highlights the famous Jonathan Edwards sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”—of which he made his own copy at one point—as a prime example of the “Angry God” preaching he believes to be the logical outcome of holding to penal substitution.

<sup>5</sup>Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands*, 89.

<sup>6</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, “Christus Victor View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 42–43. In Boyd’s view, the principle of loving/forgiving one’s enemies is grounded in a non-violent atonement that highlights the evil of the sinner’s actions, declaring, “Our Calvary-like response to our enemies exposes the evil of what they are doing, breaks the tit-for-tat cycle of violence that keeps the demonically oppressed world spinning, and lovingly opens up the possibility that our enemy will repent of their ways.”

<sup>7</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, “Christus Victor Response,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 103–4.

<sup>8</sup>Boyd, “Christus Victor Response,” 103–4.

## 1. The Fathers on the Atonement

In order to address the first charge—that the doctrine of penal substitution is a relatively recent invention that would have been foreign to the early church—it is imperative to examine how patristic authors understood the atonement and whether their statements regarding Christ’s work on the cross resemble the penal substitutionary position. Given the magnitude of his influence in this era, there is perhaps no better place to start than with Athanasius and his signature work *On the Incarnation*. In his fourth chapter discussing the death of Christ, Athanasius makes several statements allowing readers considerable insight into his theology of the atonement.<sup>9</sup> He describes the purpose for Christ’s coming to earth as follows:

Here, then, is the second reason why the Word dwelt among us, namely that having proved his Godhead by his works, He might offer the sacrifice on behalf of all, surrendering His own temple to death in place of all, to settle man’s account with death and free him from the primal transgression.<sup>10</sup>

It is generally accepted that Athanasius, in contrast to other patristic theologians such as Origen of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, rejected the ransom theory of the atonement which stipulates that the sacrifice of Christ was a price paid to Satan in order to free humanity.<sup>11</sup> However, in speaking of Christ serving as a sacrifice in the place of others and settling an account, it appears that he conceived of the atonement as more than—though certainly not less than<sup>12</sup>—a cosmic victory over Satan.<sup>13</sup> Athanasius clearly has in view the idea that Christ went to the cross in place of others, that he gave himself up instead of those who actually deserved his sentence. He further comments:

He had come to bear the curse that lay on us; and how could He “become a curse” otherwise than by accepting the accursed death? And that death is the cross, for it is written “Cursed is every one that hangeth on tree.” Again, the death of the Lord is the ransom of all, and by it the “middle wall of partition” is broken down.<sup>14</sup>

Note that not only does Christ sacrifice himself on behalf of others, die in their place, and settle their account of sin, but he also becomes a “curse”—bearing that which should have fallen on sinful humanity.

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<sup>9</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1996), 49. Athanasius devotes a full chapter of his work to the meaning of Christ’s death, later asserting “now that the common Savior of all has died on our behalf, we who believe in Christ no longer die, as men aforetime, in fulfillment of the threat of the law.”

<sup>10</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Michael J. Vlach, “Penal Substitution in Church History,” *MSJ* 20.2 (2009): 201.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this understanding of the atonement—often labelled the Christus Victor model—see Greg Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). A brilliant writer who demonstrates a pastoral heart, much of Boyd’s work—particularly his serious and prolonged engagement with the patristic authors (pp. 116–18)—is indeed commendable. However, it is not necessary, in order to hold that Christ defeated the power of sin in his atonement, to dispense with the belief that he also bore the penalty of sin. His charge that penal substitution “tends to downplay the revelatory significance of the cross” (p. 161) and that a proper “understanding of salvation is distorted and paganized” (p. 528) by this doctrine stand out as clear shortcomings.

<sup>13</sup> Vlach, “Penal Substitution,” 200.

<sup>14</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54–55.

This is the very heart of penal substitution; the innocent receives the penalty due the guilty, and the guilty receive the pardon due the innocent. What makes Athanasius's testimony even more vital is the fact that he is an eastern father, a pertinent fact given that critics of penal substitution have sometimes labelled atonement theories in general as a construct of western theology.<sup>15</sup> Granted, although his statements do not constitute a concise theory like one might find in a modern systematic theology, he clearly employs the language of substitution regarding the cross.

Athanasius is hardly the only church father to express sentiments that closely align with the doctrine of penal substitution. Writing in the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>16</sup>—again, a giant in the defense of orthodoxy frequently labelled the Trinitarian theologian<sup>17</sup>—was a staunch proponent of ransom language when discussing Christ's atonement yet distanced himself from the view that his sacrifice was a price paid to Satan.<sup>18</sup> He found repugnant the thought that God owed a debt to Satan in order to redeem the human race; while divine justice did indeed require a ransom to redeem humanity, he felt his fellow patristic writers erred in suggesting that the price was owed to anyone but God himself.<sup>19</sup> Though acknowledging the difficulty in accepting that God required the sacrifice of his son in the place of sinners, he considered it the logical and biblical conclusion of ransom language in the Scriptures—just as proponents of the penal substitution would argue. Moreover, when the NT refers to Christ becoming a curse, Gregory argues this refers to him standing in place of the guilty, taking their sin upon himself. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:21 he claims, “As for my sake, he was called a curse.... He makes my disobedience his own as Head of the whole body. As long then as I am disobedient and rebellious ... Christ is also called disobedient on my account.”<sup>20</sup> In using such language, Gregory affirms the essence of penal substitution. Christ takes on the sin of humanity and thus becomes accursed, incurring the punishment they deserve; in turn, his people are freed from their debt and, as Gregory

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<sup>15</sup> Vlach, “Penal Substitution,” 200. Though Vlach admits the considerable influence the Reformers in particular and the western tradition broadly had in the doctrine's recent development, he demonstrates that the substance of the penal substitutionary understanding far precedes the emergence of Protestantism. See also Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands*, 82. The author contends that the penal substitutionary model “was wisely rejected in the Eastern Church,” and his title proves to be a very sharp criticism of this view. He claims the character of God is “viciously maligned” by its proponents in their attempt to “explain the cross according to the honor codes of feudalism.” Indeed, he is “suspicious” of the very idea of atonement theories in general as “attempts to reduce the scandal and mystery of the cross to rational and utilitarian formulas.”

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that Boyd engages with Gregory in chapter 10 of *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, citing him to argue the thesis that the language of sacrifice in the OT is an example of God accommodating to fallen human understandings of the divine rather than an actual desire for sacrifice, a requirement that God abolished “when his people had matured further” (p. 710). Yet, the fact that Gregory speaks of the atonement in the above terms seem to show he understood the work of Christ as an actual sacrifice, and that the biblical passages that speak of it as such are not an accommodation to human shortcoming.

<sup>17</sup> Vlach, “Penal Substitution,” 208–9.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross: Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross*, 48–49.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 174. In this volume the authors survey no less than ten writers of the patristic era, all of whom embrace key aspects of penal substitutionary atonement. This, they claim, is imperative to avoid the error which critics already accuse defenders of penal substitution of—interpreting Scripture in a novel fashion and thereby misrepresenting the work of Christ.

goes onto say, united with Christ.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, this is a far cry from the notion that the atonement was a price paid to Satan.

However, of all the material penned by the early church pertinent to this discussion, *The Epistle to Diognetus* may be the most consequential of all. An early Christian apologetic dating to the 2nd century, the writer employs unmistakably substitutionary language in describing Christ's work on the cross. While the author's identity remains uncertain,<sup>22</sup> his theology of the cross occupies a central place in the epistle, as he asserts, "He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for wicked, the innocent for the guilty, the just for the unjust."<sup>23</sup> Further using the language of substitution, the author continues, "O the sweet exchange! O work of God beyond all searching out, O blessings past our expectation that the wickedness of many should be hid in one righteous man and that the righteousness of the One should justify many wicked."<sup>24</sup> The understanding of the atonement, and the ransom language involved, is clear; it does not involve simply Christ's cosmic conquering of the power of sin as Christus Victor proponents would assert,<sup>25</sup> nor does the author give any indication he aligns with the ransom theory wherein Christ's death is a price paid to Satan. In view is the idea of exchange; the wicked are justified before God on account of the atonement of his Son. How? Because in his work on the cross Christ serves as a substitute—"the just for the unjust"—meaning that he receives the penalty they deserve on account of their transgressions while his people are blessed with his righteousness—hence the author's exclamation, "O sweet exchange!"

In all fairness, it could rightly be noted by opponents of penal substitution that the doctrine hardly represents the clear consensus of the early church. To be sure, this would be clear if only for the sympathy for the ransom theory found in the writings of such giants as Augustine of Hippo and Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the purpose here is not to demonstrate that this understanding of the atonement was unanimous among the early Christians in the first place, but simply to show that it was not unheard of but was, in fact, fairly widespread. With this position established, the next question becomes whether this understanding may be connected to the further development of the doctrine in the medieval era.

## 2. Medieval Theology

As stated at the outset, one of the more popular claims made by critics of penal substitution is that the doctrine had never been conceived of until the time of the Protestant Reformation. Thus, having established its presence in the patristic era, it now bears analyzing how the medieval theologians

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffery, Ovey and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 174.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Foster, "The Epistle to Diognetus," *ExpTim* 118 (2007): 163. Foster notes the parallels between the epistle, however, and the writings of early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr. He also points out that the introduction bears striking similarity to Luke's greeting to Theophilus at the beginning of his Gospel, both of which indicate the very early dating of this piece—and, thus, the very early development of an atonement model closely resembling penal substitution.

<sup>23</sup> Henry George Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus: The Greek Text with Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1949), 87.

<sup>24</sup> Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Boyd, "Christus Victor View," 44.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross*, 47–48.

conceived of the atonement. There stands at least one figure in medieval theology that even fierce opponents of the penal substitutionary model of the atonement generally grant expressed the position clearly. Anselm of Canterbury's support for the doctrine, or at least his sympathy with the essence of it, is well documented through his so-called satisfaction theory. In Anselm's view, the atonement clearly involves God rescuing humanity from his own wrath.<sup>27</sup> Granted, he also speaks of Christ freeing humanity from the power of Satan, comparable to the *Christus Victor* position; however, he goes well beyond this as he describes his substitutionary work. Anselm, drawing a parallel between the feudal society in which he lived and the cosmic moral order of the universe, reasoned that just as doing harm toward a human lord damaged his honor and threatened the community, to rebel against God was to dishonor him and his rightful place as Lord of the universe.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in Anselm's view, Christ's atonement satisfies the wrath of God, paying on sinful humanity's behalf a debt they could never repay. One may note the commonality between Anselm's explanation of the atonement through the analogy drawn from his medieval context and Gregory of Nyssa's explanation through the lens of Roman society.<sup>29</sup> While this has invited criticism from those who argue both men relied too heavily on their respective social contexts to construct their theology, it could also be taken to demonstrate that Anselm's theology did not simply emerge as a result of his feudal context but rather echoed a concept present in Christian theology hundreds of years before the medieval era. Like the church fathers before him who employed the language of ransom and substitution to describe the work of Christ on the cross, Anselm views an atonement that expiates the sin of humanity as essential to salvation. This expiation, in his thought, is grounded in propitiation, as the Son takes on the sins of the guilty in order to satisfy God's wrath.<sup>30</sup> His writing on the atonement was vigorously opposed by his contemporary Peter Abelard, who argued that, rather than a demonstration of God's justice, the cross must be understood as a demonstration of God's love for humanity.<sup>31</sup> This is not to say that Anselm had nothing to say of the love of God demonstrated in the cross or that Abelard objected to understanding the cross as a sacrifice in any sense. Rather, Abelard differed with his counterpart first of all in emphasis, and secondly in his rejection of the notion God himself required a payment to forgive the sins of humanity. Unlike Anselm, he argued that the atonement need not have an objective basis, in other words.<sup>32</sup> The purpose here is not to argue whether

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<sup>27</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. Thomas Williams, Hackett Classics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 10. Anselm addresses the objection "that God allows him to be treated in that way, even though he was willing, does not appear suitable for such a Father with respect to such a Son," by explaining that, "it is appropriate for such a Father to consent to such a Son if what the Son wills is praiseworthy because it honours God and it is useful because it procures the salvation of human beings, which could not be accomplished in any other way."

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Finlan, *Options on Atonement*, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Saint Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 299–300. Despite Abelard's opposition to Anselm's articulation of the atonement, McGrath cautions that, "While Abelard did indeed place considerable emphasis on the subjective aspects of the atonement, that is, Christ died to become an example to humanity of God's love, he set this emphasis within a context which included a full incorporation of sacrificial understandings of the cross."

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Gospel: Encounter between the Middle Ages and the Reformation*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 60 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 86–87.

or not Abelard or Anselm is correct, but rather to point out the debate surrounding the penal aspect of the atonement far preceded the Reformation.

Another important medieval voice on this subject (and other major theological issues) is the Thomas Aquinas. Without a doubt, differences do indeed exist between Aquinas's view of the atonement and the position later articulated by some Reformers. As Randall Zachman, emeritus professor at the University of Notre Dame notes, in Roman Catholic Christology the Son of God "experience(s) the beatific vision" at all points in his earthly life, a view that differs from John Calvin's understanding of penal substitution wherein Christ suffers the vengeance of God to the extent that he experiences the reality of hell itself.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the substance of Aquinas's argument remains the same as the predecessors in the patristic era and successors during the Reformation. The language that Aquinas uses to describe his understanding of the atonement sounds little different from the penal substitutionary view:

God's severity is thus manifested; he was unwilling to remit sin without punishment, as the apostle intimates when he says, He did not spare even his own Son. But it also illustrates God's goodness, for as man was unable to make sufficient satisfaction through any punishment he might himself suffer, God gave him one who would satisfy for him.<sup>34</sup>

Note that Aquinas, while not asserting that God could not forgive sin without due punishment, clearly states that he would not; thus, Christ acts as a sacrifice in taking that punishment.<sup>35</sup> Aquinas goes on to label the work of Christ a "propitiation" on behalf of sinners, and declares that the debt Christ paid fulfilled the requirement of divine justice.<sup>36</sup> Although he never employed the phrase "penal substitution," in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* one will find as clear a description of it as anywhere else in medieval theology. God, on account of his justice, must punish those guilty of sin. Yet, Christ offers himself as a sacrifice of propitiation who satisfies the requirements of such justice and allows the sinner to be freed from their debt.<sup>37</sup> In terms of substance, what more could one require of Aquinas?

### ***3. The Reformers on the Atonement: Innovation or Explanation?***

At this point one may highlight the relative lack of discussion surrounding the substitutionary nature of the atonement in medieval scholarship when compared with the age of the Church Fathers, and such a statement would be fair. It is perhaps partially on account of this that the Protestant Reformers, viewing themselves as heirs to the Fathers, were eager to recover a robustly biblical understanding of Christ's work. Having laid out how the atonement of Christ had been understood during the patristic and medieval eras, the question concerning the Reformers becomes this: were they in fact introducing

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<sup>33</sup> Randall Zachman, *Reconsidering John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 156.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, 3a q.47 a.3, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948).

<sup>35</sup> Anselm and Aquinas differ slightly on this point; while Aquinas stopped short of claiming God could not forgive sin without punishment, Anselm argued that "it is not fitting for God to do anything unjustly ... that he does not leave unpunished a sinner" and that "if injustice is forgiven by mercy alone, it is freer than justice, which is utterly absurd" (*Cur Deus Homo* 1, 12)—indicating that he understood the penal aspect of the atonement essential to a proper understanding of the cross.

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, 3a q.47 a.3.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 184–85.

an entirely new theory of the atonement to the church, or merely explaining and expanding that which had already been established?

In order to demonstrate that the Reformers did not, in fact, formulate their own doctrine of the atonement from scratch but simply taught and expanded on that which was believed in centuries past, it is helpful to consider how Anselm's previously discussed satisfaction theory compares with the atonement theory of one of the giants of the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther. On the surface, differences indeed do exist; one can easily note the distinction in their style and theological method as they explain and defend their respective understandings of the atonement, with the former relying heavily on principles of logic and reason and the latter who preferring to defend his doctrine from the Scriptures alone. Even in answering the question of whether or not the atonement was necessary, Anselm answers the question from a logical standpoint, arguing that divine justice and honor logically necessitate that an atonement be made.<sup>38</sup> Luther, on the other hand, rejecting the scholasticism that permeated medieval ecclesiastical thought, made the case that an atonement was essential simply because it is what God determined would happen; because he had ordained the atonement of Christ to be the means by which individuals are saved, it is by definition necessary.<sup>39</sup> Yet, while their theological method may differ, concerning what took place on the cross the two parties are very much in agreement, especially on the matter of divine justice. Both Anselm and Luther insist that the work of Christ must meet demands of divine justice, for if sinners cannot repay the debt they owe God on account of their sin, a substitute is essential to pay that debt.<sup>40</sup> In other words, Luther concurs with his medieval counterpart that God's justice required payment, and Christ made that payment through his death on the cross. In substance, then, Luther's doctrine of the atonement was hardly new, even if his emphasis differed from that of Anselm. While some claim that Luther did not, in fact, hold to the penal substitutionary view but rather the Christus Victor model, the preceding evidence clearly demonstrates he did understand the cross to entail Christ substituting himself in the place of sinners, bearing the wrath of God due them for their transgressions. It is a mistake to assume that because Luther—or, for that matter, any believer—makes certain statements consistent with another atonement model such as the Christus Victor understanding that they therefore reject penal substitution. They are not, by nature, mutually exclusive. One finds statements sympathetic to both models in Calvin's thought as well as in Luther's.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when modern proponents of the Christus Victor position claim that the model "dominated" Christian thought for the first thousand years of the church,<sup>42</sup> it must be remembered that even if this is the case, the presence of the Christus Victor model does not imply the absence of the penal substitutionary model. It is quite possible to hold them simultaneously, as it appears Luther and Calvin did.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Burnell F. Eckardt, *Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was It "Necessary"?* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 177. This approach is consistent with the distinction previously highlighted between Anselm and Aquinas.

<sup>39</sup> Eckardt, *Anselm and Luther*, 190.

<sup>40</sup> Eckardt, *Anselm and Luther*, 28–29.

<sup>41</sup> Strehle, *The Catholic Roots*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Boyd, "Christus Victor View," 44.

<sup>43</sup> See Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior*, 253–54. Not only does Boyd acknowledge that, like Luther, "Calvin saw the cross as the center both of Jesus's revelation of God and of his saving work," but he actually credits the Reformers with preparing the groundwork for the emergence of his own "cruciform hermeneutic"—the key focus

As for Calvin himself, it is quickly admitted that the Genevan Reformer held tightly to the penal substitutionary model, both by those who hold to the position and look to him for support and clarity and by those who reject it and decry the prominence it occupies in his theology of the atonement. Speaking of the work of Jesus on behalf of humanity he declares:

Christ interceded as his advocate, took upon himself and suffered the punishment that, from God's righteous judgement, threatened all sinners; that he purged with his blood those evils which had rendered sinners hateful to God; that by this expiation he made satisfaction and sacrifice duly to God the Father; that as intercessor he appeases God's wrath; that on this foundation rests the peace of God with men.<sup>44</sup>

There is much to unpack in such a rich theological text, but perhaps the best place to begin is noting how, in Calvin's thought, expiation and propitiation are inherently linked; the latter makes the former possible. This serves as a prime example of how Calvin and his fellow Reformers were not the first to affirm the essence of penal substitution but did further expand and explain the implications of it. One looks in vain for such a systematic explanation in the church fathers of how exactly expiation and propitiation are linked, even though there is ample discussion of both in their writings. Calvin goes on to assert that he has attempted to maintain consistency with the fathers and the Apostle's Creed,<sup>45</sup> putting to rest the charge that it was his intent to revise the doctrine of the atonement rather than remain in the apostolic tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Considering this brief historical survey, it seems clear that, far from being a Reformation invention, the Reformers embraced and taught penal substitution precisely because it was not a new doctrine. The Reformation, contrary to popular belief, did not give rise to a new atonement theology as much as it recovered, refined, and reasserted that which had been held dear since the apostolic era.

#### *4. The Biblical Witness*

While the testimony of the historic church is indispensable to properly understanding the atonement—or, in fact, any doctrine—the ultimate standard by which any theological claim must be measured is the Word of God itself. For the purpose of understanding the atonement, it must be asked whether the Bible itself supports the notion of penal substitution, beginning in the OT. This requires at very least a basic understanding of how an Israelite in that context would have understood concepts such as atonement, the wrath of God, and redemption. In the first place, the concept of penal substitution

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of his work—through this recovery of the centrality of the cross. Yet, he also strongly disagrees with them both on this point, and indeed notes that the founders of his own Anabaptist tradition considered their position “myopic.”

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960). Calvin, in the vein of patristic and medieval theologians before him, likewise viewed expiation and propitiation is tied together, prefacing his above comments by declaring that God's people “were under a curse until their iniquity was atoned for by his sacrifice.... They were estranged from God until through his body they were reconciled.”

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.6.

<sup>46</sup> For a full-length analysis of Calvin's dependence upon patristic authors in the development of his theology—not just on the atonement, but a number of other doctrines—see A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

rests on the notion that the wrath of God is indeed a fearful reality and that he will carry out retribution against those who violate his holiness.

While penal substitution is far from a developed doctrine in the early chapters of Genesis, God establishes a pattern that he intends all of his creation to abide by: obey his commands and live, or disregard them and face the consequence—death.<sup>47</sup> This is the inevitable result of sin and is a direct result of the judgement of God—as the Apostle Paul would put it thousands of years later, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23 ESV). Moreover, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, while not explicitly laid out in Genesis 22, seems to be foreshadowed as notable parallels exist between the offering of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>48</sup> As the passage details Abraham and Isaac journeying up the mountain together, so the Gospels detail Jesus’s journey from Bethlehem to Calvary, communing with the Father and submitting to his will along the way. However, unlike when Abraham lays his son on the altar yet is ultimately permitted to spare him, God the Son is abandoned on the cross as he bears the sins of the world;<sup>49</sup> there is no goat or ram supplied to serve as a sacrifice, for the spotless lamb bears the wrath of God in the stead of sinners. Donald McLeod posits that it is this separation that evokes Christ’s cry of dereliction from the cross as he sorrowfully laments his abandonment by the Father.<sup>50</sup> While God spares Isaac, he offers Jesus; while Abraham’s son continues to enjoy fellowship with his father, the Son of God is forsaken by his.

Likewise, in the Levitical Law—and indeed, the entirety of Israel’s story from the Exodus in Egypt through their conquest of the Land—the concept of a blood atonement, with a substitute offered to cover the sins of the people, is inescapable. As the angel of death passed through the land of Egypt, prepared to take the life of every firstborn son in an act of divine judgement for that nation’s oppression of God’s people, the Israelites were commanded to paint their doorposts with the blood of a slaughtered lamb so that the wrath of God would not come upon their household as well.<sup>51</sup> What deflected the wrath of God, the sentence of death, was not the righteousness of the Israelites; they too would suffer the loss of their firstborn unless they obeyed the command. The difference lay in the blood which lay over the doorpost, indicating that a sacrifice had been made to cover the household. Thus, the Passover lamb—which would be memorialized for millennia in the Jewish Passover festival—served as a substitutionary, propitiatory role, pointing to their future Messiah who would one day serve as the true and perfect Lamb of God.<sup>52</sup> And what of Leviticus? The Day of Atonement alone embodies the concept of penal substitution, with its ceremony involving two goats; one to be slaughtered and the other to be sent into

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<sup>47</sup> William D. Barrick, “Penal Substitution in the Old Testament,” *MSJ* 20.2 (2009): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 177. McLeod notes this parallel when addressing the mystery of Christ’s abandonment by the Father, saying of Christ’s bearing the sins of humanity that, “The paradox should not escape us. He was sinless. He was the Son of God. But there, on Golgotha, he was a sinner. He was sin.”

<sup>49</sup> MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 177.

<sup>50</sup> Donald MacLeod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 48–49.

<sup>51</sup> Barrick, “Penal Substitution,” 9. Addressing the blood painted on the doorpost of every Hebrew home, Barrick explains “the sacrifice appeared to forestall the penalty of death for those who were within the household—especially firstborn sons. Although the lamb signified substitution, the text does not state that the blood atones or expiates; it only protects and preserves the household from divine wrath.”

<sup>52</sup> Barrick, “Penal Substitution,” 10.

the wilderness, bearing the sins of the nation.<sup>53</sup> While Calvin may have expounded in depth the concepts of expiation and propitiation in the sixteenth century, one need look no further than this ritual from Leviticus for a prime example of how the two are connected in dealing with human sin. Indeed, the Hebrew word for atonement—כָּפַר—frequently refers to an act of propitiation.<sup>54</sup> In Numbers 25:13, for example, Phineas the priest “made atonement for the people of Israel” by driving a spear through a couple caught in fornication—an act that, though gruesome and even somewhat bizarre to the modern reader, satisfied God’s wrath and ended the plague he had brought upon the nation on account of their idolatry and sexual immorality with the Midianites.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, no discussion of the doctrine of penal substitution would be complete without a thorough analysis of Isaiah 53, which details the afflictions of one commonly referred to as “the suffering servant”—in the historic Christian understanding, the Son of God himself. What is so striking about this passage is that not only does the servant substitute himself in the place of others, but that, in doing so, he is afflicted by Yahweh himself.<sup>56</sup> William Lane Craig notes that what God refused to do to Moses—that is, take his life on behalf of the people of Israel—he readily does to the servant.<sup>57</sup> Reminiscent of the Levitical Law, he is said to be a “sacrifice for sin,” echoing the language of animal sacrifices prescribed in the Torah. Moreover, verse 10 makes the striking assertion that it “was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isa 53:10), making it abundantly clear that the servant is taking a punishment that is not his own. The surprising element in this passage is that, while God had indeed commanded the Israelites to engage in animal sacrifice, the practice of human slaughter was strictly forbidden—unlike the cults of Israel’s pagan neighbours. In this passage, it seems clear that what Yahweh would not

<sup>53</sup> Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 42–43.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 274. While acknowledging that “Hebrew linguists widely disagree about the nuances implicit in the verb,” Hamilton notes, “It is significant that the Targum of Leviticus from Qumran ... translates the Hebrew word *kappomret* (‘mercy seat, propitiatory’).” Furthermore, in his discussion of the sacrifices outlined in the first seven chapters of the book, Hamilton asserts that the sacrifices required in the case of a guilt or sin offering, “are expiatory or propitiatory in nature. Explicitly, sin and its forgiveness are the issues” (235). See also BDB 497 (כָּפַר), which notes that the term can also be used to mean “cover over” or “pacify,” and Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 50–51. Sklar observes that though this term can sometimes be used to denote purification, “in contexts when sin is being addressed ... [the focus] is on averting God’s wrath.”

<sup>55</sup> Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 42–43.

<sup>56</sup> See Bernd Janowski, “He Bore Our Sins: Isaiah 53 and the Drama of Taking Another’s Place,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 48–74. This essay is written as “an alternative to Immanuel Kant’s narrow understanding of representation...which insists that no person can represent or take the place of another in matters of personal guilt” (48). The author charges that in the context of Isaiah 53, “Israel, which is no position to take over the obligation arising from its guilty, must be released from this obligation in order to have any future. This liberation comes from an innocent one who surrenders his own life according to Yahweh’s ‘plan’ ... the expression about the vicarious ‘bearing’ of the guilt of others (v. 4a; cf. vv. 11b, 12b) means to say nothing other than this” (p. 69).

<sup>57</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Atonement*, Cambridge Elements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 13.

accept from Isaac or Moses, he would accept from the servant—to bear the sins of the people and in doing so incur the divine wrath that should have fallen on them.<sup>58</sup>

Just to demonstrate that the OT foreshadows a penal substitutionary atonement would be insufficient, however; many opponents of the model concede that the God of Israel frequently seems to behave in a brutal manner.<sup>59</sup> What should really be of interest in understanding the cross, it is charged, is how Christ and his Apostles understood the atonement. Thus, proponents of penal substitution must be willing to grapple extensively with what the NT teaches as well. Throughout his earthly life and ministry, Jesus forthrightly declared that his purpose in coming to earth was to give his life as a ransom.<sup>60</sup> This sentiment is echoed throughout the NT letters, making clear that his Apostles also viewed his work on the cross as a substitution for others. Scot McKnight, elaborating on Christ's understanding of his atonement, notes that Jesus depicts his suffering as a necessity; the Son of Man, as he often speaks of himself, had to be delivered over to the authorities and suffer.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, in Matthew 20:28, Jesus employs the Greek word *αντί*—that is, in place of—to describe his death on the cross for sinners, demonstrating that he understood his work to be substitutionary in nature.<sup>62</sup> During the Last Supper with his disciples, he interprets the OT Passover ceremony as a foreshadowing of his own atonement—the Passover, in which a lamb would be slaughtered in order to cover the sins of the people. The bread and wine that he offers to the disciples is his body given “for you” and his blood poured out “for you” (Luke 22:19–20), which would be shed “for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). It seems that in Christ's understanding of the atonement, there is more in view than a cosmic defeat of sin or a moral example; rather, he offers his life as a substitute for them.

At this point, some critics of the penal substitutionary model posit that it makes God guilty of hypocrisy, for if God requires a sacrifice on the part of Jesus before he forgives, how could Christ, in his earthly ministry, instruct his disciples to turn the other cheek and simply forgive when they are wronged?<sup>63</sup> Is God not, in punishing his Son, ignoring his own command to his people? However, such a charge fails to recognize how the persons of the Trinity, when rightly understood, are not at odds in

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<sup>58</sup> Craig, *The Atonement*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands*, 25–26.

<sup>60</sup> Craig, *The Atonement*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 62. While McKnight goes on to state on page 347 of his work that Paul's theology of the atonement is much broader than just a penal substitutionary understanding, and in fact cautions against overemphasizing the importance of any one model of the atonement, he also criticizes those who—unlike the apostle—avoid using the language of substitution because they find some of the implications of it uncomfortable. Though he sees Paul's theology of the atonement as centered around issues of life and death rather than divine justice—as, for example, in Anselm—he still recognizes that concern as a “real and fundamental issue for soteriology.” In the prologue of his work, McKnight uses the analogy of a set of golf clubs in his description of atonement theories, and cautions against the tendency, common among too many Christians in his view, to rely only on one “club,” as it were, instead of understanding “the value of each.”

<sup>62</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, “The Scriptural Necessity of Christ's Penal Substitution,” *MSJ* 20.2 (2009): 139–48. “The phrase to give his life *as a ransom for many* is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament of the saving effect of Jesus' death,” according to R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 1 (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 297.

<sup>63</sup> G. J. Williams, “Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 72–73.

this understanding of the atonement.<sup>64</sup> First of all, the fact that each member plays a different role in accomplishing the atonement does not mean it is not a thoroughly Trinitarian work; on the contrary, this would make the atonement not unlike creation, the incarnation, or the resurrection.<sup>65</sup> Christ did not have his life taken against his will; as the Gospels document, he laid it down of his own accord (John 10:18). Thus, on this understanding Jesus is not a helpless victim but a humble savior as Isaiah 53 depicts. As for the charge that penal substitution depicts God as unwilling to forgive others, as Jesus requires of his people, it is certainly possible that Jesus instructs his disciples to forgive those who have wronged them precisely because of his atonement. Whatever wrong one's human enemies may have committed, the atonement of Christ means that their sin has been dealt with at the cross by the Son of God, indicating his willingness to forgive—thus necessitating a willingness for his people to do the same. Second, the argument that God cannot take vengeance if he instructs his people not to do so runs counter to the NT's teaching that God's people must not seek revenge in part because the Lord repays individuals according to his justice.<sup>66</sup> Judgment is a prerogative that, while denied to his followers, is reserved for God himself, who always judges perfectly. Finally, because penal substitution is a Trinitarian act, in which God, in the flesh, bears the penalty due humanity, it is essentially God himself assuming that which his enemies should have borne. Does this not parallel the human act of forgiveness—often a painful step—in a very real sense?

The doctrine is not limited to Jesus's teaching, however, as it is clearly on display in the thought of Paul. The apostle notes that all people are under the wrath of God on account of their failure to acknowledge him for who he is (Rom 1:18). The penalty for such an offense is death; however, in his writing to the Corinthian church, Paul declares that God made Christ to be sin in a substitutionary sense order to accomplish the redemption of humanity. Brian Vickers explains, that "The Old Testament background of Paul's language, the concept of reconciliation, and the context all point to a sacrificial interpretation of 'God made him who had no sin to be sin' in 2 Corinthians 5:21."<sup>67</sup> Harkening back to Leviticus, Paul refers to Jesus as a "sin offering," and says that those who believe in him have been "justified by his blood" in Romans 5:9.<sup>68</sup> Further, he says God "condemned sin in the flesh" by sending Christ (Rom 8:3); as the Son bore in his body the iniquity of mankind, he took upon himself the condemnation of

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<sup>64</sup> The issue of how the persons of the Trinity relate in the atonement is another issue raised by Brian Zahnd, for example, as he claims that penal substitution "fractures the Trinity by pitting the Father against the Son in order to vent divine rage," comparing it to "the cultic practice of ritual sacrifice" (Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands*, 106). Thus, perhaps despite obvious disagreement, this question is one that proponents of penal substitution would do well to grant more attention to given the seriousness of this charge.

<sup>65</sup> Keith E. Johnson, "Penal Substitution as an Undivided Work of the Triune God," *TJ* 36 (2015): 60.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, "Penal Substitution," 73.

<sup>67</sup> Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 170. Vickers argues that this understanding is not unique to this epistle; he later proposes, in his detailed analysis of "the righteousness of Christ" in this passage, "When one recognizes the sacrificial background for 2 Corinthians 5:21, the substitutionary atonement that background entails supported by the theme of representation in verses 14–15, and the non-reckoning of sin in verse 19 that takes place by Christ's vicarious bearing of sin—this text begins to look and sound similar to Romans 3:21–26" (p. 183). See also Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 72–73.

<sup>68</sup> Craig, *The Atonement*, 11.

God.<sup>69</sup> The Father, then, in Paul's thought, makes Christ an offering for sin—echoing Isaiah in the OT. In Galatians 3, yet another epistle to a different congregation, he describes how Christ fulfilled the law and defeated the sin of his people by becoming a curse on their behalf.<sup>70</sup> And what of the other NT authors? Hebrews depicts Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's sacrifices in the OT,<sup>71</sup> which have already been established as propitiatory and expiatory; such sacrifices were merely a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice, for the author declares such animal sacrifices could never truly take away human sin (Heb 10:4). Peter, who followed Jesus throughout his earthly ministry and witnessed firsthand his death, burial and resurrection, declares that Christ suffered on the cross as righteous in the place of the unrighteous in order to reconcile the guilty to God (1 Pet 3:18).<sup>72</sup> He references the servant of Isaiah in 1 Peter 2:24, noting he "bore our sins in his body on the cross" and declares that "by his wounds we are healed." His suffering, his sacrifice, his taking the sins of the world on himself, is ultimately what makes this healing possible. These statements make little sense unless they are taken to mean that Jesus substituted himself in place of the guilty. Finally, in his discussion of the rites of the Mosaic Law as "copies of the heavenly things" as a precursor to the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews observes that according to that law, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22–23 ESV).

The biblical witness, then, is clear. Not only are Calvin and his contemporaries not responsible for inventing the doctrine, but neither are the church fathers who they leaned on so heavily. The true origin of the doctrine lies in Scripture itself. Once again, far from misrepresenting and demeaning the character of God, the saints throughout the ages who have believed and taught the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement have done so in light extensive biblical support for the position. Thus, it not reasonable to propose that the contemporary church do likewise?

### 5. Conclusion

Given the rich historical and biblical witness to this doctrine, then, a decisive conclusion may be drawn. This doctrine is not a distortion of biblical teaching, making Yahweh comparable to a brutal pagan deity, nor is it the product of any sixteenth century system. On the contrary, the doctrine of penal substitution is a precious truth that should evoke awe and thanksgiving on the part of those redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. While it may be true, as critics assert, that the substitutionary aspect of the atonement has been overemphasized in some circles to the exclusion of other integral components,

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<sup>69</sup> Williams, "Penal Substitution," 79.

<sup>70</sup> Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," 73. In contrast to many critics of the penal substitutionary understanding who claim that it makes true love and forgiveness, as Jesus demands of his followers, incoherent, Schreiner claims just the opposite. "The forgiveness of our sins by virtue of the death of Christ," he claims, "is the wellspring of ethics; we love God because he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19), and such love is the wellspring of a life of obedience." Thus, a Christian understanding of ethical behavior may be grounded in this understanding of the atonement; because Christ loved the believer and sacrificed himself for them prior to any expression of love on their part, they are free to do adopt the same posture toward others.

<sup>71</sup> For a detailed treatment of this matter, see R. B. Jamieson, *Jesus' Death and Heavenly Offering in Hebrews*, SNTSMS 172 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 57. Hebrews 8 in particular, according to Jamieson, "confirms that Christ offered himself in the only place where he was qualified to serve as high priest, the heavenly tabernacle.... Heb 8:1–5 confirms that, just as the Levitical priests offered their sacrifices in the earthly tabernacle, so Christ offered his in the tent in heaven."

<sup>72</sup> Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," 92.

this should not mean that penal substitution ought to be dispensed with altogether; on the contrary, it should serve as a catalyst to recover a balanced, Christ-centered theology of the cross. Doing so could come as a much-needed reminder that this understanding of the cross is not inherently a hindrance to recognizing other benefits of the atonement as well. It may also serve as an occasion to demonstrate that the doctrine of penal substitution is not at odds with, but rather perfectly fits into, the larger story of Jesus's earthly life and ministry—as well as other models of the atonement as well.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, in the vein of the historic Christian tradition, the contemporary church would do well to recapture a rich, through doctrine of the atonement that recognizes all that Christ accomplished in his death on the cross, a key component of which is the propitiation of humanity's sin.

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<sup>73</sup> Boyd's criticism that the penal substitutionary model "tends to unwittingly drive a wedge between the salvific cross, on the one hand, and every other aspect of Jesus's identity and mission" cannot be overlooked here (*Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, 161). Certainly, it is worth considering whether this charge is accurate. However, though some evangelicals may be guilty of such imbalance, it is a mistake to view such a shortcoming as the inevitable result of holding to penal substitutionary atonement. If true, the goal must be to correct this perceived imbalance without making the mistake of dispensing with a doctrine that ought not to be blamed for the problem.

# Making Sense of Hell

— Robert D. Golding —

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**Abstract:** Christian universalism (the view that all people are eventually saved) is largely predicated upon a negative reaction to the traditional doctrine of hell. It is therefore a “second option” to those who see hell as illogical, unnecessary, and/or cruel. In this article, I will argue that hell is not only logical and just but that it is also conceivably necessary. I will do this by way of a theological examination of those who occupy hell’s harrowing halls. This is essential because the loss of the traditional doctrine of hell can mean the loss of souls along with it. Doubting hell is playing with eternal fire.

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In<sup>1</sup> the ten years from 2004 to 2014, Americans saw a 22% reduction in those who claimed to believe in a literal hell.<sup>2</sup> One of the primary drivers of this trend was an instinctual response to hell that perceives it to be illogical, unnecessary, and cruel.<sup>3</sup> In his massive tome *The Devil’s Redemption*, Michael McClymond chronicles Christian rejection of an eternal hell, which spans all ages of church history dating back to a few decades before Origen. He meticulously shows that this rejection of eternal hell was always the minority report, if not relegated to one or two even more obscure groups depending on the era—that is, up until the 1960s. At that time a massive uptick in universalist thinking occurred which, he says, “is unprecedented in the history of the church.”<sup>4</sup> Though the traditional doctrine of hell has been under fire for millennia, only recently it has been endangered.

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to (preeminently) my beautiful wife for allowing me to barricade myself in my study while she chased our kids around the house during COVID-19 lockdown, to Sinclair Ferguson for allowing me to extend the normal limits of this paper for his class, and to Brian Tabb for robust and helpful feedback throughout this article. All views and shortcomings herein are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Winseman, “Eternal Destinations: Americans Believe in Heaven, Hell,” *Gallup*, 25 May 2014, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/11770/eternal-destinations-americans-believe-heaven-hell.aspx>; “Belief In Hell,” *Pew Research Center*, 2014, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-hell/>.

<sup>3</sup> Bavinck enumerates and dismantles five general arguments (over one hundred years ago!) against the traditional doctrine of hell, which are summarized as follows (and distilled above): (1) incompatible with God’s goodness, (2) incompatible with God’s justice, (3) inconceivable in terms of biblical imagery, (4) not taught in Scripture, and (5) denied by Scripture’s universalist claims. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:704–5.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil’s Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 1005.

D. A. Carson showed that hell is one of eight possible motivations for accepting the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller whittled it down to one of six.<sup>6</sup> Both place it first on the list. Historically, it has played a large role in convincing people of their need for Christ. Today, we are losing our doctrine of hell, and Carson and Keller intimate that we are losing conversions with it. If we care about the lost, we must take care to articulate not just what we are inviting them *to* in Christ, but what we are inviting them away *from*. Hell is real, eternal, and it makes sense, despite what some philosophers say.

In this article, I lay out a conception of hell as infinite, progressive, and asymptotic in an attempt to offer a Biblical picture that rebuts the above aversions.<sup>7</sup> I present the hell as a place of infinite duration for people who are progressively moving further and further from their true existence as subsistence in God, which can be viewed as asymptotic in the same way that the saints<sup>8</sup> progressively move closer and closer to God in eternal communion with him in heaven. To do this, I rely on Jonathan Edwards's notion that hell is understandable when we consider the gravity of sin<sup>9</sup> and seek to develop his teaching by synthesizing it with Christopher Woznicki's concept of the asymptotic nature of sin and sanctification.<sup>10</sup> The goals of this article are threefold as they are presented in its respective sections. First, I provide an extrapolation of the reprobate in hell. Second, I rebut some universalist arguments against eternal hell. Third, I provide a potential explanation for the necessity of hell over against the universalist claim that it is unnecessary.

### *1. The State of the Reprobate in Hell*

The next four subsections will offer different lenses through which we might conceive of the reprobate in hell. These various facets will be combined in order to help us better understand how it is just for God to eternally punish the reprobate. This is a sobering and difficult topic. The language used below is not intended to brush over the severity and hellishness of hell. Rather, it is employed to help us better articulate what hell is, so that others might avoid it in the strong arms of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, "Motivations to Appeal to in Our Hearers When We Preach for Conversion," *Themelios* 35 (2010): 258–59.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 114.

<sup>7</sup> An asymptotic curve is one that continually approaches a straight line without touching at any point, which is employed to describe our ascent into greater and greater communion with the infinite God in Christ. More on this below.

<sup>8</sup> This term is used hereafter to refer to those who are in heaven (though it ordinarily can refer to Christians on earth).

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Davidson, "Reasonable Damnation: How Jonathan Edwards Argued for the Rationality of Hell," *JETS* 38 (1995): 47–56.

<sup>10</sup> Woznicki's goal is to defend Edwards's conception of hell by arguing it can be an issuant account as entailed by God's election and reprobation being asymptotically grounded in being. I use his asymptotic conception but in regards to ethics instead. Christopher Woznicki, "Redeeming Edwards's Doctrine of Hell: An 'Edwardsean' Account," *Themelios* 42 (2017): 321–34.

### 1.1. Asymptotic

The term asymptotic is employed to capture the reality of the infinitely increasing experience of God that his creatures will enjoy in eternity and the opposite reality for those in hell. While speaking of the grades of glory in heaven as rewards for the saints, Francis Turretin provides us with a reason for gradation of glory: “Objective blessedness which is placed in God does not admit of degrees because he is the supreme and infinite good. But formal blessedness which is placed in the possession of God and *participation of his blessings* is not in like manner infinite and nothing prevents it from having degrees.”<sup>11</sup> Turretin is not describing a progressive increase of glory in heaven, but a gradation of glory that is bestowed upon God’s people as a reward for their earthly works.<sup>12</sup> He and others are relatively silent in regards to the question of whether this gradation in glory can be progressive.

