

themelios

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DESCRIPTION

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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

A Biblical Theology of Education

— D. A. Carson —

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The topic at hand—a biblical theology of education—is like an oversized, under-inflated beach ball: you can’t miss it, and it’s easy to swat around, but it’s very difficult to control.¹ Nevertheless, let me try to impose at least a little order on the topic. Begin with the expression “biblical theology.” Although there are many variations, today’s use of the expression commonly conjures up one of two ideas.

First, whereas “systematic theology” tends to order its treatment of the theology of the Bible along logical and hierarchical lines (see, for example, a standard systematic theology like that of Bavinck or a more popular one like that of Grudem), biblical theology tends to order its treatment of the theology of the Bible along temporal lines, focusing on the contribution of each book and corpus along the path of the Bible’s storyline. The distinction between systematic theology and biblical theology is never absolute, of course, but it is strong enough to warrant recognition. Thus, a biblical theology of, say, the temple, traces out temple themes in the early chapters of Genesis, follows their trajectories all the way to the Apocalypse, and observes how these trajectories are not random but interrelated, constituting the warp and woof of interwoven themes, unfolding across time. Similarly, one can speak of the biblical theology of creation/new creation, of priesthood, of exile, and of much more. But in this sense of “biblical theology,” can one legitimately speak of a biblical theology of education?

I don’t think so. It’s not as if there is a theological development of the theme of education from one end of the canon to the other. Of course, one could cheat a little and insist that all of God’s self-disclosure across human history constitutes an education of those humans. In that sense, education *is* biblical theology. But no one uses the term “education” today in precisely that way. Consider the definition of education advanced by Wikipedia (“Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits”). This static vision of education is not following the storyline of redemptive history. To put it another way, it is difficult to discern that the canon provides developing reflection on education. So, in this sense of “biblical theology” we may reasonably doubt that there is such a thing as a biblical theology of education.

¹ This is a slightly revised version of a paper delivered at the International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) annual conference on 3 February 2021 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and tweaked in light of questions and comments at the conference, and in light of suggestions made by the editor of *Themelios*.

A *second* common contemporary meaning of “biblical theology” is theology that is found in or based upon the Bible—a way of referring to systematic theology that is biblically faithful. On this view, our title makes education a subset, in effect, of systematic theology. This is conceptually less problematic. To talk of the biblical theology of education, in this sense of biblical theology, is akin to talking about the biblical theology of ecology or the biblical theology of angels. Ecology, angels, and, I would say, education, are not central biblical themes akin to Christology, atonement, and theology proper, but enough is said about each of them that if we assemble these bits carefully and inquire as to how they fit into the Bible as a whole, it is surprising how much can be learned. So, let us assemble some of the bits and pieces of what the Bible says about education. Then we shall briefly survey how those bits and pieces have worked themselves out in a handful of historical arrays, before we explore the peculiar challenges of putting these pieces together at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the Western world.

1. Observations on Some Biblical Bits and Pieces

One of the first passages cited by writers who survey what the Bible says about education is Deuteronomy 6:6–9: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of our houses and on our gates.” Indeed, in the future when a new generation asks what this is all about, the older generation is to fill them in on the entire exodus history, the history of the redemption of God’s covenant people and the bedrock that warrants the call to obedience (6:20–25). The concern is to educate each new generation. Three details stand out: (1) The primary responsibility lies with the parents who are called to shape their children. (2) The focus is not on education broadly conceived, but on knowing their own God-shaped history and the covenantal structure and stipulations that rest on that history. (3) The context in which this theological formation takes place is not a formal educational institution but family life—sitting at home, walking along the road, answering questions in the intimacy of the family. A millennium and a half later, the same family structure is presupposed in the Olivet Discourse: “Two men will be in a field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left” (Matt 24:40–41). In the economic culture of the time, the two men were likely to be two brothers, or a father and a son; the two women were likely to be two sisters, or a mother and a daughter. That is why the separation brought about by the Lord’s return is so shocking. But that is also where education takes place.

Of course, some training takes place outside family lines: Eli mentors Samuel, Elijah mentors Elisha, to cite two obvious instances. Nevertheless, recall the importance of the family in the wisdom literature: “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years, and bring you peace and prosperity.... Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. Then he taught me, and he said to me, ‘Take hold of my word with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live.’ ... My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Prov 3:1–2; 4:1–4; 6:20; cf. 1:8). Family instruction lays emphasis on conduct: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Prov 22:6). The role of the mother in educating her son in the

faith surfaces unforgettably in the influence of Lois and Eunice on Timothy (2 Tim 1:5), and, sometimes regrettably, in the influence of Rebekah on her son Jacob. All of such trans-generational education is, of course, informal.

The importance of the written materials that make up what we today call the Bible surfaces in both personal and institutional contexts. When an Israelite came to regal power, his first responsibility was not to audit the books of his predecessor, nor to appoint a full slate of cabinet officers, but to copy out, by hand, “this law” (scholars continue to debate how much is included in the expression), then read it every day for the rest of his life (Deut 17:14–20)—a stipulation more commonly observed in the breach than in the performance, or all of Israel’s history would have been different. Psalm 119 is a sustained meditation on the law of the Lord and its shaping power. Times of reformation and revival are driven by the rediscovery of the written Word (Josiah) or by the exposition of that Word (Nehemiah). Although the exact referents are disputed, Paul’s desire to be reunited with the books and the parchments disclose a similar priority (2 Tim 4:13), as do affirmations of the unyielding importance of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–20). In recent years, scholars have shown how during the patristic period Christians stood out from their pagan peers, not least by being people of a book: their teaching, evangelism, catechizing, and worship were all shaped by written documents, by Scripture. All of this presupposes a sustained interest in *learning* what texts say, that is, in theological education. Whether early Christians read, say, 1 Corinthians for themselves, or accessed it primarily by hearing it read at length in the congregation, they stood out for their desire to become educated in their sacred texts.

The roots of such priorities lie deep within Old Testament soil. Unlike the other tribes, the Levites did not settle in one tribal area, but were scattered among the tribes, not least because their responsibilities included teaching the Word of God to their fellow Israelites. In other words, there was an *institutional* pattern of educating the people in holy Scripture. This side of the exile, that pattern morphed into the synagogue system, with its heavy emphasis on memory and recitation. In the New Testament, under the new covenant, assemblies were to be led by pastors/teachers/overseers, and one of the qualifications demanded of such leaders was that they be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). The Pastoral Epistles devote quite a lot of space to spelling out what the teachers must aim to accomplish: they must ground the believers in sound doctrine, warn divisive people, provide encouragement, and so forth. More broadly, Christians are to admonish one another. All of these are forms of education—Christian education. And, after all, even Christian proclamation of the gospel is a form of education.

The Bible also lays some stress on the lessons to be learned from history—or, more precisely, the lessons to be learned from history as interpreted by God. The entire book of Judges overflows with the point: when the covenant people slide into idolatry, God sends judgment until there is repentance and a desperate call for help. The book as a whole teaches that the people are incapable of long-term faithfulness without a godly king to keep them in line. The juxtaposed blessings and curses of Deuteronomy are designed to educate the people along similar lines. The seven churches of Revelation 2–3 are threatened with the dire consequences of prolonged sin: the candlestick is removed, the church is destroyed.

Although there is very little reflection in the Bible on how each new generation was educated in the broader knowledge and science of the day, there are adequate glimpses of the range of expertise. Genesis 4 identifies nomadic herders, musicians, and technical folk with rising mastery of tools made from bronze and iron. David was a poet; Solomon set himself to master proverbs; scribes collected and compiled them; and all of these skills require training of some sort or other—education, if you will.

The word “wisdom” covers a wide range of competencies, of course, but in some contexts it refers to something like a technical skill. Bezalel and Oholiab are “wise” men because they are endowed “with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts” (Exod 31:3–5). When David reflects on the sky, he declares, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge” (Ps 19:1–2; cf. vv. 1–6). Like Paul in his reflection on what can be learned about God from the natural order (Rom 1:19–20), David runs quickly to theological implications, but we cannot fail to note that these theological structures are anchored in observations of the natural order. Job knows about constellations such as Pleiades and Orion: presumably someone educated him in elementary astronomy. Once again, there is little reflection on the processes, structures, and methods of education, but quite regularly the biblical writers spell out nature’s theological implications.

I cannot abandon this survey without saying something about the Lord Jesus. One of the dominant ways by which his disciples referred to him is as “the Teacher.” After Jesus and Martha have finished their quiet exchange in John 11, Martha, we are told, “went back [to her house] and called her sister Mary aside. ‘The teacher is here,’ she said, ‘and is asking for you’” (11:28). Jesus himself ratifies the appropriateness of the designation when he instructs his disciples how to prepare for the Passover: “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near’” (Matt 26:18). Or again, in John’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am” (13:13). In Matthew’s Gospel, the apostle provides five large teaching blocks, the first of which is the sermon on the mount, which begins with the comment, “His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them” (5:1–2), and ends with the observation that “the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (7:28–29). Mark’s Gospel reports much less teaching, but the evangelist has a predilection for referring to Jesus as the Teacher.² Certainly the canonical Gospels depict Jesus teaching in a variety of modes: lecturing; mentoring those closest to him; coining one-liners; interacting with opponents; illustrating some element of his teaching with parables or with symbol-laden miracles; unpacking grace, faith, obedience, and more. None of this is presented as a disquisition on education. The focus, rather, is on the content—Jesus himself, the kingdom, his path to the cross and resurrection, eternal life—and that content is presented by a master-teacher. One may legitimately learn some things about education by watching Jesus, but it would rather miss the point to come away and say, “After studying Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, I see how copying Jesus’s teaching styles will improve my performance in my classes teaching students the challenges of how nuclear fusion might one day contribute to the electrical grid.”

2. A Miscellany of Historical Observations

Before trying to pull some of these strands together to see what kind of biblical theology of education we might weave, it might be worth our while to offer a potted miscellany of historical observations. This survey quickly discloses how almost none of the controlling features of what we mean by “education” today share any substantive overlap with the elements of education that surfaced in our survey of Scripture. When today we talk about education, we unwittingly smuggle into our discussion such categories as

² “Teacher” (διδάσκαλος) refers to Christ twelve times in Mark (4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14).

colleges and universities, private Christian institutions versus public options, K-12 schools, the value or otherwise of SAT exams, two-year associates degrees, technical colleges, distance learning, digital courses, universal access to libraries (hardcopy or digital), or, more broadly, access to the internet—and not one of these categories, not one, had any place in the mind of Solomon, of Hezekiah, of Dr Luke, or of Thomas Aquinas. To think about some of these categories for a moment enables us to ponder what we may and may not legitimately infer about education from the biblical texts.

In the first century, there was no ideal of government-supported, universal education. Some governments trained some of their employees or slaves: we catch glimpses of this as early as the time of Daniel and his three friends. Most Jewish lads in the time of Paul learned how to read, but most would not have owned any of their own books. There was nothing akin to a modern Western university. Lecturers/preachers often wandered from town to town, giving addresses in the public market place. If they were good enough, local nobility might pay them to educate their sons—and this could lead to the establishment of a one-man local academy, such as the school of Tyrannus. In relatively rare cases, a learned scholar attracted other would-be scholars who gathered around their master. The focus could be as broad as all philosophy, or much more narrow (e.g., mathematics). One of the results of this diversity is that although these so-called schools could argue amongst themselves, there was no government-mandated curriculum. Of course, government pressure came in other ways: read the Apocalypse, or 1 Peter. But it was not usually exerted through the rather slender first-century institutions of education. There were no trade schools. People who learned a trade did so in a master/apprentice relationship, in some cases controlled by the guilds (the ancient version of trade unions). Not infrequently the son learned his father's trade from his father. That is why Jesus was labeled "the carpenter's son," and, in one remarkable passage, simply "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3)—probably because Joseph had died, and Jesus had taken over the family business before embarking on his public ministry. Thus, the moral and theological education envisaged in Deuteronomy 6 took place on the same platform, in the same fields and shops, as the formation needed to become a farmer or a carpenter.

In the early Middle Ages, because clergy were the citizens most likely to be able to read, and because collections of books (which were very expensive) could usually be accumulated only by institutions substantial enough to pay for them, cathedrals and monasteries became the preserve of learning, and often ran their own schools. In his book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*,³ what Thomas Cahill really means is "how the Irish monasteries saved civilization." Certainly there were other monasteries than Irish ones. The first three European universities—at Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge—were first of all monkish enclaves, and the trappings of Christendom, to say no more, continue in them from the 12th century to the present day. Eventually these institutions became quite powerful. You can still visit the room in Queen's College, Cambridge, where Erasmus did much of his work. John Owen (1616–1683) was an administrator at the University of Oxford, and an advisor to Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. By and large, however, Oxford sided with the Catholics, and Cambridge with the Protestants—no College more so than Emmanuel College ("Emma"), Cambridge, whose support of the Puritans meant that Cromwell wanted to replace the Masters of the other colleges by Emma men. Meanwhile the fall of Constantinople to the Muslims (1453) sent many scholars and their manuscripts to the West, strengthening the Renaissance by the recovery of ancient learning.

At this period in history, a university was indeed a *university*: it was *one* body, an organization given to research and teaching, with something approaching a unified vision, with God at the center. In the

³ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

late medieval period, even the university libraries were organized in such a way as to demonstrate that theology is the unifying queen of the sciences. Today, for many reasons, there is little that is conceptually and vibrantly unifying in most universities.

From where did those students come who were admitted to Oxbridge (as Oxford and Cambridge together have come to be called) and other universities? Parents with means often paid for a part-time or even a live-in tutor to prepare their sons (and at this historical juncture, only sons went to university) for the leap to Oxbridge. But meanwhile another movement had sprung up. Eton College, a boarding school for boys ages 13 to 18, was founded in 1440 as a sister “feeder school” for King’s College, Cambridge, and other colleges with similar purposes followed in its train. They were called “public schools” because they were open to any young man with the money and the gifts to get in—unlike students who made their way by relying on private tutors. Transparently they were not public in the sense that they were sustained and controlled by public funds. As measured by those standards, England’s “public schools” were, and are, not public but private and elitist.

Five more steps completed the transformation to something akin to what we have today. *First*, in 1751 William King, followed very closely by Robert Raikes, started the first Sunday School. This was designed to provide basic education for children in the workforce who had had no educational opportunities at all. Sunday schools grew very rapidly. They taught reading, writing, cyphering (arithmetic), and a basic knowledge of the Bible. This was Christian education organized by Christians and some others to provide basic content to the disadvantaged.

Second, the Education Act of 1870 provided elementary education to everyone at government expense. Eventually this cut out the need for most Sunday schools as they had operated, and gradually transformed them into what we mean by Sunday schools today. At the same time, the same move brought the powerful force of government into play. The reach of government soon extended through secondary schools, technical colleges, and universities. The power of the purse is often velvet-gloved, but it can be formidably coercive. I shall return to this reality in a moment.

Third, Britain’s demographics changed, especially after WWII. The polite but anemic Judeo-Christian perspective that had dominated the culture for centuries gave way to massive multi-culturalism. London currently boasts somewhat more than 460 languages spoken on its streets. Some of us love the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity; others are frightened by it. Meanwhile, in such a population, where is the consensus on history, social studies, culture, religion, ethics, sexuality and gender identity, controlling literature, sense of humor, courtesy, justice, economics? How will the disagreements that undergird such diversity play out in government and in education at every level? What is clear is that the widespread attempts in government and the media to advocate a neutral ground called secularism is simultaneously naïve and dangerous.

Fourth, we cannot ignore the impact on education of the Industrial Revolution. New skills were needed, and many of them could not be acquired at home. Gradually the knowledge and skills needed in a scientific and technological society were taught by colleges and universities. The benefits were many, but the pattern of sending large numbers of 18-year-olds away from home to acquire an “education” tended with time to weaken the influence of the home and to modify what we mean by education.

Fifth, James Tunstead Burtchaell’s book *The Dying of the Light*⁴ carefully traces (in almost 900 pages) the common steps taken by colleges and universities as they departed from the confessional

⁴ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

convictions and organizational control of the denominations that founded them. One of these common steps is a change in the kind of leadership. Very often these educational institutions were founded by visionary pastor/theologians. As the institutions grew in numbers, however, boards sought out leaders with administrative, financial, and legal skills. The controlling pursuit of secularism was the result. The administrative skills are necessary, of course, but the question is whether they should be allowed to displace or domesticate the founding vision.

Obviously, with the exception of the last couple of points, I've slanted my potted history toward Britain, but with remarkably little modification I might have told the story of the US, of France, of Germany, of Canada, and so forth. The bearing of such historical realities on the topic of this paper is obvious. There is no straight-line development from what might pass as education in the Bible to what has developed as education across the last half-millennium. By the same token, it may be useful to cast a glance over a handful of recent cultural developments that certainly add to the challenge of trying to think biblically about education.

3. Some Recent Developments

If we are to interact with the culture in which God has placed us, we must try hard to understand it, especially as it has a bearing on our understanding of education. One of the most striking features of Western culture is how fast it is changing. It is hard to keep up; indeed, there is a danger that some of us will try so hard to keep up with the changing face of the culture that we spend too little time in the Bible, leaving ourselves with little more than a Sunday School grasp of what the Bible actually says. So, at the risk of considerable presumption, permit me to list a handful of authors whose insight has helped me.

3.1. Thomas Sowell

Sowell has written many shrewd books over the past several decades, all of them graced with clear thinking and exceptionally clear writing. The volume I mention here is his *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*.⁵ Sowell claims that the demand for a perfect solution on every known inequity soon coughs up doctrinaire "solutions" that are not only simplistic but they also damn anyone who disagrees. Worse, to qualify for the benefits of the "solution," it is necessary to be a victim, which results in long-term dependence on those claiming to have the "solution."