However, Jonathan Edwards argues that the glorified saints do not statically commune with Christ, in terms of their glorification and experience of his majesty. Rather, they continue to advance in their relation with him.<sup>13</sup> The common conception of gradation in glory in heaven for the saints, depending on their earthly works, is Reformed groundwork which lays the foundation for Edwards’s conception of a progressive heavenly state. The reason, says Edwards, that we must move closer and closer to God in heaven, rather than being in some inert state of perfect communion, is because God is infinite and we are finite. Since God’s power and perfection are so great, “all other beings are as nothing to him, and all other excellency ... as nothing and less than nothing ... in comparison of his.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, “The whole system of created beings in comparison of him is as the light dust of the balance.”<sup>15</sup> Since God’s infinity is, by definition, infinitely higher than our greatest blessedness and he, in the words of Calvin, “contains the fullness of all good things in himself like an inexhaustible fountain,” we will continue to grow in our appreciation and experience of his goodness for eternity in heaven.<sup>16</sup>

In the same way that a causally or temporally infinite regress is said to be impossible,<sup>17</sup> it is presumably the case that the same can be said for qualities. Just as a person cannot go infinitely backwards or forwards because each step would be a step to nowhere since at the end of the journey infinity would always stand infinitely far away, it seems logical to say that we can never reach the climax of a move away from or toward God’s infinite perfection. However, it would be unreasonable to assume that this movement away from God’s perfections would be qualitatively static. A movement away from an infinite point does not negate the movement itself. It is a journey without an end, but a journey nonetheless.

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T Dennison, trans. George Giger (Philippsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 629 (emphasis mine).

<sup>12</sup> Calvin and Bavinck say the same; see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.25.10, trans. John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:727–30.

<sup>13</sup> See the appendix entitled “Heaven is a Progressive State” in Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, The Works of Jonathan Edwards 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 706–39.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, 451.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies: Entry Nos. 1153–1320*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney, The Works of Jonathan Edwards 23 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 133.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.10.

<sup>17</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 290.

This is important for our purposes (though, much more importantly, our worship) because I seek to use the same concept, but with hell. In a way similar to the progress toward God<sup>18</sup> in heaven that the saints enjoy, the lost in hell will continue to move further and further away from his blessedness because, in the same way that there is no “height” to God’s perfections, there is no “depth” upon which a soul might rest as being infinitely far from God.

This conception of hell is being offered because, as we will see, it potentially provides a means by which we can avoid speaking of hell as a place where the people we love are tortured for eternity. This sort of crass language must be refined in order to better articulate what is happening in hell. In what follows I seek to show how a better understanding of those who are in hell will help us see their condition as warranted.

### 1.2. Less than Human

C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce* portrays a masterful illustration (not a dogmatic presentation) of the souls in hell. Grumbling provides an example of the sin that leads to hell:

It begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it: perhaps criticizing it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. Ye can repent and come out again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. There will be no *you* left to criticize the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.<sup>19</sup>

Nietzsche propounded a conception of true humanity that is diametrically opposed to the Biblical teaching. Rather than participating in true humanity by worshipping God, real or ideal humanity (the *Übermensch*) is only possible when God is completely erased from his conscience.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to this aberration from traditional theism, in his *Commentary on the Psalm*, Theodoret of Cyrus shows that true humanity cherishes the things of God, rather than avoiding them. God’s word is “worth more than gold and precious stones and sweeter than honey—not to all human beings, however, but to those *truly human*, whose life is not comparable with the brute beasts.”<sup>21</sup> True humanity cherishes God’s word as more precious than anything for, as the word of God, it is life itself (Deut 30:20; Ps 27:1; John 11:25). Sinful humanity, in its rejection of God, removes the “you” in you (cf. Rom 7:20).

It is therefore only “in Christ, the second Adam, [that] we are set free to be *truly* human (John 8:36).”<sup>22</sup> As Kuyper beautifully put it, “outside Paradise, a person is not truly human. Paradise belongs

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted here that this movement toward God or progressive communion with God is not to say that heaven is not perfect. Rather, it is to say that God’s perfection is infinite. Thus, an experience of infinite perfection, while perfect, is never complete, if you will. There is always more perfection to be experienced. The depths of God’s goodness will never be reached by those who love him, making ever deeper the riches of their blessedness and grounds for worship. This is analogous to Adam’s state of probationary perfection in the garden since both are dynamic states of perfection (of course, with serious differences).

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 507.

<sup>20</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 120.

<sup>21</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalm* 19:5–6; cited in Craig A. Blaising and Carmen Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50*, ACCSOT 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 154 (emphasis mine).

<sup>22</sup> Toby Kurth and Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Study and Discussion Guide* (Zondervan, 2013), 27 (emphasis mine).

to being human. It involves a person's second body."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, if we can confess with the Chalcedonian Creed that our sinless Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man (θεὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς) it seems we must confess that our sin renders us something less than truly man (ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς).<sup>24</sup> In Genesis, God's creation is pronounced good (טוֹב) and the creation of man is superlatively so as he is very good (מְאֹד טוֹב; Gen 1:31). As such, "man is ... the crown of creation."<sup>25</sup> Though he remains human after the fall, it seems warranted to say that he is significantly less human than when he began. If there is a connection between goodness and humanness (and I think there is), then man's descent from goodness is simultaneously a descent from humanness. This is indicated by the biblical distinction between eternal life and eternal death. It is not proper to think of humanity as that which is dead. True humanity is alive; life is one of its principal components. The process by which a person loses true spiritual life and becomes spiritually dead is one in which a person becomes less than what he once was. Thus, it seems we have biblical warrant to suggest that reprobate man is somehow less-than-human.

N. T. Wright suggests that those in hell "exist in an ex-human state ... [and] become at last, by their own effective choice, beings that once were human but now are not, creatures that have ceased to bear the divine image at all."<sup>26</sup> While I avoid the question of the *imago Dei* in the reprobate and I take pause with the moniker "ex-human," I do suggest that those in hell are in some sort of (mysterious as it may be) less-than-human state. This is in the vein of Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, in which the reprobate are fully recognizable to the glorified saints and are even capable of having conversations, but they are depicted as small and increasingly hollow looking when compared to the massive and solid saints (this seems to comport with the distinction in Paul between the physical body [σῶμα ψυχικόν] and the spiritual body [σῶμα πνευματικόν] in 1 Cor 15:44; cf. 15:40).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Turretin states that the saints' glorified bodies "will shine and glitter like the stars and the sun, hardly capable of being looked at by mortal eyes."<sup>28</sup> The state of the saints is so great that the word "human" seems too narrow to bridge the chasm between saint and reprobate.

Though words fail (hence the power of Lewis's illustration) the point is that there is a qualitative distinction between the reprobate and the saints in glory as a result of God's goodness in them.<sup>29</sup> This distinction grows perpetually in the way that a line can asymptotically grow closer to a point and, on the other end, further from that same point, yet neither ever reaches an end. This is because the saint and the reprobate are on an infinite journey away from and toward the blessedness of God, respectively. On earth, the reprobate enjoyed his providence and common grace. In hell, his sole disposition toward them is one of wrath. Therefore, all of the things that were produced in them by means of God's providence and common grace will have, presumably, disappeared as a result of their asymptotic move

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<sup>23</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Honey from the Rock: Daily Devotions from Young Kuyper*, trans. James A. de Jong (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Chalcedonian Creed, A.D. 451, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930), 181.

<sup>26</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 182–83.

<sup>27</sup> See Lewis, *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 463–542; cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:696–98.

<sup>28</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:619.

<sup>29</sup> For a distinction based on 1 John 2:19 see, Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:606.

from him.<sup>30</sup> But, we still want to maintain that they are, albeit in a sense different than the glorified saints, still human beings.<sup>31</sup> Hence the term less-than-human seems fitting since they (at some point) become (almost) pure evil. Operating from a primarily privation of good (*privatio boni*) conception of sin, we encounter mystery here since God needs to give some goodness (namely, existence or being) to those creatures in hell.<sup>32</sup> Bavinck articulates this mystery well, “In the essential character and concept of the devils, there is something completely incomprehensible. ‘We can only conceive of an absolutely evil being on condition that we either omit something from their absolute wickedness or from their true existence.’”<sup>33</sup> To this issue we turn next.

### 1.3. Corporeal Bodies

Though we can rightly distinguish between a human’s body and soul, Reformed theologians have typically conceived of man as an integrated being.<sup>34</sup> John Cooper describes this reality as holistic dualism because humans can exist without bodies (i.e., in the intermediate state which advances dualism) but corporeal existence is the way that they were created, and the way that they will exist in eternity (which advances holism).<sup>35</sup> This corporeal nature of the redeemed and reprobate does not mitigate the previous discussion. The reprobate do not need to exist in hell as mere spirit to be less-than-human. Indeed, the corporeal nature of the damned in hell gives us a means to further discuss their state.

Earlier it was said that all of God’s gracious disposition toward the reprobate will be removed after judgement. However, we must also recognize that their being itself is, in the words of Calvin, “a subsistence in God” and thus part of his gracious disposition.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the question arises: How are they to exist if God’s providence is removed from them completely, yet that same providence is required for their existing? Without digressing into the issue of the distinction between being and body, the bodies of the reprobate require God’s providence. How do they then have bodies if they are without God’s providence?

The answer to this question is simply that God does not *completely* remove his providence, if we can use the word in this way.<sup>37</sup> The people in hell require God’s sustaining power to exist. However, it is my

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<sup>30</sup> This “movement” is not to be understood as locative. Rather, it is an ethical disposition in which the person seeks more and more distance from God through more and more egregious desire for sin.

<sup>31</sup> Bavinck is emphatic on the point that, at least at the resurrection, the reprobate are corporeally human. “Corporeality is the end of the ways of God.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:693–94. For the distinction between flesh and body, see 4:696–98.

<sup>32</sup> For a helpful discussion on this topic see, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:40–48.

<sup>33</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:146; citing C. E. Nitzsch, *System of Christian Doctrines* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1849), §116.

<sup>34</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 192–93; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 472–82; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:693–98.

<sup>35</sup> John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 230–31.

<sup>36</sup> This is because a person’s being can never be merited. If it is not merited, then when God gives it, it is gracious. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1; See also, Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, ed. Joel Beeke, trans. Todd Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 3:372.

<sup>37</sup> Some have argued that this willing of man’s continued being is one way that God’s damnation of the reprobate is to be seen as “loving” since being is a good. See: Eleonore Stump, “Dante’s Hell, Aquinas’s Moral Theory,

suggestion that God only provides them with the bare minimum required for existence. As part of that minimum, they do have corporeal bodies, as is attested by Scripture (Matt 3:12; 10:28; 18:6–9; 25:41–46; Mark 9:42–48; Luke 13:23–25; 16:23–24; John 3:36; Rev 14:11; 20:10, 14–15; 16:11; 21:8). Therefore, upon the privation theory of evil, they are not as evil as possible since that would require non-being. This is perhaps what Mastricht means when he says that God “never exercises justice without any mercy ... by punishing his sins not according to their worth and guilt,”<sup>38</sup> since it is a mercy, of sorts, to uphold the being of the persons in hell.<sup>39</sup> But, I suggest that they are as evil as possible *while still existing*. They “have become total wrecks” who “lack the fullness of life granted by Christ to believers.”<sup>40</sup>

The privation theory of evil fits neatly with the asymptotic conception. If evil is truly a lack of the goodness of God, then the evil souls in hell must be radically different from God. They are, as it were, the “opposite” of God, or the “lack” of God. As evil beings, whatever is good in God they, by definition, do not possess. However, since God’s goodness is infinite, their lack of possession of that goodness can never be complete because one can never determine a point that is infinitely far from another point without the potential for further separation. The bar of God’s perfection, as it were, is so high that the only way the reprobate could be maximally far from it would be to cease to exist. But exist they must. Hence, they are on an infinite journey of a hellish lack of goodness. Each moment contains less goodness than the one before, yet in no moment is goodness ever had. They are like cosmonauts drifting away from the edge of the universe whose journey will never end—always infinitely far from the edge, yet infinitely far from their destination.<sup>41</sup>

However, hell “is not only a place of privation but also of sorrow and pain, in both soul and body; a place of *punishment*.”<sup>42</sup> Truly, a terrifying place to be. Praise be to the eternal Son of God, “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” who swallowed up this infinite horror in his body on the tree (Rev 21:6; 1 Pet 2:24)! Who is sufficient for these things (2 Cor 2:16)?

### 1.4. “The Execrable Shape”

Clark Pinnock, a proponent of an annihilationist conditional view of hell, said the traditional view of hell is like “people watching a cat trapped in a microwave squirm in agony, while taking delight in

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and the Love of God,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1986): 181–98.

<sup>38</sup> Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:357–58. However, cf. 2:375: “Scriptures ... remind us of a judgement without mercy.” Interestingly, he uses James 2:13 as support for both of these seemingly contradictory statements.

<sup>39</sup> Space precludes addressing the question of whether or not those in hell would wish to be annihilated (and therefore lose the goodness of being). In passing, I will suggest that it seems plausible that the reprobates’ intense desire for sin will compel them to desire continued existence in the (illogical) hope that their sin might abound (this seems to be the case with Satan). Further, Frame notes the possibility that “in their very punishment in hell, God is giving a privilege to the lost” by allowing them to display his justice. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 413.

<sup>40</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:710.

<sup>41</sup> This is analogous to Kvanvig’s presentation of hell in which he shows that there can be a seemingly contradictory, but nonetheless compatible, distinction between the teleological end of hell (moving toward non-being) and the actual mechanical end of hell (maintenance of being). Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 148.

<sup>42</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:703.

it.”<sup>43</sup> It is my contention that likening those in hell to cats is a red herring, if not a straw man. Describing crimson sin in terms of feline placidity is pure lionization. The poor cat is a far cry from Milton’s deprecation: “Whence and what art thou, execrable shape?”<sup>44</sup>

We have said that the reprobate is less-than-human. But, we have also said that he is corporeal. This leads us to ask how it is that a corporeal person could in any meaningful way be described as “less-than-human.” Even if the person is as evil as possible, how can we describe him in this way? We have already noted the affirmation of the Bible and its teachers in this regard. Below, we will try to offer an explanation.

To answer this question, we can imagine a psychopathic child abuser. Though he has a body, we are more apt to call him “monster” than “man.” However, on earth this man might still have qualities that his mother finds lovable.<sup>45</sup> Though he abuses all other people, he still buys his mother flowers on Mother’s Day. Even if this is the one good thing he ever does in his life, there is still something to point to and say, “human.” At this point we must remember that a description of humanness is that which properly participates in God’s created order. We are human insofar as we relate to God in the way that we should. In this case, the human activity of the man (that is, buying his mother flowers) is human because it fulfills (though woefully in part) the fifth commandment. Furthermore, this human activity is only possible by God’s common grace that simultaneously restrains the man’s evil impulses to do something different on Mother’s Day (which would have precluded his buying flowers) and also enables him to do something that is (again, only at an infinitesimal level) in accord with the Scriptures, since he is honoring his mother.

It is my contention that when that man, if God should so pass him over in his election, enters hell, he will (either eventually or immediately) lose all but every scintilla of goodness that he once possessed (while still possessing the limited goodness of limited being). God will remove the restraints on the man, and even the impulse to buy his mother flowers on Mother’s Day will be lost to an overwhelming desire to increase in his transgressions. The one thing that his mother could look upon as good in her son, will now be gone. Therefore, even the man’s own mother would see the state of her son in hell and be wont to say, “That is not my son. I do now know what has become of him.” In this sense, the man is her less-than-son, if you will. On the other hand, there will be a person to look at who could be called by the same name without logical absurdity. Due to his continual (asymptotic) move from God’s goodness, the mind cannot imagine how horrible he will become. Our earthly conception of the “monster” is but a caricature of his true form in hell.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Clark Pinnoch, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 140.

<sup>44</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2.l681.

<sup>45</sup> We see a real-life example of this, from daughter to father, in Edda Goerin’s description of her father, who was one of Hitler’s right-hand men, as “loving.” Though the man was evil, his love for his daughter was something good. See Daniel Slotnik, “Edda Goering, Unrepentant Daughter of Hermann, Dies at 80,” *New York Times*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/13/obituaries/edda-goering-dies.html>.

<sup>46</sup> This theme is ubiquitous in literature. We have already noted C. S. Lewis’s example. Others include characters like Darth Vader, Lord Voldemort, and Gollum (*Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Lord of the Rings* respectively) who began their fictional lives as humans (or, in Gollum’s case, a hobbit) but steadily increased in evil to the point of being something, arguably, other than human (or a hobbit). My thanks to Brian Tabb for pointing this out to me.

Another distinction can help us at this point. The difference between total and utter depravity is such that, “due to common grace, and due to the fact that total depravity is not utter depravity, [man’s] sin does not work itself out in perfect consistency at any point, *this side of hell*.”<sup>47</sup> However, it seems logical to assert that total depravity evolves into utter depravity on the other side of hell. The distinction, therefore, between a totally depraved person and an utterly depraved one should further help us understand the difference between the reprobate people we know on earth, and their utterly depraved counterparts, if you will, in hell.

Furthermore, the saints blessed union with Christ in eternal communion with him should not be understood as an abstractable entity that is not integral to who they are. Their union with Christ is analogous to their union with a corporeal body. They *are* united with Christ. As such, we see yet another radical distinction between the saints in heaven and the reprobate in hell. Indeed, it could be said that the difference is as great as that between God and the devil, or good and evil. The saints are to be identified as being in Christ, and the reprobate as being outside of Christ. This is a noteworthy distinction. Appealing again to mystery, we admit with Wilhemus à Brakel that “there is an incomprehensible difference between the final destiny of believers and the ungodly.”<sup>48</sup> But, this incomprehensibility actually serves our purposes. It is in the magnitude of difference that the incomprehensibility lies, and magnitude of difference between the glorified saints and reprobate is just what I seek to emphasize.

### 1.5. Initial Conclusion

In all that has been said, it seems that there is reason to conclude that there is enough of a radical distinction between the beings of the saints in heaven and the reprobate in hell (though they are both corporeal humans) that the word “human” does not sufficiently capture the range between them.<sup>49</sup> As we turn to make some defenses against universalism, this distinction will go a long way in rebutting some intuitive attacks against the traditional view of hell. This is because we are not talking about the same human undergoing torment in hell that is enjoying God’s blessedness in heaven. J. I. Packer put it this way: “One not only becomes desperately miserable; one is steadily being dehumanized. Richard Baxter was right to formulate the alternatives as ‘A Saint—or a Brute.’”<sup>50</sup>

## 2. Against Universalism

I now seek to use the previously provided picture of the reprobate to rebut some arguments for universalism. The universalist arguments I respond to here are primarily negative. That is, they seek to undermine the traditional view of hell by pointing out alleged inconsistencies. There are, of course,

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<sup>47</sup> Lane Tipton, *TH221 Doctrine of Man*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), “The Estate of Sin and Misery” (emphasis mine).

<sup>48</sup> Wilhemus à Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 4:303.

<sup>49</sup> Again, the point of this remark is not to ease the horror by denigrating the being experiencing it. Rather, it is to justify that selfsame horror because it is properly fitting for the being that undergoes it. The goal is not to decrease God’s judgement but to decrease man’s estimation of himself apart from God.

<sup>50</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 114.

positive arguments for universalism, but they fall outside the scope of this article since a defense of the traditional doctrine is in view, not the dismantling of universalist thought.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.1. Intuitive Argument: Family Members in Hell

A common universalist argument employed against an eternal hell is that the saints in heaven will not be able to enjoy communion with God because they will be in constant anguish over their loved ones' suffering in hell.<sup>52</sup> In response, we may apply the previously discussed definition of the reprobate to answer the objection. That is, the love that we have for our family members is only a love for the goodness in them. The mother of the addict does not love her child's addiction. She loves her child despite that addiction. When everything lovable in that child is gone, the mother will not mourn what is left. In fact, we can now understand how she can desire what is left to be eternally destroyed. If the addiction is all that is left (speaking anthropomorphically), why would she want it to be rescued?

Discussion in this vein is not only helpful in rebutting universalism. It has profound pastoral implications for God's people. In his exposition of Revelation 18:20, Jonathan Edwards taught that the saints in heaven will rejoice over the damnation of their unbelieving family members in hell because they will be witnessing the justice of God in glorious display.<sup>53</sup> While I agree with this assertion, it seems more needs to be said in order for it to make sense to us. Seeing those family members as less-than-human beings devoid of anything that we once loved in them, I argue, makes sense of his teaching.

Thinking in this way makes sense of the rejoicing of the saints over Babylon in Revelation 18:20. If the people in hell are reduced to the parts of them that only seek to do Christ and his bride harm, then we would rightly rejoice over their destruction. Caesarius of Arles asks and answers the question: "Is Babylon the only city in all the world that persecutes or has persecuted the saints of God, so that when she is destroyed all of them are avenged? *Babylon is throughout the whole world in evil people, and throughout the world persecutes those who are good.*"<sup>54</sup> The rejoicing over Babylon is due to the fact that the Babylonians seek to bring the saints down with them and thus, "God will judge Babylon just as severely as she persecuted others."<sup>55</sup> In the words of Simon Kistemaker, "The wicked passed verdicts of punishment on God's people, but now God has passed the same verdict on them."<sup>56</sup> The rejoicing over Babylon is not the rejoicing over the destruction of our loved ones. It is the rejoicing over the destruction

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<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Michal McClymond devotes the bulk, if not the entirety, of his analysis against the positive arguments of universalism. See McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, especially, 999–1062. He also notes, as I mention above, that attacks against the traditional doctrine of hell could be driving modern movement toward universalism: "The root-and-branch reevaluation of Christianity that we find among contemporary universalists may also have something to do with the critical voices to which each author is speaking" 942.

<sup>52</sup> The most forceful version of this argument, perhaps, is seen in, David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 130–58.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Rev. 18:20," in *Sermons, Series II, 1733*, Works of Jonathan Edwards Online 48 (New Haven, Yale University, 2008), 277.

<sup>54</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Exposition on the Apocalypse 18:20, Homily 17*; cited in William C. Weinrich, ed., *Revelation*, ACCSNT 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 294 (emphasis mine).

<sup>55</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 917.

<sup>56</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 500.

of the parts of our loved ones that sought to do us harm. Though the mother loves her addicted son, she justly hates the part of him that would kill her for another fix. Indeed, she wishes it would be crushed.

In regards to our earthly life, Calvin said, “The miserable ruin, into which the rebellion of the first man cast us, especially compels us to look upward.”<sup>57</sup> If this applies this side of eternity, what reason do we have to say it does not apply to that side? Further, he says, “quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God. Then, by these benefits shed like dew from heaven upon us, we are led as by rivulets to the spring itself.”<sup>58</sup> Calvin is saying that the goodness we perceive in other people is nothing other than subsistence in God that should lead us to him. I argue that those subsistences are all but removed from the damned and therefore the glorified saints have no reason to look to the damned with affection, for their felicity is completely to be found in goodness, which is completely in God. The damned are vessels made for dishonorable use (Rom. 9:21). Before judgement, they were worthy of affection because they were potentially redeemable and they contained some of God’s goodness. After judgement, they are no longer redeemable, and any goodness they once contained will then be gone.

In this way, the parts of our reprobate family members that we love will not be in hell if, may God forbid, they are not saved in the end. There is no goodness in our family members that is not from God. All goodness is indirectly related to God as its creator and sustainer. Thus, the redeemable qualities in the reprobate are glimmers of God reflected in the marred image of God that they still maintain. When we enjoy other people properly (whoever they are), we are really indirectly enjoying God. When we are in heaven, those redeemable qualities will be, on my view, reunited, as it were, with God. The vestiges will no longer be in the individual person. However, they will not cease to exist. Rather, when we behold God, we will behold those instances of goodness that we once beheld in our loved ones, but in an infinite way in God. In this sense, we will “see” our loved ones in the face of God. This is not because the things we loved in them somehow moved to God, but because the things we loved in them were God. The emanations of the sun do not cease to exist when the moon is gone.

I admit at this point that there still is, as said above, *some* goodness in the people in hell. This is because they exist. They have being. Existence and being are good gifts from God. I can only guess that this glimmer of God’s goodness, when compared with God’s infinite goodness, is so insignificant by comparison that the saints will hardly notice. If Edwards is right to say that the “whole system of created beings in comparison of him is as the light dust of the balance,” the less-than-human portion in hell is (to put it mildly) even less so.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, this does not mean that their damnation is not terrifying and to be prayed and preached against with as much fervency as humanly possible. The saints in heaven will never be able to behold God’s beauty with their family members, laugh with them, talk with them or enjoy them. However, we must hold this truth as no more pressing than the reality that our perfect communion with Christ cannot be dampened by anything. Therefore, I offer this section as a means of understanding this tension. The damned will suffer in eternal corporeal bodies as the people that they were on earth, but in such a diminished fashion that the saints will not mourn their absence. Neither truth is meant to diminish the other, but to establish it.

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<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, 133.

## 2.2. Hell Is Unfitting

Another objection is that eternal hell does not fit a temporal crime. Since humans only transgress in limited ways on earth, it seems warranted to claim that they should only sustain limited punishment in hell. Traditionally, this has been answered by appealing to God's infinite goodness such that, though the crime is limited in duration, it is committed against an unlimited Person and thus deserves unlimited retribution.<sup>60</sup> While there is some weight to this response in the abstract, it does not seem to provide much relief intuitively, if for no other reason than the fact that Christ was able to take our sin into his limited human body (1 Pet 2:24) and pay for it in a limited period of time. A response to this is given that, as per the communication of properties within Christ (*communicatio idiomatum*), Christ the Person is paying for our sins, and it is therefore a payment of unlimited proportions. However, this does not help us understand why limited sin requires eternal punishment. Even if we (rightly) agree that Christ can pay for sins that deserve eternal punishment in a limited period of time, we are still met with the difficulty in assigning eternal culpability to limited sin. Perhaps the most stinging objection in this vein is made by David Bentley Hart in his vociferous apologetic for Christian universalism. He argues that guilt must be assigned on the basis of the transgressor alone. His response to assigning guilt on the basis of the person (or Person) sinned against is this: "all of this is nonsense: guilt's 'proportion' is not an objective quantity, but an evaluation, and only a monstrous justice would refuse to assign guilt according to the capacities and knowledge of the transgressor."<sup>61</sup> Hart is saying that it is "monstrous" to assign guilt to someone on the basis of the person sinned against, rather than purely on the basis of the sin itself.

To respond to this attack, we can point again to the less-than-human status of the reprobate or, more specifically, their (almost) pure state of evil. If the persons in hell are devoid of God's goodness, they are as evil as possible. So much so that we should not even use the term "human" to describe them if we want to use the same term to describe the saints in communion with God. Therefore, we should imagine a repugnant distillation of evil in hell, not an amalgamation of lost souls and poor misled Buddhists, etc.<sup>62</sup> If we think of the former as opposed to the latter, it seems we can intuitively agree with God's wrath upon it. As Bruce Davidson says (explicating Edward's thought), "Hell will be a purification and magnification of this wickedness and its attendant ugliness. All will finally see the wicked world for what it is, once God's restraining hand of common grace is removed."<sup>63</sup> Everything nice in the "poor misled Buddhist" is not in hell, only the hateful and treacherous parts of her (this is where the asymptotic conception helps us). Further, if we recognize that this repugnant distillation of evil would like nothing more than the death of God and destruction of his sons and daughters, we can find ourselves singing with David, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies" (Ps 139:21–22). This sinful distillation, as I have put it, of the reprobate in hell continue to egregiously sin against God and his children in increasingly evil ways. This means that their culpability continues due to continued sin

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<sup>60</sup> First articulated by Anselm in 1094–1098. See, *Cur Deus Homo* 1.21; 2.14; Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, ed. C Holbrook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 39–42, 130–33.

<sup>61</sup> Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 140.

<sup>62</sup> David Hart proffers Buddhists as examples of superior charity to that of Christians. See Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 14–15.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Davidson, "Glorious Damnation: Hell as an Essential Element in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *JETS* 54 (2011): 819.

and maximized evil. Though it is helpful to point to God's unlimited perfection in order to understand the culpability of sin, it seems to me that pointing to the sinfulness of sin itself can take us all the way to fully understanding why God eternally punishes temporal sins. Sin deserves eternal damnation on its own account.

In sum, emotive force of the universalist argument proffering the poor old Buddhist grandmother burning in the flames as a logical absurdity (or evidence of God's cruelty) evaporates, for she is a caricature tantamount to the little red devil with a pitchfork.<sup>64</sup> The difference between the unspeakably detestable serpent called Satan and his infamous little cartoon is the same between the people who inhabit hell and this Buddhist simulacra.

### 2.3. Concluding the Defense

The desire to water down the doctrine of hell is ubiquitous in the Church's history. In what has been said, it is not a diminishment of hell that was offered. Rather, it is an increase in the understanding of the evil of the reprobate through an asymptotic idea of their sinfulness. I do not argue that their damnation is warranted by adjusting hell into a softer frame. Rather, I argue it is warranted because theirs is a severer evil. That is, it seems that a Reformed doctrine of hell should focus on God's infinite perfection and the horror that a privation of that goodness begets in order to better articulate this vital doctrine to the world. Hell will not be understood by making light of it, but by making much of God and sinful man's distance from him.

## 3. Reasons for Eternal Hell

What has been said so far in defense against universalism only serves to rebut the notion that hell is unjust. However, it does nothing to explain why it is necessary. Though related, justice and necessity are distinct. A thing can be just without being necessary. In order to defend the necessity of hell, we will briefly examine the traditional argument, then I will put forward my own.

### 3.1. God's Glory

Traditionally, Christians have taught that the necessity of hell is such that, without it, God would not be fully glorified since his justice would not be fully manifest. In this vein Edwards said that "mercy and grace are more valuable on this account. The more they [that is, the saints in heaven] shall see of the justice of God, the more will they prize and rejoice in his love."<sup>65</sup> This is because "the vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible, and therefore glorious."<sup>66</sup> Edwards's conception of hell, according to Bruce Davidson, is such that it increases the saints' felicity, and it is required for God's maximal glorification, which is his chief goal: "Like a perpetual volcanic eruption, this unending display of wrath will call forth the amazement, worship, or terror of the sufferers and redeemed observers."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Bavinck says that the "image [of God] has changed into a caricature" after the fall. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:140.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 2:209.

<sup>66</sup> Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:87.

<sup>67</sup> Davidson, "Glorious Damnation," 817.

To this it has been objected that it is more glorious for God to justly redeem sinners, than it is to justly punish them, if for no other reason than that the former glorifies Christ, while the latter (allegedly) does not. Warfield, on the other hand, paints a picture in which it is Christ's wrath that causes us to be "moved with amazement."<sup>68</sup> However, there does seem to be some weight to the argument because, even if Christ is glorified in subjecting evil (which, I agree, he is) it still seems that he would be more glorified in defeating his enemies by making them his sons. The previously discussed less-than-human conception does not help us understand why God needs to punish them. It only seeks to remove the venom from the universalist attack. So, the defense of hell by way of God's glory helps us some. But can more be said?

### 3.2. Hell as Believers' Confirmation?

At this point the article moves from the suggestive to admittedly speculative. The impetus for what follows is a rebuttal of the claim that there can be no logical reason for eternal hell. Therefore, this subsection is presented as a *potential logical possibility* in accordance with Scripture, but *not* as a dogmatic answer to the question. This possible situation does not need to be actual reality for it to serve as a rejoinder to the aforesaid universalist claim. It is a defense, not a theodicy.

Perhaps the means by which believers are confirmed in heaven is the existence of hell that is progressively purified of all vestiges—and therefore corruptions of—God's goodness, such that an onlooking body of saints see no means of "escape" from the beatific vision other than a progressively murkier pool of pure evil that is simultaneously shrinking as the substantial vestiges of goodness that were once in it are purged. Eve saw the beautiful fruit and heard the whisper of Satan inviting her to eat. The saints see the opposite of beauty in hell and hear the vomitus cries of regret. Perhaps this is the means by which the saints are graciously led to never desire the fruit again—the constant reminder of its filth and the agony it heaped upon their God on the cross.

No one goes to bed an unbeliever, and merely wakes up a Christian. God always uses means to unilaterally redeem his sons. In maintaining divine meticulous sovereignty and Reformed soteriology, we are not forced to endorse blind determinism, coercion or some mysterious will of God that actualizes events in our world in purely supernatural ways. Children are not dropped from the heavens by God's miraculous power (though of course they could be). They are miraculously formed by God's providential action through natural means in their mothers' wombs.<sup>69</sup> Every Christian was saved by very ordinary means of grace like the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the word, and prayer.

Perhaps it is the case that confirmation in heaven is similarly "ordinary." In this case, believers would be lovingly (and justly) reminded of the final end of all swerving from the glory of God. Rather than being ontologically supplemented with a supernatural ability to resist all evil, believers would simply be visibly reminded by such a great deterrent that sin would be effectively rendered impossible. I cannot offer these words more tentatively because I am now attempting to say that communion with God would not be sufficient to convince glorified men to abstain from sin. Instinctively, I do not want to say this. However, this is precisely what happened in the garden—Adam's mutably perfect communion

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<sup>68</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Power of God unto Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1903), 18–19.

<sup>69</sup> I use the term "miraculous" here loosely in the sense that through God's meticulous sovereignty all events are, in a sense, miraculous. Of course, there is a distinction here between that type of miracle and the one that is supernatural and inexplicable in natural terms (like the virgin birth).

with God “was not enough,” as it were, to keep him from sin. Somehow, he was led to leave. What is it in the consummation of all things that remedies this situation? Perhaps it is human experience—we have all tasted the bitter apple, and we will not forget it. This remembrance will not be grievous, but glorious because God will display his glory upon it.

It seems hell can be placed within the realm of soteriology because it can compel sinners to embrace Christ. It also humbles us, brings us to Christ, draws us to the reverence of God and back from sin.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, I am merely suggesting an expansion of this understanding of hell. We agree it has soteriological effects specifically in justification and perhaps sanctification. I am suggesting that we could potentially expand those soteriological effects to perseverance and confirmation of the saints as well.

At this point it might be argued that the eternal damnation of conscious beings is a gratuitous means to procure the confirmation of the saints in heaven. If God is omnipotent, why create the terrifying reality of hell when he can simply ordain that no saint ever lose his glorification in heaven? The only response to this is another question: Why did he create the terrifying reality of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in order to elicit the same end? The tree was a physical means of procuring the spiritual end of eternal confirmation. Perhaps hell is the same.

This does not serve to disagree with Augustine’s conception of glorified man as not able to sin (*non posse peccare*).<sup>71</sup> Rather, it seeks to offer a potential explanation for why that will be the case. We indeed will not be able to sin, and this is potentially part of the reason why: there will be no other option for us, because we will see evil as it is. Further, this does not serve to denigrate God’s goodness by saying we need something else to be perfectly blessed. Rather, it serves to illustrate our creaturely nature that, even in heaven, we require shepherdly means to stay in the fold. And in the fold we shall remain. If this notion does anything, it reduces the saints’ status, not God’s—though I hope it does neither.

Further, this does not serve to disagree with the notion that our glorified state which contains the seed of God (1 John 3:9) is the means by which we continue as saints. We will be made perfect through perfect communion with God and this is indeed the grounds of our incorruptibility in heaven. If it is true, as Frame says, that “God’s wrath serves the purposes of his love,” then perhaps this is a logical outworking of that principle at an eternal level.<sup>72</sup> The use of hell as a means to this end is not offered as a replacement for the biblical teaching, but a potential subset of it.

A potential analogue for this idea can be seen in Christ’s temptation in the wilderness.<sup>73</sup> Though it is impossible, as per his divine nature, for Christ to sin, I contend that, according to his human nature, it was possible for Christ to sin in the sense that it is possible for me to eat dirt. Technically, or mechanically, yes, this is possible. But there are no possible states of affairs in which I can willfully be led to do this if I am not constrained by external necessity. Christ had the physical ability to kneel before Satan or jump from atop the temple and, therefore, the ability to sin, in a sense; but it was, at the same time, repugnant to him like eating dirt is to me (yet infinitely more so). So, more properly, it was impossible for Christ to sin. This felt repugnancy is one of the means by which he was not able to sin (*non posse peccare*), just

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<sup>70</sup> Maastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 2:359, 401–2; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 830–34.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 11:32–12.33, *The Enchiridion* 118 (NPNF 3:275).

<sup>72</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 468.

<sup>73</sup> My thanks to the anonymous referee(s) who helped me revise this paragraph to be more readable and precise.

as my knowledge of dirt is the means by which I have been able to refrain from eating it all these years. Why was Christ able to be so opposed to sin in the wilderness? Part of the answer to that question is that he saw sin exactly for what it was. If this is correct, Christ's temptation could be a window into our confirmation in heaven. The saints are free and uncompelled, yet it is impossible that they will ever seek to depart their felicity in heaven which is communion with God. Christ was able to see Satan's offer to sin as what it really was—repulsive. Perhaps hell is the means by which we will be able to make that selfsame assessment in heaven. What is the difference between glorified saints and prelapsarian Adam? The former truly know what sin is.

Interestingly, Turretin picks up on the hellish language of Song of Songs when describing the saints' perseverance, "The love of Christ is said to be 'strong' (Cant. 8:6,7, i.e., insuperable) as 'death,'" which conquers all things, and a "jealousy cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire ... which God ... kindles to endure forever."<sup>74</sup> He follows this with the striking claim that Christ "gives us his fear that we may not cease loving him."<sup>75</sup>

Turretin says that perseverance arises "from a purpose of mind and a constancy of will in retaining the object [of salvation]." As such, he affirms "means appointed by God to obtain it [that is, perseverance]." Hence, believers do not have perseverance "through any external force ... but in the use of the means [such as] exhortations and promises and threatenings."<sup>76</sup> To be sure, Turretin is here referring to earthly perseverance. However, in describing threatenings as a means of perseverance, it is not a far step to say the same about hell. If this is so, we are merely extending hell as a means of perseverance in heaven as well.

We can, of course, appeal to mystery and God's sovereignty to answer these questions. We can say that we do not know exactly why or how we will not sin in heaven other than the fact that God is fully capable of giving us freedom that will choose him for eternity. We can also say that a full view of God (though not comprehensive) will render sin an impossibility, but this seems to go against the grain of Genesis 3, as stated above. However, even with this difficulty, the previous discussion would probably not need to be suggested. The impetus for these remarks is, again, universalist critique of eternal hell as unnecessary. As such, what has been said is highly tentative and formulated on the basis of apologetic needs; it is not on dogmatic necessity. However, if it is true, this would provide us with an issuant account of hell. That is, God's love could be properly seen as the telic end of hell.

Rather than denigrating the status of heavenly saints, this is an appeal to better understand their status. Since glorification is not some abstractable ontological supplement to be endowed in eternity, it seems better to understand one facet of it in terms of our future relationship with God. As such, it seems possible that one of the innumerable means by which he will unite us with him is by showing us what sin really is, so that we see it, as far as were able, like he does. Of course, he could do this in an instant without means, but God typically employs means, as has been said. This seems to provide us with a more concrete, ethical and relation-based understanding of eternal preservation, rather than an abstract one. That is, rather than seeing God as zapping us with spiritual understanding, we can imagine him as taking us by the hand to the precipice of eternal destruction and saying, as the last lines of Isaiah proclaim:

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<sup>74</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:600.

<sup>75</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:601.

<sup>76</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:611.

“From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me,” declares the Lord. “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” (Isa 66:23–24)

#### 4. Conclusion

It is my hope and prayer that this article will strengthen the resolve of gospel preachers, whoever they may be, to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) which includes eternal damnation for those who reject it. First, I have attempted to present a picture of the reprobate in hell that comports with a just dispensation of God’s wrath as depicted in Scripture. I have sought to show that the reprobate are so hellish that any fond feelings for them (as the universalists seek to evoke) are misplaced. The second part of this paper used that conception to negate intuitive arguments against eternal hell as a place that would mar the saints’ felicity due to their loved ones being there, as well as the notion that eternal hell does not fit finite sins. The hellish nature of the reprobate would not detract from the saints’ felicity because the goodness of their loved ones would not be in hell; since only the evil remains, eternal destruction is fitting. The final part of this paper aimed to present a *logical possibility* for the necessity of eternal hell, building on the conception of those who inhabit it. If it provided a possible explanation that is in accordance with Scripture, the universalist claim that eternal hell is necessarily illogical would be refuted.

All of this has been done in the desire to maintain a biblical explanation of hell that is in accord with the vast majority of Christian tradition. But that is not all; I firmly believe that a failure to maintain a biblical doctrine of eternal hell will greatly reduce the number of people who place their hope in Christ. God is sovereign and unilaterally saves his elect; but he always uses means. One of those means is the proclamation of the gospel. “Proclaiming” the gospel without warning our hearers of the hellishness of hell is like offering chemotherapy to a person without telling them they have cancer. It is spiritual malpractice. Perhaps some will accept the treatment because they think it will provide them with a better life here and now, but most will not. If we are convinced that people eternally die without the gospel, we must tell them so. The unpalatable nature of eternal hell has led many people who profess belief in Christ to reject what Christ himself taught about hell (Matt 3:12, 10:28, 18:6–9, 25:41–46; Mark 9:42–48; Luke 13:23–25, 16:23–24; John 3:36). Could this be the reason that the church has been dwindling? Correlation is not always causation, but it is interesting to note that the church has been shrinking at the same time that people are rejecting the doctrine of eternal hell. This is surely the case with the ever-diminishing mainline churches who by-and-large reject this doctrine. And this makes sense—why give up my life, and “take up my cross” if after this life all will be well no matter what I do? Christ’s beauty *should* attract us to him no matter what the alternate possibilities may be. But we are sinful creatures with hearts and minds bent on destruction (Jer 17:9). We must, therefore, clearly present the destruction toward which those who are outside of Christ are hurdling. We must soberly look sin and hell in the eye if we want to vanquish it. Pretending it is not there—like universalists do—is simply denial. And denial will never destroy.

In case one does not find that this compels him to teach the traditional doctrine for the sake of others, perhaps he should examine himself. Christ’s incarnational words about hell are multitudinous. Some universalists reject those words as “intentionally heterogenous phantasmagory, meant as much to

disorient as to instruct.”<sup>77</sup> But Christ said, “Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). We should not be ashamed of the Bible’s doctrine of eternal damnation any more than we should be ashamed of Christ’s words. Instead, we should be ashamed of our sin that *requires* eternal damnation. I close with these words of Bavinck: “When all is said and done, sin proves to be an incomprehensible mystery ... [but] when revelation has been complete and Christ comes to destroy the works of the devil, then also the ‘deep things of Satan’ become manifest.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 119.

<sup>78</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:145–46.