On issue after issue, the morally self-anointed visionaries have for centuries argued as if no honest disagreement were possible, as if those who opposed them were not only in error but in sin. This has long been a hallmark of those with a cosmic vision of the world and of themselves as saviors of the world, whether they are saving it from war, overpopulation, capitalism, genetic degradation, environmental destruction, or whatever the crisis du jour might be.⁶

The number and intensity of such movements are escalating, along with the corresponding arrogance. The demand for perfect justice turns out to be impossible in this broken world, and turns out to disenfranchise and belittle those who successfully make merely ameliorating improvements. Genuine modest improvements are sacrificed on the altar of reductionistic but absolutist visions to which all

⁵ Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

⁶ Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 103.

must bow, not least in the fields of education. By contrast, in the name of King Jesus, Christians are educated to do good to all people, to confront wickedness and injustice, while knowing full well that perfection awaits the return of the King.

3.2. Charles Taylor

Of his many books, doubtless the most important for our purposes is *A Secular Age*.⁷ His cultural analysis cascades onto his readers in prose that is sometimes dense but invariably enlightening. One of his most insightful notions is that our age has, for a number of complex reasons, elevated the notion of “authenticity.” A person is to be held in high regard and celebrated if he or she is *authentic*—that is, living in conformity with what he or she claims to value. It matters little what that siren vision is; what matters is the authenticity of the pursuit. Traditional voices of authority against which we measured ourselves in the past—family traditions, religious commitments, social and governmental demands, sexual conformity—now have no intrinsic authority unless for some strange reason I choose to adopt them as mine. What makes me an admirable person is not the vision I choose to pursue, but that my pursuit, in whatever direction, is authentic. It is difficult to imagine a stance more calculated to baptize my opinions with public approval. It is equally difficult to imagine a stance more antithetical to what Jesus teaches us: our Lord wants us to follow him, die to self-interest, and take up our cross and die daily, not in a pique of self-flagellation but because we have been educated to recognize that it is in dying that we live, in giving that we receive, that the plaudits of a passing world are not to be compared with the glory to come and with the “Well done!” of the Teacher. In other words, in large parts of “our secular age” the traditional goals of education have been turned on their head. Once the new goals have been widely adopted, education in any classical sense means challenging the culture.

A second insightful contribution is Taylor’s exposition of what he calls the modern social imaginary. By this expression he refers to the web of values, morals, direction, institutions, laws and symbols by which a society imagines itself and even realizes itself. The social imaginary of the Western world of five hundred years ago included belief in a (more or less) Christian God; the social imaginary of today’s Western world is functionally atheistic, even while many espouse belief in some kind of God (not uncommonly the moralistic, therapeutic, deistic god described by sociologist Christian Smith).⁸ That fundamental shift in the social imaginary means it is far more difficult to talk about the God of the Bible, far more difficult to educate people in the Christian way.

3.3. Douglas Murray

A provocative essayist with many contributions to his credit, Douglas Murray came to prominence with the publication of his previous book, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*.⁹ His more recent volume, and the one about which I wish to say a few words here, is *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*.¹⁰ Some of it could have been written only by someone self-described

⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1997).

⁸ See Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–71.

⁹ Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017).

¹⁰ Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019).

as gay. What he brings to the table are two things: a remarkable degree of clarity as he discusses four of our culture's most disputed terms (viz., gay, women, race, and trans), and, above all, a passionate plea for sane discourse over against the carefully engineered mass hysteria of our time, "the madness of crowds."

To illustrate: It is a remarkable fact that when Hillary Clinton ran against Barack Obama, both of them declared that marriage should be between one man and one woman—and that declaration was just over a dozen years ago. How short is the time it took to make homosexual marriage the law of the land, with penalties for those who dare to disagree! Once again: "the madness of crowds." Millennia of convictions as to what marriage *is* were jettisoned. Precisely how should an informed and compassionate, yes, and dispassionate confessional stance educate the culture? How shall we re-capture clarity, reason, sanity, in order to declare the logic and coherence of the gospel, when we are competing with the madness of crowds?

3.4. Christopher Caldwell

His book *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*¹¹ offers a reading of the past half-century that is thought-provoking and must be at least partially right. In brief, he argues that the attempt to resolve all of our cultural disputes by legislation has generated a citizenry characterized by a deep sense of entitlement, complete with whining and a knee-jerk reliance on the courts to right all wrongs.

3.5. Mary Eberstadt

She has become one of the most insightful cultural commentators that we have. Among other contributions, she wrote *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies*.¹² More recently she wrote *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*.¹³ In some ways this book is akin to Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, first published in 2000.¹⁴ She argues that with the arrival of the pill and the sexual revolution it helped to spawn, personal identity was no longer tied to family and community. Individualism was tied to freedom, not least sexual freedom, and if there was community, it was arbitrary community incapable of sustaining well-being. In the wake of what Eberhardt calls "the great scattering," small wonder that teenage psychological problems are on the rise, along with loneliness studies, a loss of social learning, and "the infantilized vernacular of identity politics itself."¹⁵ The "primal scream" of the title is the desperate cry, "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong in the world?"

3.6. Other Contributions

Constraints of space forbid that I comment on other contributions, including those of Jordan Peterson and Rod Dreher. Roger Trigg may be taken as a fine exemplar of those who argue that our mediating institutions—family, clubs, trade unions, professional societies, schools, universities, and the

¹¹ Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

¹² Mary Eberstadt, *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* (New York: Harper, 2016).

¹³ Mary Eberstadt, *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton, 2019).

¹⁴ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, revised ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

¹⁵ Eberstadt, *Primal Screams*, 11.

like—are gradually being displaced or progressively being controlled by the state.¹⁶ The result is more and more control by the state—not least in the domain of education. Perhaps the most comprehensive and convincing analysis is the very recent book by Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*.¹⁷ If you have time to read only one of the books I have mentioned, let that be the one.

The point of this survey is to remind ourselves that if we are to interact with the culture in which God has placed us, we must try hard to understand it, and be discerning. The challenge is captured in the well-known and strangely prescient lines of T. S. Eliot, drawn from the opening stanza of his *Choruses from the Rock*, now a century old:

Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

4. Conclusions

First, the center of what the Bible intimates about education is that nothing is more important than the knowledge of God mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ. That is as true for the diesel mechanic, the window washer, and the neurosurgeon as it is for the pastor/theologian. What shall it profit anyone to gain the whole world, including a Nobel prize or two, and lose their own soul? For those of us laboring in the fields of education, that axiomatic truth ought to shape not only our curriculum but our relationships with one another and with our students, our adorning of the gospel as well as our articulation of it.

There are many implications. For a start, it means we could not possibly be satisfied with a return to broad Judeo-Christian values, even if we could arrange their return (and of course, we cannot). A Dickensian Christmas, complete with a turn-over-a-new-leaf Scrooge, doesn't bring us any closer to "the real meaning of Christmas" than a bacchanalian frenzy. In fact, Dickens may be more dangerous, since his sentimentality tends to swamp our discernment. Attempts to adhere to the second greatest command become thin when the first of the two greatest commands is ignored. The first thing to hold on to is that nothing is more important than the knowledge of God, mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, it follows that, owing to the very nature of what it means in Scripture to know God, our educational priorities can never be *merely* curricular. It is not enough to train students to recite the Nicene Creed and identify who the left-handed judge is: they must learn to integrate their knowledge of the Bible and theology with personal faith, ethics (including personal, sexual, and social ethics), with goals, use of time and money, and relationships with fellow believers in the life of the church. They must learn how to conduct themselves with those of different faith, and with unbelievers whose carefree abandonment of all religious claims is utterly alien to us. All these things, and more, flow out of what Scripture and theology *teach*—that is, how Scripture *educates* us.

Third, the piecemeal nature of what Scripture says about education, and the highly diverse patterns in which the institutions of education have played out across the centuries, alert us to the danger of thinking that the Bible provides us with a thoroughgoing handbook of the dos, don'ts, and how-tos

¹⁶ Roger Trigg, "Equality and Freedom of Religion," *Theology* 124 (2021): 32–39.

¹⁷ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

of educational practice. The Bible does provide us with broadly comprehensive educational goals and incentives; it cannot be said to determine the shape of our educational institutions. We must never fall into the trap of thinking that provided we educate people in line with the best current educational fads, all will be well. I have said too little, except implicitly, about the moral dimensions of education, or teased out the profound assumptions embedded in the words, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10) and “of knowledge” (Prov 1:7), nor have I considered the work of the Spirit and of regeneration, and the place of the life of the church in any truly Christian education. Such considerations take us well beyond techniques and institutions.

Fourth, a responsible strategy of education must be shaped by the place where God has placed us. I recently read a book by John and Bonnie Nystrom with the title *Sleeping Coconuts*,¹⁸ relating their work of overseeing the translation of the Bible into Arop and nine other languages in Papua New Guinea. Part of their task of education entails the formation of tribal translators, teaching people what an alphabet is, teaching people how to read. All of that is Christian education, even though it is very different from the courses taught by a Christian university. Closer to home, in the US when heavy-handed opposition tries to shut down Christian groups on campus, students appeal to freedom of religion and to constitutional rights. They cast their meetings as worship, which is constitutionally protected. That argument won’t fly in France, where students, to preserve a hearing, insist that their meetings are *not* religious, but academic and educational: the French Revolution had a different shape to the American Revolution. The former mandated freedom *from* religion, while the latter opted for freedom *of* religion. My point is that the Bible does not provide a detailed protocol for how education should properly and appropriately engage each culture, whether in PNG, France, the US, or anywhere else. That is why in trying to outline the fundamentals of a biblical theology of education, and applying them to the Western cultures I know best, I have avoided universalizing the practical outworkings. While we debate whether (for instance) it is wiser to stay in the public schools and exercise influence there, or to withdraw and build independent Christian schools, the shape of this debate is very different in, say, Hungary, or China, or Bahrain, or first-century Athens. A faithful biblical theology of education will provide us with the framework for thinking through such questions, but will not give us formulaic universals.

Fifth, this does not mean that all of our relationships with the unconverted world must be adversarial. Those in the Reformed tradition often appeal to “common grace”—the grace that God distributes commonly, to the redeemed and the unredeemed alike. It is not for nothing that Jeremiah tells us to seek the good of the pagan city in which we reside. At the end, according to Revelation, the kingdoms of this world are depicted as bringing their treasures into the new Jerusalem. The summary exhortation of the apostle Paul is striking: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil 4:8). The implication is obvious: there are many fields of study where we may, and sometimes ought to, share the educational endeavors of our lives with others. That this will demand wisdom and discernment should drive us to James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” If we are not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed (Rom 12:2), it will be by the renewal of our *mind*, by what and how we think, which presupposes sound formation, sound education.

¹⁸ John Nystrom and Bonnie Nystrom, *Sleeping Coconuts* (Orlando: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 2012).

In one of his recent books,¹⁹ Tim Keller outlines what the Bible teaches Christians to observe and practice in the way they treat others. He highlights key features of the early church's social vision, which should inform Christians' vision today: (1) be multi-racial and multi-ethnic; (2) care for the poor and marginalized; (3) choose to forgive and not retaliate; (4) stand strongly against abortion and infanticide; (5) insist on and practice what is today considered a revolutionary sexual ethic. At the risk of generalization, political liberals typically support (1) and (2), political conservatives typically support (4) and (5), and neither practices (3). That means the thoughtful Christian cannot totally align with political (and educational!) parties other than the kingdom of God. That does not mean there is no place for working with some such entities, as Daniel worked for the government of Babylon. Similarly in the field of education: doubtless there is a place for working with others, but we are called to do so in such a posture of faithfulness that we risk being cast into a den of lions. It is a dubious exercise to predict the future—there are too many unknowns. But it is not unthinkable that our commitment to (the *relatively* little of) what the Bible says about education could drive us to the educational equivalent of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes or to the Great Ejection.

Finally, although the Bible provides no biblical theology of education of the sort that runs along a clear trajectory to climax in a resounding typological consummation, it provides biblical theology of education in the shape of many pieces that enrich our thinking about the substance, goals, and means of truly Christian education—what the French rightly call *formation*. Coupled with informed surveys of the changing shape of educational institutions across the centuries, the biblical mandates and examples take form in various ways, and make us aware of how urgently we need to become insightful “readers” of the present culture. Here the outworking of faithful gospel proclamation, surely including biblically faithful education, will carry us to renewed influence, or to painful persecution, or perhaps both.

Editor's Note: Jackson Wu has faithfully served for five years as the Mission and Culture book review editor and is now transitioning off of the editorial team. We thank Dr. Wu for his significant contributions to the journal as an editor and author and wish him well in his work as Theologian-in-Residence for Mission ONE.

Matthew Bennett succeeds Dr. Wu as the Mission and Culture book review editor. Dr. Bennett is assistant professor of missions and theology at Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio, and previously served in North Africa and the Middle East. He completed a PhD in Missiology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and is the author of *40 Questions About Islam* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020) and *Narratives in Conflict: Atonement in Hebrews and the Qur'an* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019). Dr. Bennett may be contacted at matt.bennett@thegospelcoalition.org.

¹⁹ Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020), 25–29. I am grateful to my pastor, Steve Mathewson, for tracking down this reference.

STRANGE TIMES

No Longer Humans, but Angels (and Demons)

— Daniel Strange —

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A colleague of mine once interviewed a retiring bishop during a weekly college chapel service. It was a pleasant, but to be honest, fairly anodyne back and forth. That is apart from the last exchange. My colleague asked what had kept the bishop persevering in ministry all these years. We were all expecting something uplifting yet predictable: ‘The glory of God,’ ‘love for the sheep,’ ‘my prayer life,’ even ‘my wonderful family,’ etc. What we got was somewhat different. The bishop paused, looked down at the lectern, looked up at us all, and responded with the following: ‘an infinite capacity for disappointment.’ Suffice it to say, my colleague struggled to wrap up that part of the service with a neat little bow and an appropriate rousing hymn the band could start playing. (I could list a number of disappointing hymns and songs but few on the *theme* of disappointment!)

An infinite capacity for disappointment. While not a particularly welcome lodger, that answer has stayed in my brain over the years. What are we to make of such an utterance? Stoic? Sagacious? I’ve screwed up my eyes in concentration and tried to recall the tone and posture in which the bishop uttered those words. I don’t remember it being a cutting acerbic barb. Nor was it said tongue-in-cheek with a twinkle in the eye. Possibly the closest I can liken it to in mood is G. K. Chesterton’s description of Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, a novel with the ‘quality of serene irony and even sadness’ written in the ‘afternoon of Dickens’s life and fame’: ‘at no time could Dickens be called cynical, he had too much vitality; but relatively to his other books this book is cynical; but it has the soft and gentle cynicism of old age, not the hard cynicism of youth.’¹ Chesterton expands on this later in his appreciation:

When he sets out to describe Pip’s great expectation he does not set out, as in a fairytale, with the idea that these great expectations will be fulfilled; he sets out from the first with the idea that these great expectations will be disappointing. We might very well, as I have remarked elsewhere, apply to all Dickens’s books the title *Great Expectations*. All his books are full of an airy and yet ardent expectation of everything; of the next person who shall happen to speak, of the next chimney that shall happen to smoke, of the next event, of the next ecstasy; of the next fulfilment of any eager human fancy. All his books

¹ G. K. Chesterton, ‘Great Expectations’, in Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations with Appreciations and Criticisms by G. K. Chesterton*, reprint ed. (Bristol: Read & Co. Books, 2020), 5. Chesterton’s introduction is taken from his 1911 book *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*.

might be called *Great Expectations*. But the only book to which he gave the name of *Great Expectations* was the only book in which the expectation was never realised.²

Alternatively, take the 1919 American Tin Pan Alley hit “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles.” Although covered many times, it’s a song now most associated as the anthem of my own (for better or worse) beloved Premier League Football Club, West Ham United, and belted out with complete commitment at the beginning of every home game. While it may seem a bizarre choice of tune when one considers the words, it’s very apposite in describing the perennial mood of many West Ham supporters:

I’m forever blowing bubbles,
Pretty bubbles in the air,
They fly so high,
Nearly reach the sky,
Then like my dreams,
They fade and die.
Fortune’s always hiding,
I’ve looked everywhere,
I’m forever blowing bubbles,
Pretty bubbles in the air.

1. A Disappointing Definition

There seems to be a waft of disappointment in the air at the moment as we look back at the last eighteen months in terms of the pandemic, and as we look around at a church in which we’ve witnessed a string of public ministerial disappointments which might even stretch our bishop’s ‘infinite’ capacity. It merits a little musing albeit admittedly somewhat meandering.

On one level, defining disappointment is relatively straightforward. It is to ‘frustrate the expectation or desire (of a person).’³ Brian Rosner notes an equation to calculate the magnitude of any given disappointment:

Major Disappointment = High Hopes + Dismal Failure

Minor Disappointment = Inconsequential Hopes and Negligible Failure⁴

However, there are some immediate edges that we wouldn’t want to trip over. The first is cultural and temperamental. For those coming to Britain, a number of semi-serious cultural acclimatisation websites invariably note the following:

² Chesterton, ‘Great Expectations,’ 7. To my mind this comment is even more pertinent if one chooses the original ‘unhappy’ ending to the novel (which appears as an appendix in the Penguin and Oxford editions). For those interested in this heated Dickensian debate see Edgar Rosenberg, ‘Putting an End to Great Expectations,’ in Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Norton Critical Editions (London: Norton, 1999).

³ ‘Disappoint,’ in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), 1: 403.

⁴ Brian S. Rosner, ‘Bonhoeffer on Disappointment,’ in *The Consolations of Theology*, ed. Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 108.

What the British say: 'I was a bit disappointed that....'