# Book Reviews

## — OLD TESTAMENT —

- Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell. *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*. 167  
Reviewed by Kevin S. Chen
- John Goldingay. *Daniel*. 169  
Reviewed by Tim Meadowcroft
- John Goldingay. *Genesis*. 171  
Reviewed by Dustin Burlet
- Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, eds. *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. 173  
Reviewed by Drew Grumbles
- R. W. L. Moberly. *The God of the Old Testament: Encountering the Divine in Christian Scripture*. 175  
Reviewed by Vincent K. H. Ooi
- Benjamin J. Noonan. *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament*. 177  
Reviewed by Kyle Young
- Daniel C. Timmer. *Nahum*. 179  
Reviewed by E. Ray Clendenen

## — NEW TESTAMENT —

- John M. G. Barclay. *Paul and the Power of Grace*. 180  
Reviewed by Ryan Johnson
- Constantine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington. *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey*. 182  
Reviewed by Matthew Y. Emerson
- Benjamin L. Gladd. *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*. 184  
Reviewed by Joel White
- Michael J. Gorman. *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul's Theology and Spirituality*. 185  
Reviewed by Hunter Brown
- Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond, Christine Jacobi, and Jens Schröter, eds. *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*. 187  
Reviewed by Benjamin E. Castaneda
- Eric C. Moore. *Claiming Places: Reading Acts through the Lens of Ancient Colonization*. 190  
Reviewed by Steve Walton

---

— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Thomas Williams. 192  
Reviewed by Coleman M. Ford
- John R. Bower, ed. *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction*. 193  
Reviewed by Ryan David Shelton
- Tim Challies. *Epic: An Around-the-World Journey through Christian History*. 195  
Reviewed by Ryan Rindels
- Charles E. Cotherman. *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*. 196  
Reviewed by Nathan A. Finn
- James Eglinton. *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*. 198  
Reviewed by Kenneth J. Stewart
- Paul R. Hinlicky. *Luther for Evangelicals: A Reintroduction*. 200  
Reviewed by Martin Foord
- Donald Macleod. *Therefore the Truth I Speak: Scottish Theology 1500–1700*. 202  
Reviewed by A. T. B. McGowan
- Mary C. Moorman. *Indulgences. Luther, Catholicism, and the Imputation of Merit*. 203  
Reviewed by Robert Kolb
- William Perkins. *The Works of William Perkins*. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas. 205  
Reviewed by Matthew N. Payne
- Ellen Vaughn. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*. 209  
Reviewed by Amanda Wood Aucoin
- Robert Louis Wilken. *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*. 210  
Reviewed by Miles S. Mullin II
- Johannes Zachhuber. *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics*. 212  
Reviewed by James Rutherford

— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

- Richard Bauckham. *Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation*. 214  
Reviewed by David A. Larson
- S. Mark Hamilton. *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards Continuous Creation and Christology*. 215  
Reviewed by Robert W. Caldwell III
- Richard J. Mouw. *All That God Cares About: Common Grace and Divine Delight*. 217  
Reviewed by Dennis Greeson

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

- Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson. *Work and Worship: Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy.* 219  
Reviewed by Dennis Greeson
- Paul Maxwell. *The Trauma of Doctrine: New Calvinism, Religious Abuse, and the Experience of God.* 221  
Reviewed by James Rutherford
- Gilbert Meilaender. *Thy Will Be Done: The Ten Commandments and the Christian Life.* 223  
Reviewed by Andrew J. Spencer
- Paul E. Miller. *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life.* 225  
Reviewed by Jeremy M. Kimble
- Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody.* 226  
Reviewed by Neil Shenvi
- Joe Rigney. *Strangely Bright: Can You Love God and Enjoy This World?* 231  
Reviewed by Samuel G. Parkison
- Robert S. Smith. *Come, Let Us Sing: A Call to Musical Reformation.* 233  
Reviewed by Matthew D. Westerholm
- Preston Sprinkle. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church and What the Bible Has to Say.* 235  
Reviewed by Robert S. Smith
- Christos Tsiolkas. *Damascus.* 237  
Reviewed by Anthony Brammall
- Mark Vroegop. *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation.* 239  
Reviewed by Kit Barker
- Gordon J. Wenham. *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage: In Their Historical Setting.* 241  
Reviewed by Philip H. Kern

— MISSION AND CULTURE —

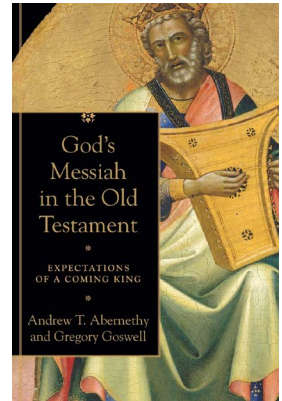
- Scott Callaham and Will Brooks, eds. *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues.* 243  
Reviewed by Kyle Faircloth
- Robert Covolo. *Fashion Theology.* 245  
Reviewed by Steven Lindsey
- Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke, eds. *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry.* 246  
Reviewed by Alan B. Howell

- Michael W. Goheen and Jim Mullins. *The Symphony of Mission: Playing Your Part in God's Work in the World*. 248  
Reviewed by J. D. Payne
- Ayman Ibrahim. *A Concise Guide to the Qur'an: Answering Thirty Critical Questions*. 250  
Reviewed by Matthew Bennett
- Dean Inserra. *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel*. 251  
Reviewed by Stephen M. Davis
- Carl R. Trueman. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. 253  
Reviewed by Ted Newell
- Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements. *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*. 255  
Reviewed by Jessica Udall

— OLD TESTAMENT —

Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell. *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xii + 292 pp. £21.99/\$29.99.

Two accomplished Old Testament scholars, one younger (Abernethy) and one older (Goswell), have teamed up to produce this important book on the Messiah in the OT. This subject “is fundamental to a proper understanding of the faith we profess” (p. 1). Its primary audience is “pastors and students,” without excluding scholars (p. vii). The book is well written and is accessible to a broad audience, with some interaction with biblical languages and modern scholarship, but not so much as to be overwhelming. It is well edited, with only a few mistakes or style issues (e.g., misspellings: “Othneil” on p. 29 and “Evil-Merodoch” on pp. 80, 83; outdated use of “oriental” on p. 5; repetition between pp. 125–26 and pp. 137–38).



After a brief introduction (pp. 1–9), the bulk of the book’s structure (ch. 1–15) adheres to a Hebrew tripartite division of the canon (Law, Prophets, Writings) with the exception of Ruth (see pp. vii–viii), followed by one chapter that discusses “Jesus as the Christ” in the NT (ch. 16). Chapters 1–15 each end with brief “canonical reflections.” The book’s conclusion uses the metaphor of an abstract mosaic to creatively illustrate the authors’ approach. Proportionally, the book’s contents are weighted towards the Prophets (ch. 2–12, pp. 28–181), compared to the Law (only ch. 1, pp. 10–27) and the Writings (ch. 13–15, pp. 182–223). There are several chapters with varying amounts of content based on previously published material, whether Abernethy’s (ch. 6) or Goswell’s (chs. 3, 8–14).

Abernethy and Goswell understand “Messiah” and “messianism” in terms of “the hope of the coming of a royal agent who will serve God’s kingdom purposes, an expectation that Christians believe finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ” (p. 1). As such, their approach sees the kingship of *God* as “central” (p. 5) with human messianic kingship in a subordinate role (pp. 33, 50–51, 156, 183, 193, 239). Relatedly, “a messianic passage or book ... is one in which this royal figure is prefigured, anticipated, predicted, or described” (p. 1). Based on these definitions, the authors’ discussion of these texts does not necessarily involve eschatology or an individual Messiah specifically (pp. 23, 52, 110–13; though see pp. 134, 184).

Their emphasis on a *royal* Messiah leads them to exclude the Servant Songs in Isaiah, the subject of which they classify as prophetic (pp. 1, 85–87, 228, 244). Thus, this book does not treat Isaiah 53 and some other classic passages (e.g., Deut 18:15–19; Isa 49:5–6) that do not fit the authors’ definition. They see messianism as “only one of several strands ... that lead to Jesus” (e.g., prophet, priest, God; p. 1), which are later brought together in the NT (pp. 99, 227). Personally, I do not think that these “strands” can be fully isolated. For example, the Suffering Servant seems to have king-like qualities, such as his exaltation and being respected by kings (Isa 52:13, 15; cf. 6:1; David as “my servant” in 37:35). This mixing suggests that messianic expectation *within the OT itself* involves a king who also has other roles (e.g., priest in Ps 110:4).

A large proportion of the book involves either measured treatments of classic messianic passages or constructive exegesis of other relevant texts. Regarding the former, the authors interpret the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 collectively as humanity (p. 13), the promise to Judah in Genesis 49:8–12 as either about an individual or a dynasty (p. 19), the star of Jacob in Numbers 24:17 as either an individual

or an ideal (p. 23) and 2 Samuel 7:14 as concerning a metaphorical father-son relationship between God and David's offspring rather than a prophecy about Jesus (p. 62). Regarding the latter, Deuteronomy 17:14–20 presents “an ideal through which future kings would be assessed” (p. 25), Judges “advocates for a kingship” that lives up to this ideal (p. 34), Ruth has important Davidic connections (p. 37), David's triumphs in Samuel provide a “messianic picture” (p. 56) of an “ideal king” (p. 63), and Kings also brings out “the ideal of kingship” (p. 67).

In the Latter Prophets, the authors see “a truncated form of human kingship as the model for the future” (p. 7; cf. “muted messianism,” p. 176), with Isaiah having only four predictions of a Davidic king (Isa 9:1–7; 11:1–9; 16:5; 32:1; p. 85), and these are taken to originally concern historical kings (p. 98). The authors also argue repeatedly that the prophets depict the Messiah not so much as a savior or deliverer but as one installed *after* divine deliverance (pp. 93–94, 135, 152, 155, 160, 203–4). However, this is not to say that the OT never portrays the Messiah in this way (Num 24:17; Ps 2:9; p. 243) but perhaps illustrates the authors' salvation-historical approach in which different emphases appear at different times (p. 239).

For brevity's sake, I must conclude my summary in hope that the preceding fairly represents the book. As a former student of John Sailhamer, I am grateful that Abernethy and Goswell chose to interact with his view of the Messiah in the OT (pp. 20–21), which is both significant in itself and still influential in some evangelical circles (e.g., Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, eds., *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* [Chicago: Moody, 2019]). At the same time, I wish that the critical interaction showed a deeper understanding of and engagement with Sailhamer's proposal involving the eschatological-messianic message of the Pentateuch's major poems (Gen 49; Num 24; Deut 32–33). Their critique relies on agreement with other scholars and posing questions that reflect personal skepticism, which are secondary to the primary methodological and exegetical issues themselves. Some of these primary issues logically precede the interpretation of the disputed Deuteronomy 33:7. Neither is there sufficient acknowledgment of the textual evidence Sailhamer provides for relating these major poems together, first for the macrostructure of the Pentateuch and then intertextually.

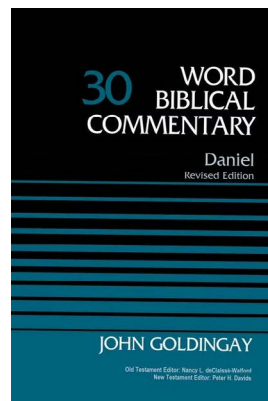
Although this book's approach to Messiah in the OT is quite different from mine, I still found it to contain a good number of helpful insights (e.g., pp. 17, 44–47, 74–76, 94–96, 105, 120, 167, 176–77, 218) and much useful engagement with current scholarship. I trust that those who prefer a more restrained approach to Messiah in the OT will enjoy this book and benefit from it greatly. Either way, it stands as a significant contribution to the conversation concerning the Messiah in the OT.

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John Goldingay. *Daniel*. Revised edition. Word Biblical Commentary 30. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 624 pp. £40.00/\$59.99.

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When I began research in the book of Daniel as a newly minted graduate student in 1990, John Goldingay's Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) volume on Daniel had just come out the year before. In the days before easily accessed electronic bibliographic databases, it proved to be a gold mine of up-to-the-minute research, and I came to appreciate Goldingay's commentary on Daniel as one amongst several of the very best commentaries on that book. At the same time, within the well-performing WBC series, the commentary on Daniel is one of the best. The commentary has worn very well over its thirty-something years of life, anticipating as it did several strands of research that have continued to feature in Danielic studies. And now Goldingay has improved it even further with this revised edition. In the author's own words, the revision "didn't make me change my mind about big things, but it gave me new things to say" (p. 9). In a range of subtle ways, his earlier work is enhanced in this edition.



The basic generic concepts of the WBC series remain in place. The commentary is still characterized by a desire to hold together the best of critical and technical biblical scholarship with a conviction that the Bible contains the living word of God for contemporary readers. To that end, each major section opens with a comprehensive targeted bibliography, and then five parallel treatments of the passage. The first is a *translation*, followed by detailed technical *notes* on the translation and text-critical issues arising therefrom. Then comes a section on *form/structure/setting*, in which an overview of the basic structure and thrust of the passage is laid out. This includes details of the literary setting, which inevitably entails also reference to the historical and social context of the biblical text. The commentary then turns to *comment*, which entails much of the material traditionally associated with the commentary genre. This is where details relating to cultural background and other particularities are spelled out. The final treatment in each major section of text is labeled *explanation*. It is in this section that the distinctives of the WBC approach are most evident. Therein the commentator has the opportunity to highlight threads of narrative, and comment in more detail on literary and theological moves that the writer of the text might be making. In the process, the relevance of the text to contemporary life and societies is also drawn out. All of this is preceded by a comprehensive bibliography and an introduction that outlines key critical issues in the study of the book and the commentator's position where these issues are particularly contested.

In the introduction to the commentary, Goldingay goes into helpful detail on the Jewish and Christian reception of the book of Daniel. He also sets the book of Daniel into the context of the broader corpus of Daniel-related texts, such as the Qumran material and the early Greek translations. In the process, he does not focus explicitly on issues such as date and authorship, being content to let his position emerge in the context of broader considerations. The result is a nuanced approach to both issues that leave space for readers from a range of theological perspectives to find their place within the commentary.

Goldingay is similarly careful and constructive on the fraught matter of eschatological interpretation of the book of Daniel. He wants to read the visionary material primarily against the backdrop of the Antiochene crisis of the 160s BCE and is careful not to over-read a literal interpretation into the present

day. He also challenges those whose reading is dominated by academic concerns not to lose sight of the fact that the book of Daniel should not be captured by a primarily historical approach; it transcends that into our own day, and readers need to be prepared to be surprised by what it might say (pp. 133–34). Humility is called for in the face of the temptation to exclude readings with which we disagree or which display a degree of naivete. God may be speaking therein also. This becomes clear not so much in the introductory material as in Goldingay's treatments of the various visions.

Unlike some revisions of earlier published material, this one from Goldingay demonstrates a detailed acquaintance with scholarly work on Daniel that has emerged since his original edition. As he indicates in his preface, this new material does not cause any major shifts in his thinking on the book of Daniel, but brings some extra nuance in places. A particular achievement of this revision is the manner in which Goldingay draws the views of more recent authors into his discussion of the book of Daniel.

He has also continued to work on his translation, which has been refined here and there. In the process, Goldingay's ability to surprise the reader with fresh perspectives remains very much in evidence. Whether or not the reader agrees with all his translation choices, the effect is always thought-provoking. See for example Goldingay's rendering in poetic form of Daniel 12:2–3, the verses that I think of as the capstone to entire book:

Thus many of those who sleep  
    in a land of earth will wake up,  
Some to lasting life,  
    others to utter shame, to lasting abhorrence.  
The discerning will shine  
    like the moon in the sky.  
Those who set the multitude right  
    will shine like the stars to all eternity. (p. 505)

Accordingly, there is the occasional amendment to the technical notes, although most of them remain intact from the earlier edition. This is also true of the form/structure/setting and comment sections of the commentary.

The most development between the original and the revised editions is found in the explanation section. These tend to be slightly longer than in the original edition and the added length may largely be attributed to Goldingay not so much shifting direction as extending out two trajectories that were in evidence in the original edition and have characterized much of his writing in other Old Testament sub-disciplines in the intervening years. First, he brings extra finesse to a literary appreciation of the stories and visions of Daniel. Second, there is expanded theological reflection on the contemporary significance of the book of Daniel, including on matters eschatological (on which see above).

It seems to me that the WBC format outlined above is intended to make the commentary accessible to a range of types of readers. There is plenty there for the technicians, for those who come to the commentary with questions of meaning, and for those who want to know how all of this might apply in our own day. This is a strength of the format, but it also has inherent weaknesses. The long, densely packed bibliographies can be off-putting. And the distinction between structure/form/setting, comment, and explanation is not always evident, especially that between comment and explanation. This results in a not entirely user-friendly experience for those who want to quarry the material (which is probably most users of commentaries). Sometimes the reader has to work quite hard to find the point she or he is looking for. Having said that, the layout and font in the revised edition are a vast improvement over

the original, and also account for a considerably thicker commentary (624 pages versus 351 pages in the original edition).

Notwithstanding any weaknesses in format or layout, this commentary is a good one for preachers, students, and researchers as well as for critically aware laypeople. It is one of the best of its genre and one of the best on the book of Daniel from the pen of one of the leading scholars of our generation. If you are looking for one commentary devoted to the book of Daniel for your bookshelf, this one is quite possibly it.

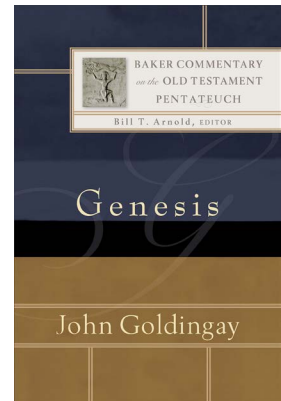
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John Goldingay. *Genesis*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xix + 808 pp. £39.99/\$59.99.

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Few canonical writings are as formative to the shape of Scripture as the book of Genesis. As the first book of the Pentateuch, it is “the fountainhead from which the Bible’s ‘Torah’ (its teaching) flows” (p. ix). As such, it behooves all Christians to ensure that they have ready access to reliable resources for reading such important texts. Enter the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (BCOT): Pentateuch. The BCOT volumes are “critically informed and respect the original discourse as well as the theological dimensions of the text. That is, the commentaries consider not merely what God originally said through the authors of the Torah but also what God is saying today through these ancient books” (p. ix). John Goldingay’s commentary on Genesis marks the first entry of this exciting new series.



Goldingay’s work is divided into four roughly equal sections:

- Part 1: The lines of descent of the heavens and the earth, through Noah (Gen 1:1–11:26);
- Part 2: The lines of descent of Terah, through Abraham and Sarah (Gen 11:27–25:11);
- Part 3: The lines of descent of Isaac and Rebekah, through Jacob (Gen 25:12–35:29);
- Part 4: The lines of descent of Jacob, through Joseph (Gen 36:1–50:26).

The book rounds off with an impressive forty-page bibliography and three indices—author, subject, and scripture/other ancient writings. Regrettably, there is no Hebrew word index.

Concerning the translation that is used throughout this volume, Goldingay makes clear that he utilized an earlier version of his *The First Testament: A New Translation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), which was then reworked as he wrote the commentary itself (p. xi). The differences between these two works, however, are (mostly) negligible.

Although some readers may quibble with the fact that all references to Hebrew are in transliteration, Goldingay’s actual engagement with the language is *par excellence*. He judiciously cites the standard lexicons and avoids many of the all-too-common exegetical fallacies (etymologizing, semantic overload, etc.). The commentary also uses informed nomenclature, such as *wəqāṭal* and *yiqtol*, pays

close attention to various aspects of Hebrew syntax, and makes extensive reference to many standard reference grammars, such as IBHS, GKC, JM, and DG.

Goldingay too has an exceptional knack for keeping the concerns of the “person in the pew” at the forefront of the discussion. To be clear, throughout the text, aside from the “interpretation” sections, Goldingay also includes a number of “implications.” Racism, injustice, sexuality, the world scene, even taxes, are all addressed in these brief snippets. Goldingay’s capacity to effectively bridge the divide between the pulpit and the ivory tower is highly commendable and provides tremendous insight for the church’s ministry.

That being said, however, this commentary is not above reproach, and not a few readers will almost undoubtedly find reason(s) to nitpick and/or take umbrage with various aspects of Goldingay’s work. For instance, the sparse introduction (eleven pages) covers such matters as the overarching schema of the book of Genesis (genealogies), the origin, text, and language of Genesis, how to understand narrative, and the relationship between story and history. Concerning this last point, specifically, Goldingay states: “One of the trickiest tasks in interpretation is determining whether an author was seeking to write history or fiction. Whereas some readers of Genesis have seen it as [a] simple story, others as pure fiction, it looks more like something in between, like the Greek histories or like movies ‘based on fact’ that use imagination to bring out the significance of events” (p. 5).

These assertions, of course, have certain implications that may trouble some readers. Three examples to this end should suffice. Concerning Cain’s murder of Abel and what follows (Gen 4:1–16), Goldingay brings up some potentially complex aspects of the text, such as who Cain’s executioners might be, for instance, but then, regrettably, sidesteps the issue(s) by claiming that these chapters are (merely) “historical parables” and that “in a parable one does not press the details” (p. 102). Elsewhere, Goldingay claims that the appearance of camels in Genesis seems to be anachronistic but rather than engage with contemporary scholarship on the matter, he simply opines that “they may be another result of the story being told in terms that work for later listeners” (p. 220). Lastly, concerning Abr(ah)am, Lot, and the coalition of kings (Gen 14:1–24), one of the few accounts that refer to things within an “international context,” Goldingay maintains that though it is theoretically possible that this description “might enable one to relate the Genesis narrative to a more specific context in the time before Moses ... we know virtually nothing about the individuals or the people involved in the story. It is ‘a world of its own.’ Presumably the audience suffers from the same ignorance. The narrator either has some historical information that we cannot control, or created the narrative out of an inspired imagination to make the history-like story” (p. 231).

With respect to redaction history, another possible point of contention for some readers, the following types of comments (in this particular case, relating to the Noahic Deluge) pervade the text: “we can broadly infer how some sequences of verses came from J and others from P, following clues such as their terms for God and their way of numbering the animals (P just talks of pairs of each species, J talks in terms of one pair of impure animals and seven pairs of pure animals)” (pp. 138–39).

Aside from the above, certain other disquieting elements also appear within Goldingay’s commentary. For instance, with respect to the *imago Dei*, Goldingay asserts, “Genesis 1 invites people listening to the story to see male and female both together as made in God’s image and as both together designed to rule over the world, not to rule one over the other. Does it also invite people to infer that God is both male and female?” (p. 37). Elsewhere, Goldingay claims that wine ought to be understood as the means of “alleviating/lifting” the “curse” on the ground and that Noah’s “relief” was provided through viticulture

(p. 120). Lastly, concerning Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1–11), Goldingay opines, “Lot does not invite the crowd to sleep with his daughters, and it’s not obvious why this would satisfy their reasons for wanting to ‘know’ the strangers. Maybe Lot is rather offering them as hostages” (pp. 304–5). Though Goldingay states that he has indicated instances at which his view is idiosyncratic (see p. xii), many readers at these points will likely scratch their head in puzzlement or shake them in bewilderment.

To conclude, John Goldingay’s BCOT commentary on *Genesis* is highly detailed, eminently readable, and conversant with the best of contemporary scholarship (both evangelical and critical). As such, it is of unquestionable import for all serious students of Scripture. That being said, however, Goldingay’s fairly loose stance concerning genre analysis, the lack of verisimilitude between the biblical text and historical referentiality, and other idiosyncrasies often cause one to question the integrity, reliability, and authority of the book of Genesis, as a whole. As such, though there is no question concerning the author’s scholastic capabilities or his warmth with respect to matters of theology and church life, the claim that this “landmark commentary is a rich gift to biblical scholarship and to the church” (see the back cover) seems to be far truer for the former than it would seem for the latter.

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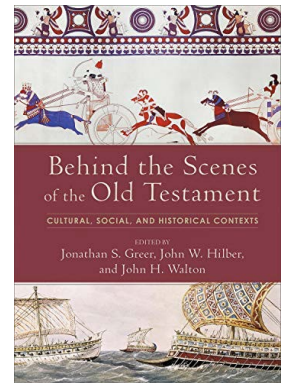
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Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, eds. *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. xix + 615 pp. £33.99/\$49.99.

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*Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament* is a dictionary full of substantive articles on a wide-ranging number of issues relating to Old Testament background and ANE history. The book is cleverly organized around the metaphor of a theater play, including categories like The Stage (Historical Geography), The Sets and Props (Archaeology), Acts (Broad Historical Contexts), and Scenes (Event-Based Historical Contexts). The largest portion of the book, a third of the total pages, explores themes of the drama. Here, the writers use integrated approaches to examine a particular theme in the OT, such as family or monotheism. They take knowledge from fields previously discussed in the book, such as archaeology, ANE literature, geography, and historical events, and integrate them to show how they illuminate the culture of OT times. This method shows the reader the “pay-off” of studying historical background issues.

The editors of *Behind the Scenes* have recruited a diverse array of contributors, hailing from the UK, Continental Europe, Israel, and both seminary and university settings in the USA. The contributors are also both seasoned (Richard Hess, Amihai Mazar) and junior scholars (Ryan Stokes, Joshua Walton). Unfortunately, the theological and methodological perspectives may be too diverse for usefulness in certain settings. The editors admit this diversity, stating their hope that this will “enhance the pedagogical value of the volume in serving diverse readers in different settings” (p. xviii). However, more conservative scholars may be less comfortable recommending some perspectives. For example, a more conservative discussion of the conquest and settlement by Pekka Pitkänen (pp. 201–7) argues for a “settler-colonial” model. Pitkänen integrates the biblical text into his theory but also helpfully



pushes against a simplistic reading of conquest texts in Joshua. Pitkänen claims that some events in Joshua are “telescoping” and written in a “stylized, exaggerated form” (p. 206). On the other hand, a less conservative entry, such as one by Matthew J. Lynch on monotheism, makes claims like, “apart from Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, and 32:39, there is little *explicit* monotheistic rhetoric in the Pentateuch” (p. 343). He also concludes, “Monotheism does not involve by necessity the explicit denial of other deities” (p. 347). He bases this claim on texts that mention other gods or divine beings (what he calls deities). For example, Lynch claims that biblical texts like Exodus 20:3 “*allow for* the possibility of other deities” (p. 342, emphasis original). Instead, such a text simply acknowledges the reality that people will believe in other deities. The OT acknowledges a major difference between YHWH, the one true God, and other spiritual beings that are so-called gods (Isa 44:6, 9–20).

Despite the difference in perspectives and methodologies, this dictionary is helpful in teaching students the importance of historical and cultural background for accurately interpreting and teaching the OT. The main benefit of this work is its comprehensiveness. The book will teach a student subjects as diverse as food preparation in Iron Age Israel (pp. 456–63) to the life of Akhenaten (pp. 253–59). Thus, the information serves to provide more depth and accuracy in teaching. For example, while recently teaching on Hosea 7:8, “Ephraim is a cake not turned,” I had in mind the kinds of ovens Israelites would use and their method for baking disks of bread (pp. 458–59). Another important example is Richard Averbeck’s entry on slavery. He explores the difference between chattel and debt slavery in the ANE, and notes that in Israel owning fellow Israelites as chattel slaves was impermissible. He also concludes that, “The institution of ancient slavery was not supplied the way that it was in the New World institution, though both could be characterized by dehumanization” (p. 430). Averbeck’s essay is very helpful in thinking about OT texts on slavery.

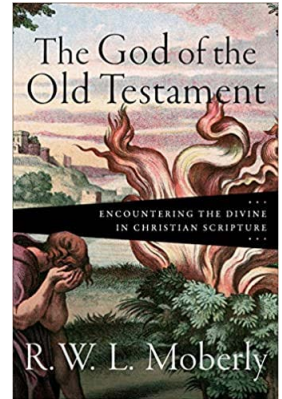
The editors state that the book is designed for use alongside OT surveys or introductions (p. xviii). The book is likely too detailed and large for an overview course, since students are already reading the OT text itself and a large introduction textbook. This work would be good as a reference supplement for OT introduction students or a main textbook in a course on OT background. The work is also helpful as a reference for scholars and pastors as they work on certain areas of the OT. There does not appear to be a similar work that addresses such a wide range of issues focusing on OT background, while written at a more accessible level than works like the Anchor Bible Dictionary. In the end, the book is recommended if one feels he/she has the time to work through the book as occasions arise in teaching and study.

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R. W. L. Moberly. *The God of the Old Testament: Encountering the Divine in Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xiv + 290 pp. £22.99/\$34.99.

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Walter Moberly is professor of theology and biblical interpretation at Durham University and has composed many works on the interpretation of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. As someone who has been inspired and instructed in thought and life by Moberly's oeuvre, I eagerly anticipated the publication of this tome. Here, he offers close readings of eight Old Testament texts in six chapters with a view to giving accounts of their significance as Christians Scripture for the concern of what it means to know that the Lord is God (Ps 100:3). Along the way, he judiciously converses with an impressive range of past and present thinkers on matters not only relating to biblical texts and Christian thought but also in contemporary culture, literature, and psychology.



The six chapters are flanked by an introduction and an epilogue. In the introduction, Moberly provides the rationale for his choice of Old Testament texts and sets out his approach to reading them as Christian Scripture. The latter he summarizes with the following words: “I propose to read *the received form* of the biblical text with *a second naiveté* in a mode of *full imaginative seriousness* that probes *the subject matter* and recognizes its *recontextualization into plural contexts* in relation to which I bring to bear *a text-hermeneutics and reader-hermeneutics* and also utilize a *rule of faith*” (p. 5). The terms he italicizes are then accessibly unpacked. The first chapter, entitled “The Wise God,” studies Proverbs 8:21–31 to consider what it means to live in God’s world here and now in the light of God as the wise Creator. “God creates in/by/with/through Wisdom” (p. 27) then “those who learn to love wisdom are in some way engaging with the true nature of the world, with reality as it is, and conforming themselves to it” (p. 28). Towards articulating what this might look like in the contemporary world, Moberly not only engages John Gray and Thomas Nagel on meaning and living but also gives generous space to discussing “was there a time when Wisdom was not?” and points out resonances between the calling voice of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and the shining light of the Word in John’s gospel.

The second chapter brings us to Exodus 3 to reflect on the revelatory nature of “the Mysterious God,” focusing on the disclosure of the Divine Name in vv. 13–15. Technical and translational issues surrounding these verses are meticulously discussed. Their interpretative clues in the narrative context are also suggested: “the burning bush provides a fully appropriate symbolic resonance for the divine name ‘I AM WHO I AM’” (p. 66) as well as the ways of the Lord that frustrated and perplexed Moses’s hope in his first engagement with the pharaoh (5:1–6:13). This chapter includes a brief account of the history of interpretation of the Divine Name and concludes with reflections on the nature of divine revelation and human activities in the formation and reading of the Bible.

Psalms 82 takes center stage in the third chapter, “The Just God.” Moberly asks: “How should this psalm about an assembly of deities, in which all but one of its members are condemned to die, best be understood?” (p. 97). Classic readings that view “gods” in vv. 6–7 as speaking of human judges and contemporary religio-historical readings that view them as deities are evaluated. Moberly then offers a fresh reading of this psalm as “a conceptual analysis of what is, and is not, meant by the term ‘*‘ēlōhīm* ... conveyed in imaginatively concrete form rather than in a theoretical or abstract mode” (p. 109). He suggests that Psalm 82, among other texts, presents justice as a criterion for discerning and entering into the presence and way of God.

Chapter 4, “The Inscrutable God,” focuses on Genesis 4:1–15. Moberly argues and demonstrates that the narrative could also be meaningful if the question of why God favored Abel’s offering over Cain’s is acknowledged as inscrutable, and attention is directed towards how Cain handled God’s guidance on being an unfavored one. Moberly suggests that “the issue at the heart of the story of Cain and Abel is not the avoidance of being half-hearted or only giving the second best to God.... Rather, the issue is how to handle life in a world where some are more favored than others and, especially, how to cope with being, in one way or another, the one who is unfavored” (p. 135).

The fifth chapter, “The Only God,” turns to the story of Naaman’s healing in 2 Kings 5 to reflect on the significance of his confession in v. 15 in relation to the term “monotheism.” Views on Naaman’s requests for Israelite soil and to genuflect in the temple of Rimmon are assessed to consider how Naaman’s requests might continue to inform Christians seeking to live faithfully in challenging and hostile circumstances. The final chapter, “The Trustworthy God,” deals with Psalm 46, Jeremiah 7, and Micah 3, with particular focus on their distinctive voices concerning the security of Jerusalem and its temple. The chapter reflects on how and why trust in God might become self-serving and how it might be authentic and sustained. Along the way, Moberly discusses accounts of Zion’s theology by Jon Levenson and Konrad Schmid.

So, in what way is this work valuable? First, much has been written in recent years *about* theological interpretation of Scripture. This often talked about discipline is here masterfully and elegantly practiced by Moberly. In other words, for very fine examples of theological interpretation of Scripture, consult this book. Second, Moberly’s close readings and theological reflections of biblical texts are exemplary, being instructive, imaginative, and thought provoking. He has a knack for articulating familiar texts in fresh ways and finding ways forward in interpretative impasses by reframing and weaving together insights, concerns, and debates across different disciplines. Third, sophisticated hermeneutical notions and issues are handled in an accessible manner and in the service of reading Scripture. Fourth, there is much here that preachers will find suggestive and helpful. Moberly renders the gap between the Old Testament texts he considers and our contemporary (postmodern) world less apparent. In sum, scholars, students, and pastors will find here treasures that inspire and instruct thought, prayer, vocation, and life. Admittedly, I was initially rather disappointed that in a book about the God of the Old Testament, Moberly does not return to his earlier studies on God’s self-disclosure in Exodus 32–34 (*At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983] and “How May We Speak of God? A Consideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TynB* 53 [2002]: 177–202). However, I discovered later in the epilogue that Moberly gives a brief account for this lacuna. Nevertheless, I hope he will revisit Exodus 32–34 in future works.

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Benjamin J. Noonan. *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 336 pp. £22.99/\$38.99.

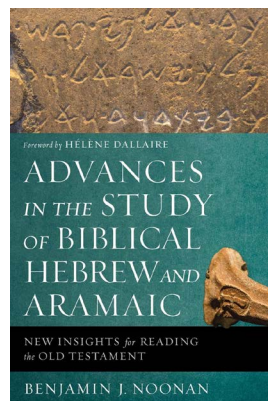
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Benjamin J. Noonan's new book attempts to distill the groundbreaking developments and unanswered questions in research on Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic that have emerged since the turn of the twentieth century. Along the way, he tries to elucidate essential technical jargon and theories, especially from the field of linguistics, so that readers can further their acquisition of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, understand the state of research, and enhance their faithfulness in exegesis and ministry. Noonan's audience includes "students, pastors, professors, and scholars" (pp. 25–29; cf. pp. 270–80). Despite limited accessibility for part of his audience, Noonan has provided a comprehensive and largely accurate resource.

Chapter 1 overviews *linguistics* and details some specific theories that scholars have used with Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. In Chapter 2, Noonan details how scholars have researched Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic since the tenth century and concludes by listing principal resources devoted to promoting Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. Chapters 3–10 each detail a linguistic topic then show how biblical scholars have accounted for the topic in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. Every chapter ends with recommended directions and resources for further study. Noonan concludes the book by briefly reiterating what he hopes the book will accomplish.

Chapter 3 shows how biblical scholars have conducted *lexicology* and applied those insights in Old Testament (OT) *lexicography*. The discussion of the theories behind OT dictionaries and lexicons is invaluable, although Noonan here—unlike elsewhere—limits his discussion almost exclusively to English resources (cf. p. 79 n. 63). Noonan thereafter (ch. 4) sketches notions like valency, transitivity, and *Aktionsart* and describes how scholars have tried to account for the derived stems of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic verbs using such concepts. In Chapter 5, Noonan defines tense, aspect, and mood and delineates scholars' rationale for claiming which component of tense, aspect, and mood, if any, is most prominent in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. Noonan next discusses discourse analysis (ch. 6)—which includes but surpasses the propositional analysis of logical relationships that many exegetes exclusively associate with "discourse analysis" (cf. pp. 149–50, 168)—and its application to the OT. In chapter 7, Noonan explains markedness and typology, especially as they relate to word order, and outlines the arguments that scholars have lodged against the traditional notions of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic word order. Chapter 8 propounds sociolinguistics and provides examples of how sociolinguistic insights can help account for phenomena that traditional perspectives have not adequately addressed. Noonan in Chapter 9 explicates how linguists identify language change, use differing methodology to date texts, and apply these methodologies in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. The final chapter (ch. 10) details how Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic pedagogy has evolved in the last few decades, especially through communicative-based approaches to language acquisition.

Leaving aside facets that I wish had been discussed more (e.g., the relevance of ancient translations, which Noonan only mentions dismissively [pp. 77, 134–36]; the significance of alternative masoretic traditions of the OT, such as we learn from the unmentioned Cairo Geniza), Noonan inaccurately describes two areas. First, Noonan's discussion of dating Biblical Aramaic (pp. 244–59) falls short. He excludes formidable scholars after H. H. Rowley (e.g., John J. Collins, Ian Young) who do not have a



traditional bent. Thus, Noonan pronounces, “it is now clear that Biblical Aramaic—including Daniel’s Aramaic—falls within the dialect of Imperial Aramaic” (p. 257). While I too believe that Daniel pre-dates Middle Aramaic, a fairer assessment of scholarship suggests that this is now the minority opinion. In the same section, he situates “the Palestinian Targums” within Middle Aramaic (p. 257)—though they are likely Late Aramaic—and designates 11Q10 as “Targum Job” (pp. 253–54)—when 11Q10 is simply an Aramaic translation, not a targum. Second, Noonan surprisingly omits (cf. pp. 78–87) any reference to the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (CAL), whose editor is Stephen Kaufman, Noonan’s former doctoral supervisor.

Noonan’s discussions occasionally lack clarity, thereby hindering the book’s accessibility. For example, technical words appear that he does not define (e.g., delocutive, desiderative [pp. 105–7], evidential [p. 137], ulpan [pp. 268–73]). More than once he left me questioning whether he understood the concepts to which he referred (e.g., obligatory grammatical arguments [p. 89]; possible syntactical passivity for Biblical Hebrew verbs [p. 93 n. 16]; quasi-ergativity as applied to the Piel [pp. 103–4]). Nevertheless, one can expect several shortcomings in a book that digests such an astounding amount of scholarship.

Pastors may want to skim the book and then avail of the recommended resources (esp. pp. 62–64, 169–80, the “Further Reading” sections, and ch. 10). Aspiring and current doctoral students will find a buffet of potential research questions. Scholars should note Noonan’s repeated recommendations to incorporate modern linguistics (esp. cognitive linguistics)—and glean especially from Noonan’s suggested resources in ch. 1 and the footnotes he cites there—while continuing to use earlier insights from philology, comparative linguistics, and Semitic studies.

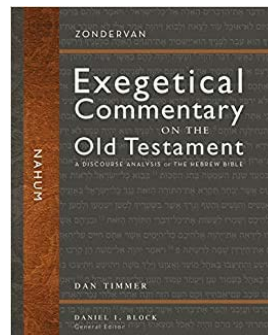
Noonan’s scope is ambitious, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive. He interacts with many modern and ancient languages. The back-matter includes an extensive bibliography plus useful author and subject indices. In his appraisals, he displays a command of multiple domains, yet he demonstrates freedom to step back from theories when they do not enhance one’s understanding (e.g., pp. 198–99, 272). The book should certainly whet one’s appetite for what linguistics has to offer research on Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. Beyond describing advances in the study of OT languages, Noonan advances the study of them in so doing.

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Daniel C. Timmer. *Nahum*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 208 pp. £20.00/\$37.99.

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This series, described as “a discourse analysis of the Hebrew Bible,” has long attracted me, though this is regrettably the first volume I’ve examined. It won’t be the last. Although Bible commentaries used to focus on answering, What does it mean? and then perhaps, So what?, many have lately shown additional interest in the questions, How does it mean? and What does it do? Various linguistic and literary devices are shown to impact the readers in a certain way. The terms “rhetorical/discourse analysis” or, as series editor Daniel Block points out, “macrosyntax” are used. Purpose has taken its rightful place beside meaning, and rhetorical force beside message. Combined with biblical theology, this approach provides a clearer path to contemporary relevance. Block has charted a course for the series that promises to provide us with a solid foundation for biblical preaching and Christian living.



This volume on the little-known and less appreciated book of Nahum will abundantly repay study. It exhibits well the four necessary attributes of a great Bible commentary. First, it is based on competent, independent analysis of the original language text, using the latest linguistic resources, and drawing from the best in scholarly research (note especially the reliance on textlinguistics from such authors as Buth and van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze). Timmer also shows not only how the parts contribute to the whole, but also how the text’s grammar and syntax create meaning. The commentators he cites most often are Spronk, Fabry, Christenson, Longman, and Roberts, although he draws from most other major recent works on Nahum.

Second, Nahum’s message is shown to fit the original historical and cultural setting so far as it can be known. Timmer shows particular expertise in this area. Many recently published Assyrian inscriptions are quoted or cited to provide religious-political background to better understand Nahum’s message. They show Nahum’s familiarity with and use of Assyrian propaganda to provide hope and comfort to his true Judean audience (e.g., the flood motif in 2:7[6] and the lion metaphor in 2:12–14[11–13]).

Third, Nahum is interpreted holistically. First, Timmer shows how each part contributes to forming the message and achieving the purpose of the whole. Most important, he shows how the narrowness of God’s judgment against Assyria and deliverance of Judah in most of the book emerges from God’s eventual universal judgment prophesied in 1:2–8. Although universal guilt is assumed there, so is the possibility of anyone finding refuge by trusting in Yahweh’s goodness (1:7). Timmer also integrates the book into its canonical context, relating it to the theological concepts found both in earlier and in later books, including the NT, thus where it fits in the divine plan of redemption. Since God’s redemption is ongoing, this means explaining the book’s ongoing relevance. For example, he shows how Nahum contrasts the characteristics of those who are reconciled to God and those who are not. He also notes that the abuses of Assyrian imperialism are with us today. Finally, he argues that Christian Christocentrism parallels Nahum’s message. On the issue of Nahum’s place in the Twelve, Timmer cautions against discounting the reading of each book’s “historical setting and unique perspective” (p. 56). A comparison between Jonah and Nahum, for example, must recognize that Jonah is set during a time of Assyrian unrest, while Nahum, about a hundred years later, shows Assyria “as strong as ever and so much less inclined to repent” (p. 57).

Fourth, the commentary displays a tone of humility: it does not claim more than the evidence allows and shows respect for alternative views. Timmer does an excellent job of supporting his interpretations with the evidence rather than engaging in distracting polemics against the views of others. I appreciate the many charts, especially laying out the Hebrew clauses in each section with a literal translation, showing how the clauses relate to each other and how the analysis emerges into an exegetical outline.

The weaknesses of this work are few but must be acknowledged. For example, although Timmer helpfully cites several foreign-language works inaccessible to many readers, he appears to ignore some older works such as commentaries by O. Palmer Robertson and Walter A. Maier, and along with them the fact that “the great city of Nineveh” (Jon 3:2) was lost until the mid-nineteenth century (W. A. Maier, *The Book of Nahum* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959], 278). Also, a few times a statement in the text is redundantly found in a footnote. More importantly, the irony in the lion motif of 2:11–13 [Heb 2:12–14] is insufficiently recognized. To explain the motif’s use, Timmer cites many examples of Neo-Assyrian kings, especially Nahum’s contemporary Ashurbanipal, portraying themselves as lion hunters (pp. 139–40). Nahum, however, portrays Yahweh as the lion hunter and Assyria as a pride of lions. Although the image of a raging lion is used of other Assyrian rulers, Ashurbanipal is especially known for his royal lion hunts, as Gordon Johnston has noted (“Nahum’s Rhetorical Allusions to the New-Assyrian Lion Motif,” *BSac* 158 [2001]: 305). Thus, Nahum shows Ashurbanipal the lion killer being killed like a lion by Yahweh. Although Timmer mentions Johnston’s article (p. 143), he downplays the irony.

Despite minor weaknesses, this will be the first commentary on Nahum I turn to in my continuing study of this important book.

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## — NEW TESTAMENT —

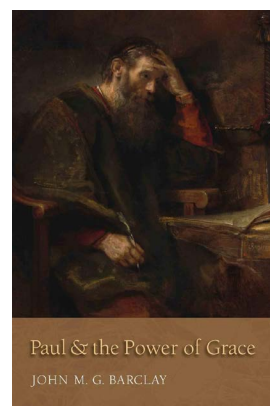
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John M. G. Barclay. *Paul and the Power of Grace*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. xvii + 159 pp. £15.74/\$22.00.

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The first nine chapters of *Paul and the Power of Grace* provide readers with a significantly shorter presentation of the main arguments found in Barclay’s previous work, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). While this new, shorter work is meant to be a popular level version that distills the main findings of the larger work for a wider audience, Barclay does expand on the original in chapters 10 through 13. The main expansion is that Barclay begins to explore other letters of Paul in addition to Galatians and Romans. All in all, this work is a valuable resource as an entry level introduction for those who have not read *Paul and the Gift* and as a refresher with some added material for those who have.