What the British mean: 'I am most upset and cross'

What is understood: 'It doesn't really matter'

It's probably helpful to check that your 'disappointment' or your being a 'disappointment' really is what is meant in terms of how we hear and how we are heard.

The second is biblical or rather 'unbiblical' in that the etymology of disappointment appears to be 14th century French (*désappointer*) in terms of undoing an appointment, with the sense of unrealised expectations only first appearing in the late 15th century.⁵ While the frustration of expectations is surely a biblical theme, and an important one, 'disappointment' cannot be read straight off of the text of Scripture and is rather an implication particularly in the psychological and existential sense we usually mean.⁶

2. A Disappointing Survey

With notable exceptions, initial searches for theological treatments of disappointment have been, well a little disappointing (I'll leave you to guess whether I mean that in the British sense or not?). In his Grove booklet, *Facing Disappointment: The Challenge for Church Leaders*,⁷ James Newcombe lists a number of loci for disappointment: local church, wider church, individuals, family, self and God together with some consequences of disappointment: exhaustion, frustration, demoralization, burnout, and loss of faith. He then lists seven ways of dealing with disappointment: admission, lament, adjusting our perspective, understanding God's sovereignty, knowing that 'all things work together'; and realising that God shares our disappointment. Speaking into the pandemic, Abbey Wedgeworth notes that while the object of our disappointments reveal what love, 'the *magnitude* of that disappointment can sometimes reveal an inordinate desire or disordered love, unmasking something we love or desire more than God himself.' Through our prayers concerning our disappointments we are offered forgiveness for our disordered loves and Spirit's help to reorder and reorient our hearts.⁸

In his article 'The Reality of Disappointment', Jeremy Pierre notes that like all emotions, 'disappointment is a gauge of how a person perceives his life—what he believes about it and wants from it.'⁹ For Pierre the key theological dynamic is the relationship between the fixed reality of 'reality', and the more fluid less determined response to reality which we call 'expectation'. Post-fall, 'disappointment is an accurate response to a disappointing world'¹⁰ and is a pervasive theme throughout Scripture. Pierre lists some principles to process personal disappointments. First, our 'specific disappointments are only

⁵ See once again *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1:403.

⁶ I am aware of Romans 5:5—'And hope does not put us to *shame*'—where some versions translate κατασχύνω not as 'shame' but 'disappoint'. I'm unsure as to whether 'disappoint' in the way I am using it in this piece is exactly what is been referred to in this particular verse.

⁷ James Newcome, *Facing Disappointment: The Challenge for Church Leaders* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2016).

⁸ Abbey Wedgeworth, 'Everything's Canceled! Dealing with Disappointment in Pandemic', *The Gospel Coalition*, 24 March 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/canceled-disappointment-pandemic/>.

⁹ Jeremy Pierre, 'The Reality of Disappointment', *Tabletalk Magazine*, May 2018, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2018/05/the-reality-of-disappointment/>.

¹⁰ Pierre, 'The Reality of Disappointment'.

the manifestation of a broader disappointment.¹¹ Ultimate satisfaction is not and cannot be found this side of the eschaton, and that our disappointments should not lead to self-pity or self-hatred. Second, our 'disappointments may show that your expectations don't line up with what God says about reality.' Third, and, conversely, our disappointments show a match between expectation and reality, 'plagued with difficulty for now in order to sharpen your desire for the world to come. The grief of realizing the world is broken can be a platform to worship the God who even now is preparing an unbroken world.'¹² Finally, our disappointments should provoke lamentation and seeking.

The aforementioned Brian Rosner has written a perceptive and moving chapter on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and disappointment.¹³ Bonhoeffer's disappointment quotient was profoundly and tragically very high combining 'prodigious prospects and devastating failure.'¹⁴ His expectations and plans first for 'the renewal of the German church and people,' and second, to marry his fiancée Maria von Wedemeyer, were never realised after he was imprisoned and then executed in 1945. From mining his *Letters and Papers from Prison* and *Love Letters from Cell 92*, Rosner traces a number of ways Bonhoeffer dealt with disappointment and how we might learn from his example. The chapter is well worth a close and careful reading, but Rosner summarises as follows:

In order to cope with setbacks and maintain hope Bonhoeffer warns us the false hopes of wallowing in regret, curbing desire, seeking a substitute, and merely hoping for the resurrection of the dead. Instead, he counsels: (1) Focus on the invaluable; (2) Don't give up on your legitimate desires; (3) Embrace a godly optimism; (4) Don't pretend or minimize the failure; (5) Compare yourself with those less fortunate rather than more fortunate; (6) Find comfort in the God who 'seeks again what is past'; (7) Remain cheerful; and above all 8) Give your disappointments to God.¹⁵

Rosner notes that these lessons emerge from Bonhoeffer not settling for false bifurcations and the holding together of things considered mutually exclusive:

He believes in *both* divine sovereignty *and* responsible action, *both* bold deeds *and* gracious forgiveness; *both* caring deeply *and* not despairing, *both* loving this world and eagerly anticipating the next. Bonhoeffer knows that he is not the author of his own life. Yet that does not stop him from dreaming and yearning and hoping and working.¹⁶

In a little piece, 'I Am Disappointed in You,' Ed Welch focuses not on the disappointed, but the disappointer.¹⁷ Stating that 'forgiveness does not remove disappointment',¹⁸ he comments that the 'older you get, the more oppressive the word'¹⁹ because being a disappointment 'makes you feel less that,

¹¹ Pierre, 'The Reality of Disappointment'.

¹² Pierre, 'The Reality of Disappointment'.

¹³ Rosner, 'Bonhoeffer on Disappointment'.

¹⁴ Rosner, 'Bonhoeffer on Disappointment', 108.

¹⁵ Rosner, 'Bonhoeffer on Disappointment', 128.

¹⁶ Rosner, 'Bonhoeffer on Disappointment', 129.

¹⁷ Ed Welch, 'I'm Disappointed in You,' CCEF, 5 November 2012, <https://www.ccef.org/i-am-disappointed-you/>.

¹⁸ Welch, 'I'm Disappointed in You'.

¹⁹ Welch, 'I'm Disappointed in You'.

lower than—lower than—the person you disappointed, ‘kids already feel like they are not quite in the same category as adults, so they don’t fall very far, but other adults and spouses are peers, and now you have slipped down the ladder into the child category, or that of the family dog.’²⁰ Welch notes that if we are a disappointment to others, how much more do we feel a disappointment to God who is neither distracted nor forgetful (the usual ways disappointment is mitigated and managed in human relationships). However, noting the example of Israel (at times the disappointer *par excellence*), he reminds us that ‘The Lord turns his face toward them and delights in blessing them. In doing this he invites them to turn their face toward him. *There are no doghouses in the Kingdom of God.*’²¹ God’s turning towards his disappointing people is to be our model, ‘instead of turning away from someone who is rightly disappointed with you, imagine going *toward* the person (probably after you have asked forgiveness), and saying: “I know I disappointed you, and I hate that, so I want to understand your concerns—I want to really hear them and take them seriously—because my relationship with you is important to me.” Move toward people with humility rather than humiliation.’²²

3. *Disappointing Dangers*

The area of disappointment which has particularly caught my attention is not so much how we deal in a godly fashion with disappointment in terms of our general life circumstances, or disappointment in myself, but rather my disappointment in others. In particular how do we deal with disappointment in brothers and sisters who profess Christ? Perhaps most acutely, how do we deal with disappointment in those who often, but not exclusively, are in leadership of whom we expect much? Once again, if disappointment in other believers is what our bishop was referring to, how much are we to covet, learn from and pray for his ‘infinite capacity’ as a strategy and ‘answer’ for perseverance in our own ministry and calling? Is this a mark of wisdom or weariness? What does our disappointment *in* other Christians mean existentially for our coping with disappointment *as* Christians?

Being disappointed in others, both believers and unbelievers is a reality for all those living ‘under the sun’. It is not sinful to be disappointed. However, our refraction of it and reaction to it (into which I include our ‘capacity’ for it), is complex and somewhat paradoxical. Disappointment presents a realised eschatological challenge, the sweet spot of which is hard to find. It’s important we do not succumb to a subtle drift and find ourselves in unhealthy, ungodly and ‘worldly’ waters in our dealings with disappointment. Philosophically there are cultural sirens that can pull us in two different directions.

The first is disappointment with an over-realised expectation. Recently the website of celebrated novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie temporarily crashed after she published a stinging polemic on abuse she has received on social media. She finishes her essay as follows:

I have spoken to young people who tell me they are terrified to tweet anything, that they read and re-read their tweets because they fear they will be attacked by their own. The assumption of good faith is dead. What matters is not goodness but the appearance of

²⁰ Welch, ‘I’m Disappointed in You.’

²¹ Welch, ‘I’m Disappointed in You’, emphasis original.

²² Welch, ‘I’m Disappointed in You’, emphasis original.

goodness. We are no longer human beings. We are now angels jostling to out-angel one another. God help us. It is obscene.²³

In explaining this state we're in, Charles Taylor has described Nietzsche's 'acid account' of the sources of modern philanthropy and solidarity which captures 'the possible fate of culture which has aimed higher than its moral sources can sustain it.'²⁴ He notes that while 'our age makes higher demands of solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before,'²⁵ there is a dark underbelly to a secular humanism which replaces the doctrines of sin and depravity for those of goodness and greatness. It's worth quoting him in full here:

But philanthropy and solidarity driven by a lofty humanism, just as that which was driven often by high religious ideals, has a Janus face. On one side, in the abstract, one is inspired to act. But on the other, faced with the immense disappointments of actual human performance, with the myriad ways in which real, concrete human beings fall short of, ignore, parody and betray this magnificent potential, one cannot but experience a growing sense of anger and futility. Are these people really worthy objects of all these efforts? Perhaps in face of all this stupid recalcitrance, it would not be a betrayal of human worth, or one's self-worth, if one abandoned them. Or perhaps the best that can be done for them is to force them to shape up.

Before the reality of human shortcomings, philanthropy—the love of the human—can gradually come to be invested with contempt, hatred, aggression. The action is broken off, or worse, continues, but invested now with these new feelings, and becomes progressively more coercive and inhumane... The tragic irony is that the higher the sense of potential, the more grievously real people fall short, and the more severe the turn-around will be which is inspired by the disappointment. A lofty humanism posits high standards of self-worth, and a magnificent goal to strive towards. It inspires enterprises of great moment. But by this very token it encourages force, despotism, tutelage, ultimately contempt, and a certain ruthlessness is shaping refractory human material.²⁶

Ironically, therefore to idolise or 'angelise' humanity in general and any human in particular can quickly lead to a demonisation, which airbrushes over our God-given dignity and worth. As Christians, our disappointments in others, even in other Christians, must be measured and tempered with a healthy hamartiology which neither excuses nor ignores the consequences of sin, but is able to comprehend, is able to lament, and is able to offer forgiveness and potentially restoration. Not only does a 'realistic' realised eschatology help us 'cope' with disappointment, it could be and should be radically counter-cultural. For another recent example, the game of English international cricket has been embroiled in

²³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "It Is Obscene: A True Reflection in Three Parts", 15 June 2021, <https://www.chimamanda.com/>. For the debate surrounding this essay, see Alexandra Alter, 'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Sparks Controversy in Online Essay' *The New York Times*, 16 June 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/books/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-essay-tweets.html>.

²⁴ Charles Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?' *Marianist Award Lectures* (The University of Dayton, 1996), http://ecommons.udayton.edu/uscc_marianist_award/10, 29.

²⁵ Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 29.

²⁶ Taylor, 'A Catholic Modernity?', 31–32.

a heated and excruciatingly awkward controversy concerning the newly capped twenty-seven-year-old Ollie Robinson. On the day that the English Cricket Board had players wearing 'cricket is a game for everyone' T-shirts asserting their commitment to fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism, several historic racist and sexist tweets were unearthed which Robinson had sent when he was eighteen years old. Even though Robinson publicly apologised he was immediately suspended pending an ongoing investigation. Various commentators and politicians have waded in, some saying the punishment 'over the top', others deeming it appropriate. While it would be wrong to speculate (not knowing all the facts involved), it's a high bar we've set when I hear one fellow cricketer Michael Carberry being interviewed on the radio and stating, 'I don't believe this is a problem where you can rehabilitate someone. If it was down to me Ollie Robinson would not be playing Test cricket. Robinson spoke about educating himself, but what is he talking about? I would be very interested to know. I am a black man and I have never needed any education to speak to my white friends.'²⁷

The second danger is disappointment with an under-realised expectation. Cambridge academic (and fellow West Ham supporter) Andy Martin writes about living with disappointment and how the Stoicism of the first-century Epictetus is admirable. He notes Epictetus's example of the servant who breaks your favourite vase. Rather than berate your servant you say to yourself "The vase is not broken, it has only been restored." Returned, in other words, to its pre-vaselike state. So nothing has been lost. The vase itself was only a temporary anomaly. So too, all human life, condemned to entropy.'²⁸ However, Martin himself notes the internal problem with Stoicism: a dissatisfaction with dissatisfaction, 'in the end you want to fix things and change the world, even if it's only trying to stick that vase back together again or make a new one. Such is negentropy, a protest against the tendency of everything to fall apart.' As this point, Martin reaches for 'Reacher':

In modern literary terms, the best case of the stoic who finally revolts is Jack Reacher. On a rooftop in Madrid, Lee Child, Reacher's creator, says 'philosophically, Reacher is a stoic. Stoicism is about all he has in the way of philosophy'. He can put up with unbelievable amounts of pain without moaning. He disdains paracetamol and aspirin. He can re-set his own broken nose and tape it up with duct-tape. But is he really a stoic?

Epictetus urges us to see no distinction between an 'is' and an 'ought'. Everything right now (no matter how bad) is just the way it ought to be. Nothing (tsunamis, volcanoes erupting, shipwrecks, Brexit, Trump or crashing out of the FA Cup) is that big of a deal, you say to yourself. Thus easing the pain and attaining the serene calm of ataraxia. Very cool. But hard to keep up.

Question: if the lone woman on the late-night metro in Paris is getting mugged or groped by some drunk, do you just sit there and lift up your copy of *L'Equipe* and concentrate on the day's news? The Reacher response is an ascending scale, from indifference to a

²⁷ This comment by Michael Carberry is cited in Simon Burton, 'Boris Johnson Joins Oliver Dowden in ECB Criticism over Ollie Robinson', *The Guardian*, 7 June 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/tc5cnf9p>.

²⁸ Andy Martin, 'Singing in the Rain: The Philosophy of Disappointment', *The Independent*, 13 January 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/25bj6jfr>.

sense of injustice, to indignation and righteous fury. Sometimes a broken jug just cries out for fixing.²⁹

Once again, transposing this into our disappointment with other Christians, do we baptise a Christian form of Stoicism which becomes a parodic version of William Carey's famous dictum? Rather than the urgent and activistic, 'expect great things, attempt great things' we have a resigned and rather passive 'don't expect too much, and why bother attempting anything really'.

On hearing the latest Christian who publicly has fallen from grace, or the latest local church blow-up and break-down, I don't think I want to be unmoved and impassive. I don't want to be 'wise' if wisdom means a numbness that means I knowingly nod and say something like 'nothing surprises or shocks me anymore'. I want to be surprised. I want to be shocked. I should be concerned when I'm not. This isn't the way it's supposed to be! I want my disappointment to have in it high expectations, not only because sin does violence to our God-given worthiness, which is tragic and lamentable, but that Christians have been born-again:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor 5:17)

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Pet 2:9)

As Christians, our disappointments in others, even in others within the Christian community, must be measured and tempered with an expectation of God's work, which certainly recognises God's disciplining, and refining by his Spirit, and yes a winnowing process which is painful but purposeful and predicted time and again in Scripture. Disappointment does not mean despair and should not lead to a passive stasis but a positive moving forward because God is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

It is within boundaries that neither over- nor under-realises our disappointment that the bishop's 'infinite capacity for disappointment' could interpreted as wise for it is most importantly 'real'.

4. Concluding Disappointing Thoughts

First, the way we use language and illustrations matter as was pointed out to me recently by one of my post-grad students.³⁰ For a while I have been happily using the analogy of the church being like a show-home on a building site—the closest thing we have now to the new heaven and the new earth. The illustration is not original to me and I can't remember where I picked it up. First, it was noted methodologically that when we use illustrations, metaphors and analogies we need to ask whether the concepts we're using are rendering the same patterns of judgements as the concepts of Scripture. Second, concerning the illustration itself, it is helpful when it is focussed strictly on the notion that something bigger and more complete is coming that is now only illustrated in part. However, it falls down as an analogy when one considers the central conceptual function of the show-home. The show-

²⁹ Martin, 'Singing in the Rain'. See Andy Martin, *Reacher Said Nothing: Lee Child and the Making of Make Me* (Cambridge, Polity, 2020).

³⁰ My thanks to Iain Lingwood for these observations.

home should be complete and functioning perfectly which might lead people to expect too *much* of the church here and now. Clearly the church ought to be distinctive from the world in numerous ways including—but not limited to—people’s love for one another and the nature of leadership. Yet the church is also to be a model of repentance and forgiveness which in itself presupposes that it is not yet finished.³¹

A better illustration might be that of the church as restoration project, a ‘doer-upper’ in that there is a continuity of purpose between the original edifice and the rebuilding project. The project is not one of starting from scratch, but a renewal, whereby God comes in and takes possession in a new way to restore the building to its former glory (in fact, more than its former glory—to be something better than it ever was to begin with). And it’s a doer-upper where the work is still being done. To borrow the temple imagery, the foundation has been laid, and maybe we could say the walls are up. But there’s a gaping hole in the roof, the gutters are blocked up and the ’70s avocado bathroom suite is still in place. There is a lot of work to do, but because the work has been begun, and because we have access to the architect’s plans, anyone who watches seriously can catch a glimpse of how things are going to look in the end. This might be a truer and more real picture with which to frame our disappointment in God’s community.

Second, within the body of Christ, the global church, we would do well to learn from each other as we learn to be disappointed Christianly. Brothers’ and sisters’ different characters, temperaments, ethnicities, cultures, generations, and slightly different theological stresses should provide the checks and balances to drive us back to Scripture to make sure we haven’t been too over-realised or under-realised in our disappointment. For example, there can be an expectancy in the theology and practice of my more Pentecostal and charismatic sisters and brothers which forces me back to Scripture to ask whether I am too under-realisingly resigned in my patterned reaction to disappointments. Of course, the reverse might also be true.

Third, we can learn from biblical examples noting what I cautioned above concerning the recent history of the English word ‘disappointment’. I immediately think of Paul’s disappointments in ministry and with other Christians which contain a rich seam to be mined. ‘Disappointed but not despairing’ would not look out of place in Paul’s list in 2 Corinthians 4:8–10. As Rosner noted about Bonhoeffer, Paul disavows false bifurcations. It seems, however complex, that one can *face* disappointment, one *be* both disappointed and a disappointment, while still being content (not Stoic!) in all circumstances (Phil 4:11–12).

And, of course, we learn from our Lord for whom disappointment one could list as an ‘innocent infirmity’.³² In Gethsemane, and with a certain expectancy given his own prophetic prediction in quoting Zechariah 13:7—‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’ (Matt 26:31), one still senses the disappointment of Christ in his sleeping disciples when he asked, ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?’ (v. 40). But this disappointment does not lead to Jesus turning his

³¹ One might pose the question: Does describing the church as a show-home imply a fundamental newness to what the church is expected to do? As in, the purpose of the church is to demonstrate the glory of God to the watching powers. But that is what humanity was designed for to begin with. In this sense, the church is very much a restoration project.

³² I take this term from the 19th century theologian Henry Melvill: ‘But whilst He [Christ] took humanity with the innocent infirmities, He did not take it with the sinful propensities. Here Deity interposed. Christ’s humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the Fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the Fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin.’ Melvill, *Sermons* (New York: Stanford & Swords, 1850), 47.

face away from his followers in either an act of demonization or Stoicism, but rather towards them in love and compassion as he headed determinedly towards Golgotha where the Father would turn his face away from him.

‘Life under the sun’ may feel like one disappointment after another, but life in the Son in faith union is the opposite. Jesus Christ is the one who never disappoints and whose blessings never disappoint. He really is the only one who, with fellow-feeling and sympathy, has an infinite capacity for disappointment in our dismal failures. And Jesus is the one who has secured disappointment’s end in the promise of the new heaven and new earth—that Greatest Expectation finally realised. In the reality of the resurrection and ascension of Christ we see the declaration of the Father well pleased with his beloved Son. This is the Christian negentropic principle: God has installed his king on Zion, his holy mountain (Ps 2:6). Commenting on this verse Spurgeon writes:

Is not that a grand exclamation! He has already done that which the enemy seeks to prevent. While they are proposing, he has disposed the matter. Jehovah’s will is done, and man’s will frets and raves in vain. *God’s Anointed is appointed, and shall not be disappointed.*³³

³³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, <https://archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps002.php>. I should note it is the end of this Spurgeon quotation that is quoted as an historical example of the entry ‘disappointed’ in the 1979 *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, and I note referenced wrongly(!) as ‘Psalm xi 6’. Disappointing.

Testimonies of Faith and Fear: Canaanite Responses to YHWH's Work in Joshua

— Cory Barnes —

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Abstract: This article surveys five narrative passages in which Canaanites hear of the works YHWH has done on Israel's behalf and act according to what they have heard (Josh 2:10–11; 9:1–2; 9:3, 9; 10:1–2; 11:1). Using some basic tools from narrative criticism, the article explores each passage by analyzing the characters who hear of YHWH's work, the content of the message they receive, and their reaction to the message. The analysis of the narratives provides insight into the theology of the book of Joshua and informs theological method for contemporary readers of the OT.

In Romans 10:17, the Apostle Paul writes, “Faith comes as a result of what is heard.”¹ This principle of Christian theology is well known to readers of the NT. The statement is no less true in the OT; hearing is essential to faith in YHWH. The *Shema* reminds readers of the OT that Israel's faith is a faith which must be heard, “Hear (שמע) Israel! YHWH our God, YHWH is one!” (Deut 6:4). Israel, therefore, is to be active in hearing the words and works of YHWH, in believing what is heard, and in proclaiming those words and works to subsequent generations.² The command of the *Shema* is given to Israel, but the OT makes clear that the ability to hear and obey YHWH is not reserved only for those born into the nation of Israel.³

To understand the message of the book of Joshua, readers must consider how the narratives in Joshua connect with the message of the Pentateuch.⁴ The book of Joshua is saturated with the message of YHWH's past works, which are chronicled in the Pentateuch. Readers of Joshua encounter references

¹ All biblical quotations are my own and are based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* in the case of OT Scripture, or the *Nestle-Aland 28* in the cases of NT Scripture.

² Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 339–41.

³ See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1965), 1:296–305; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary 5 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 76.

⁴ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12*, AB 6B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 205.

to the past works of YHWH in multiple places throughout the book, but nowhere more so than on the lips of the inhabitants of Canaan.

1. Canaanite Testimony Texts

The book of Joshua contains five texts in which Canaanites testify concerning the work of YHWH in the past and how it affects their present (2:10–11; 9:1–2; 9:3, 9; 10:1–2; 11:1).⁵ Through these narratives, readers of Joshua see a theological methodology on display in the biblical text. This study provides a brief exegetical analysis of each Canaanite testimony giving attention to three primary areas: (1) What character or group of characters hear the message of YHWH's action in the past, and how does the narrative present these hearers?⁶ (2) Of what event in history do the Canaanites in each passage hear? (3) How do the Canaanites who hear of YHWH's past work on Israel's behalf react to the message?⁷ By answering these questions, we see how the Canaanites in Joshua come to their theological conclusions.

We do not do theology simply to tell us what other theologians—whether they be theologians of the ancient world, contemporary theologians, or any theologians in between—believe about who God is, what he has done, and what he is doing. Inquiry about the work of God in the past without considering God's ongoing work in his people is history. Inquiry about the work of God in the present without consideration of the past is speculation. Theology is grounded in the work of God in the past, present, and future because its proper object is the God who was, who is, and who is to come (Rev 1:8). The final section of this article, therefore, explores how the passages of Canaanite testimony inform theological inquiry in our current context.

Three of the Canaanite testimony texts in Joshua may be categorized as testimonies of fear (9:1–2; 10:1–2; 11:1). These passages describe adversarial reactions of the Canaanites to the acts of YHWH. The other two passages (Josh 2:9–11 and 9:3–9), however, describe surprising testimonies of faith among the Canaanites. In both the testimonies of fear and testimonies of faith we see examples of how different groups of Canaanites understood and reacted to what YHWH had done and was doing in his land. Their reactions provide insight into the theology of the book of Joshua and a model for how we must respond to what God has done and is doing in our world.

⁵ Two other verses which are similar in nature are Joshua 5:1 and 7:9. Although 5:1 is vital to the understanding of the function of the Canaanites hearing to the work of YHWH in Joshua, it is not one of the five primary texts examined because it only mentions what the Canaanites hear, but does not describe how they testify and react to the message. Joshua 7:9 notes the Canaanite reaction to a specific event, namely, the failure to capture Ai.

⁶ This area of inquiry draws heavily on methods of character analysis used in narrative criticism of the OT. See the following works: Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); R. Dennis Cole, "OT Narrative," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 260–72.

⁷ In other words, how do these Canaanites implement their understanding of the historical acts of YHWH in Israel's past? See John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume 1: Israel's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 29–50.

2. Testimonies of Fear

Three passages in Joshua serve as exemplars of testimonies of fear. In these passages groups of Canaanites assemble to go to war against Israel, thus testifying to their fear of the promise God has made to his people to give them the land.

Then when all the kings who were in the hill country on the other side of the Jordan and in the lowland all along the coast of the great sea towards Lebanon—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—heard of this, they assembled together to fight Joshua and Israel with one purpose.⁸ (Josh 9:1–2)

Then when Adonai-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai, and had put it under the ban, as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the ones dwelling in Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were with them he was very frightened, for Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and was larger than Ai and all its men were warriors. Then Adonai Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron and to Piriam king of Jarmuth and to Japhia king of Lachish and to Devir king of Eglon and said, “Gather with me and help me and we will strike down the Gibeonites because they have made peace with Joshua and the sons of Israel. (10: 1–4)

Then when Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this he sent to Jobab, king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph ... and all of these kings met together and they went out and they made camp together to the west of Merom to do battle against Israel (11:1, 5)

The testimonies of the Canaanite kings follow the pattern readers of the OT may expect from those outside the covenant community of Israel.⁹ They all have in view the promise YHWH gives in Deuteronomy 2:25 that he will cause all people under the face of heaven to fear Israel.¹⁰ The common thread throughout all three narratives is that “hearing leads to the nations fearing, while Israel sees what God has done and knows.”¹¹

2.1. The Hearers: Canaanite Kings

The kings in the narrative of Joshua 9–11 are vassal kings and rulers of local city-states. These vassal kings would have been dependent upon allegiance to major empires of the period (Egypt, Mittani, Hittites, etc.) as well as alliances of local city states.¹² The testimonies of fear give no biographical information of the kings. They are flat characters in the text, merely names representing the role of

⁸ Literally, “with one mouth” (פֶּה אֶחָד).

⁹ See Reinhard Achenbach, Albertz Rainer, and Jakob Wöhrle, eds., *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, BZABR 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011).

¹⁰ See Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, WBC 6A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 43. Christenson notes that this passage introduces the language of holy war into the book of Deuteronomy.

¹¹ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 2nd. ed., WBC 7A (Nashville: Zondervan, 2014), 444.

¹² See Niels Peter Lemche, “Kings and Clients: On Loyalty between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient ‘Israel,’” *Semeia* 66 (1994): 119–32; Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 63–86.

Israel's enemies.¹³ These pagan kings base their actions on the message they have heard concerning the work of YHWH on behalf of his people, though there is no indication in the text that they give credit to YHWH for Israel's military success.

2.2. The Message: The Immediate History of Israel

The chief question in these passages involves the content of the message that is heard by the Canaanite kings. In all three passages, the verb שמע is without an object; thus most English translations read "When they heard this." Richard Hess proposes that the Canaanites in all three texts hear of Israel's defeat at the battle of Ai. In Hess's interpretation of Joshua, the defeat at Ai provides the Canaanites with hope that Israel can be defeated resulting in additional struggle for the Israelites.¹⁴

Joshua's narrative does not support Hess's theory. The events in Joshua 7–8 makes clear that after Achan and his family were killed—and thus the community ritually purified—the unmitigated success of the conquest was to continue as evidenced by the procession of the ark to Ebal and Gerizim.¹⁵ The narrative flow indicates the message that the Canaanite kings heard concerned the events that took place in Israel's immediate past.¹⁶ Thus the message the Canaanite kings hear in each subsequent narrative is of the events that recently occurred in the storyline of Joshua. Josh 9:1 indicates that the kings have heard of the desolation of Ai. Joshua 10:1 makes explicit that the message heard is that of the treaty with the Gibeonites. In 11:1 the message heard by the kings of the northern coalition is of the defeat of the southern coalition. All of these messages are confined to recent events, thus limiting their theological scope. Where Rahab and the Gibeonites will consider the broader history of Israel and her God, the Canaanite kings in chapters 9–11 hear only of recent events and thus ignore the greater theological implications of Israel's history.

2.3. The Reaction: Alliances and Attacks

The Canaanite kings react as most readers of Joshua might expect—they seek to protect their own interests through political alliances that build military might.¹⁷ Readers must be careful, however, to recognize the response of the Canaanite kings as a theological testimony concerning Israel and her God. While Rahab and the Gibeonites make theological assertions based on a broader and better understanding of the work of YHWH and his people in the past, the Canaanite kings testify and act based on a limited view of the history of YHWH's people.

¹³ See Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 23–42; Cole, "OT Narrative," 268–69.

¹⁴ Richard Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 193.

¹⁵ Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12*, 392–94; Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 417–19.

¹⁶ Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 416.

¹⁷ Evidence of exactly this type of maneuvering is prevalent in the Amarna letters, which reflect the historical setting of Canaan near the time of Joshua. See William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

3. Testimony of Faith: Rahab the Prostitute

In stark contrast to the three passages that exemplify the fear of the Canaanite kings, Joshua 2:9–11 contains the testimony of Rahab who responds to God’s promise to give Israel the land by faithfully accepting God’s sovereign power and authority.

I know that YHWH has given the land to you, and that he has caused terror concerning you to fall upon us, and that all the hearts of the ones dwelling in the land to melt before you. For we have heard how YHWH caused the waters of the Red Sea to dry up before you when [he was] bringing you up from the land of Egypt,¹⁸ and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were across the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard [these things] our hearts melted and we were demoralized¹⁹ before you. For YHWH your God is indeed God in heaven above and upon the earth below. (Josh 2:9–11)

YHWH’s promise to give the land to Israel is a foundational component of Israel’s identity and is central to YHWH’s promise to Joshua in Josh 1:1–9.²⁰ Joshua and the Israelites, however, are not the only ones who understand God has given the land to his people. Within the walls of Jericho, we encounter Rahab the prostitute (זֹנָה) who testifies to Israelite men about God’s gift of the land. Rahab’s character is an enigma: how does a Canaanite prostitute become the first Canaanite convert to Yahwism?²¹ What message did she hear, and what causes such a surprising reaction?

3.1. The Hearer: The Character of Rahab

The author of Hebrews bears witness to the faith of Rahab: “By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, having welcomed the spies in peace” (Heb 11:31). Readers of the NT may find the commendation of a prostitute’s faith surprising, and so readers of the OT may be perplexed for the same reason when reading Joshua’s narrative. Though interpreters often struggle with nuances concerning the morality of Rahab’s profession, the biblical author undoubtedly presents her character in a positive aspect.²²

Except for Joshua, Rahab is the only character in chapter 2 who is named, signifying her central place in the story.²³ Her character drives the chapter’s narrative and dialogue, demonstrating the importance of understanding her role to interpreting Joshua 2. The first characteristic the text highlights is that Rahab is a זֹנָה (“prostitute”); thus, the initial impression she leaves on readers is a far cry from the positive assessment of her character provided by the passage as a whole.²⁴ The author uses the inherent tension between the identity of Rahab the prostitute and the Hebrew spies to move the narrative

¹⁸ This translation follows some Masoretic MSS and the LXX, which insert מִמְּצָרִים before מֵאֵרֶץ.

¹⁹ Literally: “The spirit of each man could no longer rise” (וְלֹא-קָמָה עוֹד רוּחַ בְּאִישׁ).

²⁰ John H Stek, “Rahab of Canaan and Israel: The Meaning of Joshua 2,” *CTJ* 37 (2002): 28–48.

²¹ David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, NAC 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 97.

²² Stek, “Rahab of Canaan and Israel,” 39.

²³ Though Joshua is named in the narrative, he is largely passive, serving only to send and receive the spies, thus forming the inclusio in which the narrative takes place.

²⁴ Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 127.

forward.²⁵ Readers are naturally shaken by the narrative of Joshua 2, for they find themselves struggling with this woman whose actions contrast with the stigma of her profession.²⁶ Rahab's character sets up the altogether surprising conclusion of the narrative—Rahab becomes a covenant member of Israel.²⁷

Rahab's actions in the text show her to be a competent character who is capable of subterfuge and shrewd negotiation.²⁸ This Canaanite prostitute is a "dangerous and strange woman, unreliable prostitute, faithful and wise theologian, and capable informant."²⁹ Rahab demonstrates that she is the capable protagonist of the narrative, and thus readers discover this suspicious woman is the most worthy character in Joshua 2—indeed, one of the most worthy in the entire Bible.³⁰ The pinnacle of Rahab's character is not found in her actions, but in her confession. This raises the question, "On what grounds does a prostitute profess faith in YHWH?"

3.2. The Message: The Works of YHWH in the Past

Prior to Rahab's confession she confirms that YHWH has fulfilled his promise from Deuteronomy 2:25 that he will, "put the terror of you and the fear of you upon the face of all people under heaven, so when they hear of you they will quake and tremble before you."³¹ Rahab affirms this by stating that the people of Canaan, herself included, have *heard* of the works of YHWH and his people. Yet for Rahab the message surpasses fear and leads to a testimony of faith based on her understanding of YHWH's work.

Rahab has heard more than mere rumors of terror. Her knowledge of the work of YHWH for his people goes beyond rumblings of a warrior God who is acting on his people's behalf. Rahab focuses on two specific points in Israel's history: the drying up of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15) and the defeat of Sihon and Og (Num 21). These events delineate both the beginning and the end of the experience of God's people in the wilderness, thus serving as a reference not only to the specific events, but also to God's holistic work in the deliverance of his people.³² The message Rahab hears is a more complete message than what the Canaanite kings hear in Joshua 9–11. In those testimonies of fear, the Canaanites hear only the threat of a conquering people, but Rahab has heard the story of a God who has delivered his people and who continues to fulfill his promises to them.³³

²⁵ Bird, 131; Aaron Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-Examination of Joshua 2," *JSOT* 31, no. 1 (September 2006): 53–54.

²⁶ Berel Dov Lerner, "Rahab the Harlot: And Other Philosophers of Religion," *JBQ* 28 (2000): 52.

²⁷ See Péter Jenei, "Strategies of Stranger Inclusion in the Narrative Traditions of Joshua—Judges: The Cases of Rahab's Household, the Kenites and the Gibeonites," *OTE* 32 (2019): 136–39.