*Paul and the Power of Grace* is a study of the concept of grace in Paul that places the theological notion of grace within the anthropological category of gift. By “gift” Barclay



means “the sphere of voluntary, personal relations characterized by goodwill in the giving of a benefit or favor, which generally elicits some form of reciprocal return that is necessary for the continuation of the relationship” (p. 2). Because Paul views God’s action in Christ to the world as a gift, Barclay wants to determine what *kind* of gift is the Christ-gift.

To do this, Barclay develops a taxonomy of six possible perfections of grace. The notion of “perfections” refers to the tendency to draw a concept out to an endpoint or extreme for definitional clarity (pp. 12–13). Barclay’s six perfections of grace are:

- *Superabundance*: The supreme scale, lavishness, or permanence of the gift;
- *Singularity*: The attitude of the giver as marked solely and purely by benevolence;
- *Priority*: The timing of the gift before the recipient’s initiative;
- *Incongruity*: the distribution of the gift without regard to the worth of the recipient;
- *Efficacy*: The impact of the gift on the nature or agency of the recipient;
- *Non-circularity*: The escape of the gift from an ongoing cycle of reciprocity. (*Paul and the Gift*, 185–86).

This taxonomy, laid out in more detail on pp. 13–17, has incredible explanatory power. Not only can it help illuminate Paul’s own theology of grace, it can also help “clarify some of the major disagreements on the topic of grace in the course of Christian theology” (p. 17).

After a quick examination of the various expressions of grace in the writings of some of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries (pp. 24–37), Barclay begins the main part of his study, an examination of the letters of Galatians (pp. 38–74) and Romans (pp. 75–113). While making many exegetical decisions along the way—for instance, Barclay argues that “works of the Law” refer to observance of the Mosaic Law, he takes a forensic view of justification, and he argues for the objective genitive of πίστις Χριστοῦ (p. 48)—ultimately Barclay argues that the central conviction of Paul’s theology of grace is that the Christ gift, “the definitive act of divine grace” (p. 40), was an incongruous gift; the gift was given without regard to the worth of the recipient. Divine benevolence, however, does not leave recipients how it found them. On the contrary, grace works to transform unworthy recipients into fitting beneficiaries, even if it never fully accomplishes this transformation in this life.

In Barclay’s new material in *Paul and the Power of Grace*, he argues that incongruity, rather than being one theme among many in Paul, is “the structure or pattern of the leading ideas in Paul, what we might call the grammar of his theology” (p. 114). Barclay, therefore, expands his argument to the other undisputed Pauline letters. This incongruous grace of God, which brings with it strong expectations (i.e., it is unconditioned but not unconditional), also works to create communities of believers that then show the grace of God to one another and to outsiders.

Before concluding with some practical present-day applications of this understanding of grace (pp. 149–59), Barclay situates his “grace perspective” on Paul in relation to other perspectives. This includes demonstrating the similarities and differences between his view and the Augustinian/Protestant perspectives (pp. 138–41), Catholic perspectives (pp. 141–43), the New Perspective (pp. 143–45), and the Paul Within Judaism perspective (pp. 145–48).

Barclay makes a significant and helpful contribution to the world of Pauline theology. His taxonomy should help move the conversation forward from entrenched debates that are the result of using the same language but meaning different things. This is particularly helpful in showing the differences between the New and Old perspectives on Paul. Even though *Paul and the Power of Grace* is around 423 pages shorter than the fuller treatment, this new work still provides profound insight into Paul's theology of grace. Most issues with the work come in the details. For instance, Barclay does not hold to the Pauline authorship of certain letters. This will impact his view of grace in Paul because his corpus of letters is now limited. He also makes vague and potentially troubling comments regarding gender and sexuality in Paul (pp. 152–53). Finally, Barclay seems to downplay the efficacy and priority of grace, particularly in Romans. These details aside, however, *Paul and the Power of Grace* is a thoughtful, helpful, and accessible introduction to the conversation.

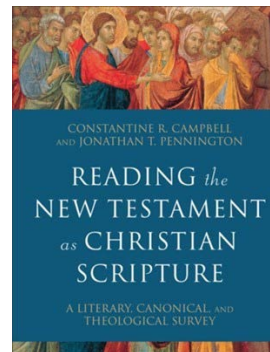
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Constantine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington. *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xii + 416 pp. £39.99/\$54.99.

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Those of us who teach Old and New Testament introductions at evangelical institutions have long hoped for a textbook that covers not only the historical and literary features of the text but also its theological message and canonical shape. While there are many useful OT and NT introductions on the market, and while each of these in its own way capably familiarizes the reader with the background, text, and themes of the biblical books, none until now has also incorporated to such a degree the theological nature and message of the testaments as a whole and the books which comprise them. Campbell and Pennington's *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture* should thus supplant other NT intros, because it combines the best of what is included in its predecessors with material that fills a serious lacuna.



The authors begin by introducing the reader to the concept of the NT as Christian Scripture. In this initial chapter, Campbell and Pennington explore what it means to read the NT as a disciple of the Triune God, the God who has made himself known in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is not to preclude non-Christians from reading the NT beneficially or with understanding; on the contrary, the authors clearly state that “anyone can read the New Testament” (p. 4). They are also clear, however, that “to read the New Testament as Christian Scripture is to read it so as to become conformed to the image of Christ himself, imitating the apostles, who themselves were imitating/following Jesus (John 13:12–15; 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Pet 2:21). Anything less than this transformative pilgrimage is less than a Christian reading of the New Testament” (p. 4). They end this first chapter by exploring what it means to read the NT as the second part of one book alongside the OT, why the term “New” is applied to the second testament, and why the word “Scripture” is used to describe its contents. Finally, the authors give a “lay of the land”

for the rest of the book, noting that each chapter is intended primarily to help students “thoughtfully read the text of Scripture themselves” (p. 9), includes bolded terms that are included in a glossary, and uses different “sidebars” to give students more information in five categories: historical matters, literary notes, theological issues, canonical connections, and reception history.

The authors also include introductory chapters on the NT as a book (concerning matters of canon, textual transmission, and translation), the world around the NT (concerning the Jewish, Greco-Roman, and early Christian contexts), and Jesus’s life and teaching. In addition to these “stage setting” chapters, there are also chapters on the fourfold Gospel book, Paul’s life and teaching, and reading the NT as Christian Scripture in the 21st century. Most of the book, however, simply consists of chapters on individual books or, in some cases (e.g. 1–2 Timothy and Titus, 1–3 John), sets of books.

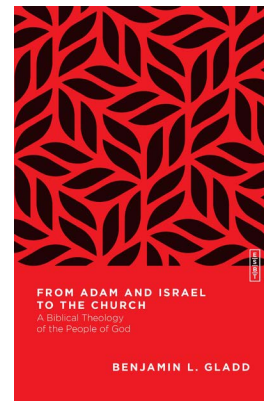
Each chapter contains three sections: orientation, exploration, and implementation. Most space by far is devoted to the middle section, in which the authors introduce students to key themes and teachings of each book, and also direct students to read certain passages of the book related to those themes and teachings. Background issues like authorship and date are still covered under the “Orientation” section, and the authors make sure to connect each book to today in the “Implementation” section, but, as they stated in the beginning, Campbell and Pennington really do want to focus on helping students read the text. This is evident in the way the chapters are organized and also in how much time they spend in the “Exploration” sections.

As far as NT introductions go, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture* ought to be at the top of every professor’s list. For those who teach NT survey, Campbell and Pennington hit all the right marks with respect to introductory issues; in other words, they capably introduce students to historical matters and come to what we might call theologically conservative conclusions regarding issues of authorship, date, and the like. But they do not stop here, or only cursorily survey the literary themes of the NT books, but instead offer something new: a theological primer on the NT that situates the reader in the context of Christ’s church throughout space and time. Helping students to read the NT not only to mine its historical background or to see its literary shape but also and ultimately to understand its theological teaching and to be transformed by its message ought to be our goal in evangelical institutions. Campbell and Pennington have provided a path for just that kind of course: one which teaches students to read the NT not just for information but transformation, not just in its historical and literary contexts but in the context of the faith once delivered to the saints.

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Benjamin L. Gladd. *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*. Essential Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019. xiv + 182 pp. £16.99/\$22.00.

With this book Ben Gladd, Associate Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminar in Jackson, Mississippi, puts in his debt those scholars who care about the church and believe that it needs more, rather than less theology. He offers a compelling biblical ecclesiology that is accessible without being shallow. His approach combines two story lines, one in the Reformed tradition that emphasizes the continuity between Adam, Israel and the Messiah Jesus, in which the last of these fulfills what the former two in turn left undone, and a more novel approach that weaves the traditional offices of the Messiah—King, Priest, and Prophet—into this narrative. Gladd starts with the creation and fall of Adam (chs. 1–2), shows how the story of Israel parallels this creation and fall (ch. 3), delineates the hope of Israel’s restoration in the “latter days” (ch. 4), demonstrates how Jesus fulfills this hope as Israel’s ultimate king, priest, and prophet (chs. 5–7), and finally articulates the church’s role as the new Israel that carries out these offices on Christ’s behalf (chs. 8–10). Reflections on “the Church in the New Creation” (ch. 11) and “Concluding Practical Reflections” (ch. 12) round out the volume.



The great strength of Gladd’s book is that it shows how Scripture tells a coherent story that grounds the Church’s identity and facilitates her understanding of her eschatological purpose, though I wish he had highlighted more clearly how this biblical narrative motivates her mission in the world. As they stand, the practical reflections seem more tacked on than educed from the theology, though this may simply reflect the fact that they are kept—consciously, I’m sure—very concise.

From a methodological standpoint, the book raises questions not only for Gladd but for all those who recently have begun propagating a robust temple theology. There is perhaps much to be gained from the insight that heaven serves as a template for the tabernacle/temple, but that does not mean that the reverse is true. The author of the Book of Jubilees virtually equated the one with the other, positing, for example, that purity laws were observed in Eden (Jub. 3:8–14), and Gladd seems susceptible to the same siren song. For my part, I find no basis in the text of Genesis 1–3 for his notion that there were three levels of holiness in Paradise, corresponding to the temple’s outer courts, holy place, and holy of holies. Rather, like the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22, there seems to be an inside, which is holy, and an outside, which isn’t. States of perfection have, it would seem, no need for postlapsarian gradations of temple purity.

I am not sure why they would require a prophetic office either. Gladd assigns one both to Adam and to believers in the final state, but there is no evidence for this in the relevant biblical texts, and it ignores a crucial element of the new covenant: “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord” (Jer 31:34 NRSV). Where perfect fellowship exists between God and human beings, there would seem to be little need for a prophetically mediated proclamation of God’s word.

Finally, I find Gladd’s exposition of image theology unconvincing. He often, though not exclusively, refers to Adam and Eve as “God’s image” (e.g., p. 12). On the other hand, he repeatedly speaks of Christ as being “in the image” of God (pp. 87–89). He is not alone in overlooking the fact that this turns biblical usage on its head. Neither Genesis 1:26–27 nor Genesis 5:1 nor Genesis 9:6 says that man “is” the image

of God, but only that he is created “in” or “according to” God’s image. (Only 1 Cor 11:7 maintains that “the man is the image of God,” but that is *in contrast* to the woman; something else is going on there.) And Paul never says that Christ is “in” the image of God, but only that he “is” that image (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). That is the reason I think Christian Stettler is right when he posits that the correct background for image Christology is not Genesis 1–2, but Ezekiel 1:28, which describes the Shekinah-Glory as God’s image (cf. Joel White, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Kolosser*, HTA [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2018], 118–20). Careful attention to the nuanced language of both Genesis and Paul would bolster Gladd’s conviction that “God fashioned the first Adam in the garden after the preincarnate Christ” (p. 88) and forestall the impression that he thinks the opposite is the case.

One can discern a common tendency behind the weaknesses I perceive in Gladd’s otherwise helpful study: a blurring of the distinction between template and derivative. In biblical theology at least, features of the former, which exhibit perfection, cannot be merely deduced from the latter, which do not. Postlapsarian realities such as Israel and the temple do not simply mirror life in the garden or the New Jerusalem. They are modified in important ways to point to the need for the redemptive work of Jesus, the true Messiah of Israel and the Son of God.

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Michael J. Gorman. *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul’s Theology and Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. xxiv + 294 pp. £26.99/\$30.00.

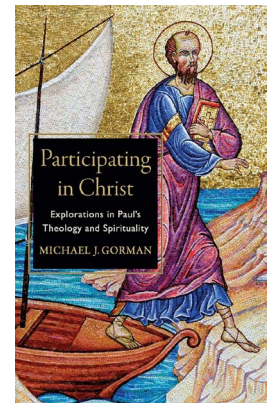
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To adapt a Lukan parable, at a table of Pauline scholars Michael Gorman might be the most likely recipient of those gospel words, “Friend, move up here to a better place” (Luke 14:10 NET). As a former student of Dr. Gorman’s I can affirm that he pursues his scholarship with commendable humility and that his work is worthy of greater exaltation.

Gorman’s most recent publication endeavors to “expand, deepen, or reiterate” (p. xxiii) arguments and themes that he has explored for much of the last two decades. Of special note in his prefatory remarks is his designation of 2 Corinthians as the “highlighted letter” (p. xxiii) of the volume. The book is divided into two parts “Paul and Participation” (part 1) and “Paul and Participation Today” (part 2). The lion’s share of the book is allocated to part one (9 of the 11 chapters).

The introductory chapter, which takes the form of thirteen propositions, gives readers a framework for what follows in the book. Here, Gorman effectively summarizes much of his prior work on Paul and participation; those looking for a primer on the theology of Michael Gorman need look no further. Chapter 2 then attends to the cross-shaped nature of Paul’s thoughts about God, humanity, and the church.

For this reviewer chapter 3 is the gem of the work. Here Gorman adds further nuance to the idea of cruciformity that has been such an important part of his scholarship. This chapter is an irenic response to critiques of what some have thought to be a neglect of the resurrection in Gorman’s thought.



Gorman argues that cruciformity should be retained as the foundational concept in Paul's picture of the Christian life, but addends this claim with suggestions that the term can be appropriately prefixed as "resurrectional cruciformity" or "resurrection suffused cruciformity" (p. 74). The argument here is paradoxical and memorably depicted in paschal imagery, "To be in Christ is to embody continuously and simultaneously Good Friday and Easter" (p. 74).

Chapter 4 tries to address the "translational conundrum" (p. 77) of Philippians 2:5 by offering the following rendering: "Cultivate this mindset—this way of thinking, acting, and feeling—in your community, which is in fact a community in the Messiah Jesus" (p. 93). This result is achieved via a meticulous engagement with the relevant debates.

Chapters 6–8 are interconnected discussions of Pauline justification. They argue, in sum, that "justification, according to Paul, is both participatory and transformative—so transformative that the apostle describes it as resurrection to new life" (p. 115). It is at this point that the head nods coming from evangelical readers, likely frequent up to this point of the book, may come to a halt. In his readings of Galatians 2:15–21 (ch. 6), 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 (ch. 7), and Romans (ch. 8) Gorman seems to cut against imputed righteousness readings of Paul. His interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:21 is representative in this regard. Gorman reads the righteousness of God in this text as a "human righteousness," i.e., as referring to the transformation of believers into people who are actually righteous (pp. 171–72). He also seeks to distance himself from readings of Romans 4 that present Abraham as "fictitiously considered just or righteous" (p. 203). He further comments, "Paul is probably implying—to the chagrin of some interpreters—that Abraham's faith consisted of faithfulness as well as belief or trust" (p. 201).

Despite the unease with which some will digest these justification chapters, most will find that the argument has critiqued simplistic Protestant readings more than those offered by more nuanced expositors. Gorman is careful to point out that he is not denying forensic elements of justification and he cites approvingly the readings of 2 Corinthians 5:21 offered by the likes of Mark Seifrid and George Guthrie. Even in the places where evangelicals will ultimately diverge from Gorman, they will find the deep engagement with Scripture in these chapters compelling.

Chapter 9 zooms in exclusively on 2 Corinthians and gives special focus to the economic theology of 2 Corinthians 8–9.

The final two chapters (part 2) conclude the book on practical notes. Chapter 10 takes the form of an imaginative letter from Paul to the contemporary church in North America (this, Gorman notes, was styled after Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermon series "Paul's Letter to American Christians"). In addition to being theologically and practically illuminating, Gorman's letter is especially winsome as it has his imaginary Paul making reference to modern classics like John Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, trans. B. Green and R. Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). The book then ends with chapter 11's series of reflections on what it means to preach the resurrection today.

Gorman traces clearer lines than most from Jesus the Messiah to spirituality, discipleship, ecclesiology, and missiology. *Participating in Christ* displays his remarkably coherent—and Christological—exegesis of Paul. Certain readers, not least evangelical Protestants, will dispute some of the ways his lines of thinking move, but I suspect that most readers of this work will appreciate the consistency of Gorman's thought and its grounding in Scripture. Readers will also appreciate the breadth of questions (both

theological and practical) to which this work contributes. Gorman is an important voice at the Pauline table and readers of this text will be edified by this, his latest offering, to the academy and the church.

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Chris Keith, Helen K. Bond, Christine Jacobi, and Jens Schröter, eds. *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*. 3 vols. London: T&T Clark, 2019. £450.00/\$545.00.

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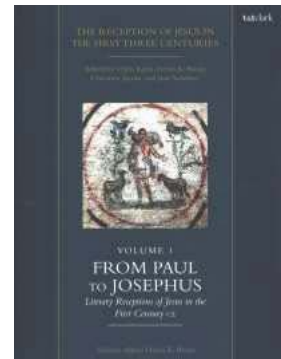
The publication of this three-volume set is an indisputable feat of scholarship. The aim of the editors is simple yet stunning: to describe and discuss the myriad of sources from the first three centuries—canonical and non-canonical, literary and visual, Christian and non-Christian—that preserve and present the influence of the person and/or work of Jesus.

The scope of this project is hard to grasp—both figuratively and literally. To encompass the vast amount of material from this time frame, the editors assemble eighty-two contributions from recognized scholars around the world. Just to provide a small taste of the content, chapters address the individual books (or small sub-units) of the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers (e.g., 1 Clement, the Didache, and Polycarp), apocryphal Gospels (e.g., the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter), heretics (e.g., Marcion and Valentinian Gnosticism), the earliest Christian apologists (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen), skeptics or opponents of Christianity (e.g., Pliny, Celsus, and Suetonius), pictorial representations (e.g., the cross symbol, the staurogram, and the fish symbol), liturgical rites (baptism and the Eucharist), and even ancient graffiti (e.g., the Alexamenos Graffito).

However, what makes this set unique is not simply its immensity but also its distinctive methodology. As implied by the title, the work as a whole approaches its subject from the vantage point of “reception history” (sometimes called *Wirkungsgeschichte* or “history of effect”). In an engaging introductory essay, the editors define the term: “[Reception history] emphasizes the *impact* of prior knowledge, understanding, and tradition upon a given interpreter, and thus sees any given interpretation of a text as a product of a mixture of what the interpreter has inherited from the past and the present circumstances from which he or she receives that past” (1:xv; emphasis original).

Put another way, the toppling of a domino can start a chain reaction, causing other dominoes to fall as well. While the tools of historical criticism have traditionally isolated and examined the initial domino—i.e., individual bits of tradition—reception history carefully observes the cascade effect, noting how dominoes impact one other and the intricate patterns that result. In this case, the initial domino is Jesus of Nazareth, while the cascade effect is the vast array of literary and non-literary representations stemming from his ministry, death, and resurrection. The editors thus distinguish their project from yet another quest for the historical Jesus. Their goal is the inverse of Jesus’s questions to his disciples in Mark 8:27–29. Rather than answering, “Who do you say that I am?” they focus their attention on Jesus’s first question: “Who do people say that I am?”

The chapters are arranged roughly in chronological order across each volume, and each chapter is relatively easy to follow due to the use of a standard four-point format. Each chapter begins with



an introduction addressing historical matters, followed by a description of how Jesus is distinctively represented in the particular source (the “portrayal of Jesus”). The author then moves to consider the “reception of Jesus,” analyzing how the source’s representation of Jesus reflects “the hermeneutical reshaping of inherited tradition” (1:xxv). Each chapter closes with a helpful concluding summary.

I cannot hope to canvas adequately a reference work of this magnitude within the confines of a short review. In what follows, I briefly summarize a sample chapter to illustrate the method, then I conclude with a short discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the set.

Chris Keith examines how Jesus is represented in the story of the woman caught in adultery (the *pericope adulterae*), usually found in English Bibles in John 7:53–8:11 (1:197–208). The text-critical “problem” of the *pericope adulterae* is well-known—the passage almost certainly was not original to John’s Gospel, but was added at a later date, probably because its portrayal of Jesus coheres so well with the testimony of the Gospels. As such, the story provides a fascinating glimpse into how some of the earliest readers of the Gospels perceived Jesus.

In the introductory section of his essay, Keith traces the history of the *pericope adulterae* in the manuscript tradition of the Gospels and in the writings of the church fathers. After establishing a relatively early timeframe (perhaps 150–250 CE) for the inclusion of the passage, Keith investigates the portrayal of Jesus in the details of the story itself and argues that “the Jewish leaders are challenging Jesus to challenge Moses” (1:201). Will Jesus minimize Moses by refuting the requirements of the Torah, or will he scuttle his status as “a friend of sinners”? Jesus’s response to this dilemma is intriguing. Rather than answering, he sits and writes in the dirt. Only then does he stand and respond that the person without sin should cast the first stone. Keith points out that there are probably literary allusions being made here to the instructions in Deuteronomy 13:9 and 17:7 to stone idolaters. “By means of such narrativization, all ancient Israel—its leaders and its people—symbolically stands ready to pummel the woman with stones” (1:201).

In the third section, Keith examines “the reception of Jesus”—how the author of the *pericope adulterae* takes prior Jesus traditions and reworks them. Keith notes the similarities between this story and other narratives, especially from the synoptic Gospels, that portray Jesus as being in a battle over interpretation of the Torah with the Jewish religious experts (1:202). Keith also points out that this story contains a link with other Johannine traditions, specifically John 7 and the question of Jesus’s literacy (1:204). Finally, Keith highlights a juxtaposition of rare Greek words in John 8:6 and 8:8, tracing their usage back to Exodus 32:15 and the giving of the Law on Sinai. Keith argues that the author intends for Jesus’s actions to be read “against the narrative background of Moses, God, and the Decalogue,” such that Jesus “stands in parallel to God the law-giver rather than Moses the law-receiver” (1:206–7). Keith concludes the chapter by gesturing toward the broader implications for our view of John’s earliest readers.

The strengths of this reference work are obvious. Within the covers of these tomes lies a vast, near-egregious wealth of historical and thematic data for the careful and discerning student. The chapters are written by top-notch scholars and contain (generally) up-to-date discussions of each source. What’s more, the methodology of reception history represents a refreshing change from the search for the historical Jesus based on somewhat arbitrary criteria of authenticity. Rather than trying to get behind the text to divine the truth from the presumably fictional additions of later ecclesiastical communities, the respective authors focus on the sources themselves (1:xix).

However, one problematic feature of this reference work should be mentioned as well: the unevenness of the chapters. This issue unfortunately seems to be endemic to large, edited works. Some chapters are stellar, such as that by Chris Keith above. Others, however, contain unhelpful or surprising interpretive decisions.

For example, Christine Jacobi's discussion of the Pauline reception of Jesus continues to repeat the tired line that by the time of Paul the term "christ" had lost any special significance and was used simply as a name for Jesus (1:20). This conclusion completely overlooks the influential work of Matthew Novenson (*Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], esp. 64–97) in overcoming the deadlock over whether "christ" is a name or a title. Given that Novenson's monograph is not new, its absence from her discussion is surprising.

Similarly, Sandra Huebenthal's discussion of names and titles for Jesus in her chapter on the Gospel of Mark is disappointing, for she sees the titles ascribed to Jesus in the text as competitive portrayals of Jesus's identity. As a result, one finds statements such as, "The way the narrator guides the audience through the text clearly indicates that while the Son of David-motif applied to Jesus might be a current tradition, it still is a mistaken concept" (1:57).

Lastly, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr's chapter on James surprisingly denies that the letter contains any allusions to Jesus tradition, instead arguing that "the burden of proof is with those who assert that the author *wanted* to refer to the Jesus tradition at all" (1:273, emphasis original). Not only does this decision reject the overwhelming consensus of the interpretive tradition, but it has the additional effect of forcing Niebuhr to put all his reception-historical eggs in one basket. James's conception of Jesus has to be pinned entirely on the description of Jesus found in James 1:1 (Niebuhr seems to follow Dale Allison in believing that the reference to Jesus in 2:1 is a later interpolation).

The problem of unevenness notwithstanding, this landmark set will serve students of the New Testament and early Christianity well for years to come.

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Eric C. Moore. *Claiming Places: Reading Acts through the Lens of Ancient Colonization*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2/525. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020. xiii + 270 pp. £79.23/\$139.35.

This thoughtful and readable study has enriched my understanding of the cultural world(s) in which Luke wrote, and illuminates Acts by its comparison with ancient accounts of colonization. It is a revised version of a PhD dissertation supervised by Carl Holladay at Emory University. It is very well organised and clearly written.

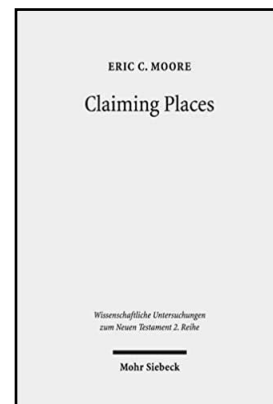
Dr Moore sets the scene (Introduction) by introducing colonization as a framework for reading Acts. By “colonization” he means “the establishment of new cities in the ancient Mediterranean world” (p. 2). He is not suggesting that this framework was consciously in Luke’s mind as he composed Acts; rather, he is looking at Acts as “a story about community replication” (p. 1), and thus reads Acts in conversation with the ancient *topos* of community or civic origins. He argues (cogently, I think) that this is helpful to understanding the cultural expectations which readers/hearers might bring to Acts.

He provides the customary literature review to locate his work (ch. 1), discussing works on the genre of (Luke-)Acts and the geography of the double-work, before turning to studies of ancient cult/community formation across the Greek world, in Paul, and in Acts. He reiterates that his focus is not on genre or geography, but on reading Acts through the lens of colonization.

A major study of colonization follows (ch. 2, 51 pp.), first identifying three major motifs found in colonization stories: the community’s origins, with the aim of legitimizing the community; divine sanction for the foundation of the community, frequently through oracles; and the founder(s) of the community, who act with a divine calling, and frequently are somewhat surprised at that calling. Dr Moore then works carefully through a series of case studies during the archaic period (Gela, Rhegion, Croton, Syracuse, Cyrene), the classical period (Amphipolis, Epidamnus, both colonies of Thracian Chersonese), and the Hellenistic period (Egyptian Alexandria, and cities in Syria and Anatolia founded by Seleucus Nicator), before turning to the colonization/foundation of Rome itself. He shows well how his three motifs are seen across this wide historical period, and in different geographical settings.

The rest of the book applies this analysis of colonization to reading Acts, arguing throughout that the three major motifs are seen in sections of Acts that focus on new communities of believers. Acts 1–5 is his first focus (ch. 3), identifying Jesus himself as *the* founder of the believing community in Jerusalem, and the apostles as further founding figures (pp. 88–92), the origins of the community in Jerusalem (pp. 92–93), and the work of the Holy Spirit, announced by Jesus (1:4–8), as providing divine sanction for the community (pp. 93–97). A substantial discussion of the list of nations in 2:9–11 concludes that this maps a representative and wide colonizing claim (pp. 97–105). The work of the apostles as founding figures then develops in Acts 3–5, supported by divine sanction through the Spirit’s work in doing wonders and signs (e.g., 4:31; 5:12), and the “institution” of sharing possessions demonstrates the fruitfulness of the colonization process.

The foundation of the believing community in Syrian Antioch is the focus of Dr Moore’s next study (ch. 4, looking at 11:19–30; 13:1–2; 15:1–35). After a helpful sketch of Antioch’s foundation and history, he argues that the Antioch assembly is presented as a colony from the Jerusalem community.



Its origins are in a crisis which leads to believers fleeing Jerusalem (11:19), and Dr Moore presents other accounts of colonization resulting from particular crises, and which also involve transfer of a cult to the new community. The latter is paralleled by the gospel proclamation in Antioch which leads to the planting of the believing community there (11:20). Strikingly, this new community is “mixed,” including Jewish and gentile believers, prefigured in Acts by Philip’s ministry in Samaria and with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Paul’s commission, which will lead to his involvement in Antioch (9:1–31; 11:25–26), and Peter’s encounter with Cornelius’s household (10:9–11:18). He notes Jerusalem’s oversight of this new community (11:22) and the response of the Antiochene believers to famine affecting the mother community in Jerusalem (11:27–30) as signs of the bond between the two groups. He goes on to consider how the Antioch community becomes a “mother city” for further colonization in sending Barnabas and Saul out as founders for new communities (13:2–3) with divine sanction through the Spirit’s words (13:2).

The final major chapter (ch. 5) considers the planting of the believing community of Pisidian Antioch, part of a “second wave” of colonization from Syrian Antioch (Acts 13–14). As with Syrian Antioch, Dr Moore provides a valuable sketch of the history and setting of Pisidian Antioch (pp. 170–78), and then focuses on Paul’s very substantial speech (13:16–41) and its consequences (13:42–52). He proposes that much of Paul’s language in reviewing Israel’s history is echoed in colonization accounts, but now with Jesus as savior as that history’s climax. The discussion of the speech is well done, and I shall return to much of the careful detail of his exegesis. The mixed community that is founded has divine sanction, for events were orchestrated by God, whose actions are at the heart of Paul’s speech and its results (13:16, 22, 23–37, 40, 47, 48, 52).

A brief conclusion summarizes Dr Moore’s finding, noting that the features of colonization which are paralleled in Acts have cultural significance, for they are about how communities “validated their identity” (p. 217). Specifically, his work highlights the major emphasis of Acts on “the replication of the Christian cult community” (p. 217), and foregrounds key *topoi* drawn from colonization accounts found in Acts: origins and their legitimation; divine sanction; and the role of founder(s). He observes that he could have taken the analysis further into Acts (and I suspect was limited by the constraints of a doctoral thesis from doing so); this could profitably be done by Dr Moore or another.

This is a fine book, which is lucidly written, clearly and persuasively argued, and which succeeds in illuminating Acts by the conversation with ancient colonization. Dr Moore has kept his argument within its bounds well and has put us in his debt by his careful work. Future study of mission and the believing communities in Acts simply must engage with this argument.

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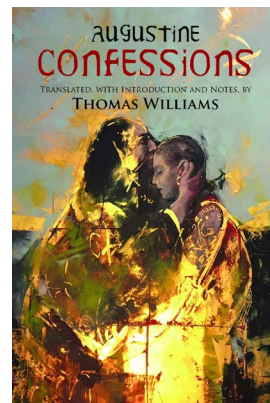
— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

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Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2019. 344 pp. £11.99/\$11.00.

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*Confessions* is considered to be one of the great works by Augustine of Hippo (354–430). While Augustine wrote many more influential treatises, sermons, and even letters, it is *Confessions* that is most associated with the North African theologian. It is one of his most studied works and continues to captivate readers of all stripes and dispositions. This newest translation of *Confessions* by Thomas Williams is a masterful work that beautifully captures Augustine’s thought and heart. Williams seeks to convey the philosophical nuance of Augustine’s thought, but in doing so, provides a translation that can be confidently used by students of any field, including the casual reader. Augustine’s autobiography is unique in that it reveals more about him than any other figure from antiquity that we possess. His story, however, is not the common biography akin to biographies found on display in airport bookstores. It is not an exclusive “tell-all” that provides every juicy detail of a wayward son turned saint. *Confessions* is, first and foremost, a prayer, a conversation between creature and Creator, wherein the author intentionally weaves the fabric of grace into the tapestry of his early life. In his journey to explore the deep recesses of the soul, Augustine set the course for much of Western theological and philosophical thought. Not bad for an extended life-story wrapped in the language of devotion and prayer!



Williams provides a helpful introduction to the life and thought of Augustine as it arises within the *Confessions*. This section is a welcomed discussion on intertextuality and a note on the essential passages of Scripture woven throughout the text. As Williams conveys, his translation speaks to the philosophical notions of Augustine, yet with the desire “to be as musical as possible” (p. xxx). Williams’s introductory remarks, however, remain brief as the goal of the text is to immerse readers in the *Confessions*. The text, likely composed around 395, may have been a defense against Donatist detractors who claimed that Augustine remained tied to his Manichean roots. Still, it is more likely that it was an exposition on the role of divine grace using himself as the subject. It is possible that the text served multiple purposes in the mind of Augustine. Whatever the rationale, the mysterious and glorious working of God’s grace in the life of Augustine remains a consistent theme. It is the story of a soul coming alive to the truth and beauty of God and finding its true rest and satisfaction in knowing God, and God knowing him.

Williams’s translation does not diminish the value of other modern translations. Evaluating a new translation of a pivotal text such as *Confessions* should shed light on the previous offerings. The multivolume work of James J. O’Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) is matchless in many ways, both in helping understand the background and context of *Confessions* but also in providing guideposts for subsequent translations. The translation by Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997) is great for new readers of *Confessions*. While the translation from F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006 [2nd ed.]) retains its value, Williams brings modern language to bear on the text. The “Thou shalt” of previous translations are smoothed away and replaced with modern vernacular. That said, some renderings, especially in translating the biblical references, are a bit too loose. This is a similar situation to Garry Wills’s translation (New York: Penguin, 2008), which renders Augustine and the

Scriptures with an acute eye to prose. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961) and Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) retain value for a much more straight-forward translation, but Williams combines a straight-forward approach with some more modern nuance in a readable form. Last, a 2014 addition to the Loeb Classical Library with a fresh translation of *Confessions* by Carolyn J. B. Hammond provides a useful diglot containing the Latin text. Hammond's translation renders a readable text that is smooth while also closely maintaining adherence to the Latin original. With these considerations, Williams gives readers a good mix of prose, modern language, and attention to the contours of Augustine's thought. The abundance of good translations of *Confessions* shouldn't confuse the reader, but rather confirm to the reader the importance of this essential text of Christian spirituality and theology.

What comes alive in this translation is not only solid English prose but the voice of the theologian who found his rest in God. Although this translation is geared more towards a philosophical understanding of Augustine, it captures the thought and life that has continued to impact Christian theology and spirituality for generations. It is a worthy translation for any use, be it in a classroom or personal reading. It will become my go-to translation for the *Confessions* for years to come. This does not negate the value of other excellent translations put forward in recent history, notably Chadwick (Oxford), Boulding (New City Press), or Hammond (Harvard University Press), among others. Williams does well to capture the thought of Augustine, knowing that it is multi-faceted. I am thankful for this new translation and commend it to both seasoned and amateur readers of Augustine.

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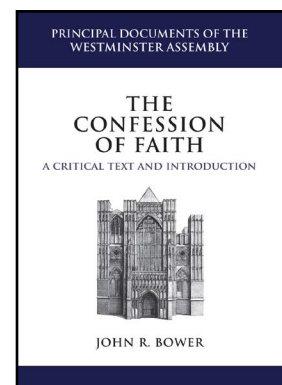
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John R. Bower, ed. *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction*. Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2020. xx + 416 pp. £31.99/\$40.00.

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Since Chad Van Dixhoorn edited *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), many have wished to glean from the rich deposit of scholarly insight available but have found the five volumes and their 3,200 pages unapproachable (or the \$1,215 price tag prohibitive). For them, John R. Bower's newest volume for the Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly is a much-welcomed addition. *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction* presents readers with a modern critical edition of the Westminster Assembly's Confession and fresh insights into the document's sources and editing. Bower provides 192 pages of scholarly introduction that narrate the process by which the "Learned and Godly" divines debated, compromised, and maneuvered during the tense period from 1643 to 1649 (p. 3).

Chapter 1 recounts the Assembly's original mandate to revise the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles in a path more amenable to Parliament's Puritan agenda. But after only a few months of revising the articles, Parliament interrupted the work and ordered an "entirely new documentary foundation" to unite the national churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland (p. 4). Chapter 2 describes the period between when the revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles was halted, and the work on the Confession of



Faith began in 1645. It was then the Westminster Assembly produced the Directory for Public Worship, which briefly replaced the Book of Common Prayer in the Church of England and Scottish Kirk, as well as a new Directory for Church Government. Bower notes the “awkward position” this unintentionally caused ministers, who needed to fence the Lord’s Supper without clear dogmatic standards to enforce. This dilemma forced the Assembly to produce a skeleton doctrinal formula until they could complete the full confession (p. 32). Bower also provides background on the Reformed confessional tradition that supported the work to create a new multinational Reformed confession. Bower demonstrates how the work relied heavily on John Legat’s *Harmony of Confessions* and the Irish Articles.

Chapters 3–6 treat, respectively, the Confession of Faith’s four main sections: The Plan of Redemption (WCF 1–9), the Application of Redemption (WCF 10–19), the Parameters of Service (WCF 20–24), and Serving the Church (WCF 25–33). These chapters provide the book’s primary value, condensing a treasury of research from *Minutes and Papers*. Bower provides the reader concise summaries of the Assembly’s drafting and revision process for each section. Readers will find it illuminating—and at times surprising—to learn which chapters and sections were passed with little fuss, what language was (or wasn’t) debated, for how long, and by whom. Concluding the introductory portion, chapter 7 discusses how the manuscript of the Confession was transcribed, approved, printed, and distributed. Chapters 8 and 9 give a brief methodological overview for the critical text which follows.

The center of the volume is a critical text of the Confession of Faith that should become the standard for years to come. After the critical text, Bower includes several illuminating side-by-side textual comparison tables. Following is a comparison of four texts: 1646p (Edition 1), which only includes the first 19 chapters, the Braye manuscript, 1646 (Edition 2), and 1647 (Edition 3). Next, we find a table comparing the order of the Westminster Confession with the Irish Articles, which serve as the closest predecessor. The volume concludes with the halted revisions of the Thirty-Nine Articles that launched the Assembly’s project.

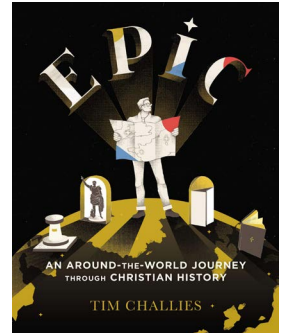
The research provided in this accessible and affordable volume will benefit anyone interested in the development of Reformed Confessionalism, seventeenth-century Puritan history, and Reformed Orthodoxy. For many, *The Confession of Faith* will provide a handy reference volume to consult. The lack of an abbreviations page seems to be a minor fault. Instead, the footnotes rely on the “hereafter abbreviated as” device, so non-specialist readers who dip in and out will have to hunt down the first instance. The margins are also annoyingly narrow for note-takers, and a timeline would have helped some of the chronology redirects. These quibbles aside, for those interested in learning how one of the most significant confessional texts in the English language was created, or those looking to have the new standard reference text, this volume (as for the rest in this ongoing series) deserves a place on your shelf.

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Tim Challies. *Epic: An Around-the-World Journey through Christian History*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 175 pp. £12.99/\$19.99.

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At a time when the COVID pandemic has limited world travel, Tim Challies's *Epic: An Around-the-World Journey through Christian History* provides readers with the kind of vicarious journey through church history that few men or women are privileged to experience even in ideal circumstances. Most popularly known for his blog ([www.challies.com](http://www.challies.com)), Challies has a broad audience in mind, as indicated by the video documentary that complements the book. *Epic's* focus is on "original, historical artifacts" that Challies believes are significant for lay Christian readers to have familiarity. Not intended as a professional historian's critical account of church history that relies on archaeological or archival research, the book nonetheless seeks to avoid items found in museums and monuments that postdate a person or event (p. 9).



In many ways, *Epic* is a 21st-century Protestant pilgrimage that is experientially and existentially significant for Challies, though not sacramental in the formal sense. The book is likewise pastoral, with exhortations and encouragements interwoven throughout its 33 short chapters. Totalling 175 pages, the text follows a chronological rather than geographical sequence that begins with Augustus of Prima Porta and ends with the YouVersion Bible App. *Epic's* brisk pace mirrors the author's travels around the world, which feature the frustrations of inaccessible sites and inevitable language barriers. The featured item of each respective chapter is embedded in one or more pages that contain background information and commentary by Challies himself.

Like most popular works of history presented from a Protestant perspective, little attention is given to the Medieval period. With the exception of the *Book of Kells* (9th century), no artifacts are mentioned between the 4th and the 15th centuries. If *Epic* is not a work of academic history, Challies does provide judicious historical judgments. In chapter 16, "William Brewster's Chest," the author resists any theocratic temptation, acknowledging that "it may be difficult to argue that America is or was a truly Christian nation" (p. 84).

In chapter 24, which focuses on the "Slave Bible," Challies comments that "it's a story that warns us of the dangers of compromising the message of the gospel to accommodate our sin ... a reminder that sinful humans can use good things—even the precious Word of God—to commit great evil" (p. 118). That a redacted Bible was commissioned in the 19th century to uphold chattel slavery is an uncomfortable but salutary lesson for contemporary Christians. In balancing the picture, Challies notes that William Wilberforce (p. 108–11) and David Livingstone (p. 125–29) actively opposed African slavery in their respective contexts.

Challies examines items from recognizable figures such as William Tyndale and John Calvin but also cites obscure examples. The 18th century Huguenot Marie Durand, who was imprisoned for nearly 40 years, is the focus of chapter 18 (p. 89–93). In addition to Durand, Challies features women such as Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–1790), who was an influential supporter of evangelicalism in Britain. The African American Congregationalist preacher Lemuel Haynes (1753–1833), later coined the "black Puritan," and the Methodist Josiah Henson (1789–1883), whose autobiography formed the basis for "Uncle Tom" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (p. 122–124) are both mentioned.

For global Christianity in the last century, Challies focuses on influential evangelists such as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts, noting the latter's role in the genesis of the prosperity gospel as a global phenomenon. In addition to missionaries Amy Carmichael (p. 130–34) and the five men martyred by the Huaorani tribesmen in 1956 (p. 156–60), Challies devotes space to the *Paapallacta Dam* in Ecuador, a hydroelectric project completed in 1971 whose energy enabled a radio ministry to flourish that has reached millions of hearers over 50 years (p. 147–50).

Because of succinct chapters, topical arrangements, and vivid images, *Epic* can be a helpful introduction to church history for teens. Culturally and theologically sensitive, the book nevertheless avoids the kind of detached false humility that can characterize modern discourse on Christian history. Like any journey, a traveler discovers what is good as well as bad. Whether a Christian will benefit from such knowledge depends on other considerations. Nonetheless, *Epic* behooves a reader to be faithful to Christ in the present, a time which, in Challies own words, is “filled with promise and possibility” (p. 167).

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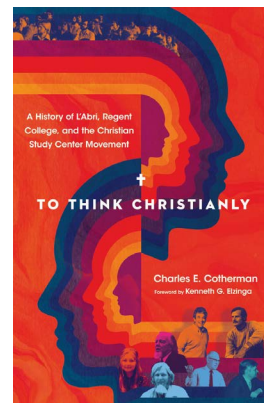
Charles E. Cotherman. *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. xv + 301 pp. £28.99/\$35.00.

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Over the past generation or so, scholars have written at length about the history of Christian higher education in America. The best-known works have focused upon the decline of Christian commitments at now-secular universities, though many have examined the stories of various institutions that have remained more or less faithful to their historic Christian identity. More recent years have witnessed the first scholarly studies of evangelical campus ministries, most notably Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru) and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Many of these works have proven to be of immense value to historians, theologians, academic administrators, and campus ministry leaders.