²⁸ Ken M. Campbell, "Rahab's Covenant: A Short Note on Joshua 2:9–21," *VT* 22 (1972): 244.

²⁹ Butler, *Joshua* 1–12, 256.

³⁰ Butler, *Joshua* 1–12, 265–67. See also NT passages that reference Rahab's faithfulness: James 2:25, Hebrews 11:31 as well as the inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5.

³¹ Hess points to YHWH's promise in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:16: "Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O LORD, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by." Deuteronomy 2:25 is a closer intertextual connection with the general concern of Joshua 2. The song of Moses only comes into view due to Rahab's explicit reference to the Exodus event. Hess, *Joshua*, 88.

³² Hess, *Joshua*, 89.

³³ Butler notes that the focus of the broader story of YHWH and his people in Rahab's discourse with the spies has much in common with prophetic discourse. Thus, he calls Rahab, "The first prophetic figure in the historical books" (*Joshua* 1–12, 259). Though the text never calls Rahab a prophet, Butler is correct in drawing parallels be-

How Rahab heard the message of YHWH's deliverance of his people is unclear, and speculating about where she encountered this message adds little to the interpretation of Joshua.³⁴ Instead, the author of Joshua emphasizes that Rahab understands the theological reality of God's promise by recording her words, which closely resemble language from the Pentateuch. The biblical author calls attention specifically to the Song of Moses, indicating that Rahab recognizes that what has been said concerning the Canaanites, namely that "all of their inhabitants will melt away" will come to pass (Exod 15:15). The climax of her confession in Joshua 2:11 demonstrates that she is familiar with the historic commands of YHWH demanding faithfulness.³⁵ When Rahab proclaims, "YHWH your God is indeed God in heaven above and upon the earth below," the author of Joshua places on her lips the very words of Deuteronomy 4:39.³⁶

The message Rahab has heard, therefore, is the message of how YHWH acts in history. Were the narrative of Joshua 2 to cease after verse 10, it would be appropriate to speak of Rahab as a faithful witness to what she has heard, for up to this point in the narrative she has recited the facts that have come to her and made reference to their general effect on her culture. Rahab, however, is not content with the recitation of facts. Rahab is not, as Von Rad states, in search "for a critically assured minimum"; rather, she now makes a faith-filled testimony that encapsulates a "theological maximum" and thus we must now turn to the testimony of Rahab the theologian.³⁷

3.3. The Reaction: A Confessional Response

Rahab's discourse with the spies in Joshua 2:9–13 begins with a confession that demonstrates Rahab understands the theological significance of the historical account she is about to tell. By saying, "I know that YHWH has given the land to you" (v. 9), Rahab affirms all that has been said about the land in Josh 1, and by extension, affirms the promise of the land as revealed throughout the Pentateuch.³⁸

This is a confessional statement as is evident from the obvious deviation of the norm in the testimonies of the Canaanite kings. The kings of the northern and southern coalitions (Josh 10:1–4; 11:1–5) hear of YHWH's actions among his people and react in exactly the opposite way. Rather than taking the opportunity to affirm that YHWH is the owner of the land with the right to give it to his people, they amass their forces to do battle to attempt to keep the land YHWH is giving to Israel. Here it becomes critical to recognize that Rahab hears much more than the other Canaanites, or at least that she takes more of what she has heard into account. Where the testimonies of fear give little to no detail concerning what is heard about the work of YHWH among his people, Rahab has heard enough to make an accurate confessional statement.

tween her speech and the speech of prophets. The similarity is even greater when one considers that the words of Rahab serve as a message to the people of Israel collectively through the report of the spies at the end of Joshua 2.

³⁴ See Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 259.

³⁵ Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12*, 243–44.

³⁶ There are two other possible texts to which Rahab may be alluding: Exodus 20:4, or Deuteronomy 5:8, both of which contain identical wording to Deuteronomy 4:39 and Josh 2:11. Deuteronomy 4:39 seems the most likely, however, due to the similarity in message and context. See Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 103.

³⁷ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 108.

³⁸ See Suzanne Boorer, *The Promise of the Land as Oath*, BZAW 205 (New York: De Gruyter, 1992).

The same is true for Rahab's penultimate theological proclamation in Joshua 2:11. Rahab has heard of God's mighty acts in history and this motivates her to proclaim trust in YHWH in the present.³⁹ Rahab, therefore, demonstrates the importance of hearing in the book of Joshua. Like other hearers, she has heard and been terrified by the reality that YHWH is moving to conquer the land for his people and in doing so remove all hostile Canaanites.⁴⁰ Unlike the Canaanite kings, however, Rahab makes an altogether different theological testimony based on what she hears.⁴¹ This message of terror drives her to faith and thus becomes a message of hope.

4. Testimony of Faith: The Gibeonites

In addition to the faithful testimony of Rahab, the testimony of the Gibeonites also stands in contrast to the fearful testimony of the Canaanite kings. In Josh 9:3–10 we encounter a group of Canaanites that, like Rahab, realize that it is futile to stand against the power of YHWH.

Then when the ones dwelling in Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they acted themselves with cunning, they went and prepared provisions, and took worn sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn and torn and sewn, with worn, patched sandals on their feet, and worn clothing; and all their provisions were dry and moldy. They came to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the Israelites, "We have come from a far off country; so now make a treaty with us But the Israelites said to the Hivites, Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty with you?" They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country, because of the name of the LORD your God; because we have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt, and of all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan who was living in Ashtaroth." (Josh 9:3–10)

Interpreters of Joshua have proposed a wide range of theological assessments of the treaty between Israel and Gibeon. These assessments range from blatant faithlessness on the part of Israel and sin on the part of the Gibeonites to understanding the covenant made with Gibeon as an important reminder of the mercy of God. As with Rahab, God's mercy shown toward the Gibeonites demonstrates that God's command banning Israel from associating with the people of the land (e.g., 7:1–5; 20:10–15) is not inconsistent with God's willingness to show mercy to those outside of ethnic Israel.⁴²

³⁹ Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 267.

⁴⁰ Note that in the book of Joshua it is the Canaanite Rahab who first uses the verb חָרַם with reference to the complete destruction of Sihon and Og (2:10).

⁴¹ Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 44.

⁴² See R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 53–74. Moberly advocates for understanding the divine command of "the ban" (חָרַם) in connection with Israel's election. In this view, the command to destroy other nations is secondary to the necessity of Israel's separating themselves from other nations.

4.1. The Hearers: A Cunning People

Joshua 10:2 contains a vital piece of information about the city of Gibeon; it is said to be a “great city, as one of the royal cities, and was larger than Ai and all its men were warriors.” The expectation is for Gibeon to capitulate to the normative action of a vassal city state and join in alliance with other kings against a conquering force, yet there is more to these Gibeonites than expected.

Where all the Canaanite kings are type characters, the Gibeonites have more depth. They חרם demonstrate both strategy and intrigue in their dealings with Israel.⁴³ Where Rahab is a character who makes her theological assertions in a direct conversation/confession, the Gibeonites’ theological assertion will cause them to act out an elaborate ruse to attempt to gain the favor of Israel and her God.⁴⁴

4.2. The Message: The Works of YHWH in the Past

As with Rahab, the Gibeonites are familiar not only with the works of Israel in the immediate past, but also have knowledge of Israel’s broader history. Implicit in the text is the Gibeonites’ awareness that YHWH forbids Israel to make treaties with people who live among them in the land, thus their deception concerning their location.⁴⁵

Though the Gibeonites do not demonstrate knowledge of the same detailed account of Israel’s history as did Rahab, they still proclaim the same summary message of YHWH’s interaction with Israel from deliverance in Egypt to the defeat of the trans-Jordan kings. That the Gibeonites have heard of the defeat of the kings of the trans-Jordan is particularly important in context as it would serve as a reminder to them that YHWH and his people are more than a match for vassal kings, even in alliance with one another.⁴⁶ The Gibeonites do not mention the work of YHWH in the destruction of Jericho and Ai, likely due to their attempt to portray themselves as people of a foreign land, unfamiliar with local events, though these events would have been a part of the message they heard concerning YHWH and his people.⁴⁷

4.3. The Reaction: Deception Based on Conviction

The Gibeonites demonstrate a radical departure from the Canaanite kings who lead their people in war against Israel. The Gibeonites have heard a different message and take a different course of action.⁴⁸

Regardless of whether or not Israel *should* have entered into a relationship with Gibeon, there is no mistake that this is what the Gibeonites request. Their methods for approaching this covenant

⁴³ The details given concerning the Gibeonites recommends the author of the text is concerned with how they are perceived by the readers of the text. See Yitzhak Lee-Sak, “Polemical Propaganda of the Golah Community against the Gibeonites: Historical Background of Joshua 9 and 2 Samuel 21 in the Early Persian Period,” *JSOT* 44 (2019): 115–32.

⁴⁴ Howard, *Joshua*, 223.

⁴⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 223.

⁴⁶ Butler, *Joshua* 1–12, 448.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Joshua* 1–12, 449.

⁴⁸ The Canaanite kings may also have been familiar with many of the additional facts about the works of YHWH in Israel’s history, but the fact that the author of Joshua only presents those facts in the narrative of the Gibeonites demonstrates that they are the only ones who consider this broader history in their reaction to the message.

relationship with Israel and her God may be questionable, but their motives are made obvious in the text.⁴⁹ The Gibeonites have heard what YHWH has done in Israel's history and they understand that their only hope is to submit to him, for he cannot be conquered in battle.⁵⁰ The Gibeonites' reaction to the message that they hear about YHWH and his actions in Israel's history drive them to faith rather than to fight.⁵¹ Thus Bruce Waltke states, "As with Rahab, the delegation from Gibeon both recognize and confess their fear of I AM—and so also their faith in him—and are familiar with the Mosaic law. Both believe in I AM's promise to give Israel the land."⁵²

5. *Hearing and Faithful Testimony*

Gerhard von Rad explains that "Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history. It regards itself as based upon historical acts, and as shaped and re-shaped by factors in which it saw the hand of Jahweh at work."⁵³ Exploring the various testimonies of Canaanites in the narrative of Joshua affirms the centrality of history to theology.

What is remarkable about the texts surveyed is that they represent people placed in a situation where they must consider of YHWH's work in the past and make theological decisions—decisions which lead to life altering actions—based on that history. A significant amount of literature, particularly in conservative biblical studies, is rightly dedicated to helping readers understand the historical veracity of the OT.⁵⁴ These "hearing" texts in the book of Joshua, however, invite readers to go beyond considering the OT as a collection of historical facts. The biblical author presents the reality of how YHWH has worked in the history of his people and thus beckons readers to consider how he is working in the lives of his people today.

The history of YHWH's interaction with his people is more than a collection of past realities, but is instead a collection of events which ever challenges the people of God today to participate in the story.⁵⁵ How we participate in the story depends on the message that we hear in the text and our faithfulness to that message in our actions. The examples found in the Canaanite testimonies in Joshua do not provide an all-inclusive methodology through which we are to approach hearing the message of God, yet they still challenge contemporary readers to consider how understanding what God has done in the past impacts the life and practice of individuals and communities.

⁴⁹ See Robert P. Gordon, "Gibeonite Ruse and Israelite Curse in Joshua 9," in *Covenant in Context: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 449.

⁵¹ Christoph Berner suggests the negative portrayal of the Gibeonite deception is the product of later redaction, in "The Gibeonite Deception: Reflections on the Interplay between Law and Narrative in Josh 9," *SJOT* 31 (2017): 254–74.

⁵² Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 521. Waltke uses "I AM" to translate the tetragrammaton.

⁵³ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 106.

⁵⁴ See, for example, works such as Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 1:83.

The most overwhelming difference between the way Rahab and the Gibeonites heard the message of what God had done for his people and the way the Canaanite kings heard this message was the breadth of history they considered. The Canaanite kings have only their immediate context in view, while Rahab and the Gibeonites consider the broader story of YHWH's work among his people. The change in the scope of what was heard makes all the difference in regard to the understanding of the message. The people of God today must follow the example of Rahab and the Gibeonites by reflecting on the biblical story of God's powerful work among his people as we consider what it means to live faithful lives in our context. This calls for faithfulness informed by a robust understanding of the biblical metanarrative. No one can respond faithfully to God's work in their midst if their response is not informed by God's redemptive work displayed throughout the biblical story. Failing to consider the covenant promises God has made to his people throughout Scripture produces fearful reaction to the work of God in our midst and not faithful response.

Rahab and the Gibeonites also remind readers that the message YHWH conveys in history often calls us to actions beyond what is expected of our characters. In Joshua it is the harlot who professes faith in YHWH and the strong Gibeonites who come to humble themselves before the invading Israelites. This is because encountering YHWH's redemptive activity among his people in history effects change in his people in the present. This, perhaps, is the chief difference between respecting the Bible's historical accuracy and participating in the ongoing story of its history. In the narrative of Scripture God does something more than beckon readers to consider how he once was. God calls all who would respond faithfully to his word to testify that who he is now is who he has always been. Only the reality that the God who has done mighty works in the past is the living God of the present produces faithfulness in his covenant people. The story of Scripture calls us to action today to testify to the God who is and who was and who is to come and to live faithfully according to that testimony.

The Bows of the Mighty Are Broken: The “Fall” of the Proud and the Exaltation of the Humble in 1 Samuel

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Abstract: Modern scholarship has questioned the literary unity of Samuel’s Narrative (especially 1 Samuel), concluding that Samuel presents a fractured and, oftentimes, contradictory theological message. This article seeks to demonstrate 1 Samuel’s literary unity by highlighting the great reversal motif and the “fall” of the arrogant. The author explores four “falls” and the subsequent exaltations of the humble. The unified theological message of 1 Samuel is that God humbles the self-exalting and exalts the humble, thereby proving his sovereignty and his plan to raise up a humble prince to reign over God’s people.

Over the last century or so, modern scholarship has called into question the books of Samuel’s literary unity, arguing that the books is a collection of independent—sometimes, conflicting—narratives.¹ Some, like Leonhard Rost, for example, treat 1 Samuel’s ark narrative as being completely independent from the rest of the “history of David’s rise.”² The result of this fragmentation of the biblical text inevitably leads to variant proposals of the authors’ message—if one can effectively discern exactly which author is writing, when he is writing, and why.³ In turn, this fragmented hermeneuti-

¹ Some scholars argue that Samuel is made up of various layers of promonarchic, post-exilic, and antimonarchic material. Examples of scholars who hold this position include Julius Wellhausen (1871), Rost (1926), and Martin Noth (1943). See Brian E. Kelly, “Samuel,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Graig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 112.

² Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, trans. M. D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn (Sheffield: Almond Press: 1982).

³ Similar to the JEDP theory, redaction theorists have proposed up to three different redactors who modified the text—with various portions of Samuel belonging to either the Deuteronomistic Historian, the Prophet, or the Nomist. This is referred to as the triple redaction theory proposed by Martin Noth and advanced by Timo Veijola in *Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1975).

cal approach to Samuel, in the words of Robert Alter, loses “the richness and complexity of the story.”⁴

This article sets out to demonstrate the literary unity of 1 Samuel by exploring the pattern of “falls” presented in the book. As will be seen, the author of Samuel (whether it be the prophet Samuel, the seers Gad and Nathan, or a single editor) uses reversal—i.e., the “fall” (נָפַל) of the sinful arrogant and the exaltation of the humble—as a unifying theme in the story of Davidic kingship.⁵ In other words, the great reversal motif brings literary cohesion to the entire narrative. While this is not the first study to demonstrate that reversal is an important motif in Samuel’s narrative, this study argues that reversal is the principal motif throughout Samuel’s story and is crucial for understanding Samuel’s literary focus. Far from being a mere collection of independent stories, Samuel’s final form is a unified story with a central theme. Using this motif of reversal, Samuel prepares its readers for the rise of the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

First, a brief exposition of Hannah’s prayer will show that Hannah’s song is the hermeneutical foundation upon which the rest of Samuel’s narrative is built. Second, the paper will present the pattern of reversal, including the author’s use of physical descriptors as indicative of arrogance, the “fall” (נָפַל) of the proud, and the subsequent exaltation of a humble being. Finally, this study will highlight David’s anointing and exaltation as the foil to the arrogant antagonists’ various falls.

1. Hannah’s Prayer as a Hermeneutical Foundation for Samuel

1 Samuel 1–2 is no literary outlier in the story of redemption and Davidic dominion. The crisis, characters, and outcome in Samuel’s infancy narrative establish a paradigm that the rest of the story follows. Namely, Hannah’s song introduces the essential leitmotif of great reversal, in which the proud and self-exalting are humbled, and the humble faithful are exalted. Declaring that “Yahweh regularly exalts the lowly and confounds the powerful,” this hymn foreshadows what is to come.⁶ In this light, Dempster is right in calling this section of text a “hermeneutical bridge” between past and future redemptive history.⁷ The exaltation of the humble and humiliation of the self-exalting begins as a personal experience but escalates in national and typological significance. What Hannah experiences will be replayed on a grander scale in the life of Israel and her future Messiah, the Davidic King.

The biblical author initiates the story with a conflict between a husband and his two wives. On the one side, there is Hannah, who was beloved by Elkanah but “had no children.” Barrenness in ancient times was viewed as an unfortunate lot and was, at times, viewed as a judgment from God. One thinks of the way Elizabeth described her barrenness as a “reproach” or “disgrace.” To an outside observer, Hannah stands as one who, from a human perspective, has no favor with God and stands under his displeasure.

On the other side stands Peninnah, who has children. Some scholars believe that her name may mean something like “fruitful.”⁸ Though she is fruitful, Peninnah becomes a bitter rival toward Hannah,

⁴ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets* (New York: Norton, 2019), 163.

⁵ Bava Batra 14b asserts that the book was written by Samuel and finished by Gad and/or Nathan.