But a significant lacuna in this genre has been a scholarly study of the Christian Study Center movement. Christian Study Centers are ministries committed to intellectual discipleship that synthesizes evangelism, apologetics, spiritual formation, mentoring, and biblical worldview education. Christian Study Centers are normally adjacent to secular or non-sectarian institutions, are broadly evangelical in their identity, and often draw upon believing faculty members to help disciple students who are attracted to this ministry model. In *To Think Christianly*, Cotherman offers a narrative history of how the Christian Study Center movement gradually evolved into its present shape over the course of a generation.

Cotherman begins by retreading familiar territory: the history of L'Abri and the influence of Francis Schaeffer among evangelical baby boomers. Schaeffer's combination of apologetics and hospitality at L'Abri, along with his later status as an evangelical public intellectual, demonstrated the validity of a more cerebral and cosmopolitan approach to discipleship among collegians and graduate students. Among those inspired by Schaeffer's strategy (if not the personality cult that sometimes surrounded him) was



James Houston, an Oxford geologist turned spiritual formation pioneer who relocated to Vancouver to found Regent College in 1968. While L'Abri was more of a haven for spiritual seekers, Regent was founded as a lay ministry training institute attached to the University of Vancouver. While Regent eventually became a more traditional divinity school—much to Houston's chagrin—a combination of the L'Abri vision and the early Regent model appealed to many evangelicals in the 1970s and 1980s.

After establishing L'Abri and Regent as the fountainhead, Cotherman looks at four case studies that, to varying degrees, contributed to the Christian Study Center movement. In Washington DC, the C. S. Lewis Institute, modeled closely after Regent, was unable to establish long-term ties to a university, despite Houston's early involvement. It evolved into a think-tank that reinforced Christian worldview thinking among believers working in the nation's capital. The Ligonier Valley Study Center, modeled more after L'Abri, gradually evolved into a Reformed teaching ministry built around the personality and gifts of theologian R. C. Sproul. The ministry pioneered video teaching series and eventually closed its Pennsylvania retreat center and relocated to Orlando, Florida.

New College Berkley was the “edgiest” of the early proto study centers, situated near the center of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture in Southern California. Like Regent, with whom it shared some personnel, New College evolved into more of a traditional divinity school, albeit one that retained an emphasis on lay theological education imbued more overtly with the ethos of the emerging evangelical left. The Center for Christian Study at the University of Virginia (UVA) emerged out of an earlier evangelistic ministry and thrived because of its close ties to a flourishing Presbyterian church committed to university outreach. This fourth example, which included a full range of co-curricular activities aimed at cultivating intellectual discipleship at a deeply secular institution, became the model for most of the study centers launched from the 1990s onward.

The final chapter, which is necessarily more impressionistic because of its recent subject matter, looks at the emergence of other study centers inspired by the Center for Christian Study at UVA and the formation of the Consortium of Christian Study Centers in 2008. Indebted to the early vision of L'Abri and Regent, but influenced more recently by UVA professor James Davidson Hunter's “faithful presence” model of Christian cultural engagement, the ministries affiliated with the Consortium continue to promote intellectual discipleship in an increasingly hostile environment.

Overall, Cotherman does a fine job of offering a critical-but-appreciative history of the Christian Study Center movement. He makes a compelling case for the seminal influence of L'Abri and Regent and ably demonstrates how various ministries attempted to emulate elements of those two prime influencers before the Christian Study Center model became the one most easily replicated and exported. Though he is an insider as a product of the Center for Christian Study at UVA, Cotherman recognizes various weaknesses and shortcomings to the movement, including the tendency to be too personality-driven in earlier days and more recent failures to attract students from backgrounds that are non-white and less affluent. Later historians will likely want to spend more time evaluating how the movement compares with more traditional evangelical campus ministries and the conservative think-tank movement, each of which overlaps in some ways with Christian Study Centers.

Historians and campus ministry leaders will appreciate Cotherman's book because of the gap it fills in the literature related to evangelicals and higher education. Perhaps more important, some readers will

walk away inspired to establish Christian Study Centers and similar ministries dedicated to intellectual discipleship in increasingly anti-Christian academic environments. I pray the latter is the case.

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James Eglinton. *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xxiv + 450 pp. £32.99/\$44.99.

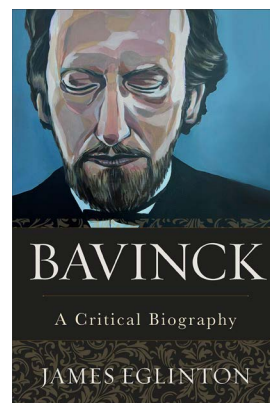
In *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*, University of Edinburgh theologian James Eglinton has given us a definitive biography of the fine Dutch theologian of a century ago. Herman Bavinck is now in the process of being freshly appreciated in light of the belated translation into English (2003–2008) of his 4 volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (2nd ed. 1906–1911).

The biography is justifiably entitled ‘critical’ for it takes into account five previous attempts at biographical treatment. Though of value (especially when the writers had first-hand knowledge of their subject), these volumes suffered from the limitation of either being produced too rapidly after Bavinck’s passing in 1921 or not taking into account a wide enough range of archival material. It is especially in this last respect that Eglinton has surpassed those who have come before him. In addition to mining the Bavinck archive now curated at Amsterdam’s Free University, he has made very effective use of personal papers and correspondence still in the possession of his subject’s descendants. Some earlier hasty judgments about Bavinck are overturned in this volume.

To the first adjective, “critical,” this reviewer would add a second: “empathetic.” Bavinck, the future accomplished theologian, raised some eyebrows when he discontinued his theological preparation for the ministry in his denomination’s Kampen seminary in favor of more challenging studies in the prestigious state-funded University of Leiden. Eglinton sensitively portrays the Bavinck family, originally hailing from Bentheim at the German border, as an example of a then-widespread upward social mobility. The father, Jan Bavinck, had initially been apprenticed to a wood-worker but entered the Reformed ministry after only rudimentary training. Eventually identifying with the separatist Reformed movement originating in the Netherlands in 1834 (the “Afscheiding”), able preacher Jan Bavinck was determined to gain for his children the kind of challenging education never available to him.

The early Afscheiding movement had been harassed and prosecuted for its refusal to abide within the national Reformed Church. But after constitutional reforms were introduced in 1848, there began a process by which these separatists moved haltingly into the cultural mainstream. Eglinton’s ecclesiastical background within Scotland furnishes him with the kind of intuition necessary to assess this process. The process yielded a theological graduate, Herman Bavinck, who represented a fusion of rugged Afscheiding conservative piety and a healthy determination to interact with modernity in the late 19th century. After a brief pastoral ministry at Franeker, Bavinck joined the Afscheiding theological faculty at Kampen in 1883. He was resolute in aiming at being orthodox, Reformed, *and* modern.

The reviewer has affirmed that the biography is both critical and empathetic. He would add that it also offers something of a “recalibration” of Bavinck’s significance, and in *two* respects. First, Eglinton



deserves credit for setting a clearer perspective on what Bavinck's relationship with Kuyper was and what it was not. Bavinck was *not* (as one contemporary chose to depict him) "Kuyper's henchman." An admirer of Kuyper, he was; a debtor to Kuyper also. But the relationship was not one of convex (Kuyper) and concave (Bavinck), neither as to temperament (with Kuyper being the master of the flamboyant gesture, Bavinck being the more measured and circumspect), nor social vision (Kuyper being the more triumphalist architect of societal transformation, the younger Bavinck taking far more seriously the ominous secularizing trends in western society), nor theological method (Kuyper sometimes staking out speculative theological positions which Bavinck found deeply problematic). We come away with the impression that what made Bavinck distinctive from Kuyper makes him a more useful theologian for us.

Second, Eglinton also clarifies for the reader the significance of a fresh orientation in Bavinck following on from the completion and revision of his massive *Reformed Dogmatics* in 1911. One earlier interpreter of Bavinck conveyed the impression that with this project behind him, Bavinck's dogmatic interest waned during the remainder of his career while he concentrated on questions of religious psychology, Christianity and culture, and the role of women in modern society. A more plausible understanding of his final period of productivity is that in the face of the de-Christianization of Western societies, Bavinck turned his attention to the advancing of the case for "mere Christianity" in a common front against unbelief. But this did not require him to back away from his *Dogmatics*.

This splendid biography, which I cannot commend too highly, does at the same time have limitations. For one, it presupposes a familiarity with and curiosity about the various strands of 19th century Dutch Protestant life beyond what an otherwise eager reader can bring to the task. Terms like Old Reformed, Revéil, Afscheiding, Doleantie—while familiar enough to this reviewer—will represent a "new world" for most who read and may leave readers bewildered. Several of these distinctions are of very weighty importance for the ongoing Reformed theological tradition beyond the Netherlands, and they deserved to be more fully explained.

A second reservation, rather like the first, is that this fine biography does not help us to grasp the wider significance of the story being told. We are told that Bavinck, like Kuyper before him, gave a series of Stone Lectures at Princeton (1908) and that Bavinck's successor, Valentijn Hepp, did the same in 1929. But we are not sufficiently helped to grasp what this meant, namely that by 1910 or 1920, the gravitational center of global confessional Reformed theology had shifted. This "center" had earlier been situated in Victorian Scotland and gradually recognized to exist at Princeton. But until the mid-20th century, that preeminent center of Reformed scholarship and energy had a Dutch address. And at the root of that theological momentum had stood Bavinck.

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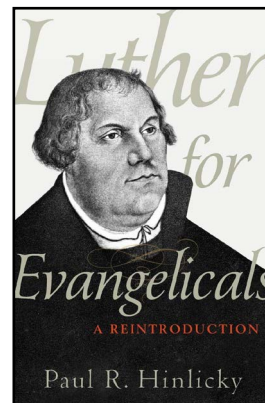
Paul R. Hinlicky. *Luther for Evangelicals: A Reintroduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 208 pp. £14.99/\$23.00.

Lutheran theologian Paul Hinlicky seeks to introduce “English-speaking evangelicals” to the thought of Martin Luther in *Luther for Evangelicals*. Hinlicky is not hostile to evangelicalism as he understands it but believes it can benefit from an encounter with Luther. He hopes this book will inspire people to read Luther himself and gain firsthand from the great reformer.

To define evangelicalism, Hinlicky draws on *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* edited by Gerald McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Molly Worthen’s *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Hinlicky believes that evangelicalism is ultimately defined by a shared experience of the new birth. If so, Luther’s understanding of the new birth can provide a way of understanding David Bebbington’s celebrated four traits of evangelicalism: conversion, Scripture, mission, and the cross. Hence, in the first half of the book, Hinlicky expounds Luther through these four lenses in as many chapters.

In chapter 1, Hinlicky contends that the first mark of evangelicalism, conversion, is for Luther the believer’s union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Hinlicky then expounds Luther’s thought on this, covering topics like faith, baptism, imputed righteousness, the Spirit’s work, and various misunderstandings of justification. Chapter 2 turns to Luther’s view of the Bible. Hinlicky believes evangelicalism is experiencing “a crisis of fundamentals” (p. 41), not least because of its adherence to inerrancy. So, Hinlicky focuses on Luther’s idea that the gospel is the key to interpreting all Scripture. Amidst the Bible’s diverse voices and even errors, Christ is the Bible’s fundamental treasure. Chapter 3 covers the topic of evangelization. Hinlicky does this via Luther’s *simul justus et peccator*, showing how it informs the gospel believers preach (including hope for future full liberation) and the lives Christians live (not perfect but not what we were). Hinlicky then focuses on the atonement in chapter 4, the last mark of evangelicalism. He holds that Luther understood the atonement according to the three motifs of satisfaction, liberation, and imitation. But Hinlicky emphasizes Luther’s “innovative (in the Western tradition) understanding” of the atonement as a mighty “duel” between life and death (p. 87).

In the second half of the book, Hinlicky turns to Luther’s *Large Catechism*. He notes that many accuse Luther of being an occasional writer whose thought was unsystematic. However, Hinlicky believes Luther’s ideas do have “a theological coherence,” particularly seen in the *Large Catechism*. So, chapter 5 orients the reader to the genre of catechism, which teaches young believers the fundamentals of Christianity. Hinlicky points out that Luther innovated this tradition by reordering the three elements of the catechism according to his Law-Gospel emphasis: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Chapter 6 covers Luther’s exposition of the Decalogue, explaining why he excluded its prologue as well as what these commandments now mean for believers in light of Christ’s coming. In chapter 7, Hinlicky explicates Luther’s presentation of the Apostles’ Creed in its three articles concerning Father, Son, and Spirit. It enables believers to begin fulfilling the Decalogue as it presents the one Father-Creator whose figure terrifies, except for the redemption provided by the Son, which is applied by the Spirit to produce “little Christs” who form the church, the mother which “bears every believer by the Word of God” (p. 132). Finally, chapter 8 unpacks Luther’s vision for



the Christian life as “new obedience” (p. 135), which is the freedom to love. Hinlicky believes various Lutheran theologians have misconstrued Luther on this point by separating rather than distinguishing Law and Gospel. He avers that if the Spirit brings faith, new life must also be present in the believer. Hinlicky unpacks Luther’s understanding of new obedience in the latter’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer (a divine command), baptism (objective incorporation in the church), the Lord’s Supper (sustenance), and confession (for pilgrims) in the final section of the *Larger Catechism*.

*Luther for Evangelicals* covers much ground and rapidly. Hinlicky mentions thinkers like Plato, Osiander, Hegel, Hobbes, Spinoza, Kant, and Derrida. He touches upon debates, such as that of Oswald Bayer and Christine Helmer’s interpretation of Luther’s hymn, “Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice.” So for what kind of evangelical is Hinlicky writing? *Luther for Evangelicals* will elude those who lack familiarity with these names because their positions are presented too briskly or not at all.

Hinlicky is to be commended on the idea of *Luther for Evangelicals*. He is correct in thinking that evangelicals would benefit immensely from an encounter with Luther. However, the book suffers from two problems. Firstly, one struggles at times to recognize the Luther that Hinlicky portrays. One example will suffice. Hinlicky states (without proof) that Luther does not “think of election as having taken place in the eternal past of God’s absolute decree” but rather sees election as “occurring where and when the Spirit pleases, in the giving of the gift of justifying faith” (p. 19). But how does this square with *The Bondage of the Will*, which is so clearly Augustinian on election?

The second problem concerns Hinlicky’s depiction of an “evangelical.” He ignores the debate that surrounds the meaning and use of this word and assumes the conclusions of Bebbington, Worthen, and McDermott. As an Australian who lives in Singapore and identifies as an evangelical, I barely recognize myself in his depiction of evangelicals. For example, Hinlicky states evangelicals have struggled with a “dictation theory of scriptural authority” akin to the inspiration of the Qu’ran (p. 50). I know of no reputable evangelical who believes this. Perhaps Hinlicky does. But it highlights the problem of how evangelicalism is defined and the particular audience he addresses.

Evangelicals who seek a helpful introduction to Luther’s thought without a knowledge of the philosophers and theologians assumed by Hinlicky would be better served reading Carl Trueman’s *Luther on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

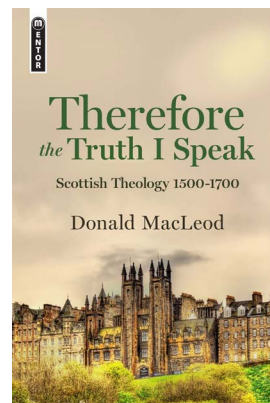
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Donald Macleod. *Therefore the Truth I Speak: Scottish Theology 1500–1700*. Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2020. 463 pp. £24.99/\$32.99.

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In this book, Professor Donald Macleod, former principal of the Free Church College (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary), traces the history and development of Scottish theology from 1500 until 1700. It is not a volume of church history, although the historical context for each theological discussion is laid out clearly. Nor is it an attempt to give a brief sketch of every Scottish Reformed theologian, as one of his predecessors, another Principal Macleod, had done. The author makes it clear at the very beginning that many illustrious names have been left out in an attempt to go for depth instead of breadth. Rather, this is an exercise in historical theology, charting the development of Scottish Reformed theology and analyzing its various debates and controversies along the way. It is also an excellent primer in Reformed doctrine, as it opens up and expounds the various theological issues under consideration.



Macleod makes the important point that many of the individuals described in the book were ministers rather than academics, although all were competent theologians. This means that their writing was intended for the church and was concerned with helping men and women understand the great truths of Scripture and how those truths impacted their lives and their salvation. Macleod himself has always been a preacher's theologian, and his concerns are similar to those of his subjects. Indeed, as we read Macleod, we are often caught up in what could easily be a sermon, and occasionally we are lifted into doxology. This is rich theology.

The book begins with the pre-Reformation martyrdoms of Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart before turning to the Scottish Reformation with two chapters on John Knox. These chapters are very much up-to-date with modern scholarship on Knox, not least the recent research by Professor Jane Dawson. Chapters on Andrew Melville, the Second Book of Discipline, Robert Bruce, and Alexander Henderson follow. Then we have two chapters on Samuel Rutherford, followed by two more on David Dickson. The second one of Dickson's chapters is on federal theology, which then leads to an excursus into the 20th century, with a defence of federal theology against the attacks upon it by T. F. Torrance, J. B. Torrance, and others. Finally, there is a chapter on Robert Leighton, an Episcopalian bishop but also a Calvinist.

Throughout, Macleod makes incidental comments (often very piercing), which demonstrate the implications of some of the debates for today. For example, he compares the high view of the church held by the early Reformers with the views of many today. He notes that "men like Calvin and Knox yielded nothing to Popes and Cardinals in their appreciation of the church as the Mother of us all, in their jealousy for her prerogatives as the one charged with witnessing to Christ, and in their passion for her unity, purity and efficiency." He then adds, "The devolution of her divinely commissioned ministries to para-church bodies and spiritual private enterprises would come only centuries later" (p. 31). He underlines this strong ecclesiology when discussing the role of the church in international missions:

In recent decades, sadly, the church has once again stood aside, leaving the work of worldwide evangelism to missionary societies which have little patience with any form of ecclesiastical oversight. They can claim, however, that if they are having to do what the church ought to be doing, the blame does not lie with them. Yet the question

whether, and how, international mission ought to be ecclesial, remains one of the major challenges facing missiology. (p. 187)

How Macleod guides readers through 18th-century debates on Arminianism, Amyraldianism, Antinomianism, and Neonomianism is a model of clarity, as is his presentation of federal theology and his analysis of the debates surrounding the covenants. This analysis is carried further in the chapter entitled “Federal Theology: The Twentieth-Century Reaction.” Here we find a comprehensive response to the attacks upon federal theology by the Torrance brothers. Their arguments that Beza turned away from Calvin’s pristine Reformed theology to a legalistic and scholastic theology, that federal theology put law before grace, and that the introduction of a doctrine of limited atonement damaged grace and made assurance difficult are all subjected to forensic examination and found wanting. This is achieved with the help of Richard Muller’s excellent scholarship on post-Reformation theology. The only disappointment is that John Murray is not considered when dealing with twentieth-century responses to federal theology. Murray’s insistence that grace comes before law, his rejection of a covenant of works, and his denial that the Mosaic covenant is a “republication” of a covenant of works, would have helped to make clear that classic federal theology and the Torrances’ theology are not the only two options. Murray’s revisionist covenant theology has much to offer.

This is a very fine volume that ought to become a standard work on Scottish theology. We are deeply indebted to Professor Macleod for this labour of love, and we hope that generations of scholars will benefit from his knowledge and wisdom.

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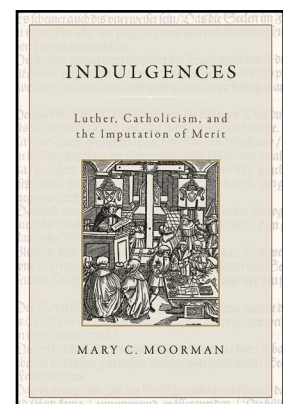
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Mary C. Moorman. *Indulgences. Luther, Catholicism, and the Imputation of Merit*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017. xl + 327 pp. \$39.95.

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This work addresses the concept of indulgences in what seems to be an attempt to question Luther’s rejection of papal authority in connection with the indulgence question. It argues that Luther wrongly “absolutized” the logic of Roman Catholic teaching on indulgences (p. 312), failing to recognize the doctrine and practice of indulgences as a logical outcome of biblical teaching on the covenantal relation of God with his people and on the church’s being Christ’s bride. Moorman also provides a detailed interpretation of the theology of indulgences in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. However, in all of this, Moorman fails to engage adequately with what Luther actually thought and wrote. Additionally, this study overlooks significant recent scholarship, and some key terms are insufficiently defined or not at all spelled out.

Among these terms is “the Church.” It is clear that by “the Church,” Moorman means the hierarchy under the papacy as the priestly office, which mediates Christ’s work to the faithful and empowers their satisfaction of God’s expectations for human performance in response to his grace. Such a definition of the “Church” is vital for Moorman’s argument since, in the end, she concludes that “Luther’s objections simply amount to an objection to the Church’s claim to act as the



sort of agent who can exercise authority over the merits of Christ for her members” (p. 312). This is partially correct. However, it misses the profound issues that Luther raised regarding indulgences and their theological framework. The context for that observation lies in a fundamental historical development ignored in this study, namely the Wittenberg reformer’s understanding of reality, or in Moorman’s terms, his relationship ontology—a view of reality that ultimately and immediately rests on God’s creative and re-creative Word.

Luther’s objection to indulgences arose from two sources. First, his activity as an Augustinian friar took him into the confessional in churches around Wittenberg. There, he encountered claims of immunity to the Church’s ministry due to Johann Tetzel’s offer. Second, his redefinition of what it means to be Christian reoriented his entire thinking about reality. He grew up in a world that retained the pre-Christian structures of religion that placed human approaches to God primarily through ritual actions directed by the hierarchy at the heart of Christian belief and practice. He found his approaches to God always inadequate to the demands of his conscience. But his biblical study convinced him that God comes to sinners, initiating and maintaining a relationship with them grounded in fundamental trust in the promise of new life through Christ’s death and resurrection.

This led him to another view of reality: that the Word of the Creator, in all its forms, determines what is real. Absolution, God’s promised reality, as mediated by any believer, is a re-creating Word. By fashioning trust in Christ, it transforms sinners into God’s children. The Word in oral, written, and sacramental form reconstitutes believers’ identity in Christ, and trust in Christ constitutes their righteousness. This passively received righteousness issues into the active righteousness of the godly life when the faithful believe what God says about them.

The Aristotelian world of Thomas, as Moorman clearly shows, is a world of an ontology of human performance and merit. Luther asserted that reality flows from God’s speaking. God relates to human creatures as creatures on the basis of their trust in him—a fundamentally different definition of faith and its role in being human. Thus, Luther’s views did not follow the logic of Roman Catholic theologies of indulgences; they broke the paradigm. Because Moorman has not grasped Luther’s way of thinking but rather tries to force him into Thomas’s, her study fails to facilitate a fair discussion of how these two worlds meet. This ecumenical exchange is sorely needed in a world where all kinds of Constantinian institutions no longer serve.

Systematic theologians are part of an ongoing conversation and use the voices of the past, mediated with contemporary scholarship. Significant elements of contemporary scholarship, beginning with work on Luther himself by Reinhard Schwarz, Oswald Bayer, Hans-Martin Barth, and others, are ignored. Critique of the “new interpretation of Paul” by John Barclay and others (such as Tom Holland, whose work may have appeared too late for Moorman to see), as well as the movement of scholars beyond this discussion go unmentioned. One brief reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer interprets him against the grain of his commitment to Luther’s teaching, as shown by Michael de Jonge. Particularly curious is the absence of reference to Bernd Hamm’s studies of medieval “theologies of piety,” especially his careful analysis of the development of indulgence doctrine and practice in fifteenth-century German-speaking lands, the heart of Moorman’s “region of the Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands, and southern France” in which indulgence practice provided a foil for Luther’s critique (p. 220).

Moorman initiates a much-needed discussion in the household of faith. Still, it cannot be conducted without a recognition of the two different ontologies that are represented in Luther’s “evangelical breakthrough”—a maturation over a decade—and the medieval scholastic structures which were

reasserted in certain ways by some Protestant theologians in the seventeenth century, alongside their continued use in Post-Tridentine thinking.

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William Perkins. *The Works of William Perkins*. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014–2020. 6608 pp. £399.00/\$500.00.

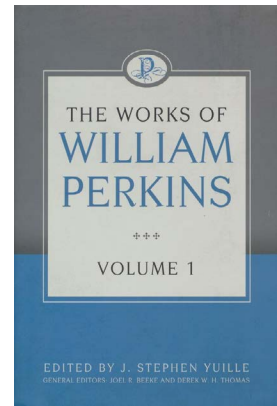
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William Perkins (1558–1602) was a highly influential English Reformed theologian whose works not only bear great historical significance but are of immense value to Christians today. Perkins was both an able theologian and a gifted populariser of Reformed theology and piety. In his day, his works proved edifying to scholars, pastors, and laypeople alike, and they retain that same potential benefit to contemporary readers.

Perkins offers an intriguing point of intersection between emerging post-Reformation Protestant identities. On the one hand, Perkins's works were so influential upon the Puritans of England and New England that he has been dubbed the “father of Puritanism.” However, he was also a lifelong member of the established English Church, and his works were intended to promote and enrich the Reformed theology and piety of its established theological formularies, as particularly expressed in *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* (1563, 1571). Perkins also occupies an important place in the early development of Reformed orthodoxy. In his lifetime, his books outsold those of Calvin and Beza in England, and he became the first English theologian to enjoy a wide readership in Europe. Perkins's most significant contributions relate to predestinarian thought, assurance, preaching, pastoral theology, covenant theology, and Roman Catholic polemic.

Given Perkins's significance, it is genuinely surprising that his works have not been republished until now. When Perkins died after a brief illness, aged 44, various of his Cambridge colleagues published his collected works in three folio volumes, with the final edition published by John Legatt in 1631. They have remained virtually unpublished since then. Even when James Nichols republished various important Puritan figures in the nineteenth century, Perkins remained neglected. Thus, except for a few individual titles (*The Art of Prophesying and the Calling of the Ministry* and *A Golden Chain*), the works of the “father of Puritanism” have remained out of print for more than three centuries. With the publication of *The Works of William Perkins* in ten volumes, Reformation Heritage Books has done a remarkable and long-overdue service to Reformed Christians.

The set was completed under the general editorial oversight of Joel R. Beeke and Derek H. Thomas, while the individual volumes have their own editors, including Stephen Yuille, Paul Smalley, Randall Pederson, Ryan Hurd, Greg Salazar, Shawn Wright, and Andrew Ballitch. Volume introductions are provided by the editors of individual volumes. These provide useful contextualization, summary, and introduction to the contents of each volume, and their informed engagement with the scholarly literature makes them of value to researchers as well as to casual readers. A biographical preface by Beeke and Yuille is also included in the first volume.



The text mostly follows the final Legatt edition of Perkins's works, occasionally noting textual variations to earlier editions in footnotes. Spelling is modernized, the volumes are attractively typeset, and obscure early-modern terms are defined in footnotes or occasionally changed to modern equivalents. However, this is not a critical edition of Perkins's works. Scholars will undoubtedly continue to refer primarily to sixteenth and seventeenth-century editions. This set of volumes is intended to make Perkins accessible to modern readers, and it fulfills that laudable goal admirably.

In the interests of orienting interested readers to this massive set, this review will give an overview of its contents along with some notes of significance and contemporary interest. The set contains forty distinct works, ranging from volume-length works to brief treatises consisting of a few pages. They are arranged into the categories of exegetical (vols. 1–4), doctrinal and polemical (vols. 5–7), and practical writings (vols. 8–10).

Volumes 1–4 contain the published sermons which Perkins preached during his position as “lecturer” (preacher) at St Andrews the Great Church, Cambridge. They consist of rich theological and practical expositions of the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1–11), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), Galatians, Hebrews 11, Jude, and Revelation 1–3. Perkins was a renowned preacher in his day, and these volumes give the reader access to the fruit of his preaching ministry and model his approach to biblical exegesis (see Andrew S. Ballitch, *The Gloss and the Text: William Perkins on Interpreting Scripture with Scripture* [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020]). Perkins is particularly noteworthy for his constant emphasis on the practical application (or “uses”) of biblical teaching and can provide a useful conversation partner to preachers as they approach these texts today. Volume 1 also includes Perkins's biblical chronology, *Digest of Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*, a precursor to the better-known chronology by James Ussher (1581–1656).

Volume 5 contains Perkins's major catechetical works, namely expositions of the *Lord's Prayer* and the *Apostles' Creed* (the first such work to appear in English), and a brief catechism. Although one of the briefest of Perkins's works, his catechism is particularly noteworthy for its instructions on how to appropriate doctrine deeply into their hearts. Perkins was concerned that while many English people had rote-learned catechetical material, this had not resulted in widespread spiritual transformation. Much of his work was given over to teaching people how to experience sound conversion and make spiritual progress. This work gives a highly condensed point of entry into some of Perkins's main pastoral and theological concerns.

Volume 6 mostly contains Perkins's major predestinarian works. *A Golden Chain* (1590) is probably his best-known work, laying out the “causes of salvation and damnation” in a predestinarian scheme that would come to be labelled “supralapsarian.” While it is reputed by some to be cold and scholastic, this is, in fact, an accessible, practical, and deeply pastoral work. This volume also includes two later predestinarian treatises that engage matters of grace and divine and human agency. These engage in more sophisticated academic theological discussion in light of the recent Cambridge predestinarian disputes (from which the *Lambeth Articles* emerged in 1595) and in conversation with contemporary Reformed and Roman Catholic theology, while drawing upon patristic and medieval thought. On all these matters, Perkins's writing is rich, clear, and insightful and will reward careful engagement. *Manner and Order of Predestination* (1598) is of particular historical interest because it provoked a lengthy published critique by Jacob Arminius. Both works would prove significant in the lead up to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

Volume 6 also contains three of Perkins's earliest treatises, two of which are translated into English for the first time by David Noe. Their subject matter is obscure to modern readers, consisting of Perkins's polemical defense of the Ramist art of memory. However, these were Perkins's first published works and demonstrate his commitment to Ramism, a sixteenth-century humanist educational philosophy that sought to reform scholarly methodology. Its most obvious expression in Perkins's writings is how he structures his ideas, defining subjects before dividing them into their constitutive parts and thus discussing them in a highly structured way (See Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins' Theology* [New York: Peter Lang, 1987]). The volume also includes a dialogical work criticizing superstitious approaches to eschatology.

Volume 7 gathers Perkins's three polemical works against Roman Catholicism, significant works that greatly bolstered his reputation as a defender of the true faith. Perkins's critique is noteworthy for its relatively accurate portrayal of Roman Catholic opponents (relatively rare among interconfessional polemical works of the sixteenth century), and his effort to lay out areas of agreement and disagreement between Reformed and Roman Catholic confessions, even as he critiques the innovations and idolatries of the latter. These works also represent Perkins's most extensive engagement with patristic sources, demonstrating his extensive reading of the church fathers as he sought to argue (as many Reformers did) that the church of the first five centuries was far more often in theological agreement with the Reformers than with Roman Catholics.

Volume 8 groups together a range of practical treatises mainly relating to the conscience in the Christian life. *A Discourse of Conscience* (1596) is a particularly lucid account of the role of conscience in the Christian life. The massive *Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (1606) is a pastoral manual that lays out an approach to godly decision making. *A Grain of Mustard Seed* (1597) is probably Perkins's most important work on assurance, a major concern throughout his works. This volume also includes his treatise on *Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace* (1589), a bestselling collection of eight of Perkins's earliest treatises which cover many of his main theological and pastoral concerns.

Volume 9 draws together a range of miscellaneous works, including two works on knowing Christ, several relating to true repentance and the battle against sin, treatises on a Christian approach to the tongue and the imagination, and finally, treatises critiquing the practices of witchcraft and astrology. Perkins's works on repentance and the battle between the spiritually renewed man and his fleshly nature are particularly noteworthy.

Volume 10 gathers together various works on callings (or vocations) and the various estates of life, exhibiting Perkins's conviction that Christian piety is integral to every aspect of human society. These include a treatise on vocations, another laying out the proper ordering of a Christian family, and works on the calling of the ministry and the task of preaching. His work on preaching, *Nature of Prophesying* (1592, translated 1607), was the first book on preaching in English, and the clarity and simplicity of both his works on the ministry are of value to pastors and students today. This volume also includes treatises on living well in all the estates of life, the importance of the principle of equity to social order, and instruction on how to die well.

This set of Perkins's works makes two notable omissions, both justified in this reviewer's opinion. Perkins's astrological critique, *Resolution to the Countryman* (1587; included in volume 9), was originally published as an appendment to a work entitled *Four Great Lyers*. This latter work aimed to debunk astrology by publishing the conflicting predictions of four popular astrological almanacs alongside

one another. Such data is only of interest to historians and thus is appropriately excluded from the present set. Secondly, a seventeenth-century work entitled *Death's Knell* (1628) was excluded, though it bears Perkins's name. This work first appeared decades after Perkins's death, and I was pleased to see it excluded lest it continue to be falsely attributed to him. It was not the first time that others had sought to make underhanded use of Perkins's name for income. His publication of his lectures on the *Lord's Prayer* was only released after an unauthorized and flawed edition appeared in print in 1592. After he died, Perkins's publisher and the executors of his will had some difficulty with others seeking to make a profit through the publication of imperfect and distorted texts allegedly from Perkins's hand (10:37–39, 201–2).

It is perhaps inevitable that a publication of this scale will contain occasional errors. For example, some text is missing and misplaced in the table adjoined to the exposition of the Lord's Prayer (5:422), and one of the titles of Perkins's works on conscience is confused for another on a title page (8:ii). However, errors like this are relatively few and minor.

One point of disappointment is that there are not more extensive footnote comments in the volumes, nor are Perkins's shorthand footnote references uniformly expanded. For example, Perkins's original shorthand Latin citations in volume 6 are expanded and translated in brackets after Perkins's original citation, along with occasional brief explanatory comments about the work or its author. Such expansion and commentary are completely absent from volume 7, even though the works in it are especially full of patristic citations and marginal Latin phrases and titles. Yet these remain in their original state without expansion or translation, making this material less accessible to non-scholarly readers.

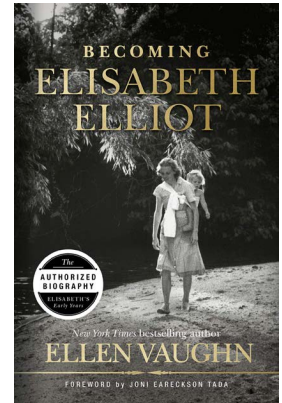
However, these minor points of criticism do not detract from the significance of these volumes. They deserve the widest possible readership among Reformed Christians and promise to enrich the lives and ministries of those who engage with them. Perkins's abiding concern throughout his career was that the riches of Reformed theology would be made accessible to ordinary Christians, who might thereby find spiritual nourishment through genuine faith and repentance unto a life of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. These works will now have the opportunity to bear fruit among a new generation of readers.

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Ellen Vaughn. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2020. 278 pp. £19.99/\$24.99.

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In Ellen Vaughn's biography of the well-known missionary and hero of the Christian faith, Elisabeth Elliot, most of us will get to know better someone we already knew. Elliot's story of sacrifice and courage on the mission field has been widely publicized both in her writing and that of others. In her seminal work, *Through Gates of Splendor*, with "skillful, unsentimental, muscular" (p. 9) prose, Elliot gave her account of the murder of her husband, Jim, and four fellow missionaries by the violent Waodani tribe in a remote region of Ecuador as early as 1957 (the reader should note that Vaughn sensitively chooses not to use the more commonly known term *Auca* to describe this people group out of contemporary understanding of its offensive origin). Their faithful praying and planning to share the gospel with an unreached people group seemed only to end in heartbreak. But instead of being the end of that mission, this much-publicized episode was actually the bloody beginning. Their experience caught the attention of *Life* magazine and soon spread around the world.



For most of us, that is where Elisabeth Elliot enters the historical narrative, as the dutiful young wife of murdered missionary Jim Elliot. In that sense, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* functions like a fascinating prequel. The reader meets a young Betty Howard from her earliest days as the child of missionaries in Belgium, growing up in an idyllic setting in her New Jersey family home, through boarding school days at Hampden DuBose Academy in Florida, and attending Wheaton College where she met her future husband and her days as a single missionary (during the five long years it took Jim to determine if he was called to marry her). By the book's end, we've become acquainted with a many-layered woman who wrote eloquently, loved passionately, and lived a life characterized by a singleness of purpose: obedience to the will of God.

Part of what makes this book a treasure is that Vaughn is able to illustrate this trait not only in the dramatic moments of Elliot's life but also in the mundane, uncertain day-to-day living of any human existence. As the author notes, "For Elisabeth, as for all of us, the most dramatic chapters may well be less significant than the daily faithfulness that traces the brave trajectory of a human life radically submitted to Christ" (p. 11). Vaughn shows us examples of this radical submission again and again throughout the book. In one chapter entitled "The First Death of Elisabeth Elliot," we meet a committed young missionary using the full force of her considerable linguistic gifts to develop a written language for the Colorado people of Ecuador's western rainforest. In harsh conditions, she labored for many months to complete a phonemic alphabet of *Tsahfihki* in the hope other linguists could eventually use it to translate the New Testament, only to have her invaluable and much prayed for language informant brutally murdered and *all* her linguistic work stolen off the back of a truck, never to be recovered.

The tragic loss of her husband, which left her a single mother of a young daughter, is well known, as is her living and working with the same tribe of Indians who killed him. What more often goes untold is how much difficulty Elliot encountered trying to begin her work with the tribe. Competing mission groups and a challenging relationship with Rachel Saint (sister of martyred missionary Nate Saint) made it seem like she would never get there and accomplish little once she did. But Betty remained steadfast, thankful for all the seemingly small things—they found all five bodies with little difficulty—and never blaming God for the big—that there were five dead bodies to be found.

Through it all, author Ellen Vaughn skillfully weaves together quotes from letters (Elliot is a biographer's dream in that she left so many), published writings, and reminisces from friends and family. Her writing style is the kind that, though informative, "gets out of the way," so it never feels like the author stands between reader and subject. The narrative also benefits from in-depth character development, focused of course on Elliot while not neglecting those who knew her best. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* is a work that will inspire, challenge and exhort its readers to strive for a life like Elliot's, radically devoted to God.

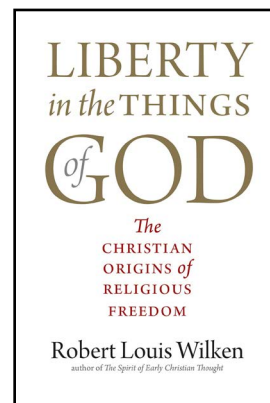
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Robert Louis Wilken. *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. ix + 236 pp. £12.99/\$15.99.

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In this superbly written work, Robert Wilken, William R. Kenan Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia, challenges the prevailing narrative that situates religious freedom almost entirely in the European ideas that emerged from the intellectual milieu of the Enlightenment. Instead, Wilken argues that many of the ideas that led towards religious freedom are grounded in the Christian tradition, reaching back to the apostolic period. 16th and 17th-century thinkers and their forbears drew upon these sources in the pursuit of religious liberty. Throughout, Wilken emphasizes freedom of conscience and free exercise as two intertwined and inseparable expressions of religious liberty. In brief, freedom of conscience means nothing if one cannot exercise that conscience in communal religious practice that conviction indicates. Alongside these, Wilken returns to three main themes throughout the work: "first, that religious belief is an inner conviction accountable to God alone and resistant to compulsion; second, that conscience is a form of spiritual knowledge that carries an obligation to act; third, that human society is governed by two powers" (p. 4). Wilken argues that religious liberty arose in the West not only from Enlightenment ideas regarding conscience but Christian ones as well.



In the first few chapters, after a brief nod to the accommodation the Romans gave to Jewish religious practice, Wilken cites both Tertullian and Lactantius as representative advocates of the position that, as a matter of conscience, religious belief could not be coerced but must be persuaded. He then quickly moves to the protocols of Milan, in which, he asserts, the emperors had more than simple toleration in mind. Medieval theologians built on those ideas, but the real work came in the Reformation period, the pivot point around which Wilken's narrative hinges.

Beginning in chapter 3, Wilken tackles the Reformation era, rightly noting that there were many "reformations." He challenges the traditional rubric for the era, writing "the fault line on religious liberty ran not between Catholics and Protestants but between those who ruled and those who were ruled" (p. 46). In Nuremberg, for example, the Franciscan sisters appealed for liberty in a manner analogous to Protestants; they appealed to conscience, using the "theological and moral ideas received from earlier generations"—just as Luther had at Worms (p. 53). In an ironic twist, Wilken suggests that the Lutheran reformation did not destroy Christendom's two swords doctrine but recapitulated it at the level of the

magistrate. The Peace of Augsburg's settlement of *cuius regio, eius religio* makes it hard to argue otherwise. The next two chapters continue along this line of thinking. In Geneva (ch. 4), Calvin and Beza employed a revitalized two swords doctrine that, on the ground, blurred the distinction between church and state, while in France (ch. 5), bloodshed led to hope for a new way forward in the *Edict of Nantes* (1598). This hope proved to be short-lived with Louis XIV's revocation of the *Edict* in 1685. Next, Wilken turns to the Reformation-era Netherlands (ch. 6). Long-percolating ideas regarding religious liberty were tangibly expressed by Dutch thinkers who argued that liberty of conscience is a natural right given by God and that free practice for religious communities was its corollary. The two could not be separated. From the ascension of Elizabeth I to the period of the Civil War, both Recusants (ch. 7) and Separatists (ch. 8) argued for freedom of conscience against the Church of England's social, economic, and legal pressures towards conformity. For both, freedom of conscience must encompass the freedom to act upon the convictions of conscience in the expressions of liturgical practice and religious community that one's conscience dictated. Here, the logical conclusions of Christian convictions regarding freedom of conscience reach their full expression for Wilken.

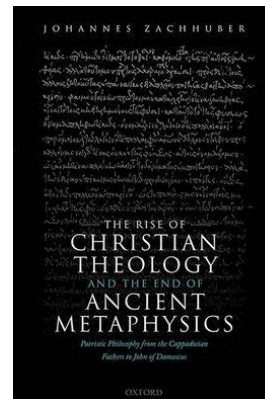
As the Reformation era drew to a close, the knotty question of how to disentangle church and state remained. Given the opportunity, even the Puritans enforced their brand of conformity. So it would be up to radical Separatists such as Roger Williams, Thomas Helwys, William Penn, and others to provide the only retrospectively sensible way forward: the dissolution of the state church and an embrace of a voluntary gathered church model. They rightly assessed the logical conclusion of the inchoate ideas of the patristic period regarding conscience towards which the Christian ideas regarding religious liberty had been running for a while, namely that "liberty of conscience had to include public worship" (p. 167). In the *coup de grâce*, Wilken demonstrates how even John Locke and Thomas Jefferson drew upon the "Christian origins of religious freedom" to articulate their perspectives.

*Liberty in the Things of God* is not heavy-handed in its argumentation; it is not a comprehensive treatment of religious liberty as imagined by Christian thinkers. Instead, it is a compelling and suggestive "historical essay" by one of the greatest historians of Christianity of his generation (p. 5). It should, as Wilken intends, inspire more research on the topic. In the meantime, the evidence he provides should give pause to those of us who have oversimplified the narrative regarding religious toleration as Wilken ably shows that there are "Christian origins of religious freedom," not just secular Enlightenment ones.

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Johannes Zachhuber. *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 357 pp. £75.00/\$100.00.

Against recent claims that Cappadocian philosophy embodied a fundamental ontological shift from unity to particularity (or from the universal to the particular), Zachhuber argues that there was indeed a shift in the ontological basis of Patristic thought, but this shift occurred much later. Recent scholarship has claimed that the Cappadocians developed a view of the relationship between particulars (a human) and their class or universal (humanity) that emphasized the reality of the particular over the universal. This would have been a fundamental break from Greek philosophy. However, Zachhuber argues that Cappadocian philosophy (“classical theory”) was fundamentally oriented towards the reality and significance of the universal over the particular (the “one” over the “many”). However, the outbreak of Christological controversies in the 4th and 5th centuries sowed the seeds for this philosophy’s transformation. Particularly, the definition of Chalcedon became a catalyst for ontological developments in both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian Miaphysite thought, as both schools sought to apply classical theory to the challenge of Christ’s dual consubstantiality (i.e., his identity with God and humanity).



For Zachhuber, classical theory can be characterised by its two poles, an “abstract theory,” deriving from Basil of Caesarea, and a “concrete theory,” deriving from Gregory of Nyssa. The “abstract theory” established the binary relationship of *ousia*, understood on analogy with the universal, and *hypostasis*, understood on analogy with the particular. Nyssa’s “concrete theory” identified the universal as the ontologically primary entity, for which the hypostases’ role was “little more than to provide concrete realizations for the universal. They are, we might say, *only* hypostases of the single *ousia* or nature” (10). The problem of using a universally oriented theory to explain Christology, with its focus on a particular individual, was not immediately apparent. It emerged, Zachhuber argues, when post-Chalcedonian parties (both its proponents and antagonists) applied the conceptual apparatus of the classical theory to the conceptual problem of Christology.

Most of the book concerns this narrative, the evolution of Patristic ontology through the church fathers’ meditation on Christology. Chapters 4–6 consider the developments within Miaphysitism, from Severus of Antioch (d. 538) through Peter Callinicus (d. 591). Zachhuber argues that the Miaphysites emphasised the concrete pole of classical theory, seeking to hold the ontological connection between the particular and the universal. This trajectory resulted from various theories around the concept of an individual nature, such that nature remained the concrete entity and yet found only particularised existence. The rejection of the Cappadocians’ concrete universal naturally led towards “tritheism,” the enumeration of each trinitarian *hypostasis* (defined as a particular nature). This development was seen especially in John Philoponus (d. 570).

Chapters 7–10 continue this narrative, focusing on Chalcedonianism from John of Caesarea (or John the Grammarian) to John of Damascus (d. 749). Whereas the Miaphysites concentrate on the concrete dimension of classical theory, the Chalcedonians focused on the abstract dimension (with the minor exception of Maximus, whom Zachhuber argues attempted to reintegrate Nyssa’s concrete universal). In John of Damascus, the abstract pole of Cappadocian theory led to the severing of the connection between essence and existence, which had thus far been inextricably connected. By moving

the locus of being from nature or *ousia* to *hypostasis*, John substantiated the claim that multiple *ousia* could be found in a single *hypostasis*. The *hypostasis* no longer indicated the *ousia*'s individuation but was itself existent and so individuated (though every *hypostasis* necessarily had an inhering substance).

Zachhuber identifies this development, a newfound focus on individuality and the separation of essence (what something is) and existence (that something is), as the unique contribution of Patristic philosophy. The last chapter suggests areas for further study of this philosophy's influence but does not attempt to contribute towards this end.

Zachhuber demonstrates a thorough acquaintance with the primary sources and the relevant secondary literature, particularly for the Post-Chalcedonian period. Though at times dense and containing formatting errors, his presentation is sufficient to communicate the argument. The narrative for which he argues is convincing in its overall contours.

However, Zachhuber's interaction with the Christological discussion up to Chalcedon is open to criticism. On page 106, for example, the final paragraph suggests that Eutyches's rejection of the double *homoousion* led to his condemnation at Chalcedon (451) not the Constantinople home synod in 448, the minutes of which were read at Chalcedon. Also, Zachhuber suggests that the "one hypostasis" of the formula "two natures in one hypostasis" was not found in the definition of Chalcedon, which is not true (Acts of Chalcedon Actio V §34, ln. 33 in Greek). Finally, it is arguable that the ontological achievement which Zachhuber credits to the 8th century was already incipient though not thoroughly developed in the 4th and 5th centuries. Apollinaris, unwittingly followed by Cyril of Alexandria, appears to have separated essence from existence. Zachhuber argues that *physis* ("nature") was equivalent to universal *ousia* ("essence") in Apollinaris (p. 98). However, a close reading of the text cited by Zachhuber, Apollinaris's other writings (e.g., Fragments 113, 142; *He Kata Meros Pistis*; *Tomus Synodalis*), and similar texts in Cyril suggests that for both Apollinaris and Cyril, *physis* could refer to a concrete individual as distinct from an essence.

These points aside, the dominant interpretation of Nicaean theology presented by the Cappadocians provided the framework for later discussion. For its persuasive narrative of the evolution in Cappadocian classical theory, Zachhuber's work is a significant contribution to our understanding of the development of patristic thought. It lays a foundation for the study of its influence in Western and Eastern Christendom and beyond.

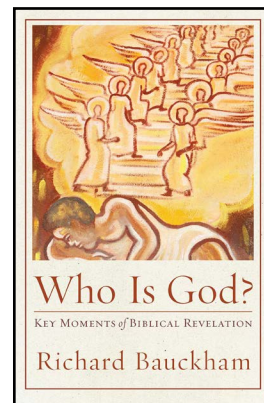
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## — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Richard Bauckham. *Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation*. Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 120 pp. £15.99/\$21.99.

The most significant works arise from the most crucial questions, and Richard Bauckham—senior scholar at Ridley Hall, Cambridge—takes on a most crucial question in this short volume, *Who Is God?* The subtitle highlights the source of inquiry: *Key Moments in Biblical Revelation*. According to Bauckham, “Who is God?” is “the key question” (p. 1), and “we can answer the question ... only by attending to who God has revealed himself to be” (p. 1). This revelation we find in Scripture, which “is about the identity of God” (p. 2).

Bauckham analyzes “key moments” where God reveals himself, and these moments in turn shape the story of salvation and drive the content for each chapter of the book (p. 2). Bauckham discusses four moments: Jacob’s dream (Gen 28:10–22), Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3), Moses with God on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:17–34:8), and instances of the Trinity in Mark’s Gospel (p. 2).



Chapter 1 analyzes Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22). Bauckham argues that God is “not ... at the top of the stairway” that the angels descend and ascend in his dream; rather, contrary to various translations of Genesis 28:13 (e.g., ESV, NASB, KJV, NET), he is “at the bottom” (p. 8). Hence, “God has ... come down the staircase and stands looking at Jacob sleeping beside him” (p. 9). Divine presence permeates the dream, and shapes the rest of the Bible, finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ (pp. 19–23; cf. Matt 1:18–23), who is the “new temple” (pp. 26–28; cf. John 1:14) and who, according to Bauckham’s understanding of John 1:51, is the “ladder” or “the way across the gap between heaven and earth” (p. 26).

Chapters 2–3 consider the Exodus account where God reveals his name at the burning bush and makes known his character at Sinai. Bauckham traces the use and lack of use of the divine name, concluding with a discussion of Jesus as Lord (κύριος) who is honored with the name above all names (pp. 55–58; cf. Phil 2:9–11). He notes that on Mount Sinai, God does not show his face, but gives “the fullest description of God’s character ... in the Bible” (p. 62): in his “freedom” (p. 62) God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod 34:6). Throughout the canon God acts in this manner not only to Israel, but “to all the nations and even all creation” (p. 79), especially in Jesus Christ who, unlike Moses who could not see God’s face, was in “the bosom of the Father,” and so “has made him known” (p. 83; cf. John 1:18).

Chapter 4 covers three “moments” where the Trinity is revealed in Mark’s Gospel: Jesus’s baptism (Mark 1:9–11), his transfiguration (9:2–8), and the confession of the centurion after Jesus’s death (15:37–39). Bauckham points out that Jesus is said to be God’s Son in each event (p. 91). The second event, the “midpoint of Mark’s story” (p. 89), shows Jesus’s pre-eminency, wherein God demands that the hearers listen to Jesus, his Son, even when he says he must die (pp. 99–103). The first and last events highlight God’s presence with the in-breaking of his works: the heavens tear at Jesus’s baptism and the temple curtain tears at Jesus’s death (pp. 91, 105). The Spirit (πνεῦμα) descends on Jesus at his baptism, and when Jesus dies, he “breathed [ἐξέπνευσεν] his last” (Mark 15:37; cf. pp. 91–92). Jesus’s last breath,

“symbolize[s] the theological truth that the death of Jesus released the Spirit of God into the world” (p. 103).

Bauckham’s volume packs a heavy punch, but opens itself to a few hits of its own. For example, Bauckham insists that the reason the Spirit is portrayed as a dove at Jesus’s baptism concerns the covenant name of God (pp. 95–96). Instead of discerning creation themes, Bauckham concludes that the Spirit as dove reflects the tetragrammaton because “the Hebrew word for dove is *yôṇāh*,” which has “four Hebrew letters (יֹנָה ...), like the Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton (יהוה ...)” (p. 96), and “three ... letters are the same” (p. 96). He concludes, “dove” therefore “resembles the name of the Lord” (p. 96). Bauckham’s lexical connection, “a speculative, new suggestion” he admits (p. 96), might be too far-reaching for less adventurous palates. This critique, however, bears little import on the book’s overall significance and contribution.

Most enjoyable about Bauckham’s book is his interdisciplinary approach that intertwines exegesis and biblical theology with subtle tones of dogmatics. After analyzing a text, he traces its theological content throughout the canon, culminating in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those interested in biblical interpretation, biblical theology, dogmatics, and the doctrine of God—whether seasoned academics or beginning students of theology—will receive this book with a warm welcome. Readers will not only enjoy the exegetical and biblical-theological adrenaline this volume provides, but will find much more happiness in the contemplation of what the book ultimately studies: the triune God who is present, merciful, and gracious, and all this preeminently in Jesus Christ.

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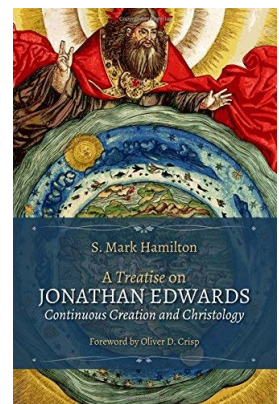
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S. Mark Hamilton. *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards Continuous Creation and Christology*. Treatises on Jonathan Edwards 1. Columbia, SC: JESociety Press, 2017. 101 pp. £13.68/\$17.99.

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In this slim yet meaty volume, S. Mark Hamilton attempts to resolve a thorny question found in the thickets of Jonathan Edwards’s philosophical theology: how do we reconcile an apparent inconsistency between his doctrine of continuous creation and his Christology? In answering this question Hamilton basically forges a new framework for understanding Edwards’s metaphysics by drawing together Edwards’s ontology with his Christology, an area that has not received much attention from scholars. All this packaged in a volume of just a hundred pages makes Hamilton’s *Treatise* a gem of a work that any serious student of Edwards must obtain.

Hamilton is a research associate at the Jonathan Edwards Society. He has written numerous illuminating and technical studies on Edwards’s philosophy, Christology, and soteriology. In this volume he tackles a vexing problem found at the intersection of Edwards’s doctrines of creation and Christology. As is generally known, Edwards affirmed the doctrine of continuous creation, or the view that the created order is brought into existence *ex nihilo* every moment before it drops back into nothingness, only to be re-created by God in the next moment. Hamilton notes that if we apply this doctrine to the humanity of Christ, we run into serious issues of



compatibility with historic, Christological orthodoxy. The Christology of the early councils affirmed that the eternal Son assumed a reasonable soul and body and continuously maintains his hypostatic union with the man Jesus (p. 78). How can Edwards affirm the constancy of this union if the man Jesus continuously ceases to be, dropping out of existence moment by moment, only to be recreated at the next point in time? “For it follows on this way of thinking,” Hamilton observes, “that the created mind of Jesus is destroyed every moment, re-created every moment, and hypostatically re-united to the Son every moment” (pp. 55–56). Such a Christology, he suggests, is fraught with insurmountable difficulties.

Hamilton, however, does not believe that Edwards fell into these Christological conundrums because, he argues, Edwards did not apply the doctrine of continuous creation to created minds (pp. 26–27). In other words, Edwards extended the doctrine of continuous creation only to mundane, non-mental objects. By contrast, created minds, including the human mind of Jesus Christ, are real substances that persist through time. Hamilton’s proposal shows that Edwards’s Christology is indeed compatible with Chalcedonian Christology. It also possesses “Cartesian” overtones since it asserts there to be only three kinds of entities in Edwards’s world: God, created minds, and everything else.

To substantiate this thesis, and to demonstrate consistency across Edwards’s thought, Hamilton must make a few adjustments to what is currently understood about Edwardsean metaphysics. It is these adjustments that make up the bulk of the argument and lead readers into the depths of Edwards’s philosophical theology. Edwards does affirm immaterialism, Hamilton notes, but it is a type of immaterialism—“immaterial realism”—which leaves room for the persistence of substantial, created minds that are not re-created moment by moment (pp. 20–27). Edwards does affirm the continuous creation of mundane objects, but past copies of an entity do not drop completely out of existence but are “archived” like past frames of a film strip tucked away on the receiving reel of an old-fashioned movie projector (p. 56). Because of this, Edwards can still be categorized as a four-dimensionalist with regard to his understanding of time (pp. 30–31). Regarding causality, Edwards was an occasionalist “of sorts,” but Hamilton nuances this by revealing how a type of secondary causality continues to operate in Edwards’s understanding of the world (pp. 47–50).

If these terms and distinctions seem complex, remote, or even esoteric, they are because the book aims to address cutting-edge scholarship on the nature of Edwards’s philosophical theology. Would-be readers should possess a high level of philosophical and Christological sophistication to appreciate the argument. For a general audience, this is probably the biggest drawback of the book. Yet, to his credit, Hamilton skillfully explains these philosophical concepts in helpful ways that those less schooled in philosophy can appreciate. As with anything Edwards related, it takes sustained attention and careful analysis to understand the Northampton sage (or what others say about him) if one desires to reap any intellectual or spiritual benefit from the exercise. Hamilton’s *Treatise* is no different in this regard.

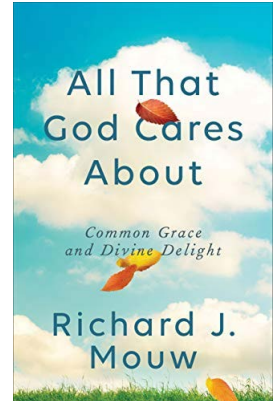
Having made this observation, I highly recommend this work. One of its significant achievements is the way the author employs the tools of current philosophical reflection to make the argument that Edwards’s views are consistent with historic, Christological orthodoxy. The secondary literature on Edwards’s philosophical theology in the last century is rife with progressive interpreters who find Edwards’s relationship to traditional Christian orthodoxy problematic. It is refreshing to find someone conversant with the technicality of contemporary discourse who argues otherwise.

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Richard J. Mouw. *All That God Cares About: Common Grace and Divine Delight*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020. x + 165 pp. £15.99/\$21.99.

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The doctrine of common grace forms a pillar of Dutch Neo-Calvinist theology of culture. Tracing its mature articulation to Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the doctrine as Richard Mouw understands it affirms that God restrains the full effects of sin upon humanity in order to allow his original purposes for his creation to develop and mature across history. Mouw’s thesis in this book is that God’s providential restraint of sin in common grace is an expression of favor, and such favor should inform how humans view creation and their place in it. As God delights in the good works of humanity, so should we. Such shared delight in the goodness of creation should produce a distinct cultural ethic that takes seriously the call to ameliorate sin and suffering in the world, while also seeing the beauty and importance of embodying cultural forms that glorify God, such as “well-written poems, Bach concertos, and sound arguments” (p. 27).



Mouw has long been associated with Kuyperian common grace and stands at the center of an effort to renew interest in Kuyper’s thought, especially among non-Calvinist evangelicals. He offers this latest book as an “aggiornamento,” or an updating and expanding of his thoughts on common grace (p. 1). His goals are threefold. First, he seeks to expand his argument, initially offered in *He Shines in All That’s Fair* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), that common grace concerns God’s favor and delight towards all humanity. Second, he seeks to clarify misconceptions concerning common grace in general, and his own thought in distinction from critics more particularly. Finally, he aims to address how Kuyperian common grace can be embraced by those outside the Dutch Reformed tradition.

Against the backdrop of a type of Calvinism which sees all historical occurrences as simply means of expressing God’s decrees of election and reprobation, Mouw argues that common grace helps show the complexity of God’s intent. He summarizes, “the Creator of the world has very broad interests. The Lord rejoices in all of his works. God is really fond of daisies and deer and oak trees. This means, then, that we have to take this broader divine agenda serious” (p. 31). God certainly cares about his economy of salvation from sin. However, Mouw stresses, it is not *all* that he cares about, and the fact that he has purposes that are not reducible to salvation help construct a broader vision of what salvation is *for*: “To be redeemed from sin, then, is to be restored to the patterns of obedient cultural formation for which we were created” (p. 77).

A major issue in debates over common grace has been whether to define God’s restraint of sin as grace in the proper sense. Though Mouw ironically discovered the doctrine of common grace and its broader importance for social ethics through the writings of Cornelius Van Til, he argues that Van Til and others like Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder esteem non-Christian thought and cultural forms to have no enduring value. Therefore, in Mouw’s assessment, they fail to deal with the complexity of the biblical narrative and the best of the Reformed tradition. He points to scripture passages such as Revelation 21:25–26 and Isaiah 60:1–9, in which he sees the treasures of unbelieving culture being brought into the eschatological New Jerusalem. He highlights how for John Calvin and Herman Bavinck the Spirit is understood to be at work among non-Christians in general revelation and the gracious illumination of it. Such internal work of the Holy Spirit among the unregenerate, for Mouw, goes far in accounting for how non-Christians can create truly good and beautiful things in which God delights.

In the final portions of the book, Mouw turns to consider the future of reflection on common grace, especially for those outside the Dutch Reformed tradition. Does common grace thinking need to retain its “Dutchiness” to remain faithful to Kuyper’s vision (p. 124)? Mouw thinks not. Instead, those interested in a Kuyperian social ethic from non-Calvinist traditions should appropriate common grace thinking while maintaining robust commitments to their own traditions. A model for this is the growth of a more generic Calvinism that does not require strict adherence to the Reformed confessions, as exemplified in the contemporary “New Calvinism” movement (p. 137). However, he cautions that “New Calvinism” has often adopted the reductionist soteriology of the Dutch Reformed theologians who reject common grace. This combined with certain personalities of New Calvinism’s leadership, as well as its complementarianism, accounts for the historic distance between the New Calvinists and the Dutch Neo-Calvinists.

Readers familiar with Mouw’s work will discern his unwavering, long-held commitments on common grace. With little here by way of expansion of what he has said elsewhere, he does provide helpful clarification of several issues. He rejects the association of common grace with universalism, and highlights how common grace is not grounded in any ontological relation between God and the world, but rather in God’s will to delight in anything which he could or would make.

Some readers will be troubled by Mouw’s insistence on the Spirit’s work of internal illumination of the unregenerate, and his open stance on the fate of the unevangelized. Others may be unimpressed at Mouw’s haste to resort to mystery in accounting for how common grace reconciles with Calvinism’s commitment to total depravity. This insistence which appeared in Kuyper’s day still needs exploring: Can Calvinist models of God’s providence consistently integrate common grace with their understandings of God’s decrees and the determination of all things? Mouw clearly thinks so, but there is more that needs to be said. In the end, however, this delightful study fittingly summarizes the doctrine of common grace that has so impassioned Mouw throughout his career.

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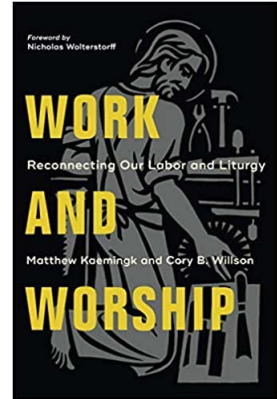
— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

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Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson. *Work and Worship: Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xii + 292 pp. £21.99/\$29.99.

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Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the intersection of faith and work. Matthew Kaemingk, who teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Cory Willson, associate professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, both celebrate the popular interest in how one's work matters to God. However, they also warn that unless Christians learn to move from the abstract relationship of faith and work to the concrete relationship of work and the church's worship, both one's faith and work will remain malformed and immature. "There exists a profound separation between work and worship in the lives of many Christians today," they argue. The problem as they see it is that this disconnect between work and worship is mutually influencing, leading to deficient work and hyper-spiritualized worship of God.



The solution the authors propose is to seek integration between work and worship by bringing the concerns of work explicitly into the Sunday liturgy, and by seeing the liturgy as directly formative for Monday through Saturday endeavors. Accordingly, their main audience is worship leaders: those who are charged with shaping the experiences of Christians as they gather for congregational celebration. While what they offer is not a "how-to" manual, the book subsequently places a strong emphasis on praxis atop a fairly comprehensive biblical theology of the worship-work relationship (p. 11).

Additionally, while Kaemingk and Willson turn their sights specifically towards the economic and liturgical practices of Western Christians, they rightly recognize that because of the fall, distorted work and worship are universal maladies suffered by humans of every culture throughout history. Thus, despite writing to a Western audience, they make a concerted effort to bring wisdom and practices from both ancient traditions and from around the world into the conversation. Their work is filled with references to international worship practices, and the literature they resource has an intentionally global scope.

The book is divided into three parts, consisting of theological and practical foundations, resources from scripture and the worship practices of the early church, and a final section on practices that suggests strategies for integrating worship and work. The first part begins with their vision for the nature and purpose of worship and its relation to work. They argue that "worship is the heartbeat of the church" and ought to be focused on "intensive" experiences of God's grace in gathered worship which fuel "extensive" scattering into the world to love and serve God (p. 19). In their view, worship is a formative practice which shapes workers for their work. Consequently, deficiencies in the nature and practice of worship will ultimately fail workers in their God-given vocations.

In chapter 2, they examine contemporary trends in worship which are inherent to a Western individualistic context and which, they believe, fail workers, before turning in chapter 3 to examine what modern workers bring with them into the worship time. Worship leaders, they argue, often fail to consider or understand the lived weekly experiences of workers who fill their pews. Because of this, workers are often not led into seeing how their work relates to worship or how God joins them in the

workplace. The irony is that weekly work is God-given and is the primary way the church joins God in his creative and redemptive missions in the world.

The second part of the book surveys theological and practical resources for proper integration of work and worship from the Old Testament, the early church of the New Testament, and descriptions of the liturgical practices of early Christians recorded in writings such as the *Canons of Hippolytus* and the *Didascalia*. For Israel, instructions for worship given in the Pentateuch were meant to form them into a people whose whole lives, including their work, honored God and revealed his lordship over creation. For instance, Israel's worship calendar of celebrations and thanksgivings followed the agricultural calendar, and the agricultural work was routinely brought into the worship service. Throughout their rituals, Israel was to remember that any bountiful harvest comes from God, and all work is to be done for and unto God.

This is reinforced through the Psalter, which consistently points to the fact that God's work is what gives meaning to our work. Additionally, the writings of the prophets warn against how worship and work "can begin to separate and die" through each one becoming either idolatrous or inauthentic (p. 117). Turning to the early church of the New Testament and beyond, Kaemingk and Willson explore how Christians frequently brought the fruit of their labors into the worship service and took their worship services to the streets to consecrate the areas of work and proclaim Christ's lordship over the cities and fields. The early church therefore presents a compelling model for how work and worship must be seen as integrally related and mutually formative.

In the final section, Kaemingk and Willson offer practical strategies for worship leaders to relate worship and work more directly in the Sunday gathering. These mainly concern bringing work into the celebration of the Lord's table, and by preparing workers to scatter into the world to continue their worship through their labors. They also highlight how architecture and atmosphere surrounding worship can engage the imaginations of workers. Concerning the gathering of the church, the examples they provide include calling worship leaders to create times to celebrate harvests or offer public petitions of workers in a church's given context, be it manufacturing, software coding, or boardroom meetings. As the church scatters into Monday life, Kaemingk and Willson see it as vital for worship leaders to pray specifically for work and workplaces, as well as to call workers through a benediction to worship God and join him on mission.

Western Christianity suffers from a centuries-old divide between the so-called sacred and the secular realms. One highlight of Kaemingk and Willson's study is their proposal that both work and worship are designed by God to "habituate" God's work in the world into both the economic and doxological activity of Christians. The ways of God's work in sustaining his creation, and bestowing grace through redemption, are infused into the life of the worker through both liturgical and economic habits, but only when they are rightly oriented and rightly related. The two are designed to be mutually reinforcing, and Kaemingk and Willson present a compelling case for what is at stake if either is neglected.

One critique of the book might be that Kaemingk and Willson's narrow focus on the experience of the worship service neglects consideration of the church's other ministries and endeavors. Limiting the scope only to the church's liturgy, however, certainly allows them to focus on making their case that what ails Western Christianity uniquely is a failure to worship well as a corporate body, leaving open further considerations for future conversation. Regardless, worship leaders will benefit from Kaemingk and Willson stirring the liturgical imagination with their practical strategies and examples of worship

from around the world. The book will also benefit anyone seeking to deconstruct the divide between spiritual Sunday life and the so-called secular endeavors of the rest of life.

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Paul Maxwell. *The Trauma of Doctrine: New Calvinism, Religious Abuse, and the Experience of God*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. 389 pp. £96.00/\$125.00.

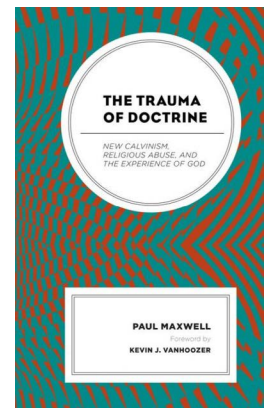
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The *Trauma of Doctrine* is a difficult book. Paul Maxwell writes as someone who has experienced religious trauma and writes of many who share his experience. Originally his PhD dissertation, the existential question that Maxwell seeks to answer is this: Will someone who apostatizes lose their soteric benefits; namely, will they go to hell? The book intends to give “a theological account of the conditions and consequences of” what he calls “trauma-induced apostasy” (p. xxii). He argues three theses in the book: “1. A Christian can lose his faith as a result of traumatic experience. 2. Reformed theology can make faith more psychologically difficult to retain. 3. The loss of such faith does not guarantee the loss of soteric benefits” (p. 303).

Part 1 addresses Reformed theology, considered as a position with a maximal view of divine providence (“MP”) and a maximal view of human sinfulness (i.e., total depravity, “TD”). Part 2 considers trauma as a wound to the imagination, which corresponds in its functions to the three aspects of faith acknowledged by Reformed theology—*notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. Thus, it is possible for there to be “trauma in the religious imagination” (ch. 6). Part 3 unpacks Maxwell’s original concept of “pistic resilience,” by which he means “the set of actions practiced by God and man that maintain commitment in the event of a perceived breaking of trust on both sides” (p. 198). Part four considers “pistic recovery” in terms of the challenges produced by Reformed communities and the need for “autonomy” as the solution to trauma.

While there is much that is stimulating and salutary in *The Trauma of Doctrine*, the argument Maxwell offers for his theses is not compelling and the solutions he proposes have the potential to be spiritually devastating.

First, the definition of the “Reformed” faith which Maxwell employs throughout the work often becomes a straw man. By isolating MP and TD from their broader contexts in a worldview that identifies itself as fundamentally biblical, he abstracts them from the context that gives them meaning. Few, if any, Reformed writers would claim that TD means abandoning human dignity (e.g., pp. 67, 305) or that humans are as bad as they could be (pp. 18, 29–30), even if we were to bracket out common grace. TD is, instead, “radical depravity”; it signifies that humans are corrupt to the core. No matter how good their actions appear, they are acting out of a posture of rebellion towards God; they are aligned with Satan, not Christ. It is thus from God’s perspective, not common sense, that they are unable to do anything good. Opposition to God will often manifest in clearly evil behavior, but also in “good” behavior that is in opposition to God, and so evil in an ultimate sense. Furthermore, few Reformed theologians would say that a sexually abused child should believe they deserved their abuse (e.g., p. 174); though culpability



is one aspect of Reformed theodicy, it cannot be absolutized. In these and other ways, Maxwell neglects the ultimate, God-centered sense of reality shaping the Reformed account of the “good,” an account which is fundamental to Reformed doctrine.

Second, his account of theodicy assumes that a common-sense moral intuition is a given and that secular accounts of goodness should be accepted. However, such a view of goodness is neither self-evident nor biblically defensible. Consequently, many Reformed theologians would rightly reject it. Because there is no standard of goodness above God, goodness must take God and his revelation into account. The concept of a universal “moral intuition” is also contentious, being individually and culturally variable. A failure to address this problem of normative goodness is devastating to Maxwell’s account of Reformed theology. Similarly, in his treatment of trauma, it is by no means clear that the “imagination” performs the function Maxwell assigns to it. This view is open to theological and philosophical criticism. For example, it is not clear that we can separate our initial interpretation of extra-mental reality from our value judgments concerning it; it seems to me that these are different perspectives on what Michael Polanyi has called our fiduciary framework. Nor is it clear that the will is related to these components of the intellect in the way Maxwell articulates, let alone that “the conceptive imagination” may circumvent the “perception cycle” and act “as a source rather merely than *by* a source” (p. 108, emphasis original). Psychology is as philosophically loaded as theology; for a Reformed Christian to faithfully integrate theology and psychology, they must attempt to do both on a consistently biblical basis.

Third, the concept of *pistic resilience* is also problematic. In arguing that Christians can apostatize without losing “their soteric benefits,” Maxwell does not address the texts most problematic for this construal. In each case he cites, there are interpretations that are not amicable to this teaching (e.g., Hos 14:4; Rom 3:31; 2 Tim 2:11–13). Nor does he address the texts that indicate apostasy shows a lack of original faith (1 John 2:19), that apostasy is final and damning (Heb 2:1–4, 6:1–12; 10:26–31), and that God preserves believers by upholding their faith (1 Pet 1:3–5). Most importantly, his suggestions for how believers may actively pursue “pistic resilience” are the opposite of the Bible’s teaching. In contrast with Maxwell’s “ecclesial disassociation” or “community departure” (pp. 246–49), the author of Hebrews makes clear that staying committed to the local church is vital (Heb 3:12–14, 10:23–25).

Fourth, it is also hard to justify the claim that excommunication promotes traumatic healing in the one who has left because a church has become “toxic to one’s faith” (cf. p. 249). Instead, the texts Maxwell cites (1 Cor 5:1–6; 1 Tim 1:19; cf. pp. 249–50), and others he does not (e.g., 2 Thess 3:14–15), all indicate that separation from the body of Christ is meant to promote repentance leading to restoration. Thus, the positive advice Maxwell gives is contrary to biblical ecclesiology. Though many aspects of Maxwell’s autonomy are actually recognized by the Reformed community, namely dignity and responsibility (pp. 271–72), it is important to uphold the biblical teaching that we are not just dependent on God but on the Christian community (e.g., Heb 10:19–25, Eph 4:1–5:2), and that we have an obligation to obey and follow God as Lord. We cannot be self-governed, though we are nevertheless bearers of dignity and responsibility.

As Christians, we must care for the hurting and broken among us. When this hurt is focused on God, perhaps for having allowed abuse or trauma to occur, we must tread with the utmost care. But we cannot do so by rejecting sound theology or by encouraging the abandonment of Christian community (pp. 219, 246–50, 279). There are clearly times to leave a church because it is abusive, but leaving a specific church ought to be paired with commitment to another, more healthy, local church. For, biblically speaking, the local church is the fundamental locus of God’s saving work in the world. By

ignoring this theological and pastoral reality, Maxwell's frequently repeated advice—leaving Christian community and setting aside traumatic beliefs even for a season—may ultimately prove to be damaging to the traumatized Christian.

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Gilbert Meilaender. *Thy Will Be Done: The Ten Commandments and the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 144 pp. £15.99/\$21.99.

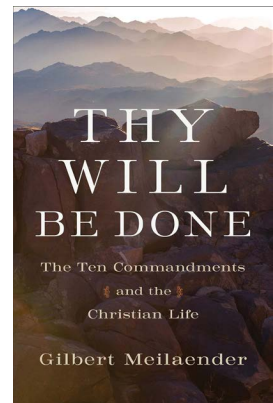
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In the West, even non-Christians are typically aware of the Ten Commandments. Although they may not be able to list them, many consider them important. The Decalogue remains a part of the cultural memory in the English-speaking world in part due to the 1956 film starring Charlton Heston that depicts a portion of Israel's history for popular audiences. The danger of popular attention to the Ten Commandments, however, is that they are valued more as a symbol than for their content.

If much more is assumed than understood about the Decalogue in popular culture, then this is not due to a lack of publication by explicitly religious authors. In the Reformed tradition, the Ten Commandments are often used as the framework for Christian ethics (e.g., John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008]). Even among Protestants who regard the Mosaic covenant as having been superseded, there is a tendency to see the Decalogue as central to Christian morality (e.g., Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018]). It might seem that among such a burgeoning backlist that another book on the Decalogue would get lost in the noise, but Gilbert Meilaender has managed to write a volume on the topic that is fresh and engaging.

Meilaender is senior research professor at Valparaiso University in Indiana. He has served in a number of prominent public positions, including as an advisor to President George W. Bush, even as he has faithfully published roughly a dozen volumes on ethics of various types. All of his books are worth reading. Moreover, he writes beautifully, even as he wrestles with contemporary questions from a firmly orthodox theological vantage point. Not surprisingly, his recent book, *Thy Will Be Done: The Ten Commandments*, is another worthy entry into an impressive collection of published works.

Chapter 1 begins by considering the role of the Decalogue in Christian morality. Meilaender surveys different approaches to the Ten Commandments throughout Christian history, particularly noting the apparent conflict between the continued applicability of the Old Testament Law and Paul's statements in Galatians about being free from the Law. Meilaender's conclusion is to resurrect the ancient understanding of freedom as living within the appropriate bounds. In the second chapter, the book shifts to discussing the five human bonds that Meilaender uses as a framework for the whole book. The first of those bonds is marriage. In the midst of social turmoil over redefinitions of marriage, Meilaender reinforces the complementary aspect of marriage as between two (and only two) individuals of naturally born distinct sexes. This is rooted in the creation narrative, rather than in later texts, but it



is reinforced by the commandment that prohibits adultery. Meilaender affirms the traditional, Christian view of marriage by putting forward a positive case for natural marriage that goes beyond biological reproduction into its representation of the gospel.

Chapter 3 wrestles with the family bond, which is reinforced by the command to honor father and mother. Meilaender's emphasis is not on the sanctity of the nuclear family, but the mutual responsibility that comes from being in familial relationship. He argues that the family should be a school for virtue, rather than merely a sanctuary from the world. The fourth chapter explores the life bond, grounded in the prohibition against murder. As many in the Christian tradition have done, Meilaender inverts this prohibition to a more general affirmation of the goodness of human life, in which we are all united since creation. This chapter mulls over the nature of war, the central aims of medical care, prohibitions against suicide, and the hope of redemption. This is the longest chapter of the book at twenty-six pages.

Chapter 5 covers what Meilaender calls the "possessions bond," dealing with the prohibitions against stealing and coveting, and the positive command to remember the Sabbath. The chapter argues for a moderated understanding of private property, which affirms the goodness of ownership but tempers that with a strong reminder that possessions are given in stewardship for the greater good. His grouping of sabbath keeping with other, more typical, property commands is a helpful reminder that in its original, agricultural context the requirement not to work on one day of the week was more than a test of spirituality; it was a way to demonstrate contentedness with one's material wealth. The sixth chapter shifts to a discussion of the "speech bond," wherein Meilaender treats the command not to bear false witness and not to take God's name in vain. The thesis of this chapter is that communication is meant to point toward truth, which is at the heart of both commandments. The chapter begins by discussing the speech bond as it was meant to be, the ways it needs healing in contemporary culture, and the hope of its redemption.

Chapter 7 serves as the conclusion of the book. Here the great commandment—to love God above all—is celebrated and placed as the crown jewel of the Decalogue. This last, and brief, chapter argues that fulfilling this command is accomplished by restoring the bonds previously discussed, but only if done for love of God first and foremost.

At one hundred and twenty-five pages of content, *Thy Will Be Done* is a reminder that a book need not be long to be powerful. While there is little original in this brief volume, which Meilaender himself acknowledges, it is beautifully written and exemplary of a rich meditation on a well-known text. This is no mean praise. There are dozens of books, ancient and modern, on the Decalogue as a centerpiece to Christian ethics. Meilaender's book is a worthy entry into the library of a pastor, professor, or educated layperson. It weaves together voices from church history while maintaining a focus on the challenges of the present day. It demonstrates a reliance on Scripture that recognizes both its historic truths and the future realities it proclaims. Most significantly, this book keeps the gospel at the center of Christian discipleship, so that the ethics Meilaender outlines are not obedience for the sake of merit, but faithfulness in response to grace and in anticipation of the coming redemption of all things. This is a hopeful book that is a pleasure to read.

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Paul E. Miller. *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 327 pp. £17.99/\$22.99.

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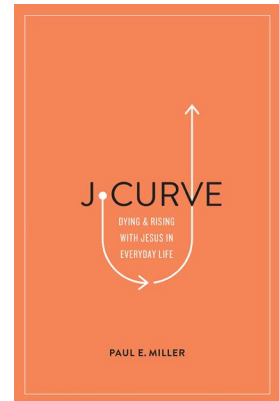
Life is fraught with trials, difficulties, challenges, and unexpected twists and turns. For Christians, it is essential that we understand all that God is doing in the world and in our lives in light of his sovereign plan. However, it can often be difficult to understand circumstances in a biblically appropriate fashion when we are focused on the pain we're experiencing, or when a desire to rise in the esteem of others is overshadowing our ability to see God's plan in a given scenario. Paul Miller's *J-Curve* serves as a steady guide as believers traverse the terrain of Christian living.

Much of Miller's work is dedicated to contrasting the J-Curve—the idea that “the normal Christian life repeatedly reenacts the dying and rising of Jesus” (p. 19)—with what he calls the “failure-boasting chart” (p. 33). This latter category describes the person who views circumstances through the lens of how it causes them to rise or fall in the esteem of others and according to overall societal standards. This is the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:4–6, boasting in his past achievements as a Jew, knowing that that is what most of his contemporaries regarded as the standard for success. The J-Curve, by contrast, speaks of entering some kind of suffering in which the flesh is weakened and sin is killed, Christ-like formation occurs, and there is a real-time “resurrection” on the other side (p. 20). In other words, the normal Christian life involves dying continually to comfort, ease, worldly success, cynicism, and despair, and finding true life in repentance, love, humility, and hope.

The author is keen for readers to see the distinct differences between these two paradigms, adopting a viewpoint that takes the J-Curve into account in Christian living. Miller further categorizes the J-Curve into three distinct kinds: the love J-Curve (we seek to serve others in sacrificial ways; Phil 2:5–11), the suffering J-Curve (evil in the world assaults us; 2 Cor 12:7–10), and the repentance J-Curve (seeking to turn from our sins; Col 3:5–11). While these J-Curves are all based on Jesus's death and resurrection, our own dying to sin and being raised to newness of life is a J-Curve in its own right. Miller summarizes by saying, “Jesus substitutes himself for us, we substitute the pieces of our lives for others” (p. 30).

The book is divided into five sections. The first is spent describing the concept of the J-Curve, beginning with Jesus's work for us and then working through how Jesus works in us (specifically, justification by faith and union with Christ). Second, Miller, delves into the specifics of the J-Curve, beginning with the concept of dying with Jesus. The third section describes this descent as a means of love, getting outside of ourselves to care for one another. Then in the fourth section the author describes rising with Jesus. Here, Miller tells the reader not to rush God's work or force the moment of being brought out of the suffering; God will do that in his own time. The big picture is that dying and rising with Jesus will happen constantly throughout the Christian life, even multiple times in one day, and we need to embrace that rhythm. The final section speaks of forming a J-Curve community, a church wherein we are not seeking to boast in ourselves, but in Christ. The J-Curve mentality frees us from tribalism and the craving for self-centered power, looking instead to Jesus who sought to serve others in love and joy. A number of helpful diagrams and charts are also scattered throughout the book.

Miller grounds much of the teaching in this work in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians and Philippians, and he also finds support in Acts, Romans 6–8, Ephesians 1, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. The depiction



of the various concepts he is seeking to convey come through paraphrased and carefully exegeted biblical narrative and teaching, as well as personal accounts of how the concepts have impacted his own life. There are moments when I wish the author had been a bit clearer in differentiating Jesus's J-Curve and our own. Yes, we are filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for example, but at times the merging of these ideas seems to correspond in too similar of a fashion (e.g., pp. 30–31). This could also be clarified when speaking of "re-enacting" the path Jesus took. Certain sentences and ideas could also be better explained. For example, Miller states, "Our suffering doesn't pay for our sin, but it does imprint us with the image of Jesus" (p. 90). While the reader can certainly infer much from that statement, a definition of "imprint" would also be useful. Also, while he speaks of progressive sanctification in very helpful terms, I do wish Miller had addressed the issue of positional sanctification, especially as this is a discussion that is gaining further attention these days (e.g., Don J. Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology of the Christian Life in Light of God's Completed Work* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020]).

And yet, while the book could have been clearer at points, *J-Curve* stands as a pivotal work on how to view the Christian life with proper perspective. Far too often we live on the boasting-failure spectrum instead of seeing our lives from the perspective of Christ's finished and continual work. Suffering, pain, trials, difficulty, death, disappointment—all of these are normal for humanity, and they are despised. But as Christians we are called to see God's work in us through these means, and to understand his purpose to humble and unite us, and to draw us closer to our great and glorious Savior. We live out our Christian faith in the context of difficult jobs, strained relationships, embarrassing circumstances, tough church meetings, and shortcomings in our personal and family lives. But all of that dying is purposeful and will be used to overcome self-gratification and self-centeredness, and to produce true life in Christ. This is a perspective we all need. I thus commend this book to you as worthy of mediation, alongside of an open Bible, engaging the texts Miller highlights throughout.

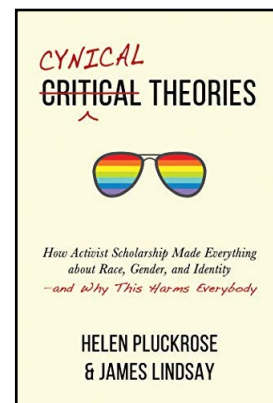
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Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay. *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*. Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020. 296 pp. £20.00/\$27.95.

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Cultural commentators on both the left and the right have noticed that the US is in the throes of a pseudo-religious revival. Some have dubbed this movement "The Great Awakening," as millions of people and hordes of institutions, corporations, and universities have embraced the messages of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," antiracism, and social justice with gusto. But what ideas are fueling this cultural revolution? What are their origins? What are their implications? Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay set out to answer these questions in their bestselling book *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity and Why This Harms Everybody*. Their work is a crucial read for Christians struggling to understand the ideological underpinnings of terms like "white privilege," "heteronormativity," "intersectionality," and "transphobia."



The book's project is ambitious: to chart the emergence of this increasingly influential ideology from its origins in postmodernism, through fields like postcolonial studies, queer theory, critical race theory, and fat studies, to its current manifestation in the Social Justice movement. According to the authors, postmodernism has evolved in three stages: its "high deconstructive" phase which petered out in the mid-1990s, its "applied" phase, which lasted until 2010, and its "reified" phase as "Critical Social Justice" (CSJ), a helpful moniker that I'll adopt for the rest of my review.

Following scholars like Walter Truett Anderson and Steinar Kvale, Pluckrose and Lindsay identify two principles adopted by postmodernism in each of its phases: (1) "radical skepticism about whether objective knowledge or truth is obtainable and a commitment to cultural constructivism," and (2) "a belief that society is formed of systems of power and hierarchies, which decide what can be known and how" (p. 31). To put it succinctly, reality and truth itself are viewed "through a lens that detects power dynamics in every interaction, utterance, and cultural artifact" (p. 15). In chapter 2, the authors explain how "applied postmodernism" grew out of a dissatisfaction with the abstract, skeptical nature of "high postmodernism." Activists realized that as long as postmodernism insisted on deconstructing *all* truth-claims, including claims about injustice, discrimination, and group identity, it would remain largely theoretical. For this reason, they combined postmodern methods with the critical social theories that grew out of the Frankfurt School and the New Left of the 1960s, which were fundamentally oriented towards liberation, emancipation, and activism. "Applied postmodernism" then retained the central principles and themes of "high postmodernism" with one amendment: "identity and oppression based on identity are treated as known features of objective reality" (p. 59).