⁶ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 14.

⁷ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135.

⁸ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 6.

perhaps out of jealousy toward Hannah's status as the beloved wife and the double portion she receives from Elkanah. First Samuel 1:6 notes the kind of acidic harassment Hannah endured: "Her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb." The ESV's "to irritate her" could also be rendered "to oppress her" (הִרְעִיבָהּ). Such terminology rules out the possibility of a few subtle slights or off-handed mocking. Instead, Hannah has become the subject of merciless verbal and emotional abuse. Seeing Peninnah's aggression in this way helps explain Hannah's unwillingness to eat, her deep bitterness, and her mourning at the temple of the Lord (v. 10). As she pours "out [her] soul before the Lord" (v. 15), readers find a woman who is to be pitied—embattled in spirit, broken in heart, and depleted by helplessness.

That Hannah fervently prays may be the author's subtle demonstration of her humility and dependence upon the Lord since other texts in the OT historical books equate prayer with humility (e.g., 2 Chr 7:14). In contrast, there is no indication that Peninnah prays at all. While Peninnah arrogantly attacks Hannah's barrenness, Hannah humbly turns to the Lord. After a brief and ironic discourse, Eli assures Hannah that God has heard her prayer. "And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son" (1:20). She names him Samuel, and, true to her vow, Hannah dedicated him to the Lord's service.

Stephen Dempster divides Hannah's thanksgiving praise into three sections: Hannah's personal reversal (2:1–3), Israel's national reversal (2:4–8b), and cosmic reversal (2:8c–10).⁹ As these stanzas tell, redemptive reversals in Israel display the Lord's sovereignty over the world.

Verses one through three make up the first stanza and describe Hannah's personal redemption. She exults in the Lord and derides her enemies because there is none holy like the LORD, no rock like our God, and because he knows and weighs humanity's actions. Stanza one sings of the Holy Judge, who gives both redemption and retribution. In her experience, God has silenced Peninnah's arrogant chatter, thereby proving that he is Hannah's holy Rock. He has judged faithfully. He has reversed Hannah's barren state—a picture of God's salvation—and has vindicated her in the presence of the proud.

Verses 4–8 describe God's present work of national reversal. The arrogant are warned because the bows of the mighty are broken, and the feeble bind on strength; the full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry no longer hunger; the barren are fruitful, and the fruitful are now barren. The LORD kills and resurrects, impoverishes and enriches, exalts and humbles. Much of this stanza describes work that God does for his people throughout redemptive history. For example, the bows of the mighty being broken correspond with the weapons that are broken when enemies make war on Jerusalem (Ps 76:2–3).¹⁰ Hannah concludes this stanza saying, "For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world" (2:8c). In other words, God's work of exalting and humbling demonstrates his comprehensive authority over all the earth. The earth's pillars belong to him, and as Creator, he holds sovereign prerogative to exalt and humble whom he pleases. Even the most exalted prince, the wealthiest noble, or the mightiest warrior can be humbled under his kingly hand.

Verses 9–10 extend the theme of reversal to the entire cosmos. God will keep his faithful ones but will cut off the wicked. No might can save man from God's justice. The Lord will judge "the ends of the earth" and "he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." In Hannah's praise, God's redemptive reversals culminate in the exaltation of an anointed king (literally, "his messiah" [מְשִׁיחוֹ]).

⁹ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 136. While Dempster's outline is helpful, it seems that 8c ("for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's") fits better in the second stanza of national reversal.

¹⁰ Interesting parallels link Hannah's song with Psalm 76 when one reads the psalm in the light of the reversal motif.

The capstone of God's work in bringing Hannah's personal reversal and Israel's national reversal is an eschatological reversal in which God's justice and salvation are poured out on the nations, and his Messiah is given royal victory.

In summary, Hannah's hymn sets Samuel's readers on a trajectory in which God exalts the humble, humbles the exalted, proves his sovereignty, and establishes his anointed king. It is no coincidence that a similar hymn closes out Samuel's book by praising "the Rock" (2 Sam 22:32), who saves "a humble people" and brings down "the haughty" (22:28). Brevard Childs was right to point out how these two hymns act as bookends of Samuel's work.¹¹ In this light, the theme of reversal forms an inclusio around Samuel's narrative that tells of Davidic exaltation.¹² The author weaves this motif as a golden thread throughout his entire narrative, and it is this thread that ties Samuel into the tapestry of the biblical canon. God's work on humble Hannah's behalf mirrors his work for his humble people and sets the trajectory to his future work in a humble king.¹³ Moving on from this hymn, the careful reader will have his or her eyes peeled for similar redemptive reversals.

2. Samuel's Pattern of Reversal

In his biblical theology on redemptive reversals, G. K. Beale defines the various ironies found in Scripture, including verbal irony, dramatic irony, and character irony. These "ironies" serve as literary devices that highlight the reversal theme. For this paper, the focus will be on dramatic ironies, in which "narrated events are turned to the opposite of the way they appeared to be heading."¹⁴ In Samuel, one half-expects the prestigious, the tall, and the mighty to be victorious. However, Samuel details a figure's looming height or status to dramatically emphasize an imminent humiliation. In other words, Samuel elevates an antagonist's status only to highlight how great his "fall" will be.

In Samuel, there are four explicit reversals, as well as various implicit reversals. Explicit falls follow a three-fold pattern: physical description (e.g., weight and height) as an illustration of pride, the subject's "fall" (נָפַל) as a sign of divine judgment, and the subsequent exaltation of the humble. These falls serve as a visible illustration of Hannah's hymn in which God exalts the humble and humbles the self-exalting. The pattern can be seen in this way (see the table below):

¹¹ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979) 272–73; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 144; Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, NSBT 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 105.

¹² "Reversal is the rhyme and rhythm of these poems: the mighty, handsome, seemingly impressive people of the world (such as Peninnah, Saul, Goliath, and Absalom) are exposed as bankrupt, while the small, weak, infertile, and unimpressive (such as Hannah, Samuel, Jonathan, and David) are exalted," according to James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 158.

¹³ Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 159.

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, *Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 22.

Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 4)

- Physical Description: “for he was old and *heavy*” (1 Sam 4:18)
- Fall: “he *fell* over backward from the seat” (1 Sam 4:18)
- Exaltation: Samuel exalted to become Israel’s prophet (1 Sam 7:3–17)

Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 5)

- Physical Description: As will be seen, the description of Dagon breaking his head on the threshold of his temple implies that the idol would have been quite tall. Though there is no explicit description, a careful reader can deduce the statue’s physical greatness.
- Fall: Dagon *fell* face downward twice (1 Sam 5:3–4)
- Exaltation: The ark is feared throughout Philistia: “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god” (1 Sam 5:7)

Goliath and David (1 Sam 17)

- Physical Description: “whose *height* was six cubits and a span” (1 Sam 17:4)
- Fall: “and he *fell* on his face to the ground” (1 Sam 17:49)
- Exaltation: “So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him.” (1 Sam 17:50)

Saul and David (1 Sam 10–31)

- Physical Description: “he was *taller* than any of the people from his shoulders upward” (1 Sam 10:23)
- Fall: “Therefore Saul took his own sword and *fell* upon it” (1 Sam 31:4)
- Exaltation: David becomes king (2 Samuel)

Some may argue that נפל is simply a metaphorical way of describing death. However, in Samuel’s narrative, it seems significant that it is especially the arrogant who “fall” to their death. In other instances of the term, David falls on his face in humility (1 Sam 20:41), and others fall on their face to pay homage to David (2 Sam 1:2; 9:6; 14:22). There are very few instances that the word נפל describes death in general (e.g., 2 Sam 11:17). However, whenever נפל is used in the context of a mighty, tall, heavy figure, “fall” depicts an ironic and humiliating death and the subsequent exaltation of someone humble. It is also interesting that no one righteous “falls” in Samuel’s narrative. Jonathan is struck down (נכה), but he does not fall (נפל) in 1 Samuel 31:2.

Further still, David never falls in death. Instead, as 1 Kings 2:10 describes, he “slept with his fathers,” providing a hopeful metaphor that may imply a future awakening or resurrection. In conclusion, whenever Samuel gives his reader the pattern of (1) physical grandeur, (2) death by נפל (fall), and (3) a subsequent exaltation, he intends to highlight the great reversal theme that was established in Hannah’s praise. The simple point in this pattern is that the arrogant “fall,” while the humble are exalted. Following this paradigm throughout Samuel’s narrative uncovers key insights and helps the reader better understand Samuel’s literary structure.

2.1. Eli's Fall (1 Samuel 4)

Physical Descriptors and Pride. Eli's ministry as a priest is filled with ironies and contradictions. Samuel introduces Eli, "sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD" (1:9). This detail may imply that Eli was sitting in a judge's seat since judges and kings often sat on a "throne" or "seat" (כִּסֵּא) by the gate to hear cases. In this light, it could be that Eli has taken upon himself the mantle of a judge as well as a priest. Moreover, Eli's "throne" becomes a symbol of irony later in the narrative.

In Samuel, Eli makes a rather poor judge. He unjustly rebukes Hannah showing that he has not the wisdom to discern sincere devotion from drunkenness (1:12–15). He wrongly accuses Hannah of being a "worthless woman" (בֵּת בְּלִיעָל) but lacks the holy fortitude to condemn his sons who are truly "worthless men" (בְּנֵי בְלִיעָל, 2:12). Ironically, Eli and his sons serve as priests, but "they did not know the Lord" (2:12). They unlawfully demand the best portions of the sacrifices spurning the Lord's Levitical commands concerning burnt offerings. In their arrogance, boiled meat was unacceptable, and the best portions were taken by force. Though it is often assumed that it was only Eli's sons who committed this travesty, there is some indication that Eli participated in this great wickedness.¹⁵ Verse 15 describes the servant of the priest (singular הַכֹּהֵן) demanding for raw meat on the priest's behalf. Additionally, when Eli rebukes his sons in 2:22–25, it is not for their contempt toward the Lord's offering but merely for their "evil dealings" with the people—explicitly, their sexual misconduct with the women at the entrance of the tent of meeting (perhaps a subtle hint of cult prostitution practiced by pagan religions at the time). Their misconduct in the sacred sacrifice goes unpunished. Bruce Waltke notes that Hophni and Phinehas' sexual immorality and Eli's passivity "combines the sin of the idolatrous Levite and the callous Levite in the epilogue of Judges."¹⁶ Eli, the self-made judge, fails to render God's justice on the guilty but foolishly rebukes the innocent. This is leadership that the Lord will not tolerate among his people.

One final detail hints at Eli's partaking in the eating of the choicest sacrificial meat. A man of God comes to pronounce judgment on Eli and his sons. Among the accusations is the indictment, "Why do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by *fattening yourselves* (לְהַבְרִיאֲכֶם) on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?" (2:29). Is this a rebuke against Eli's sons primarily, or is it a rebuke against Eli? It is no coincidence that Eli is described as "heavy" or "fat" (כָּבֵד), implying that he is the wicked priest who has been fattening himself on sacrificial meat. In this light, Eli is no passive observer when it comes to his sons' rebellion. Quite the contrary, he is an active participant.

Eating the fat of the sacrifices betrays an arrogance of the most extreme. The fat was to be dedicated and burnt to YHWH alone (Lev 7:23–25, 31).¹⁷ It was intended to be a "pleasing aroma to the LORD" (Lev 17:6). By eating the sacred fat, Eli and his sons were stealing not only from the people but from the Lord Himself. They had exalted themselves and took for themselves an honor that belonged solely to the Lord. In this way, Eli's family treats themselves as little deities. This self-exaltation sets Eli and his sons up for a great fall.

Humiliating Fall. The first hint of this fall comes from the mouth of the man of God. He declares that the same family who once fattened themselves on the sacred fat would be left begging (literally,

¹⁵ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 628.

¹⁶ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 626.

¹⁷ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 25.

“bowing” [חֹוּה] for “a loaf of bread” (1 Sam 2:36). Those who exalted themselves would be humbled and left hungry. Thus, Hannah’s prophetic words are fulfilled: “Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger” (2:5).

In 1 Samuel 4, Eli is seen sitting once again upon his throne (בִּסֵּא) anxiously waiting for news about the ark. Eli hears from the Benjamite that the ark has been captured and his sons killed. Verse 18 says, “As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell (נָפַל) over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy.” Eli’s death at the gate adds to the irony of the reversal brought about by God. Cat Quine notes that Eli’s death at the gate is significant because “city gates were a place of judgment, execution, and public displays in the ancient Near East.”¹⁸ This helps explain why judges and kings sit at the city gate on the seat of honor. Their judgment was public and final. That Israel’s failed priest-judge who exalted himself to a throne (בִּסֵּא) is now judged at the gate is an irony that cannot be missed.¹⁹ The unjust judge is judged, and the self-exalter is knocked off his self-made throne. Adding to the irony, Eli fattened himself on sacred meat and died by his own weight. As Beale writes, “The very way by which people attempt sinfully to get ahead often become the very means by which they fail.”²⁰ Eli’s self-made honor (i.e., “heaviness”) killed him.

Exaltation of the Humble. While the old priest-judge is brought down by God, the boy (נִעַר) Samuel is exalted in his place. The ironic reversal begins in 1 Samuel 2:21: “And the boy Samuel grew (literally, “became great” [גָּדַל]) in the presence of the LORD.” At the same time that the sins of Eli’s family were “very great” (גְּדוֹלָה) in the sight of the LORD (2:17), Samuel grew great in the presence of God. It seems the more sinful the priestly family became, the more God exalted Samuel to serve as judge in their place.

1 Samuel 3:1 says, “Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.” The lack of prophetic vision or divine communication often signifies God’s displeasure with his people. At such times, God’s silence is punishment. When God chooses to speak a word of revelation in Samuel, it is not to Eli, the priest—whom one would initially expect God to speak. Instead, God speaks to the “young boy” (נִעַר). That God bypasses the priest and speaks to a lad shows that a reversal has been initiated. That this same lad prophecies Eli’s destruction and the death of his sons furthers the irony. Eli would soon “fall” off his priestly throne, but God would let none of Samuel’s words “fall (נָפַל) to the ground.” Samuel was exalted and established as the Lord’s priest, and Eli’s arrogant family was humbled.

2.2. Dagon’s Fall (1 Samuel 5)

Physical Descriptors and Pride. A second reversal is seen in the fall of Dagon and the exaltation of the Lord’s ark. Some may argue that Dagon’s fall does not fit the paradigm since no physical description is given. However, as the evidence will show, there are implicit details in the text that hint at the idol’s height. Those who lived in the Ancient Near Eastern culture would have already assumed Dagon’s tall stature. Concerning the idol, the author records that Dagon’s head and hands were found at the threshold of his temple (5:4). Vladimir Orel helpfully pieces together the significance of this detail:

¹⁸ Cat Quine, “On Dying in a City Gate: Implications in the Deaths of Eli, Abner and Jezebel,” *JSOT* 40 (2016): 400.

¹⁹ Quine adds, “In this reading, it seems that Eli previously judged Israel, now Yahweh judges Eli and finds him to be at fault” (“On Dying in a City Gate,” 406).

²⁰ Beale, *Redemptive Reversals*, 26–27.

First of all, if Dagon's statue occupied the most natural place in his temple, that is, if it stood facing the entrance, at the opposite wall, the description of v. 4 gives us a certain idea of its size: the idol's height must have exceeded the length of the room as far as after the fall its head was on the threshold. Moreover, the fact that Dagon's hands were found there too makes it highly probable that the god stood with both of his arms raised so that, when falling, his hands reached the same point as his head. Thus, we may reconstruct the general picture of what was inside the temple into which the Ark was brought. In fact, the picture of an immense idol standing upright, with his hands up, opposed to a relatively small gilded [sic] box of the Ark (Ex 25:10–22 and 37:1–9), an object probably, offered to Dagon as a trophy, fill the whole picture with particular dramatism.²¹

Modern temple practices in East Asia (e.g., Daoistic and Buddhistic temples) confirm that the general practice is to situate an idol at the back of the main room. From this, readers can gather that Dagon was of a looming stature, tall, and most likely intimidating—this compared with the rather unimpressive and small ark of the covenant.

In 1 Samuel 4, the defeated Israelites determine to bring the ark of the covenant to the battle. Their decision was far from an act of faith in the Lord. Instead, they bring the ark to the battlefield in the same way the surrounding nations would have brought their idols to battle.²² To the Israelites, the ark has become nothing more than an image, an idol that they hoped would mystically bring them fortune. The Philistines interpret the Israelites' actions in this way. When they hear of the ark coming to the battle, the Philistines cry out, "A god has come into the camp" (4:7). The careful reader knows that the God of Israel will not allow his name to be misrepresented in such a way, and the subsequent defeat of Israel comes as no surprise. However, to the ancient reader, the capture of the ark symbolically meant Yahweh's defeat. Whenever an enemy army's divine image or idol was captured in battle, it was "akin to capturing those gods themselves."²³

That the Philistines put the ark into the temple of Dagon highlights their arrogance. Jeffrey Emanuel explains, "Captured cult images were routinely set up in the temples of the conquering deities, either as gifts to the gods of the victors or as lesser deities to be worshipped alongside those already present in the conquerors' pantheon."²⁴ These details betray the Philistines' cultic arrogance as they sincerely believed that Dagon had defeated "the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness" (4:8). Stephen Dempster describes the Philistines' actions as an "attempt to domesticate the ark in their pantheon."²⁵

Humiliating Fall. Such great arrogance precedes a great fall. In this account, Dagon falls twice. The day after placing the ark in the temple of Dagon, the Philistines rose the next day to find that "Dagon

²¹ Vladimir Orel, "The Great Fall of Dagon," *ZAW* 110 (1998): 428.