Chapters 3–7 take deep dives into various subfields of applied postmodernism: postcolonial theory, queer theory, critical race theory and intersectionality, feminisms and gender studies, and disability and fat studies. Each of these fields applies the same basic framework: the dominant discourse (i.e., "way of speaking") imposed by oppressor groups is interrogated to uncover subtle ways in which words, symbols, values, and norms support and perpetuate the marginalization of the oppressed group. For example, the phenomenon of "Orientalism" within postcolonial studies posits that Europeans constructed the notion of "the East" as exotic, superstitious, primitive, and "other," while attributing opposite, positive characteristics to "the West." Queer theory argues that the gender binary itself (i.e., male/female) oppressively sorts people into arbitrary categories that should be transgressed, destabilized, and "queered." Critical race theory explains how "white supremacy" is encoded not just in overt acts of violence or legal discrimination, but through supposedly neutral, objective, and colorblind laws and policies. Disability and fat studies aim to show that notions of health and obesity are not rooted in objective facts about nature or function, but are ways in which society denigrates, shames, or others certain conditions and body types.

The concept of intersectionality, which was developed within the context of critical race theory, has played an extremely influential role in the convergence of these various disciplines into one overarching CSJ metanarrative. Intersectionality posits that various identity markers interact in irreducibly complex ways. As a result, CSJ views racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and fatphobia as "interlocking systems of oppression" that are inextricably linked and must all be combatted simultaneously.

The coalescence of these various expressions of applied postmodernism into CSJ is explored in chapter 8. If high postmodernism was characterized by playful skepticism and applied postmodernism

by activism, then CSJ is characterized by certainty. Here, it's worth quoting Pluckrose and Lindsay at length:

the belief that society is structured of specific but largely invisible identity-based systems of power and privilege that construct knowledge via ways of talking about things is now considered by social justice scholars and activists to be an objectively true statement about the organizing principle of society. Does this sound like a metanarrative? That's because it is. Social Justice scholarship and its educators and activists see these principles and conclusions as *The Truth* According to Social Justice—and they treat it as though they have discovered the analogue of the germ theory of disease, but for bigotry and oppression.... Consequently, we now have Social Justice texts—forming a kind of Gospel of Social Justice—that express, with absolute certainty, that all white people are racist, all men are sexist, racism and sexism are systems that can exist and oppress absent even a single person with racist or sexist intentions or beliefs ..., sex is not biological and exists on a spectrum, language can be literal violence, denial of gender identity is killing people, the wish to remedy disability and obesity is hateful, and everything needs to be decolonized. (pp. 182–83)

Due to the proliferation of CSJ within our institutions, its basic tenets no longer need to be gleaned from esoteric academic journals. It's the water we're all swimming in.

While *Cynical Theories* is highly critical of CSJ, readers may be surprised at how balanced its treatment is. No discipline, not even fat studies, is dismissed out-of-hand. The authors routinely point out the valid insights provided by each field. Indeed, they insist they both support the pursuit of (lowercase) social justice. Rather, it's their commitment to liberal values that makes them worried that these fields are overrun by activists whose fundamentally flawed assumptions are producing fundamentally wrong prescriptions: "What is, perhaps, most frustrating about Theory is that it tends to get literally every issue it's primarily concerned with backwards, largely due to its rejection of human nature, science, and liberalism" (p. 258).

*Cynical Theories* also calls attention to the deeply poisonous nature of CSJ's adoption of standpoint epistemology. Standpoint epistemology argues that members of dominant groups (men, whites, heterosexuals, the rich, etc.) tend to be blinded by their privilege such that they should defer to the claims and prescriptions of oppressed groups (women, people of color, LGBTQ people, the poor, etc.), who have special insight into oppression due to their lived experience. That said, the latter injunction doesn't include *all* members of oppressed groups: "Members of these [oppressed] groups who disagree with standpoint theory—or even deny that they are oppressed—are explained away as having internalized their oppression (false consciousness) or as pandering in order to gain favor or reward from the dominant system ('Uncle Toms' and 'native informants') by amplifying Theoretically dominant discourses" (p. 195).

Not only is this outlook completely unfalsifiable, it also undermines appeals to logic, reason, and evidence, with devastating effects on our ability to actually solve social problems. From eruptions at Evergreen State, the University of Missouri, Haverford, and Bryn Mawr, to the shaming of Kevin Hart and J. K. Rowling, to the retraction of scholarly papers by Rebecca Tuvel and Bruce Gilley (see chapter 9), we're witnessing the consequences of the mainstreaming of CSJ.

*Cynical Theories* has garnered many positive and a few negative reviews. Some criticism seems unavoidable given the scope of the book's claims. Attempting to characterize the trajectory of an

intellectual movement spanning over half a century, dozens of fields, and the work of hundreds of major scholars will inevitably invite disagreement. In particular, the book's focus on the postmodern roots of CSJ downplays the role of critical theory, a tradition which stretches back to Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School. Yet this objection is something of a judgment call and is addressed in footnote 1 on page 271, which helpfully acknowledges the relationship between CSJ, Marxism, and critical theory (pp. 271–72).

A second, more serious objection is that *Cynical Theories* misinterprets or misrepresents numerous scholars in support of its claims. While I won't go into details, I will offer four considerations when assessing these criticisms. First, in private correspondence with me, Pluckrose acknowledged that the book contains "a couple of examples of poor phrasing which create ambiguity and potential misunderstanding," which she may address in a 2nd edition. Second, based on my reading of some of the primary sources, including the work of Dotson and Medina, I'm not convinced that accusations of misrepresentation are clear-cut. A plausible case can be made that Pluckrose and Lindsay's conclusions represent over-readings that are nonetheless consistent with the scholars' actual views on the subject. Third, it has been independently observed that postmodern scholars and their followers often employ vague or equivocal language, giving them a kind of plausible deniability when their views are challenged (see Nicholas Shackel, "The Vacuity of Postmodernist Methodology," *Metaphilosophy* 36 [2005]: 295–320). This kind of rhetorical fuzziness must be taken into account in disputes over interpretation. Finally, even if some of the criticisms levelled against Pluckrose and Lindsay's reading of specific scholars are valid, their overall argument remains convincing. Whether or not one or two trees in the forest have been mischaracterized, the forest is there and we'd be foolish not to see it.

Given the influence of CSJ on our culture, it is no surprise that this discussion has spilled over into the evangelical church as Christians wonder whether and to what extent they can embrace these ideas. While some Christians insist that CSJ is fundamentally incompatible with Christianity, others see this claim as fearmongering. Therefore, *Cynical Theories* offers a very important third-party criticism of CSJ by authors who, as professing atheists, have no "skin in the game" when it comes to the compatibility of CSJ and Christianity. While Pluckrose and Lindsay don't explicitly connect the dots between CSJ and Christian doctrine, it is not hard to see why a philosophy that challenges the possibility of objective knowledge, rejects biblical sexual ethics, adopts an epistemology based on "lived experience," destabilizes written texts, and functions as its own comprehensive, totalizing worldview will come into conflict with Christianity and will divide Christian communities.

Fortunately, more and more evangelicals are beginning to take this threat seriously. Last August, Tim Keller wrote a long article listing the ways in which "postmodern critical theory" is incompatible with the Christian worldview, and characterizing it as "deeply incoherent," "far too simplistic," "undermining [of] our common humanity," "[denying] our common sinfulness," "mak[ing] forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation between groups impossible," "offer[ing] a highly self-righteous 'performative' identity," and being "prone to domination" ("A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory, *Life in the Gospel*, <https://tinyurl.com/q5sob7s2>). In a two-part article, John Piper warned against critical race theory, writing that "in its mainstream expression — it is another manifestation of the age-old enslavement of the fallen human heart to self-deification ('I will be my own god'), and self-definition ('I will define my own essential identity'), and self-determination" ("Critical Race Theory, Part 2: The Root Problem," *Desiring God*, 24 November 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5f5gm9gz>). Recently, six SBC seminary presidents and convention president J. D. Greear issued a statement affirming that "Critical

Race Theory, Intersectionality and any version of Critical Theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message” (*Baptist Press*, 30 November 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/uf37mznp>). Finally, in his excellent book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), Carl Trueman explains how critical theory plays a major role in the modern transgender movement.

For those who continue to insist that CSJ is, at best, a fundamentalist bogeyman and, at worst, an excuse for racism, sexism, and bigotry, *Cynical Theories* should be a wake-up call. Surely, if two atheists can see a battle looming between the Christian faith and the postmodern religion of social justice, evangelicals can hardly afford to ignore it.

Yet Christians should also realize that Pluckrose and Lindsay’s prescription for fighting this ideology is limited. They urge a return to classical liberal, secular principles based on free speech, freedom of conscience, open dialogue, and public debate. Certainly, this approach will help stave off the growing illiberalism of the progressive left, but two caveats are in order.

First, they offer no basis for these shared values. Why should I permit speech I disagree with when I have the power to suppress it? Why should I refrain from imposing my values on others via law? They ultimately appeal to self-interest: we all benefit from truth and therefore we ought to support liberal mechanisms that are successful at discerning truth. But what if I am less interested in the abstract benefits I might derive from truth and more interested in the very concrete benefits I derive from the ascendancy of my tribe? Moreover, what should I do about conflicts over the legality of prostitution or pornography or abortion? At some point, we will hit bedrock differences between worldviews that will not be resolved by any amount of free discourse and public debate.

Second, Pluckrose and Lindsay insist that liberalism is not a worldview. But if they’re correct, then liberalism will never have the attraction of CSJ in terms of meeting people’s needs for meaning, purpose, significance, and identity. CSJ assures people that they are on the right side of history, that they can be clean and virtuous if only they divest themselves of power and stand in solidarity with the oppressed. In other words, CSJ tries to fill the God-shaped hole in every human heart. Even if it doesn’t quite fit, many find it more appealing than (classical) liberalism, which makes no attempt to fill this void.

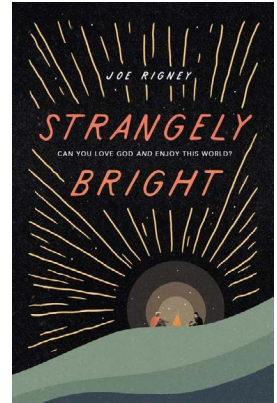
In contrast, Christianity has the resources to deal with CSJ at a deep level. It not only explains why oppression is evil, but also why it is merely one of many evils that grows in the fertile soil of the fallen human heart. It also explains why revolutions aimed at producing an earthly utopia so often produce a nightmare of bloodshed and suffering, and why no amount of virtue signaling and allyship can fill our need for righteousness. In short, the Christian gospel tells a better story. While it is universal, totalizing, and comprehensive, it does not oppress but sets captives free. That’s the good news that everyone, including the most zealous devotees of CSJ, needs to hear.

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Joe Rigney. *Strangely Bright: Can You Love God and Enjoy This World?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 121 pp. £11.99/\$14.99.

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Many today in the Reformed Evangelical world associate the term “hedonism” not firstly with an ancient pagan philosophical system, but rather instinctively with *seeing and savoring God*. This may not bespeak historical accuracy, but it does demonstrate how pervasive the ministry of John Piper has become. An entire generation of evangelicals have grown up affirming that *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him*. In recent years, however, this idea has received an appreciative call for further development. We might call this the “beer and bacon” challenge. The Christian Hedonism promoted by Piper, some have pressed, needs to do more work on enjoying God *by* enjoying his gifts. While saying “yes and amen” to the approach Piper has taken to show how God is supremely better than any created thing, we can and should affirm that the purpose of creation is not merely to be eclipsed by the goodness of God. So, the challenge has been set: can Christian Hedonism sustain more beer and bacon?



In 2014, Joe Rigney answered in the affirmative with *The Things of Earth: Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). *The Things of Earth* is, however, a rather dense defense of this thesis, and so he has recently served us with *Strangely Bright*, a more accessible version of his argument. Rigney begins the book by framing up the central tension: *should I enjoy God or the gifts that God has given?* The tension is both experiential and biblical. It is not simply that we, as Christians, feel torn between wanting to enjoy God above all else, and being drawn to enjoyment of earthly things; the commands of Scripture seem to pull the reader in both directions as well. Paul counts “everything as loss” and “rubbish” in comparison to the “worth of knowing Christ” (Phil 3:7–8), but he also considers “everything created by God” as “good” and “not to be rejective if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4).

Rigney begins to develop the biblical resolution to this apparent dilemma with a reflection on Psalm 19, and its description of the two books of God: general revelation (vv. 1–6) and special revelation (vv. 7–11). Reminiscent of many throughout church history, Rigney extrapolates from this psalm the deep meaning of the cosmos. Creation *means* more than its material form. The meaning of creation is God—he is its ultimate referent. This point should not be hastily passed by. It is not simply that we find similarities between God and creation, and subsequently make analogies on our own. The similarities are *baked in*. Their telos is to point beyond themselves to God. All created things (including those created by created things, like *bread* and *wine*) have a pedagogical purpose to teach us about God.

And this is where Rigney’s primary contention comes in: created goods teach us what God is like after, and only after, they are experienced in themselves. The analogy of God’s word being “sweeter than honey” and “more to be desired than gold” only makes sense once we have tasted the sweetness of honey and beheld the brilliance of gold (Ps 19:9–10). Having been situated in this thick and earthy context—where people go to bed in tents, bridegrooms emerge from their chambers in joy, and strong men run races with intensity—Scripture then serves as a tutor to teach us about what we are experiencing. “If creation is a language in which God speaks to us through sights and sounds and smells and tastes and sensations,” says Rigney, “then Scripture is the grammar textbook for that language, the language of God” (p. 26).

Rigney insists that it is not coincidental or arbitrary that human beings are physical creatures placed in a world teeming with pleasures of all kinds. It was God's idea to make man a pleasure-seeking animal living in a world of pleasures, all of which are intended to be extensions of—and instructors about—his own delightfulness. Grasping this helps to avoid two pleasure-related temptations: idolatry and ingratitude. The former seeks to replace the Giver with the gift, and the latter dishonors the Giver by despising the gift. While the former is an obvious error, the latter is harder to spot for many Christians. Rigney illustrates the point by describing two possible Christian responses to a creational delight like “pumpkin crunch cake.” The first is to reason that while pumpkin crunch cake is good, Jesus is better. The cake should therefore be rejected. The second response is to reason that as good as the cake is, it is only a fraction of the goodness in Christ; the greater the enjoyment of the cake, the more apparent Christ's goodness by superiority. “In the first case, we seek to make Jesus better by making creation worse. In the second, we seek to let creation be grand, only to remind ourselves that we have not yet begun to experience true grandeur” (p. 54).

Of course, this is all well and good in the abstract, but this balanced perspective cannot be maintained at every second of every day. This is why, in chapter 4, Rigney goes on to propose incorporating “anchor points” to assure Christ remains our “North Star, the fixed point that helps us to navigate our ship through life” (p. 61). In considering Paul's exhortation to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col 3:1–4), Rigney helpfully explains what this means (i.e., keeping Christ the “North Star”), while cautioning against concluding what it does not mean (i.e., disavowing all things earthly). Setting one's mind on things above and not on things that are on earth *looks like* doing a whole lot of earthly good (Col 3:5–4:1). This is how it is possible for everything said so far to be entirely consistent with the biblical call to generosity and self-denial.

The final pages of the book are flavored with a pastoral experience that brings the balance necessary in order for a book like this to be received well in a world like the one in which we live; namely, a world of suffering and loss. What should the believer do when God's good gifts are either withheld or taken away? The temptation may be to try to soften the blow by devaluing the gift. The less precious the gift, the less its loss means. But Rigney insists that this is not the way forward. Paul's promise that “this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17) is not intended to minimize earthly suffering, but rather to maximize the glory of heaven. Like more enjoyment of pumpkin crunch cake makes Christ's goodness sweeter, so the heavier the weight of loss in this world, the greater the weight of glory it is preparing for us. This, too, is a pedagogue.

By teaching us to enjoy God by enjoying his creation—to read in creation its essential inscription that bespeaks the glory of God, Rigney is doing more than resolving an existential tension. He is turning us into pre-moderns who view the world not as a modernistic reduction of mere material, but as ubiquitous divine messaging. Do not be fooled by the absence of explicit language to the effect: Rigney wants us to become Medievalists, and we will all be the better for it.

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Robert S. Smith. *Come, Let Us Sing: A Call to Musical Reformation*. London: Latimer Trust, 2020. vii + 314 pp. £11.00/\$14.00.

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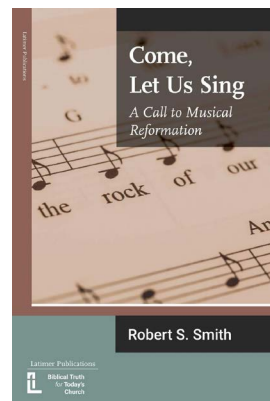
Some activities are famously difficult to perform at the same time—patting your head and rubbing your stomach, chewing gum and walking. And for many people, this list of competing activities would include singing and thinking. Singing, after all, seems to emote from the heart and erupt from the body while thinking is the purview of nobler realm of the mind. And yet, at their best, Christian gatherings consider this seeming dichotomy of heart and head as a feature rather than a bug.

Here to help readers think about congregational singing (so that congregations can thoughtfully sing) is Rob Smith. Smith serves as a lecturer in theology, ethics, and music ministry at Sydney Missionary & Bible College. (In the interest of disclosure, it is only fair to note that Smith also serves as *Themelios*'s book review editor for Ethics and Pastoralia, though he did not commission this review.) His previous book (co-authored with Mike Raiter) primarily exegeted biblical songs in their context before drawing out implications for believers (*Songs of the Saints: Enriching Our Singing by Learning from the Songs of Scripture* [Sydney: Matthias Media, 2017]). In this new book, Smith draws together insights and implications from his studies to help believers thoughtfully navigate the sometimes less-than-thoughtful world of congregational song.

Smith begins his discussion of congregational singing by considering the reasons for the Christian gathering. After a discussion of terms, Smith considers the revolutionary transformation that Jesus Christ enacts in worship. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for believers has transformed them into priests, called to sacrifice spiritually in a new temple (p. 43). Smith writes, "when we come together as Christians, we clearly don't come in order to *start* worshipping—our worship started the moment we came to (and became part of) the true temple, Jesus Christ! If anything, we come together to *continue* worshipping.... The distinctive thing is that we come to do this *with one another* and *with a particular goal*" (p. 46).

The particular goal Smith has in mind for the Christian gathering is edification. He is hardly alone in this conviction, but one of Smith's contributions is his tying of the identity of believers (the temple) to the activity of the gathering (building up). The importance of the task of "building up" derives from the importance of the building. The task of edification takes on a richer sense when the *edifice* is properly understood.

Smith begins the meat of his book by discussing how congregational singing counts as praise to God, what he considers "arguably, the central purpose of singing in Scripture" (p. 70). He looks to the Psalms to find what he calls the "two faces of praise"—adoration and advertising (p. 75). Smith goes to admirable lengths to demonstrate the relationship between doxological praise and evangelistic proclamation, exhibiting the Scriptural foundation that other writers have assumed without making explicit. Smith argues that "our singing as God's people is not a retreat from the world but a key part of our witness to the world" (p. 77). *Come, Let Us Sing* marvelously exhorts Christians not to be afraid of the world's threats without becoming callous toward the world's needs. The length of Smith's book allows him unusual opportunity to wrestle through the paradoxes of congregational singing. Praise is both natural and difficult, celebratory and mournful, divinely appointed and demonically opposed. Smith encourages believers to persevere through these difficulties by remembering God's worthiness,



his commands, and his desire for our praise. From this vantage point, praise should be thankful, fervent, and encouraging to others.

Having considered the relationship between singing and praise, Smith next considers the rich relationship between singing and prayer. Here, Smith takes a restrictive (unnecessarily restrictive, from my perspective) view of prayer, arguing that prayer is best understood as petitionary. (“Confession is confession, thanksgiving is thanksgiving, but prayer is asking” [p. 115].) Smith highlights the ways that singing expresses and enriches unity a church’s prayers, though he wisely nuances Bonhoeffer’s insistence upon unison singing (p. 124). In addition to the unity, Smith argues that “the very activity of singing truth assists us to access and process the emotional reality of that truth” (p. 128). Since biblical prayer is often associated with posture and bodily gesture, biblical singing of prayer often benefits from such accompaniments. Smith evokes Luther’s quip: “Do not despise these things, because Scripture and Christ Himself praise them” (p. 154).

In this section and in others, Smith draws upon the Psalter as a help to “pray both in a truly human way and in divinely inspired words” (p. 132). Smith advocates for churches to have a much more immersive relationship in the Psalms, yet he does not advocate for exclusive psalmody, since “although the Psalms clearly testify of Christ (Luke 24:44), they do so obliquely, presenting Him ‘in the shadows’” (p. 140). In a delightful bon mot, Smith writes that Christian congregations must “always sing the *truth of Scripture*, whether or not we sing the actual *text of Scripture*” (p. 141).

The third section of the book discusses “Singing as Preaching.” From this reviewer’s perspective, this is an unfortunate designation. Perhaps my sensitivity reflects my North American context, but referring to singing as “preaching” may prohibit female involvement in corporate singing in many complementarian churches. While Smith explicitly says, “I am using the language of preaching in a fairly general sense to refer to the many and various ways that God’s people (individually and collectively) communicate God’s truth to each other and to the world” (p. 167 n. 3), this will not prevent people from other traditions hearing the term from a narrower, clerical/elder/pastoral perspective.

Smith argues that congregational singing ought to reflect the Psalms and their “clear and carefully crafted didactic purpose” (p. 176). Singing about God’s past faithfulness provides God’s people with perspective for their present circumstances and awakens hope for their future deliverance. Thus, “singing is one very powerful way in which God’s servants have (and therefore can) remember the living Word of the living God” (p. 185). In one of the strongest sections of the book, Smith illustrates this biblical reality with an in-depth study of Revelation’s songs.

Beyond the brief quibbles discussed earlier, *Come, Let Us Sing* is a profoundly sensible and wise book. Helpful to any member of the congregation, the depth (and length) of Smith’s biblical exegesis and theological discussion will particularly reward study by church leaders and aspiring ministers of music. This fall, I assigned it for a classroom of about twenty undergraduates and found it very useful for both surveying the biblical data and for starting fruitful classroom discussions.

I encourage all to read *Come, Let us Sing*. May it assist believers who endeavor to follow faithfully the Apostle Paul’s example to not only sing praise with their spirits, but to sing with their minds also (1 Cor 14:15).

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Preston Sprinkle. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church and What the Bible Has to Say*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2021. 287 pp. £14.42/\$19.99.

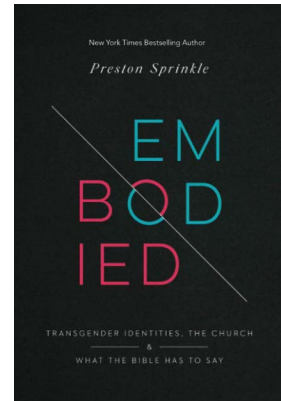
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Of all the recent evangelical engagements with the questions raised by transgender experience, Preston Sprinkle's *Embodied* is, arguably, the most comprehensive, penetrating and compelling. The book not only addresses the cultural, medical, psychological and social angles of the trans phenomenon, but also includes several chapters of incisive biblical exposition and valuable theological exploration (plus 43 pages of endnotes). Although not without the occasional inconsistency, *Embodied* is marked by a powerful commitment to biblical truth matched by an equally strong concern for real people. Accordingly, the work is set in a decidedly pastoral frame and is marked by a deeply compassionate tone throughout.

The opening chapter ("People") introduces readers to a number of real people and their stories. In chapter 2 ("Ten Thousand Genders"), Sprinkle turns to definitions, starting with the key term, *transgender*, and the various shades of what it might mean for someone to label themselves "trans\*." (Sprinkle adopts the practice of putting an asterisk after "trans," to indicate that he is using it "as broad umbrella term to include a whole range of identities that aren't strictly transgender, such as nonbinary, genderqueer, and the like" [p. 33].) He then proceeds to discuss terms such as *gender dysphoria*, *transition*, *cisgender* and *intersex*, before explaining the difference between *sex* and *gender*—parsing the latter in terms of *gender role*—"how males and females are expected to act in any given culture" (p. 43)—and *gender identity*—"one's internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither" (p. 47).

After further unpacking the question "What Does it Mean to be Trans\*?" in chapter 3, chapter 4 ("Male and Female in the Image of God") begins a series of chapters which examine the Bible's teaching. Sprinkle starts by stressing the importance of human physicality to divine image-bearing, in order to make the important point that "we bear God's image as male and female" (p. 67). While Sprinkle is quick to clarify that male and female are *sex* (not *gender*) categories, he strongly affirms Phyllis Bird's contention that biological sex is "an essential datum in any attempt to define the human being and the nature of humankind" (p. 68, citing Bird, "Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh," *Theology Today* 50 [1994]: 531). Indeed, it is our sexed embodiment that explains why "Jesus views Genesis 1–2 as normative" (p. 70); Paul "sees the body as significant for moral behavior and correlates the body with personhood" (p. 71); "Scripture prohibits cross-sex behavior" (p. 72); and "sex difference probably remains after the resurrection" (p. 75). Of particular importance is his observation that "the incarnation of Christ affirms the goodness of our sexed embodiment" (p. 74).

Chapter 5 wades into the conflicted terrain of "Gender Stereotypes." Sprinkle notes that while stereotypes may be accurate *descriptions* of how many men and women behave, "they aren't biblical *prescriptions* for all" (p. 85, emphasis original). In fact, he suggests that "Scripture contains hardly any sex-specific commands" (p. 92). He does, however, observe some—many pertaining to husbands and wives (e.g., Eph 5:22; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1), some concerning the ministry of women in the church (e.g., 1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 14:34–35), and others (e.g., Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 11:2–16) "establishing a principle that men and women should maintain distinctions in how they present themselves" (p. 94). Nevertheless, he is



concerned that this principle be applied with care, as “the meaning of clothing is culturally bound” (p. 95).

In chapter 6, Sprinkle turns to the subject of eunuchs in order to engage with the argument that “gender should supersede sex when there’s incongruence” (p. 97). In response to the claim that “the binaries of Genesis 1 are polar ends of a spectrum, allowing for hybrids and variations in between” (p. 98), Sprinkle points out that we “simply don’t encounter humans identified as something other than male or female in Scripture” (p. 99). He then turns to Matthew 19:12, arguing that while we cannot hope to know the “internal psychology” of eunuchs, they were normally regarded as biological males (albeit infertile ones), which is why Jesus invokes them as “a symbol of singleness” (p. 102). He further suggests that even if it could be shown that Jesus’s reference to “eunuchs from birth” included certain intersex conditions, what cannot be concluded is that “a person’s internal sense of self is more definitive than their biological sex when there is incongruence between the two” (p. 104). The chapter continues with helpful discussions of Galatians 3:28, Matthew 22:30, and the Bible’s familiarity with people attempting to cross gender boundaries. It concludes by addressing the question: “Should the church accept trans\* people?” Sprinkle’s answer is an unequivocal Yes, with the caveat that “Christian discipleship means moving toward embracing our embodied identities” (p. 113).

Chapter 7 explores the complexities of intersex conditions, largely to address the *since intersex, therefore transgender* argument of trans-affirming authors. The first thing Sprinkle notes is that “99 percent of people who have an intersex condition are unambiguously male or female” (p. 122). As for the remaining 1%, he suggests that they are best regarded as a “blend of the two biological sexes rather than a third sex” (p. 124). Irrespective of how those with intersex conditions identify, Sprinkle does not believe they give support to the idea that a trans\* person’s internal sense is more indicative of who they really are than their body. Trans\* and intersex are “two different ontological realities” that “shouldn’t be quickly mapped onto each other” (p. 126). The chapter concludes by raising the question, “Is Intersex Caused by the Fall?” Desiring not to exacerbate “deep wounds of societal dehumanization” (p. 128), Sprinkle declares himself to be uncertain as to how best to answer the question.

After a well-researched chapter that casts serious scientific doubt on the possibility of a person having a male brain and a female body (or vice versa), chapter 9 turns to the deeper question of whether a person can have a female soul in a male body (or vice versa). Sprinkle begins by pointing out that because sex is a biological category, “immaterial souls can’t be sexed” (p. 149). After laying out additional challenges to “the sexed-soul theory,” he concludes that the only way an affirmative case can be made is, first, by assuming a strong form of substance dualism (which he deems unbiblical) and, second, by “relying on modern, stereotypical assumptions about what constitutes femaleness and maleness” (p. 153).

The remainder of Sprinkle’s book deals with a range of relevant issues and practical questions: rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ch. 10); transitioning and Christian discipleship (ch. 11); pronouns, bathrooms, and sleeping spaces (ch.12). Following a brief pastoral conclusion, Sprinkle issues a welcome call for “less outrage and more outrageous love” (p. 224). The book is then completed by an important appendix on “Suicidality and Trans\* People,” which is both compassionate and judicious. On the one hand, Sprinkle acknowledges both the high suicidality rate (probably 22%) and that “minority stress plays at least some role in mental health issues like anxiety and depression among trans\*-identified people” (p. 236). On the other, he recognizes that “the presence of co-occurring mental health concerns” may largely explain the

high rate and that “weaponizing suicidality to push a particular ideological point might actually increase suicide attempts among trans\* people rather than reducing them” (p. 239).

While *Embodied* has numerous strengths, it also has some weaknesses. Many are minor matters of language (e.g., overuse of the term “non-trans\*” people), but some are more substantial. Particularly puzzling is chapter 7’s openness to intersex conditions existing before the Fall—especially in light of the case argued in chapter 6. In support of his agnosticism, Sprinkle declares that he “wasn’t in the garden before Adam and Eve sinned” (p. 127). Quite so. Only two humans were: Adam, a male, and Eve, a female (cf. Gen 1:27–28). Therefore, while we should take pains to communicate that intersex persons are not “fallen in more severe ways than non-intersex persons” (p. 128), failing to affirm what Scripture makes plain—that “eunuchs from birth” (Matt 19:12) were not present in creation “from the beginning” (Matt 19:4)—is not the way to achieve this.

The other point at which I find Sprinkle unpersuasive is in his advocacy of “pronoun hospitality” (p. 205)—i.e., always using a trans\* person’s chosen pronouns. Although he fairly lays out the arguments for and against this practice, he seems to miss the weaknesses of the former and the strengths of the latter. Ironically, the argument that seems to carry most weight for him—that pronoun hospitality “communicates respect” (p. 207)—is an instance of the kind of utilitarianism he elsewhere criticizes (pp. 190–91). Doubtless, a *dubious means* (e.g., using a false pronoun) may sometimes be the only way to achieve a *desirable end* (e.g., preserving a relationship). But, as Abigail Shrier argues in *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2020), it may also do greater harm in many cases, particularly in the longer term. On a consequentialist ethic alone, then, pronoun *avoidance* (rather than *compliance*) would seem to be the wiser default practice.

These points of disagreement notwithstanding, *Embodied* is a timely and much-needed book. Personally, I plan to keep a number of copies on my shelf, so that I’m always ready to put one into the hands of a Christian who is either wrestling with their own gender incongruence or seeking to care for a gender-confused loved one.

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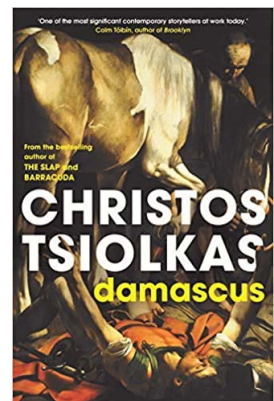
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Christos Tsiolkas. *Damascus*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2019. 423 pp. £16.99/\$22.99.

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Meet the apostle Paul. But Paul as you’ve never seen him before. A tormented soul, struggling with lust, self-loathing, doubt, and confusion about the return of Yeshua (Jesus) and his kingdom. This is a fictional Paul, not the Paul of standard scholarship. Contemporary Australian novelist, Christos Tsiolkas, by his own declaration, has become intrigued and captivated by the apostle and the beginnings of Christianity amid the darkness, cruelty, and barbarism of the first century Roman Empire. Tsiolkas has remarked that personally he finds Jesus’s words profoundly moving, but cannot call himself a “Christian” because he disbelieves Christ’s resurrection.

*Damascus* is a disturbing novel that slides, with sly creativity, between the trustworthy witness of the New Testament, the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*,



and the author's engrossing fictional embellishments. (The "Gospel" of Thomas is a non-canonical collection of supposed sayings and parables of Jesus, discovered in 1945. Like Tsiolkas, it doesn't acknowledge Jesus's resurrection.)

The book introduces us to an astonishing collection of early Christ-followers. The narrative opens with a young girl whose vicious stoning for adultery is being supervised by the unconverted Saul. There is a Greek woman, Lydia, whose daughter was born deformed and left exposed to die on a hillside. A slave girl who is lasciviously and disgracefully humiliated in the Roman arena before her throat is torn out by a lioness. A young boy from Paul's own congregation who is dragged into a pagan temple, castrated and has his tongue cut out by the cult priestess. Each takes hope and comfort in Christ despite the terrible pain, filth and distress caused by the brutality of their unbelieving persecutors.

*Damascus* is a tour de force of imagination. It mingles the powerful gospel themes of forgiveness, resurrection, love, compassion, and inclusion, with doubt, heresy, and legend. It infuses genuine biblical characters with prurient desires and strange compulsions. The young pre-conversion Saul, satiating his lustful desires, visits makeshift brothels under cover of darkness. He fights his same-sex attraction and struggles with sin and shame. After his Damascus road encounter with Jesus, he remains fearful, reluctant and sin-ridden. Yet he courageously perseveres in his newly discovered faith, along with his doubt.

The Paul of the New Testament did not cease to be a Jew; and likewise, Paul the protagonist of *Damascus* remains a Jew after his conversion. He is cut to the heart, deeply hurt and distressed to be spurned by his Jewish family and exiled from Judaism, his beloved people, and their God-given land. He fears for them in their refusal to acknowledge the Messiah. Tsiolkas, I think, gets this tension right, and there are shades of passages like Romans 9:1–5 in the background here. Through his depiction of the character and emotions of Paul, he makes the point powerfully and poignantly.

At various points in the book, we are presented with strange fictional pastiches of biblical characters. Timothy, Paul's disciple and protégé, is desperate to be circumcised. Paul, who loves Timothy deeply and probably inappropriately, oscillates between refusing his entreaties and acquiescing. Eventually, as an exhausted old man, Timothy suicides—while still trusting in Jesus. The apostle Thomas is, indeed, a twin – of the Lord Jesus! But he refuses to believe in his brother's resurrection, despite insisting that he (Thomas) remains an authentic part of the Christian community.

There is much in this novel that will shock readers into realizing how cruelly many early Christians were treated. They are contemptuously called "death worshippers" (p. 196), and a "death cult" (p. 296), and identified as "flesh-eaters and lovers of death" (p. 227). Abel, an early church elder in the narrative, reminds his flock: "Who *doesn't* hate us? Who *doesn't* want to destroy us? The Romans scorn us, the Greeks despise us, the righteous Jews shun us, and all of the unbaptised laugh at us. There is no tribe that doesn't slander us with the ugliest gossip and there is no authority that doesn't want us eliminated" (pp. 329–30).

Warning: this is not an easy book to read. Its heresy and dark imagery make it uncomfortably confronting, and may lead undiscerning readers away from the truth. But is it a good book to read? That depends on why you read it. It's fiction—strong and disturbing fiction—and hardly a retelling of the New Testament narrative. And yet, many Christians are reading it and even commending it. So it may serve pastors to be forearmed.

Is it edifying literature? On the whole, no. If you want to feel deeply the ostracism, danger, and sometimes terror experienced by persecuted Christians surrounded by pagan idolatry and hostility,

as well as savage Jewish resentment, then yes—the book will oblige you: it’s full of gruesome, gritty descriptions and raw emotions which are very likely pretty close to the reality of first century life. As Paul—the genuine Paul—himself wrote, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12).

Yet there are glittering jewels of Christian truth to be discovered: “we don’t need any signs or symbols—no liturgy, no mysteries, no temples, no priests, no sacrifices, no pomp and no idols. All we need is the word of the Lord” (p. 357). And what shines through the muck and misery is the unshakeable trust these early believers have in Jesus; their joyful generosity as Christian slaves, householders and even aristocrats—Jewish, Greek, and Roman—share life together; and their hope and joy in Jesus’s promised return. They’re not sure *when* he will come to consummate his kingdom and vindicate them, but they know with certainty that he *will*. Their customary greeting and responsive catchcry throughout the book is heart-warming: “He is coming.... Truly, he is returning!” (pp. 90, 306). And that mixture of suffering, kingdom and patient endurance is the common experience of countless Christians throughout the world today, as it has been in every age.

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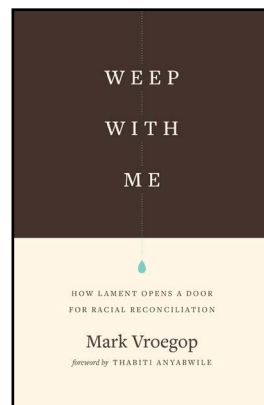
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Mark Vroegop. *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 224 pp. £13.50/\$16.99.

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*Weep with Me* is a welcome invitation to become “fluent in lament” as a pathway to racial reconciliation (p. 22). It invites both “majority” and “minority” Christians (p. 33) to embrace lament as a necessary response to the harm and pain caused by racial division. Author Mark Vroegop states, “The aim of this book is to give the church a language that moves Christians of different ethnicities toward reconciliation” (p. 22). He concedes that “lament isn’t a silver bullet” (p. 181) to end such divisions, but it is a necessary, God-given way to begin.

Vroegop has arranged the book in three parts: Lament in the Bible and History; Lament and Majority Christians; and Lament and Minority Christians. In part 1, Vroegop sets a biblical foundation for his discussion, providing a definition of lament and an outline of its central features. He defines lament as “prayer in pain that leads to trust” (p. 37) which aims “to recommit oneself to hoping in God, believing his promises, and [to] a godly response to pain, suffering, and injustice.... Laments acknowledge the reality of pain while trust in God’s promises” (p. 37). Vroegop offers a four-step description of biblical lament: turn, complain, ask, trust (pp. 38–40, 150). He then locates lament in a five-step process of racial reconciliation: “love, listen, lament, learn, and leverage” (p. 41). Part 1 takes up the topic of “Listen” (ch. 2) and calls for majority Christians to listen and learn from African American spirituals. In this important chapter, Vroegop notes that the absence of lament in the church is a problem endemic to the “white evangelical church” (p. 48). He uses the example of “spirituals” not only to demonstrate the importance and power of biblical lament, but also to underscore several of its essential functions. Lament provides Christians with “a common language to talk about pain” (p. 48), permission to come to God with that pain, and permission to vocalize pain and complicated emotions



(pp. 48–49). Lament also creates empathy (a point discussed in detail in later chapters), encouraging us to “weep with those who weep” (p. 49), and to remember the pain of the past (p. 50). The spirituals also guard against “moving quickly to solutions,” as they encourage the personalization of biblical laments in making them our own (p. 59).

Vroegop addresses majority Christians in part 2, where he commends corporate lament as a way to develop empathy. He comments, “We’ve turned a blind eye to our nation’s history, the church’s role in maintaining the status quo, and our minority brothers’ experience. With the advent of social media, the painful stories are receiving more attention—and validation. But without empathy on the part of the church, the divide will deepen” (p. 85). Vroegop maintains that weeping with those who weep is the first step. Immersion in biblical lament and the pain of minority Christians enables such tears (p. 86). He commends reading the lament psalms more regularly as we reflect upon the brokenness in our world and the fractures of racial division. He also encourages lament with minority Christians to create solidarity (p. 87) and, when done in public, to validate and share in their pain (pp. 89–90). Lament acknowledges brokenness, refuses to remain silent in the face of injustice, and seeks God’s help (pp. 102–4). Part 2 concludes with a helpful chapter discussing the appropriateness and limitations of personal remorse and repentance that majority Christians could consider.

Part 3 is directed to minority Christians. Here Vroegop highlights further features of lament and offers them as godly responses to racial oppression. He notes that lament is both protest and prophetic witness “against the brokenness of the world” (p. 143). He employs the category of exile to describe the experiences of minority Christians and states that “Lament humbly expresses the pain of exile, lovingly protests injustice—in whatever form it appears” (p. 143).

Vroegop writes as a pastor who has engaged his congregation in the process of racial reconciliation over many years. He draws upon personal and congregational experiences to illustrate his discussion. His tone is humble as he admits his own limitations and failings while delighting in some successes. He gently encourages his readers to consider what steps they need to take (both personally and corporately) to move toward the “heavenly vision of ethnic unity in Revelation 7” (p. 180). While the intended audiences of the book are minority and majority Christians in the United States, it has much to offer Christians beyond those borders, as the need for lament and racial reconciliation is universal.

The book is very accessible as Vroegop moves between biblical text and personal experiences. The discussion of the biblical text is naturally brief, yet it is sustained throughout the book offering helpful insights and ensuring key points are repeated. The book is also intentionally practical, providing steps and examples of how lament can effect personal transformation and racial reconciliation. Each chapter concludes with a guest contributor who shares a sample lament on the given topic. This is followed by a series of questions for further reflection or small group discussion. Appendix 2 also contains a “workshop” on writing a personal lament in response to a lament psalm, and Vroegop offers his own lament as an example.

There are a couple of areas of discussion which warrant further exploration. Many lament psalms contain moments of imprecation. Vroegop addresses this briefly in a footnote where he comments that imprecation is not a call for personal vengeance, but for God to be faithful to his covenant promises (p. 140, n. 12). It appears to me that this topic is too important to be relegated to a few comments and a footnote. The pervasive language of imprecation, the confusion that it often generates, and the potential for its misappropriation or marginalization suggest a more sustained treatment would be appropriate,

especially for an audience who have suffered so deeply, often at the hands of brothers and sisters in Christ.

On a couple of occasions, Vroegop states that lament leads to trust—for example, “We started by defining lament as a prayer in pain that leads to trust” (p. 150). This is certainly true. Lament psalms are intended to inspire both faith and hope. Yet laments themselves are also profound expressions of faith. Although Vroegop makes this point, I would have liked to see it more clearly and consistently expressed. Lament is itself an act of deep and profound trust and not simply a way to move toward such trust.

This is a very fine volume on an eminently important topic and the church would be well served to take up its invitation.

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Gordon J. Wenham. *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage: In Their Historical Setting*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019. xi + 131 pp. £10.90/\$12.99

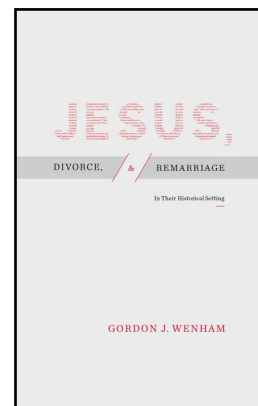
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For forty years Gordon Wenham has challenged the evangelical consensus concerning Jesus’s teaching on divorce and remarriage. He concluded already in 1984 that while divorce without remarriage is permitted in the face of immorality, remarriage is prohibited (see “Matthew and Divorce: An Old Crux Revisited.” *JSNT* 7 [1984]: 95–107). This slim and accessible volume continues this work.

The first third of *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage*, chapters 1–3, places Jesus’s teaching in its historical setting by introducing marriage practices in the ancient Near East, the OT, and later Jewish writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (in particular the Damascus Document and the Temple Scroll), Mishnah (c. 200), and Talmud (c. 500). Where modern western marriages involve choices made by a couple, in the ancient world parents of often young children arranged marriages in order to unite families. Marriage was thus about community rather than individuals, meaning divorce had social implications. Further, marriage often involved a dowry, meaning divorce could also have financial repercussions. The Mishnah and Talmud are directly relevant: in recounting the views of Hillel and Shammai they illuminate the Pharisaic schools of Jesus’s day.

The next third, chapters 4–6, explores Jesus’s teaching on divorce and remarriage in Matthew. Wenham sidesteps source-critical issues by reading the passages in their final form and canonical order—as they have been read historically. He begins with Matthew 1:18–25 and Joseph’s intention to divorce Mary prior to their marriage. To be engaged involved an “inchoate marriage” (p. 10) that transferred a woman from her parents’ to her husband’s authority as they awaited the wedding. This discussion reveals cultural and theological values, ultimately showing “how the exception clause in the other passages is supposed to function” (p. 49). In the face of sexual infidelity, the offended partner was practically required to initiate divorce.

Chapter 5 attends to Matthew 5:31–32. Jesus redefines adultery, teaching that divorce where there has been no sexual impurity is adulterous, as is marrying a divorced woman. Since the certificate of divorce explicitly states the recipient’s freedom to marry any man, Jesus is opposing the validity of the



certificate, and with it the notion that divorce dissolves the marriage. Only if marital unions survive divorce would remarriage be adulterous. Thus, the marriage bond is unbreakable, rendering a second marriage bigamous. Jesus's statement restricts the husband in two ways: it eliminates "any cause" divorce, and it teaches that men can be guilty of adultery against their wives. Before this, adultery was considered a crime against another man.

In chapter 6, Wenham investigates Jesus's response in Matthew 19 to Pharisees who challenge him concerning the scope of permissible divorce. Again, Jesus insists that remarriage after divorce is in effect adultery, reiterating the notion of indissoluble marriage. He is being asked to adjudicate the Hillelite and Shammaite positions on divorce and remarriage. His answer indicts both sides, granting only divorce as separation, not as an entryway to remarriage. The subsequent exchange with his disciples speaks of divorcees as "eunuchs" who may or may not have chosen their status but are now called to live single lives, as he himself did, for the sake of the kingdom.

The final third of the book, chapters 7–9, picks up material after Matthew. Chapter 7 briefly considers parallel passages in Mark and Luke, both of which famously lack the exception clause. Wenham nevertheless concludes that the Gospels are in agreement because Mark also equates remarriage with adultery.

Chapter 8, only four pages, discusses Paul's teaching, primarily 1 Corinthians 7, where (in vv. 10–11) Paul summarizes Jesus's teaching—sharing Jesus's explicit prohibition of remarriage but differing in starting with action initiated by the wife. Like Jesus, Paul requires the divorced person to remain single. Moving on to the Corinthians' question—What should a believer do if married to an unbeliever?—Paul instructs them to stay married. Thus ends Paul's teaching on divorce.

Finally, chapter 9 surveys the early church fathers on remarriage, observing that (1) the Reformers immersed themselves in the writings of these fathers, so we neglect them to our detriment, and (2) the fathers consistently opposed remarriage—teaching at times that even widows shouldn't remarry.

The strengths of *Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage* are many. It covers much ground, engaging with a range of important issues with humility and sensitivity. It exposes many of the exegetical challenges confronting the thoughtful Christian—no matter one's position. As such, it should be required reading for those who want to think carefully about divorce and remarriage.

Some limitations are noteworthy, however. This book is simply too short, with too broad a coverage, to defend Wenham's conclusions. Sometimes positions held tentatively in the body of a chapter become more certain in subsequent discussion. Occasionally it feels like scholarship has been chosen because it endorses a position, not because it presents a strong argument. More often an argument isn't extended to its logical conclusion: for example, while Wenham argues that we, like the Reformers, should attend to the church fathers, he overlooks Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and Knox's disagreement with those fathers who opposed remarriage after valid divorce.

Many maintain that divorce is adulterous because it assumes remarriage. Wenham instead argues that divorce apart from *πορνεία* is itself inherently adulterous; thus, Jesus has expanded adultery to include non-*πορνεία* divorces and all remarriage after divorce. But both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 introduce a step between divorce and adultery. In 5:32, divorce apart from immorality *causes* adultery, which is not to say that it *is* adultery. In 19:9, the remarriage generates adultery. This raises the question of the exception. In Wenham's reading, it would appear that "whoever divorces his wife except for *πορνεία* and marries another commits adultery" equals "whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery."

In fact, this equality becomes explicit in relating Matthew to the exceptionless statement in Mark: “As both Jewish and Roman law required adulteresses to be divorced, there was no real difference from Matthew, since Mark brands remarriage as adultery” (p. 90). This highly compressed assertion might mean that because Matthew’s Jewish readers were required to divorce adulterous wives, one is not morally culpable when putting away, without remarriage, such a woman; and similarly, though Mark doesn’t include the *πορνεία* exception while addressing non-Jews, he too knows divorce was compulsory and therefore the husband was not guilty before remarriage. We should note, however, that in trying to solve a difficult problem Wenham (1) inserts “adulteresses” where Jesus’s exception speaks of *πορνεία*, (2) converts what was for Jesus a moral issue into a legal one, and (3) makes questionable assumptions about Roman law. Few inhabitants of the empire could divorce an adulterous “wife” because legal marriage was reserved for Roman citizens. Further, to assume divorce was required for adultery stops short: Augustan law required legally divorced women to remarry. So does the Markan Jesus assume non-Jews—generally unmarried in Roman law—are required by Rome to divorce? Does Jesus command divorcees, against Roman law, to remain unmarried? It is difficult to see how the supposed legal requirement to divorce an adulterous wife helps reconcile Matthew and Mark’s accounts.

Further, according to Wenham, remarriage is bigamy and bigamy is adultery. But why then does Jesus speak of adultery rather than *πορνεία* or bigamy? The law prescribes no penalty for bigamy but death for adultery. The distinction matters, even if both are unacceptable.

*Jesus, Divorce, and Remarriage* effectively exposes some of the challenges in interpreting difficult passages. The reading is always worthwhile even if conclusions are not always convincing.

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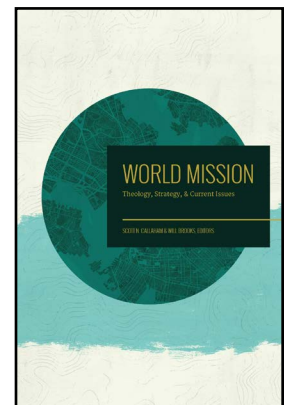
## — MISSION AND CULTURE —

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Scott Callaham and Will Brooks, eds. *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019. xii + 378 pp. £17.95/\$24.99.

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This book brings together nine biblical scholars to address current issues in mission theology and practice. Its theme is enigmatic: “We have written this book precisely because we believe that the contemporary practice of world mission has not adequately heeded the voice of the Holy Spirit through Scripture” (p. xii). Only after reading the book did I perceive it is meant to be a biblical-theological response to certain elements peculiar to evangelical missiology. Part 1 consists of three chapters and addresses the scriptural concern by highlighting the Bible’s grand narrative and demonstrates how a more robust biblical theology informs missiology. Parts 2 and 3 consist of four chapters each, touching on various issues of mission practice. Overall, the volume achieves its aim, but for two exceptions (chs. 1, 6). I’ll consider these chapters first, then simply comment on the chapters I enjoyed most (chs. 2, 3, 4, 10).



In chapter 1, Scott Callaham asserts that one should not neglect the Old Testament for understanding mission. Prioritizing the former is important as “submission to biblical authority requires first listening to the voice of God through Scripture and then forming theology” (pp. 3–4). However, without explanation the chapter “turns its attention primarily toward Old Testament theologies” concerning God’s plan for the gentile nations (p. 7). Callaham divides the rest of the chapter into two sections: the first surveys Old Testament theologies on the gentile question; the second considers the implications for mission practice. Put simply, it seems the first section is not so much a survey of Old Testament theologies as a theologized framework for supporting the author’s assertions in the second section. This is not to cast suspicion on Callaham’s motives, but simply point out an obvious disjunction between his stated intent and its execution. If nothing else, there is a conspicuous lack of careful source analysis (e.g., the discussion on the implications of the *imago Dei*, pp. 11–14, 23–25).

Chapter 6, cowritten by John Massey and Callaham, insists that true discipleship, and thus a true church, exists only where believers are baptized by immersion. Denouncing what they call “transdenominational evangelicalism” (p. 150), their argument runs as follows: (1) only a believer is a disciple and only a disciple can be baptized; (2) baptism by immersion is the only mode authorized by Scripture; and (3) a believer must be baptized to be a true disciple. Therefore, beware of (1) sacramental theology, i.e., “infant-baptizing churches” (p. 153); (2) those who delay baptism to ensure genuine conversion; and (3) those who abstain from baptism due to difficult or dangerous circumstances.

I might simply point out that the intended audience are teachers, students, and practitioners of mission from all evangelical traditions. Additionally, one contributor to this volume, Stephen Wright, is an Anglican (ch. 4). Thus, it seems counterintuitive to include a chapter that puts forward such a particular view on the subject and warns against “ecumenical engagement with non-Baptists” (p. 160). In contrast, Wright’s chapter on discipleship keenly observes that both Matthew and Mark underline “Jesus’ warning against exclusivism with the saying ‘Whoever is not against us is for us’” (pp. 117–18).

Having said this, I do not wish to rubbish the book. There are some brilliant chapters in this volume. My hope is that by indicating some of the possible pitfalls in advance, readers will better appreciate this book’s valuable contributions. To this purpose, I recommend starting with chapter 2 by Wendel Sun.

Sun’s chapter masterfully foregrounds the person and work of Jesus as a corollary of Old Testament figures and events. By the time Sun speaks to what it means to be “in Christ,” one realizes that faith in Christ is not merely a personal experience; it is the bestowal of an exalted heritage upon an unworthy people, enabling them to participate in the continuation of Jesus’s mission. For this reason, “Christ’s mission ought also to mark out our mission” (p. 56). Sun then carries this theological piece into chapter 3, carefully fitting it into the covenantal framework of the *missio Dei*.

Dovetailing nicely with Sun’s chapters, Wright (ch. 4) methodically works out the meaning of discipleship through a comparison of Matthew’s account with those of the other Gospels and Acts. This chapter is chock-full of implications for mission practice, each stemming from Wright’s observation that the evangelists do “not so much teach a *concept* of discipleship as tell a *story* of disciples of Jesus.... We cannot reduce it to schemes, formulae, or a syllabus of instruction” (p. 106). One important implication is that “no particular model of the church is implied by the concept of discipleship, and we should be wary of attempts to impose such a model” (p. 128).

Finally, I wish to highlight Jackson Wu’s chapter concerning biblical theology for oral cultures (ch. 10). Wu’s explanation for why biblical theology is necessary for discipleship among oral-preference peoples is well done, but it is his process for working out the Bible’s grand narrative *according to the*

*Bible itself* that is most thought-provoking. While the popular schema of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation is not wrong, “such summaries largely skip over the vast majority of the Old Testament, perhaps referencing Israel in passing” (p. 281). But when the Bible itself retells its own story, it recounts many events and figures from the Old Testament that, we must assume, are essential for understanding Christ and the gospel. For those not familiar with Wu’s work, this chapter is a concise introduction to the kind of careful yet creative scholarship many have come to appreciate—myself included.

Notwithstanding a few perceived shortcomings, this book is an important contribution to the paradigm shift occurring today in US-based missions. Enough time has passed to give evidence to the fact that the social-scientific principles that have dominated evangelical missions since the 1970s have failed to usher in the promised final era of missions. Hence, the call to place “every aspect of the missional task under the authority—and thus the corrective critique—of biblical teaching” is growing (p. xi), and this book contains some excellent examples of how this critique should unfold.

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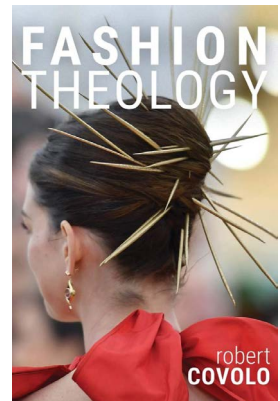
Robert Covolo. *Fashion Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020. 178 pp. £36.50/\$39.95.

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*Fashion Theology* is a fascinating analysis of the interactions between Christian theology and fashion throughout western history. Many Christians feel tension, whether consciously or unconsciously, navigating their desires and choices in personal dress and style while also seeking to celebrate beauty and creative personal expression. They want to remain sensitive to the social messaging and symbols of presentation, honoring special events and the people with whom we live, work, and worship, and retaining a humble posture. Robert Covolo does an especially sensitive job at highlighting these and many other related topics. At the same time, he provides strong biblical support and extensive research on history and culture.

Readers will appreciate the reflections from many of the most impacting figures of church history’s attention to customs of dress, culture in general, and how believers should faithfully engage their public life. This filled in a number of gaps for me and left me with unique insights on the intersection of faith and culture from evolving conversations over the centuries that continue today. There does seem to be a large historic jump of several hundred years from the influence of Calvin to the appearance of Abraham Kuyper. Other than a very brief discussion of the French Revolution and related political and cultural events, this may leave the reader wondering if there is a gap the analysis of other cultural or theological movements in intervening periods with events and figures still to be explored.

However, several especially insightful historical concepts emerge throughout the text. A poignant example is in Covolo’s reflections on Barth’s view of fashion. Barth saw fashion “as representing a long, a misplaced but legitimate hope to actualize a lost image ... (which) retains ... an unquiet fascination with an allusive glory that corresponded to humanity’s rightful claim to their true King, Christ” (p. 42). The church has always expressed concern over fashion, with it easily being an expression of prideful



hubris. But the church rarely promotes this insight over image-bearing humanity's intrinsic place of glory within the Creator's design.

This work is clearly for academics and the thoughtful believer who likes reading theology and cultural analysis. The very specific academic focus narrows the field of readers likely to work through this study. The most helpful insights and applications for thoughtful leaders and instructors in the field of fashion come in the all too short final chapter and especially in the final sections of that chapter. It is here that the theme of fashion as "performance" emerges. The text shifts to practical application and illustrates how fashion, when carefully related biblical theology, can serve well the earlier important themes of narrative, identity, and human longings to be seen and understood.

For example, "people approach the Bible as narrative creatures; that is, narrative is part of *the condition* of being human" (p. 106). We better see ourselves and understand our place in a larger narrative (the storyline of scripture) by identifying the parallels and identity "markers" of dress, gender, class, and race in our own stories as these same markers are presented and worked out in the biblical narrative (p. 107). The final "Performing Christ" framework that Covolo outlines, which is based on the apostle Paul's "putting on Christ" imagery, is incredibly insightful and helpful. This section directly relates to using fashion as an aid to every believer's call to be "culturally engaged ... hospitable ... joyful ... convivial ... prophetic ... and hopeful" (p. 112–14). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate in detail on this list. Yet, each of these descriptors could be expanded into helpful fuller discussions or chapters in and of themselves.

*Fashion Theology* sets the stage for more accessible works that spend less time explaining the philosophical, theological, and historic backgrounds. Such texts could give more time to expanding on the current trends and biblical implications of faith and fashion in our increasingly fragmented, naturalistic, and postmodern culture. I look forward to expanded discussions on these topics and am deeply grateful for Robert Covolo's rich contribution to a clearly underserved field.

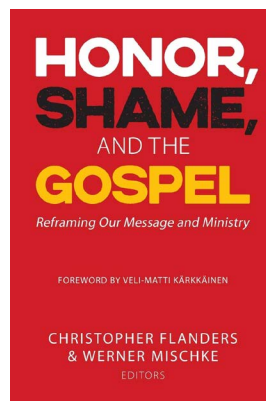
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Christopher Flanders and Werner Mischke, eds. *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2020. xxx + 252 pp. £12.99/\$17.99.

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An important and relatively recent trend in missiology and theology has come from a growing appreciation of how "honor-shame" dynamics have shaped the biblical texts, human history, and even the world around us today. This development is less of a discovery and more of a recognition of the need to join an ongoing conversation in anthropology, behavioral sciences, and philosophy. Honor-shame conferences in 2017 and 2018 created helpful space for dialogue about the intersection of these cultural categories and the gospel in a variety of contexts. As this conversation widens and many people grow aware of honor and shame, Flanders and Mischke have organized an important resource. This book provides an accessible entry point for newcomers interested in joining the



conversation. Its substantial contributions enhance the theory and practice of those already working in this field.

*Honor, Shame and the Gospel* begins with a helpful introductory chapter containing useful definitions, a short history of honor-shame relative to Christian ministry, and a thoughtfully crafted list of “Top Ten Statements.” The curated, concise list thoroughly sets the table, laying ground rules, and naming the real stakes involved for this conversation. The collection of essays is then organized into two parts, first considering “Honor-Shame in General Contexts” and then concluding with “Honor-Shame in Various Mission Contexts.”

The first section contains helpful chapters concerning Christology, exploring how honor-shame helps us understand Jesus in his own social context (Randolph Richards), the mission of God (Steven Hawthorne), and the atonement (Mako Nagasawa). Others examine honor-shame in relation to individualism and collectivism (Jackson Wu) as well as significant special issues like sexual-abuse victimhood and shame in church history (Steve Tracy). My favorite chapter in this section is Jayson Georges’s “Honor and Shame in Historical Theology.” Georges looks at how Christians in the past, like John Chrysostom, Jonathan Edwards, Athanasius, Bonhoeffer, and C. S. Lewis “explained biblical truth in honor-shame terms,” often by letting us hear them in their own words (p. 21). His “brief tour through historical theology shows that honor-shame is clearly not new” (p. 34) and is useful for considering hermeneutics, ethics, and eschatology. Although honor-shame are sometimes perceived merely as a cross-cultural mission conversation, Georges shows how honor and shame have shaped the church’s theological perspective.

Tom Steffen includes many helpful insights in his ambitious chapter, “A Clothesline Theology for the World: How a Value-Driven Grand Narrative of Scripture Can Frame the Gospel.” I agree that framing a grand narrative of the redemptive work through Christ in honor-shame terms is certainly a worthy goal; however, my main critique of Steffen’s chapter is the surprising neglect of God’s work in human history through Israel (p. 48). This section of the book (“Honor-Shame in General Contexts”) would have been greatly enriched by sustained consideration of God’s faithful partnership with the chosen people Israel, a major element in the story that can help us see honor-shame dynamics at work in powerful gospel ways.

The second part of the book turns our attention to honor-shame in particular mission contexts. The authors explore challenging settings: people in poverty dealing with shame due to a lack of education (Lynn Thigpen), personal experiences sharing life in the pluralistic setting of San Francisco (Steve Hong), potential racial and ethnic reconciliation in a variety of contexts (Katie Rawson), and how 1 and 2 Samuel can model a way of naming the complexities of honor-shame in the contentious history following the Yugoslav succession (Nolan Sharp). Also, two chapters on how honor-shame can aid our engagement with Islam, from working with women from Muslim backgrounds (Audrey Frank) to reframing conceptions of humility and leadership (Arley Loewen). Christian Dumitrescu’s chapter “Discipleship in Asian Honor Cultures” is a great resource for considering how to contextualize the discipleship journey in light of honor-shame realities (p. 162).

Of all the book’s chapters, Rich James’s “An Honor-Shame Gospel for Syrians Displaced by War: Jesus Christ as Good Shepherd and Honorable Patron” gave me the most hope and encouragement. His contribution should be required reading for anyone interested in the Christian response to the refugee crisis, whether at home or serving abroad. This chapter beautifully explains how seeing Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a way of speaking of Christ as a patron. It embodies the spirit of this book, calling us

to consider ways of living the gospel in ways that communicate clearly and boldly in an honor-shame world.

Overall, this book is an impressive, ambitious resource that reframes how we think about the church's message and ministry. It pulls in different ingredients and issues, inspiring readers to humbly go into the world, not with an antagonistic posture, but with an approach that honors others as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Michael W. Goheen and Jim Mullins. *The Symphony of Mission: Playing Your Part in God's Work in the World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. vii + 199 pp. £15.99/\$22.99.

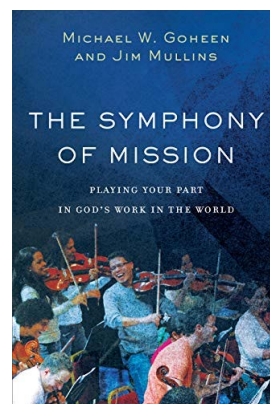
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Goheen and Mullins have written this concise work to encourage Christians to engage in the mission of God in the world. Using the metaphor of symphony, they note "God's mission is like a symphony" with a place for a diversity of artists (p. xix). His mission is broad and multifaceted; therefore, everyone in the Body of Christ has a part to play in the work. The influence of Kuyper, Bavinck, and other representatives of Dutch neo-Calvinism is felt throughout the book. Goheen and Mullins use biblical exegesis and numerous practical stories that reveal much wisdom and experience.

The authors address three particular questions: (1) What is the church's mission as she participates in God's mission? (2) What is my role within God's mission? (3) What does mission look like in daily life? They do an excellent job employing both theological and anecdotal evidence to make persuasive arguments. The missiological and pastoral experience of the authors combine to produce a compelling and engaging work. Though published with Baker Academic, the book is practical in orientation and lacks extensive footnotes. This book would connect well with the person in the pew and college and seminary students.

Early in the book, the authors address six things as the "foundation for all missional engagement" (p. 32). Mission must: (1) include incarnational presence; (2) be empowered by the Spirit; (3) be comprehensive in scope; (4) be communal; (5) include a distinct way of life; and (6) be motivated by love. The church is to be *intentional* in engaging her neighbors with both actions and words. An entire chapter is devoted to this concept of intentionality. The authors give special attention to the stewardship of leveraging one's occupation for God's glory by including two chapters on a theology of vocation/work and discerning how Christians' roles in the marketplace are to be used in God's mission. Readers are challenged to evaluate their present realities and make necessary adjustments to be more intentional in their roles in God's mission. The book concludes with a chapter on the Sabbath and how rest reflects God's work in creation and also serves as a witness to the world.

Though this book is my first exposure to Jim Mullins's work, I have encountered Goheen's work over the years and been greatly blessed. I have found his scholarship and humility to be encouraging and refreshing. *The Symphony of Mission* is an attempt to connect many lofty theological and missiological issues to church members. The authors are to be commended for accomplishing this incredible



purpose. Their discussion of God's mission throughout the Scriptures is beneficial. Their emphasis on intentionally when it comes to engagement with unbelievers is outstanding. The church slides away from mission, not toward it. Their chapter to assist readers in obtaining a biblical perspective of work and how they can find their "vocational sweet spot" (p. 148) is a must-read for college students and those not serving in traditional vocational ministry. There is *much* value and *worth* in this book.

My first concern, however, is related to a matter often found in evangelical writings on mission. While I agree with the authors' description of the breadth of God's mission in the world, they fail to give priority to the apostolic work of the church as related to evangelism and church planting where a foundation has not been established (Rom 15:20–21). I do not recall discussion related to the unreached peoples. Attention is removed from global disciple-making and placed on being sent into the world to serve like Jesus (John 20:21). This Johannine emphasis frequently misapplies and skews Great Commission actions in a direction that overlooks the emphases found in the Synoptics and Acts. The authors emphasize the problem of making any distinction and emphasis when it comes to mission (p. 38). In their attempt to elevate the importance of more people serving in God's mission, they diminish the biblical gravity given to the pioneer labors of the apostles. Their holism toward mission reduces gospel urgency and blurs the lines between temporal and eternal matters. While the authors clearly note the necessity of gospel proclamation, it is placed in a room with so many other important activities that evangelism comes across as one among many equal opportunities. "Environmental stewardship," they write, "should not be seen as an opponent of evangelism" (p. 40). To this I would definitely agree, but they are far from equivalent. The authors' view is not a novel perspective; it developed among the World Council of Churches and influenced evangelicals in the twentieth century.

My other concern involves their understanding of salvation. In their attempt to show the cosmic implications of God's mission to redeem a groaning creation, less attention is given to personal regeneration and the urgency of gospel proclamation. Very little is stated regarding calling people to repentance and faith (Acts 20:21). While the authors clearly advocate individual conversion and preaching the gospel, their noble attempt to correct a distorted evangelical theology, that only focuses on the personal, could lead the reader to wonder if they selected a poor choice of words when describing the extent of salvation. Clarification is needed. For example, by writing about "salvation" in terms of "the restoration and recovery of creation" (p. 87), attention is removed from the personal.

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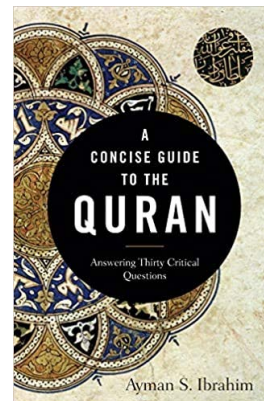
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Ayman Ibrahim. *A Concise Guide to the Qur'an: Answering Thirty Critical Questions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xvi + 192 pp. £16.99/\$22.99.

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Ayman Ibrahim is an Egyptian Christian academic who teaches at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Having grown up in Egypt and having earned his second doctorate in Islamic Studies, he is well-versed in Christian-Muslim relations, conflicts, and theological differences. So why would a Christian author exhort his audience to invest time in reading the Qur'an?

In his newest book, *A Concise Guide to the Qur'an*, Ibrahim contends that in order to understand the Qur'an's influence on one's Muslim neighbors, Christians must read it for themselves. Not only will a reader of the Qur'an better understand its role in a Muslim's life, but the very act of reading the Qur'an will likely be received by a Muslim neighbor as evidence of a loving commitment to understanding them.



Still, Ibrahim's book contributes much more than a mere appeal to take up and read the Qur'an. Throughout the book, Ibrahim presents traditional Islamic views of the Qur'an, its origins, and its textual integrity. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of contemporary critical scholarship, however, Ibrahim's book also presents significant challenges to the traditional understanding of the Qur'an that are not often considered.

For readers who are unfamiliar with the Qur'an, Ibrahim's work provides a helpful orientation. Each of the thirty chapters are titled with a question that the chapter answers, making this a valuable reference resource. The answers given will both benefit non-Muslim readers of the Qur'an and at times challenge Muslim readers as well. Though a relatively short book, *A Concise Guide to the Qur'an* represents a thorough and wide-ranging distillation of Ibrahim's extensive study of the world of Islam.

Too often, introductions to the Qur'an have chosen either a polemical perspective against Islam or merely rehearse traditional confessional views. Ibrahim's work rejects such a binary approach by providing the reader access to both the confessional Islamic claims and the critical questions raised in the academy. Some examples will demonstrate the valuable contribution of the book.

One of the most common claims about the Qur'an by traditional Muslims is that its text has remained unchanged since the seventh century. Ibrahim's book helpfully explains this claim from both the Sunni and Shiite perspectives. He also addresses traditional ways of reconciling some of the apparent discrepancies between versions of the Qur'an that are reported in early Islamic sources.

In addition to these traditional claims, however, Ibrahim highlights the often-overlooked fact that the Qur'an that modern Muslims read has less than 100 years of history. Furthermore, despite being written at a broadly accessible level, Ibrahim exposes the reader to significant historical-critical and text-critical issues that undermine confidence in the claim that the current versions of the Qur'an accurately represent an original copy. By drawing on both Islamic sources and secular scholarship, Ibrahim presents the reader with compelling reasons to dispute claims regarding the incorruptibility of the Qur'an. For Christians and Jews, who are often accused by Muslims of having corrupted their books of revelation, such information is significant.

Perhaps the greatest point of contention between Muslims and Christians is the question, "Who is Jesus?" Both the Bible and the Qur'an feature a character who was born of a virgin, did miracles, taught with authority, and was identified as a great prophet. Yet the Qur'an presents this character, known

within qur'anic Arabic as 'Isa, as the merely human Son of Mary in direct contrast with the biblical portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God incarnate.

Characters such as Jesus and Abraham and Moses appear in both the Qur'an and the Bible. As a result, they are often assumed to represent common ground shared between Muslims and Christians. Ibrahim's book, however, helpfully demonstrates how Jesus plays a different role and serves a different purpose within the horizons of the Qur'an's concern. In fact, when the Qur'an employs biblical prophets, it utilizes them as mouthpieces for Islam rather than characters used to advance God's purposes in developing redemptive history. Instead of a naïve affirmation that Islam and Christianity share a common Jesus character, the reader of Ibrahim's book will be prepared to engage in fruitful discussions and ask clarifying questions of their Muslim friends concerning the person of Jesus.

Ibrahim has admirably condensed a wealth of information regarding the Qur'an and its history into a slim volume. Due to the limits of scope, however, the reader hoping to investigate the Qur'an's interaction with biblical material may be left disappointed by the four questions that directly address this topic. Still, the questions Ibrahim does answer about the Qur'an and the Bible provide a good trajectory and starting place for further research and application.

In the end, I whole-heartedly recommend *A Concise Guide to the Qur'an* as an accessible–yet–informed primer on the Qur'an. Ibrahim manages to present Islamic traditional beliefs while also encouraging critical dialogue with Muslim claims. Ultimately, in order to love our neighbors, we must understand our neighbors. Likewise, love requires us to be willing to engage difficult conversations together in pursuit of truth. Ibrahim's book encourages and equips Christians towards both goals.

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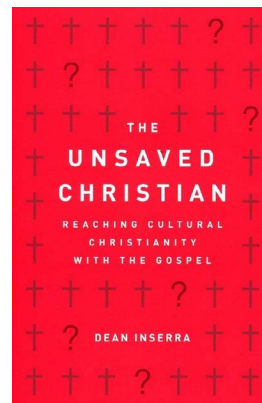
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Dean Inserra. *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019. 207 pp. £11.99/\$14.99.

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“Do you want to go to heaven when you die?” Most people who believe that heaven is a real place want to go there when they die. It is certainly preferable to the alternative. Yet how many people have responded in the affirmative, offered a quick prayer, made a decision, and years later base their salvation on a distant experience? Dean Inserra, pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, Florida, has rendered a great service to the church in this book with an intentionally oxymoronic title. Although unsaved Christians do not really exist, it is apparent that many who identify with Christianity as a religion have never experienced the new birth through faith in Christ. The book reveals a pastor burdened to reach religious unbelievers and point them to Jesus. He has numerous friendships with unsaved people and engages in intentional evangelism. The book is replete with stories, anecdotes, and personal encounters from his own experience.

At the heart of the book is the predicament of cultural Christians who may know a great deal about Christ without knowing Christ. They are lost and are trusting something other than Christ for their salvation. These are neither scoffers nor antagonistic toward Christianity. They may lead moral lives,



attend church regularly, and are falsely assured of their standing before God. Inserra describes cultural Christianity as a religion “practiced by more Americans than any other faith or religion” (p. 13) and as the “most underrated mission field in America” (p. 15). The challenge for Christians on mission is reaching people who are familiar with Christianity and Christian lingo yet appear immune or blind to their need of repentance and faith in a crucified and risen Savior. Among these unsaved Christians are those who are “religious, but not repentant” (p. 15).

The book begins with the difficulty many cultural Christians have in seeing themselves as lost and in need of a savior. The book ends with a call to action and an appeal for the readers to examine their own hearts and lives in case they are unknowingly cultural Christians. The book’s fifteen chapters each examine a different emphasis or religious experience “to illustrate common ways people may place faith in a false gospel and still identify themselves as Christians” (p. 9). Each chapter begins with a pithy quote from past and present Christian leaders and ends with discussion questions. In chapter 9, Inserra contrasts making decisions with making disciples and does well in pointing out the danger of depending on the “sinner’s prayer” as the basis for one’s assurance of salvation. In that light, he might have avoided speaking about “commitment to Jesus Christ” (p. 18) and of barriers men and women face in “making decisions to become Christians” (p. 149).

Inserra leaves few areas of cultural Christianity untouched. He works his way geographically and demographically through the United States and will cause many a pastor and church member to see themselves in unvarnished depictions. His descriptions range from civic religion, “which promotes a god without any definition and a generic faith that demands and asks nothing of its followers” (p. 36), to the Bible Belt of faith, family, and football, where “being seen as a Christian can be more important than actually being a Christian” (p. 172). Along the way, he turns his attention to nominal, generational Catholics with whom he finds gospel conversations “far easier than with nominal Protestants” (p. 146). He critiques mainline Protestantism whose brand of Christianity is “a completely different religion posing as the Christian faith” (p. 159). His own conversion came about after years in a mainline Protestant church, where he confesses that he had never truly heard the gospel. He examines models of church membership which have the feel of a country club “with low or no expectations” (p. 76) and advocates a regenerate, baptized church membership. In addition, and this might raise eyebrows, prospective members in his church must agree to join a Bible study or involvement in one of the church’s “growth environments” (p. 81).

*Unsaved Christians* engages the reader with real-life situations the author has faced. Inserra offers salutary suggestions for starting points in building bridges for the gospel. Many of the descriptions, illustrations and issues are limited in application due to different contexts of life and ministry. Almost everyone, however, will find one or more chapters that describe their faith community. The book is written for a wide audience and at a popular level. Most Christians will find it an easy and enjoyable read. Pastors and church members alike will benefit from the insights, encouragements, and practical application. They may also leave with a greater burden for the unsaved.

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Carl R. Trueman. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 425 pp. £27.99/\$34.99.

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Sexuality is endlessly in the news. This book shows that a phenomenon like gender transitioning stems from the changing idea of “selves” in Western societies over two-and-a-half centuries. Carl Trueman, a frequent contributor to the journal *First Things* and a professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College, draws on major thinkers about identity and the culture of modernity for this primer on “where we are now.”

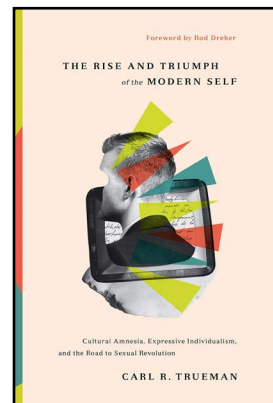
In the first section, Trueman sets out his analytical framework. The second and third sections trace changing conceptions of identity since the seventeenth century until now. The fourth section examines the rhetoric advocating for eroticism and pornography, in judges’ stated rationales for major changes in law, and in how the political alliance of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and others reveals tension between biological markers of identity and self-chosen ones. Thus, the fourth section confirms findings from earlier sections. A “postscript” suggests possible church responses in a brave new era.

The framework of the study comes from the mid-twentieth century U. S. sociologist Philip Rieff and is supported by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and the British ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre. Taylor contributes the conception of a social imaginary, claiming that “expressive individualism” is our era’s default conception of a self. Moral expectations of persons are not assigned at birth but are dynamically formed in a *Sittlichkeit*—a dialogue between oneself and others in the matrix of a society. Taylor presents personal identity as negotiated rather than given. MacIntyre contributes “emotivism,” the insight that ethics in the modern era consists in “values,” which are adopted preferences, not expressions of a transcendent order as in pre-modern times.

Rieff offers an adaptation of Sigmund Freud’s theory of culture. In Freud’s broad understanding, sexuality is the basic feature of being human; thus, culture is a system of prohibitions and permissions. Culture channels individuals’ fundamental sexual energy into socially useful and reliable outlets such as marriage, family, work, art, or religion. As the old restraining “world” loses plausibility, society relaxes prohibitions that channel sex. The new “anti-culture” inverts and mocks icons of the old order in the name of its superior non-mystical “reason,” producing what Rieff calls “deathworks.” The advice that “if you don’t like gay marriage, don’t have one,” is an example of political deathwork.

In sections 2–4, Trueman traces how Western societies moved from a “mimetic” order, where transcendent reality was understood to shape society, to a therapeutic order, which adjusts humans to immanent nature. He gives attention to René Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche, then to Freud and the New Left of the twentieth century. Trueman pays attention to three sub-questions: (1) how was the mimetic self *psychologized*? (2) how was the psychologized self *sexualized*? (3) how was sexuality *politicized*?

How the self was psychologized and then sexualized can be answered together. Rousseau suggested that culture (civilization) twisted the originally good self, yielding an inauthentic person. Society’s twisting institutions became the problem, not original sin. Freud said civilization repressed sex to channel its energies into socially valuable activity, though he thought civilization’s inevitable discontentedness to be a necessary sacrifice for communal life.



Concerning how sexuality became politicized, Trueman summons mid-twentieth-century Marxist thinkers Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, plus the ideologues of the European surrealist movement in the arts. These thinkers arranged a “shotgun marriage” of Freud with Marx. To these New Left thinkers, Marxist revolutions must refuse the pessimistic Freudian trade-off between sex and civilization. Since sexual repression by families forms people for roles in bourgeois societies, the revolution must undermine the agent of self-denying tradition. After the revolutionary year 1968, radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone, and feminist organizations forwarded similar advocacy.

Fused with Marxism, sexual identity produces unbelievable political and legal effects. To deny another’s sexual identity (L, G, B, T, or Q+) is now to refuse dignity to their very selves. Thus, even if one chooses a different baker for one’s gay wedding cake, that still leaves the first cake baker out there, denying people’s existence. Post-Rousseau, post-Nietzsche self-creators seek to dignify persons in a similar way that Christianity does via the image of God.

Trueman’s message to conservative Christians is that responding to one issue after another (e.g., a study on gender fluidity after a campaign to hold back abortion access) misses the point. While sexual politics is the contemporary pressure point, the supporting beliefs gained adherents over 250 years.

Trueman marshals a large bibliography and tells his story expertly. However, the book could be improved if it more clearly highlighted sexual politics as not only replacement ethics but also a replacement metaphysics, a replacement ontology, and a replacement epistemology. Granted, Taylor speaks of a new social imaginary, Rieff of a new “world” replacing the preceding sacred or faith worlds, and MacIntyre of the replacement ethics of emotivism. As Trueman presents them, radicals seek to tear down “bourgeois” or “capitalist” structures, but he also cites the frankest among them that the real enemy is the self-denying, suffering-accepting Christian tradition. Augusto Del Noce, the Italian Catholic philosopher whom Trueman relies on for his sexual politics exposition, is clearer that “eroticism” (his term for the cultural movement) is a life threat to Christianity. Rousseau wants to progressively rewrite social institutions for maximum human autonomy, as does Marx. In their hands, truth is pragmatic and revolutionary. With cultural, legal and political power, time is on the expressivists’ side.

The book ends with a short “postscript” of possible responses. It urges churches towards better teaching and community. But Pew research and others report that a majority of young persons in conservative churches affirm key aspects of the sexual revolution. Like Walt Kelly’s Pogo said, “We have seen the enemy, and he is us.” A church resistance program needs more than restatements; it needs a research program. Christian teaching about human identity finds its origins in a biblical understanding of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Churches and pastors need to reaffirm that the guarantee of personality is God the Trinity. The LGBTQ+ movement takes for granted the dignity of all human beings; but dignity, like the rainbow, is accurately a biblical inheritance. And, after Rousseau, Darwin, and Nietzsche, there is a need for a massive restatement of natural law, the Creator’s visible work in his creation. Christians and churches need a counter-revolution. As the author says, this book can be its prolegomena.

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Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements. *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017. 172 pp. £10.99/\$13.99.

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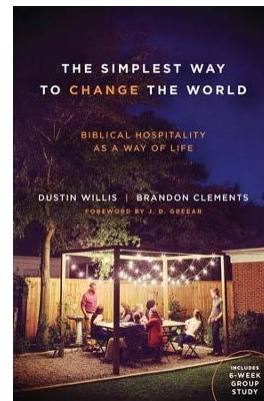
It is a slippery slope. When we are tired from work or school, we want to recharge. So, we start looking forward to getting home for some me-time, shutting the door tightly behind us. Gradually, solitude (or perhaps spending time only with our immediate family or housemates) becomes our default. Me-time becomes our habit. And this lone-ranger routine robs us of taking part in the mission of God.

Pastors Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements are concerned that “the way a typical Christian thinks about their home isn’t all that different from how a typical non-Christian thinks: *It’s the place I eat, sleep, relax, and entertain myself—by myself*” (p. 18, emphasis original). They lament that a “divorce” between what we do for the purposes of missions and what we do in our own homes causes us to miss a tremendous opportunity for evangelism and discipleship. To combat this false dichotomy, they boldly and biblically assert that “joining God’s mission can be as straight-forward as opening your door and inviting others inside” (p. 20). The authors strike a positive tone that makes these critical evaluations read like a heart-to-heart conversation, full of encouraging stories and practical can-do applications, not a finger-wagging diatribe. The resounding theme of the book is also the title of chapter 1: “small things can change the world” (p. 17).

Chapter 2 incisively identifies the “invisible cultural currents” that “shape our view of home in ways we don’t even realize” (p. 30). The authors unpack isolation, relaxation, entertainment, and busyness as things that hinder American Christians from engaging in hospitality. They pull no punches when they conclude: “You’ll have to learn to think of your home primarily from a Christian perspective and let that mindset uproot the ways your culture has taught you to view your home” (p. 35). Chapters 3–4 look at hospitality from a biblical perspective, bookending the discussion with “God making a home” in Eden and then in heaven for his people (p. 40). God’s actions are consistent with his character throughout Scripture as “a gracious host, constantly welcoming in wayward sinners” (p. 41). Hospitality is nothing less, they contend, than “putting human flesh on this gospel story” (p. 41).

Chapter 5 powerfully argues that hospitality is crucial in mission efforts today because of the loneliness in our society that leaves people “longing for a depth of relationship” (p. 55). Furthermore, the post-Christian nature of our society makes it necessary for Christians to “exhibit the gospel” even to those who would not darken the door of a church but would be happy to walk through *our* doors (p. 55). Chapter 6 provides bracing perspective and clarity on why hospitality is urgently necessary: by “opening your door,” you are “turning your home into a wartime hospital where the spiritually hurting can get the hope and care they need” (p. 67).

Chapter 7 and the following chapters dive into helpful practicalities, like putting common excuses to rest, budgeting and planning for success, and teaming up with others in order to meet new people and deepen friendships. The authors include many ideas for get-togethers to spark the reader’s imagination. They urge Christians to consider how hospitality could play a role in obeying biblical commands to care for widows and orphans, to love and welcome immigrants, and to provide for those who are in need. Things to do and not to do when seeking to share the gospel are also helpfully shared, such as asking good questions and sharing stories of hope and good news. The final chapter is a clarion call to



“use our homes to be micro representations of that final banquet table,” becoming “relentlessly warm and welcoming because we’ve been relentlessly welcomed in Christ” (p. 145). End-of-chapter personal application questions and a robust six-week group at the back of the book guide willing readers in putting the principles they read about into practice.

This book shines in its authenticity. Willis and Clements openly share both their successes and their blunders to illustrate the messy beauty of learning to be hospitable in a culture where it is not the norm. They are candid about their own struggles with introversion and busyness. The authors do not shy away from recounting times where they got in over their heads, were overwhelmed, and then often amazed at what God orchestrated next. Through their raw honesty, they invite others not into a rosy fantasy of picture-perfect entertaining, but into the rugged yet beautiful often-unexplored terrain of Spirit-led openness of heart and home.

One aspect of the authors’ authenticity that unintentionally detracted from their message was their use of military language to speak of hospitality. The idea of believers’ homes being used as “weapons of the gospel” came up several times as one of the reverberating themes of the book. While using martial imagery is not unheard of in Scripture, it is not used in the context of interactions with other people but rather in the context of loyalty to God as a commanding officer (2 Tim 2:3–4) or standing against Satan’s works (Eph 6:10–18). Since an Ancient Near Eastern understanding of hospitality quite literally extended to one’s enemies, this would imply the putting aside of weapons. Accordingly, the book would be stronger if it had employed more hospitable language when discussing hospitality.

Nevertheless, this book is a solid contribution in a growing body of work addressing the need for Americans Christians to reclaim hospitality as part of the practice of their faith. Timely, contextual, and practical, it belongs on the shelves of all who wish to open their doors wider in faith that “thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2).

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