²² Emanuel notes, "The Ark narrative is rife with standard Near Eastern motifs, of which this is a prominent example. Here, the Ark functions as the Israelites' version of a divine cult image. Taking these images in battle was common place." Jeffrey P. Emanuel, "Dagon Our God': Iron I Philistine Cult in Text and Archaeology," *JANER* 16 (2016): 31 n. 25.

²³ Emanuel, "Dagon Our God," 31.

²⁴ Emanuel, "Dagon Our God," 31 n. 26.

²⁵ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 137.

had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD” (וְהָיָה דָּגוֹן נָפֵל לְפָנָיו אֶרְצָה לְפָנָיו) (יהוה אֶרֶז, 5:3). The word “behold” (וְהָיָה) in verse 3 emphasizes the ironic and surprising outcome. From a Philistine perspective, Dagon was the victor, and yet the dramatic irony is that he bows to the true victor. The Philistines upright their god—an ironic act seeing that Dagon cannot pick himself up.²⁶ The next morning, “Behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD [וְהָיָה דָּגוֹן נָפֵל לְפָנָיו אֶרְצָה לְפָנָיו יְהוה], and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him” (5:4). Dagon’s severed head and hands indicate that combat has ensued and that YHWH has been vindicated as the real conqueror.²⁷ The broken image of Dagon corresponds with Hannah’s song, in which “the adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces” (1 Sam 2:10). The “captured” ark conquers the apparent victors. Peter Leithart says that in doing this, Dagon is forced “to bow before [YHWH’s] throne” and “was apparently joining with Israel in prostrating himself before the throne of the God of gods.”²⁸ This is a great reversal.²⁹

Exaltation of the Humble. The third part of the pattern, a surprising exaltation, is seen in the Philistine’s subsequent fear of the ark. The author writes, “The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory” (5:6). Here, the irony deepens as the ark was brought to Ashdod as a proclamation of victory over Israel’s God, and yet by bringing the ark to Ashdod, the Philistines have brought their own destruction. They take the ark to Gath and then on to Ekron with chaos following wherever the ark went.³⁰ The people of Ekron lamented the ark’s arrival, and “there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city” (5:11). The celebration of the arrogant has become the panic of the broken. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays point out the ironic drama as God executes Dagon and “then by himself invades and ‘conquers’ the Philistines, moving city by city, accepting the surrender of each city like a conquering king (5:6–12). Finally the Philistines pay a tribute to him in gold, and he returns to Israel triumphantly.”³¹ Because “the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s” (1 Sam 2:8), God is glorified and feared in both Israel and Philistia.

The reversal continues into chapter 7. Later, when Israel gathers at Mizpah in mass repentance with Samuel, the Philistines arrogantly return to attack the Israelites while they are fasting. After Samuel lifted up a burnt offering and as the Philistines were drawing near, “The LORD thundered (וַיִּרְעַם) with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were

²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 142. Wright argues, “The comic motif and the theological presupposition are the same as are used by Isaiah 46:1–2 against the mighty gods of Babylon.” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 151.

²⁷ Emanuel, “Dagon Our God,” 31 n. 27.

²⁸ Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 57.

²⁹ “The powerful are being abased, and the powerless (after all, the ark has been captured) are being exalted,” according to Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 137.

³⁰ “In this ‘ark narrative,’ as Yahweh strikes down the idol of the god Dagon and smites city after city of Philistines, the story reads as if God is indeed invading and conquering Philistia,” according to C. Marvin Pate, et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 61. Hamilton adds, “The ‘conquered’ ark goes on a victory romp through Philistine territory (5:6–6:1).” Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 160.

³¹ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 69.

defeated before Israel” (7:10). This thundering at Mizpah corresponds with the “thundering” (רעם) of which Hannah sings in 1 Samuel 2:10.³² God thunders against the proud and shatters his enemies. The paradigm of arrogant grandeur, an inglorious fall, and a subsequent exaltation is seen clearly in Dagon’s and Philistia’s story.

2.3. Goliath’s Fall (1 Samuel 17)

Physical Descriptors and Pride. This paper will come back to Saul, his rise, and his fall in a moment. For now, attention is turned to Goliath. The paradigm of a physical description, humiliating fall, and subsequent exaltation is evident in 1 Samuel 17. Textual markers suggest that Goliath may be fulfilling the role of Genesis 3’s serpent. For example, Brian A. Verrett has pointed out the connections between Goliath’s “scaly” armor and Ezekiel’s scaly sea serpent (Ezek 29:1–6).³³ Additionally, Goliath’s bronze (נְחֹשֶׁת) armor (v. 6) may be a subtle serpentine allusion, since the word for serpent comes from the Hebrew נָחָשׁ.³⁴ Commenting on this impressive armor, Robert Alter describes Goliath as “a hulking monument to an obtusely mechanical conception of what constitutes power.”³⁵ If one questions the description of Goliath’s armor as an allusion to the Genesis 3 serpent, then his arrogant enmity leaves little doubt. His defiant speech mirrors that of the deceptive serpent.³⁶ His pride is conspicuous. Dempster comments, “It is difficult not to hear in the huge Goliath’s taunts and his humiliation of the Israelites, not only the echoes of *gebōhâ gebōhâ* (“very proudly,” ESV) in Hannah’s song, but an anti-God rhetoric that worships the spear, the sword, and the javelin.”³⁷ The stage is set with a giant warrior clad in brilliant armor and defying God’s people. Readers who are carefully following the paradigm will be looking for this man’s “fall.”

Humiliating Fall. David, the youngest of his father’s household, steps forward to challenge the giant. His small stature is implied by the fact that he is unable to wear Saul’s armor. In the eyes of Goliath, David was nothing more than a little boy (נֶעָר). Again, following the paradigm, readers know that God used the נֶעָר, Samuel, to replace the “heavy” Eli; so now, he will use the נֶעָר, David, to strike down the “tall” Philistine.

Goliath, true to form, arrogantly mocks the boy saying, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” (1 Sam 17:43). He then curses David by his gods—presumably, Dagon—and threatens, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field” (17:45). Such boasts make it clear that Goliath has pridefully put his trust in his skill and armor. However, David comes with nothing but the name of the Lord of host, the God of the armies of Israel, whom Goliath had defied. David turns the giant’s threat back on him and escalates it:

This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there

³² Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 142.

³³ Brian A. Verret, *The Serpent in Samuel: A Messianic Motif* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 50.

³⁴ John L. Ronning, “The Curse on the Serpent (Gen 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 296.

³⁵ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 103

³⁶ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 148.

³⁷ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 139.

is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give into our hand. (17:46–47)

David's personal victory over Goliath will mean corporate defeat for Philistia and corporate salvation for Israel. Whereas Goliath threatens to give David's body to the birds of the air, David threatens to give the bodies of the entire Philistine army to the birds of the air. A threat to kill David will lead to the absolute desolation of the Philistine horde.

Verse 49 says, "And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground (וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פְּנֵי אֶרְקָה מִצָּח)." Scholars debate whether מִצָּח means "forehead" or "shin."³⁸ If it is Goliath's shin, then the irony would be that Goliath's armor becomes his demise "by not allowing him to rise up after having his knee crushed."³⁹ If it is Goliath's head, on the other hand, then there may be allusions to the head-crushing redemption spoken of in Genesis 3:15. Either way, Goliath "falls" (נָפַל) in humiliation.

In another point of irony, David warned Goliath that he would "cut off" his head. However, David had no sword. Goliath, who had put so much hope in his impressive armor ends up being decapitated by his own sword wielded by the "boy" (נַעַר) he has just mocked. He cursed David by his gods (most likely including Dagon) and then died like his god. The picture of Goliath falling face down and being decapitated mirrors the decapitation of Dagon in 1 Samuel 5.⁴⁰

Exaltation of the Humble. In the end, David prevailed with nothing more than a sling, a stone, and his faith in YHWH. This boy's victory over the giant echoes Hannah's song, which sings of the bows of the mighty being broken and the feeble binding on strength (1 Sam 2:4).⁴¹ David's victory over the Philistine giant sparks Israel's independence and freedom from their Philistine overlords. Moving forward, Goliath's "fall" leads to the "fall" of another key character and the rise of God's anointed king.

³⁸ Gregory T. K. Wong, "A Farewell to Arms: Goliath's Death as a Rhetoric against Faith in Arms," *BBR* 23 (2013): 43–55.

³⁹ Verrett, *The Serpent in Samuel*, 57. Wong adds, "But if, on the other hand, it was indeed one of Goliath's greaves that David's stone hit, then every single piece of combat gear mentioned in the catalog of Goliath's arms would have contributed to the author's rhetorical purpose of deconstructing a prevailing faith in arms. For not only are the helmet, armor, scimitar, and spear dismissed in their recurrences within the narrative as inconsequential toward securing victory, the greaves at the center of the catalog have now become the very item that, ironically, led to the downfall of its user. Thus, the very items that, at the beginning of the narrative, appear to make Goliath invincible have by the end of the narrative been shown either not to matter at all or, worse still to have become a liability." Wong, "A Farewell to Arms," 52–53.

⁴⁰ Dempster writes, "Goliath is felled by a small stone to the head and is immediately beheaded by David, experiencing the same fate as his god, Dagon, who collapsed in front of the ark of the covenant." Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 140. Wright adds, "In the end, the gods of human creation for all their arrogant claims and masquerade are no greater than gilded statues that have to be nailed down to keep them vertical. Even then it's a precarious posture. Philistine god Dagon was as [sic] flattened by the living God and Philistine giant Goliath was by David's sling—and for the same didactic purpose: 'And the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel' (1 Sam 17:46)." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 160.

⁴¹ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 140.

2.4. Saul's Fall (1 Samuel 8–31)

Physical Descriptors and Pride. In many ways, Hannah's great reversal motif culminates in Saul's humiliation and David's exaltation.⁴² It can be argued that the great reversal theme is portrayed most clearly on the stage of Israel's kingship. Before considering Saul's reign, it is vital to understand the background behind Saul's coronation. Nearing the end of his service as judge and prophet, Samuel hears of his sons' disqualifications to judge Israel. They took bribes and perverted justice. The people request a king: "Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (8:5); but the request has an ulterior motive. First, the people want a king "to judge" (יִשֹּׁט) them. In their eyes, it is apparent that the judge system has not provided long-term stability.⁴³ The solution, in their opinion, is a king. Up to this point, the book of Judges would agree with their assessment. With judges and without a king, all Israel does what is right in its own eyes.

The idea of a king ruling Israel was, in and of itself, not an unforeseen concept. After all, there are numerous indications from the Pentateuch that God willed to raise up a king from Judah's lineage. One need only turn to Genesis 49:7–12 or Numbers 24:17 for evidence. In Deuteronomy 17:14–20, Moses's commands describe the attributes of a faithful king.⁴⁴ From the beginning, God intended to exalt a Judahite to wield a scepter and bring global restoration through his dominion.

However, they do not ask for a king so that he will restrain them from sin and lead them in righteousness. This request is founded on a covetous desire to be "like all the nations" and have a king who will "judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:20).⁴⁵ Noticeably absent from the people's criteria of desirable qualifications (e.g., "judge" and "fight") is the qualification that Israel's king must know the *Torah* and rule accordingly (Deut 17:18). The irony is that Israel was not like the surrounding nations because the Lord himself was their judge and also the one who fought for them, as he did as Mizpah (1 Sam 7:5–11; cf. Exod 14:14; Deut 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh 10:14, 42; 23:3). Thus, instead of seeking a king who would exemplify the Lord's kingship, the people wanted a king who would replace the Lord as king. What the people wanted in a man, they already had in YHWH. This motivation sheds light on God's statement to Samuel: "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7). Israel's desire for a king was a subtle desire for independence from God, so that they could have provision, justice, and protection in a human monarch.⁴⁶ Accordingly, Israel's request is corporate arrogance in which they collectively desire to throw off their dependence upon God. This is important because Saul's arrogance depicted throughout the book of Samuel is the people's arrogance on full display. He is the king who fits their desires, but does "not necessarily meet Yahweh's."⁴⁷ As will be seen shortly, Saul's fall is Israel's fall as well.

⁴² T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 63.

⁴³ Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 97.

⁴⁴ Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 94–95.

⁴⁵ Jessica N. T. Lee, "The Role of the People in Saul's Rise and Fall," *BSac* 174 (2017): 161.

⁴⁶ Laniak helpfully comments, "The community was exposing its own belief that security could only be ensured by a human king," Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 97.

⁴⁷ Lee, "The Role of the People in Saul's Rise and Fall," 162.

Saul has both the prestige and the physique that matches the people's demands. As for prestige, Saul is a son of Kish who is described as a **גִּבּוֹר חַיִל**. The phrase can mean either a mighty warrior or a wealthy landowner. In either case, Kish and all who belong in his family enjoy high status. That Saul is Kish's son means that he shares his father's esteem. As for physique, the author describes him as a "handsome man" and says that he was "taller than any of the people" (**גִּבּוֹהַ מִכָּל-הָעָם**, 9:2). It is important to remember that the adjective **גִּבּוֹהַ** is also used of "haughty" people (e.g., Isa 5:15).⁴⁸ Saul's height serves as a metaphor for the self-exaltation he will commit throughout his kingship. Adding to the irony, Saul is from a town called Gibeah (**גִּבְעָה**), which also means "high."

As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Saul is yet another failed judge rather than the king God's people really needed.⁴⁹ First, throughout Samuel, Saul fails to carry out the conquest Joshua started. While initially, Saul defeats the serpent-like Nahash (**נָחָשׁ**), it will be left to David to finish the job by defeating Hanun "the son of Nahash" in 2 Samuel 10.⁵⁰ Saul's fear-motivated sacrifice in 1 Samuel 13 indicates his arrogant pragmatism instead of faithful dependence in YHWH. His focus on the number of soldiers (13:15) and weaponry (13:19–22) shows that he has not yet learned that the Lord saves not "with sword and spear" (17:47). Shamefully, his own son's trust in the Lord and subsequent victory serves as a foil to his father's faithlessness. Moreover, Saul's rash vow in 1 Samuel 14 echoes Jephthah's vow in Judges 11. After the initial victory, Saul remains prayerless. He fails to entreat of God what he should do, and the people encourage such prayerless action by saying, "Do whatever seems good to you" (14:36, 40)—perhaps echoing the way people "did what was right in [their] own eyes" (Judg 21:25). In 1 Samuel 14:47, Saul continues to fight "all his enemies on every side" but, tellingly, his victories bring no lasting rest (cf. 2 Sam 7:1).

Saul's judge-like failure climaxes in his refusal to honor the Lord's *cherem* command to devote to destruction all Amalekite people and property by sparing Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fattened calves, lambs, and "all that was good" (1 Sam 15:9; cf. v. 3). In this way, Saul becomes a new Achan who takes for himself whatever he deems "good" (cf. Josh 7:21). Thinking he had accomplished a great feat, Saul "set up a monument for himself" (15:12). This monument was a self-exalting "victory marker."⁵¹

When Samuel confronted him, Saul defended himself by claiming that it was the people who spared the animals—a clear contrast to author's earlier statement that it was Saul who "spared" the livestock and the Amalekite king with Saul as the principal actor (note the singular, **וַיַּחְמֵל**).⁵² Samuel persists that Saul has done a great evil in the sight of the Lord. Saul confesses, "I feared the people and obeyed their voice [**וַאֲשַׁמַּע בְּקוֹלָם**]" (15:24). This phrase echoes the way Adam "listened to the voice" (**שָׁמַעַתָּה לְקוֹל**) of his wife (Gen 3:17). Not only is Saul a new Achan, but his arrogant sin also matches that of Adam. Instead of restraining the people from sin, Saul leads the people into sin.⁵³ Jessica Lee writes,

⁴⁸ Alter writes, "Saul's looming size, together with his good looks, seems to be an outward token of his capacity for leadership but as the story unfolds with David displacing Saul, his physical stature becomes associated with a basic human misperception of what constitutes fitness to command." Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets*, 206.

⁴⁹ Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 100–1. See also, P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, AB 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 205–6.

⁵⁰ Verrett, *The Serpent in Samuel*, 92–93.

⁵¹ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets*, 236.

⁵² Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets*, 235.

⁵³ Lee writes, "Saul has inverted the proper relationship between Yahweh, king, and people by heeding those he should have restrained." Lee, "The Role of the People in Saul's Rise and Fall," 177.

“And so the man who became king because of the voice of the people is rejected for listening to the voice of the people.”⁵⁴ Understanding this helps shed light on why Samuel refuses Saul’s appeal to give him “glory” (כְּבֹדָי) and turns away from him (1 Sam 15:30–31).⁵⁵ Just as Adam’s self-exaltation led to separation from God, Saul’s self-exaltation, arrogant self-memorializing, and concern for his own honor leads to the Lord forsaking him.

Humiliating Fall. Fast-forward to 1 Samuel 31. Saul finds himself surrounded by Philistines. His army was decimated, his sons were “struck down” (נָכַה), and he was wounded. Saul asks his armor-bearer to kill him, but the armor-bearer rightly refused. “Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it [וַיַּפֵּל עָלָיָהּ]” (31:4).⁵⁶ His “fall” mirrors his people’s “fall” (נָפַל) on Mount Gilboa. Saul’s exaltation began with Israel’s arrogance, now both Israel’s army and its king are dead. When the Philistines come to strip the slain, they find Saul’s body, cut off his head, and strip off his armor. Like Eli, the death of Saul’s sons preceded his. Like Dagon and Goliath, his humiliation is symbolized by decapitation. By impaling his body on a wall in Beth-Shan, the Philistines show the ultimate disgrace.⁵⁷ He, who exalted himself, has met an inglorious end. Dempster poetically writes, “The Israelite giant (*gebōhā*) from Gibeah (*gibā*) dies on the mountains of Gilboa (*gilbōa*).”⁵⁸ Saul’s death shows that the “mighty have fallen [נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים]” just as Hannah’s song proclaims (2 Sam 1:27; cf. 1 Sam 2:4).

Exaltation of the Humble. The exaltation aspect of the paradigm is that David will now be king. Saul’s death anticipates the reign of the humble and anointed man whose heart is in harmony with God’s heart.

3. David’s Exaltation

According to Hannah’s song, YHWH’s work of great reversals culminates in his justice extending to the ends of the earth and the establishment of the anointed king: “The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam 2:10). In this poetic stanza, God’s justice and the “anointed” king come together. Hannah’s song is partially fulfilled with the anointing and exaltation of humble David.

Some scholars have wrongly attributed David’s exaltation to his military or sexual prowess, as if these attributes confirmed his fitness to reign.⁵⁹ However, this seems to go against the general grain of Samuel’s narrative. In fact, things sour whenever David exercises military (e.g., taking a census in 2

⁵⁴ Lee, “The Role of the People in Saul’s Rise and Fall,” 177.

⁵⁵ Alter suggests that instead of Samuel “turning back” to go with Saul, Samuel abandoned Saul. If that is the case, then, “Samuel is completing his rejection of Saul here by refusing to accompany him in the cult, shaming him by forcing him to offer the sacrifice without the officiation of the man of God.” Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets*, 238.

⁵⁶ Beale argues that Saul’s death is an ironic parallel with Psalm 37:14–15, which says that the wicked one who have drawn his weapon to kill the upright will die upon his own sword. See Beale, *Redemptive Reversals*, 31.

⁵⁷ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Prophets*, 306.

⁵⁸ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 141.

⁵⁹ Warner, for example, argues “that indiscriminate killing constructs the figure of the Israelite man, I should add that sexual prowess is a definite, constitutive masculine value—and not a secondary one, but one which is specifically tied to fitness.” Adam Warner, “Potency and the Potentate: The Narrative of David’s Rise,” *Proceedings* 18 (1998): 27.

Sam 24) or sexual prowess (e.g., his adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11). David is blessed when he puts no trust in weapons (1 Sam 17), refuses to vindicate himself (1 Sam 24–26), and shows mercy on his enemies (2 Sam 16:5–13; 19:16–23). Far from military or sexual prowess, David's rise to the throne is not due to self-exaltation but rather self-humiliation. David is humble, which qualifies him to reign over God's people.⁶⁰ More explicitly, David's humble beginning as a shepherd of sheep prepared him to be a shepherd of Israel (i.e., 2 Sam 7:8 and Ps 78:70–71). Any explanation of David's rise other than his humble heart contradicts the text. David is the foil to all of the arrogant self-exalters in Samuel.

The Book of Judges shows the need for a king, who will lead the people in righteousness and not in what their eyes see as right. Saul's arrogance and failures showed that not just any man could fulfill this role. Only a man "after [God's] own heart" will suffice as a "prince over his people" (1 Sam 13:14). The word נָגִיד ("prince") in this text subtly indicates that this man will be different from Saul (a "king," מֶלֶךְ) by remaining under and faithfully representing God's kingship. Donald F. Murray notes,

In our texts the *melek* ["king"] is the one who sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his own arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nāgîd* ["prince"], on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the order of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh's people, and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch.⁶¹

In other words, נָגִיד ("prince") may be the author's way of describing God's desire for a humble king. Saul's kingship represents a break from God's kingship. However, David's reign would lead the people back under YHWH's sovereign rule. David's humility offsets Saul's pride in many ways (e.g., he waits on the Lord, while Saul is rash; he seeks to lead the people in worship, while Saul led the people into sin; he is merciful, while Saul is vindictive).⁶² David's own words evidence his belief that the King must humbly rule under God's reign, not above it: "When one rules justly over men, *ruling in the fear of God*, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth" (emphasis added, 2 Sam 23:3b–4). It is not insignificant that David becomes the paradigm of successful kingship from here on (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:4; 2 Kgs 22:2; 2 Chr 17:3).

In 1 Samuel 16:1, the Lord tells Samuel to go to Jesse of Bethlehem, "for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." While Samuel is wiser and godlier than Saul, he also displays a wrongly-placed emphasis on external appearances. Seeing Eliab, the oldest, he concludes, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him" (16:6). God corrects this distorted view by saying, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature [גְּבוּהַ קוֹמָתוֹ], because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (16:7). God will not raise up another "tall" (גְּבוּהַ) king. Instead, he raises "the small" (קָטָן). This reversal is finalized as the Spirit that

⁶⁰ Alexander writes, "While this is probably the last characteristic normally associated with royalty, it is portrayed as essential in order to be a successful king." Alexander, *The Servant King*, 64.

⁶¹ Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics, and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David* (2 Samuel 5.17–7.29), JSOTSup 264 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 299. See also, Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 101.

⁶² For an excellent article on David's relationship with Yahweh, see David M. Cook, "The King's Fear of the Lord as a Theme in the Books of Samuel," *Themelios* 45 (2020): 515–27.

once graced Saul now rushes on David, showing that the Lord empowers his anointed king to fulfill his task.⁶³ Space is too limited to tell how David's faith, prayerfulness, and mercy demonstrate his humble dependence on God. Suffice it to say that David's godly demeanor and his YHWH-like heart reveal him to be a man of humility exalted by God to reign over Israel. The ark's arrival in Jerusalem demonstrates that David is positioning himself as a humble prince, who rules under YHWH's reign.

Though David later proves to be a flawed and, at times, sinful man, the fact he never "falls" (נפל) in Samuel's narrative shows that God has indeed established his dynasty. God has exalted his king by bringing down those who exalt themselves. However, even as a foil to the self-exalters, David is only a placeholder for the king that is to come. David's exaltation sets readers on a trajectory toward the Christ, through whom a cosmic, eschatological reversal will be accomplished. The book of Samuel, then, looks beyond David's exaltation to the exaltation of his Messianic descendant.⁶⁴ In this way, the author of Samuel leaves the narrative an intentionally unfinished story.

4. Conclusion

Recognizing this pattern of reversal helps demonstrate the literary unity of Samuel's narrative and Samuel's unity with the rest of the canon. The reversals played out on the stage of Samuel's story are fulfilled with greater cosmic and eschatological significance in the life of David's son, Jesus. The message of Samuel is historical—recording important events in redemptive history, exemplary—calling its readers to pursue humility, and typological—preparing its readers for the promised anointed one. By following the theological motif of reversal through the historical recounting of David's rise, this paper has labored to show that, far from being a patchwork of independent, conflicting narratives, the book of Samuel is a unified whole. From beginning to end, Samuel provides a literary framework that lays the foundation for the redemptive motif of reversal through Davidic kingship. Neglecting to see this motif's significance inevitably leads to missing Samuel's true complexity, beauty, and unity.

⁶³ Alexander, *The Servant King*, 70. See also Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 98–99.

⁶⁴ See James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Typology of David's Rise to Power: Messianic Patterns in the Book of Samuel," *SBJT* 16.2 (2012): 4–25.

A Two-Dimensional Taxonomy of Forms for the NT Use of the OT

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Abstract: The field of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament is encumbered with ambiguously defined terminology, especially with regard to such form labels as *citation, quotation, paraphrase, allusion, echo*, and the like. Refining the labels and their definitions, this article goes further in recommending a two-dimensional taxonomy that visually portrays the overlapping relationships of the various form classifications. The two-dimensional continuum charts the presence of introductory formulae on one axis and the level of verbal similarities on the other axis. This layout allows for some of the ambiguity that seems inherent in discussions of particular NT passages, but it can also help scholars see that their differences in classifying particular NT uses of the OT are not as far apart as previously imagined. Thus, the recommended two-dimensional taxonomy provides something of a playing field for scholarly discussions regarding the proper application of form labels for NT uses of the OT.

The Christian church has long embraced a commitment to the unity of the whole Bible, not least because the New Testament bears testimony that Jesus is the fulfiller of the Old Testament. There is a unity of Scripture, and somehow Jesus is that unity. And we must quickly point out that, even as the Jesus of the New Testament alone makes sense of the Old Testament, it is also the case that the Old Testament alone makes sense of the Jesus of the New Testament. This dual observation is evident from the regular references to the Old Testament made by the writers of the New Testament. Nevertheless, in studying the use of the Old in the New, many questions arise regarding how and why the NT authors utilize the OT Scriptures as they do.

Several factors are involved in assessing the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. These include analysis of the *form* classification, analysis of any *textual factors* involved (i.e., LXX and/or MT dependence), analysis of the *NT context* where the referenced OT passage occurs, analysis of the *OT context* of the referenced passage, and analysis of *other ancient uses* of the OT passage. This article offers

a new, two-dimensional taxonomy by which to analyze the *forms* used by NT authors to reference the Old Testament.¹

1. *Confusion of Terms*

When we speak of the *form* of a passage, we are referring to the means by which a NT writer refers to an OT text. Scholars working in this field disagree about the kinds of forms observed and what to call them, and many readily admit that the terminology in use can be confusing because of ambiguous definitions.² This is particularly the case when it comes to such form labels as *citation*, *quotation*, *paraphrase*, *allusion*, *echo*, and the like. Most might agree that the noun *use* is the broadest label and that it encompasses all of the forms descriptive of how the NT might utilize the OT.³ But other labels are also employed at this largest umbrella level including the terms *citation* and *echo*. There is even the proposal that the label *allusion* be the broadest umbrella term—equivalent to the term *use*—and that an introduced quotation be recognized as a specific kind of allusion.⁴ Thus, even though many scholars might prefer to employ the terms *citation*, *quotation*, *paraphrase*, *allusion*, and *echo* as specific labels for different, mutually exclusive categories underneath the broad umbrella term *use*, the English language allows for overlap in the semantic domains of these terms, even to the extent that each can be (and has at times been) employed at the highest level.

To address this kind of confusion, we suggest employing a refinement of the labels used for the different forms. Furthermore, we recommend thinking in terms of a taxonomy about the overlapping relationships of these different forms and suggest that this will be helpful to scholarly interaction. But before we discuss form taxonomies further—and recommend a particular two-dimensional taxonomy of forms—we first want to emphasize the importance of refining the definitions of the forms.

2. *Disambiguation of Form Labels*

The importance of distinguishing between forms is for gaining clarity on what one is attempting to study. If one wishes to study, for example, Luke's use of the Old Testament (i.e., "use" in the broadest sense of the term), but then proceeds to examine only Luke's explicit biblical citations, there is some self-deception afoot. Luke's use of Scripture is much more involved than can be discovered by simply examining his limited explicit citations of it. While many scholars (of course, not all) dwell on citations

¹ This article on *forms* stems from a paper presented online for the 2020 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). It follows on from a paper about *functions*, entitled "A New Taxonomy of Functions for the NT Use of the OT," presented at the 2019 annual ETS meeting in San Diego.

² Regarding confusion of terms among scholars for various categories for the NT use of the OT, see ch. 1 of Stanley E. Porter (with Bryan R. Dyer), *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament: Tracing Old Testament Themes in the Gospels and Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 3–25; see esp. pp. 16–22, where Porter cites some specific examples of debated and confused terminology and discusses whether to classify Philippians 1:19—which has five Greek words in the exact order as the LXX of Job 13:16—as a "citation" or merely an "allusion."

³ But we hasten to note that the noun *use* is employed not only in reference to the form of NT use of the OT, but it is also employed when scholars discuss the completely different taxonomical realm of function for the occurrence of an OT reference in a NT passage.

⁴ David McAuley, *Paul's Covert Use of Scripture: Intertextuality and Rhetorical Situation in Philippians 2:10–16* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 73–74.

of the OT in the NT, and while this may well prove valuable to the discussion, we must not assume that this gives us the whole picture concerning a NT author's use of the Scriptures.⁵ To assume so is perhaps another version of the old assumption that NT authors always cite (i.e., in a quotation or a paraphrase) everything from the Scriptures that they are thinking about; nothing in the OT context is to be considered if the NT author does not explicitly cite it. But this proof-texting assumption is surely as wrongheaded as such proof-texting accusations. For example, the book of Revelation is clearly steeped in OT imagery and contains dozens of allusions and verbal parallels to the Old Testament even though it has not a single citation of OT Scripture.⁶ The NT authors utilize Scripture in a variety of forms to serve their purposes, so an assessment of their utilization of Scripture should be informed by that same variety of forms.

So, a certain amount of disambiguation of terms can be helpful to the general discussion of the New Testament use of the Old Testament. This is especially the case if one wishes to investigate a NT author's particular kinds of uses of the Scriptures. Thus, a taxonomy of forms with clear definitions for the labels can only be of service to the discussion.

3. *Taxonomies of Forms*

Some scholars take up the discussion of the New Testament use of the Old with the assumption that everyone agrees with their definitions for terms like *citations* and *allusions*, without explicitly defining their use of form labels. Some suggest—or rather, appear to be working with—two basic forms: quotations and allusions.⁷ With more overt intention and by making more fine-tuned distinctions, some scholars distinguish three forms of reference (e.g., quotations, allusions, and echoes)⁸ or four forms of reference (e.g., quotations, allusions, recollections, and motifs).⁹ And of course, some have

⁵ So also Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 17, 22–24.

⁶ See Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 15–17; Jon Paulien, “Elusive Allusions: The Problematic Use of the Old Testament in Revelation,” *BR* 33 (1988): 37–53; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 11–20; and G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 60–128.

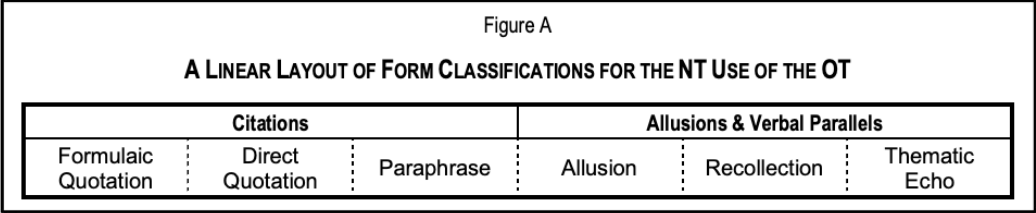
⁷ The UBS⁵ has one index of “quotations” of the OT (pp. 857–60 for OT order and continues on pp. 860–63 for NT order) and another index of “allusions and verbal parallels” (pp. 864–83). Interestingly, the “Introduction” to the UBS⁵ has a brief section describing the cross-references given at the bottom of each page of its text. Rather than two, three categories are numbered and described: (1) quotations, (2) definite allusions (“where it is assumed that the writer had in mind a specific passage of Scripture”), and (3) literary and other parallels (p. 56*).

⁸ Perhaps most notable for distinguishing “echoes” from “allusions,” albeit with great flexibility, is Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 23 and 29; see also the three-part system in Michael B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 30.

⁹ Without introduction or explication of the categories, Wilcox simply states, “Old Testament quotations and allusions, reminiscences and motifs appear in some profusion throughout much of the NT”; Max Wilcox, “On Investigating the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black*, ed. Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 231. See also the four numbered (but otherwise unnamed) “classes” utilized by Henry M. Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 65–72.

more complex taxonomies that discern various subcategories.¹⁰ Employing subcategories can be helpful for clarifying definitions. For example, a broad two-fold division can be spread into a more complex six-fold taxonomy with the category of “quotations” divided into three subcategories (formulaic citation, unIntroduced citation, and paraphrase) and the category of “allusions and verbal parallels” divided into three categories (allusion, recollection, and thematic echo).¹¹

This six-fold taxonomy can be placed on a linear continuum or cline with formulaic citation as the most explicit and thematic echoes as the least explicit.¹² With such a continuum, the categories overlap or blur into one another, such that some scholars might label a particular usage a paraphrase while others label the same passage an allusion. These labeling differences are more tolerable when the linear continuum is recognized (see Figure A). A linear continuum acknowledges that some passages can be clearly labeled paraphrases and other passages can clearly be labeled allusions, while a third set of passages is best mapped to the border between those two labels, with scholars pushing them to one side or the other (and thus the diagram in Figure A represents the borders between categories with permeable dotted lines).



Nevertheless, while such a diagram is helpful in some respects, this linear system of classification fails to account for some passages that seem to fit two categories that are not next to one another on the linear continuum. For example, sometimes a paraphrase of an OT passage occurs after the NT author makes a formulaic introduction of the text (e.g., Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:15–18). Thus, such a citation can be labeled formulaic, but it is not technically a quotation; the passage falls into two quite separated sectors of the linear continuum. We would like to propose a two-dimensional taxonomy that can address this problem.

¹⁰ For example, Dennis MacDonald utilizes a taxonomy of seven form categories in “A Categorization of Antetextuality in the Gospels and Acts: A Case for Luke’s Imitation of Plato and Xenophon to Depict Paul as a Christian Socrates,” in *Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Stanley E. Porter, NTM 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006), 213–14; some of his seven categories (i.e., citation, paraphrase, reference, allusion, echo, redaction, and imitation) have subcategories (i.e., marked vs. unmarked citations, and conforming vs. transforming allusions, redactions, and imitations). Marshall offers a taxonomy of four large groupings (i.e., actual citations, allusions, echoes, and language) containing a total of nine form categories: (1) summary references, (2) citations with formulas, (3) citations without formulas, (4) paraphrases, (5) allusions, (6) echoes, (7) scriptural terminology, (8) language, and (9) motifs and structures; I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 518–19; he admits that the boundaries between his echo and language groupings are rather fluid (p. 519).

¹¹ The category label “allusions and verbal parallels” is suggested by the UBS⁵ text; see note 7 above.

¹² This is very similar to the suggestion of Porter’s continuum of five categories moving from explicit to non-explicit: i.e., formulaic quotation to direct quotation to paraphrase to allusion to echo; Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 33–47. See also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 23; Hays has a three-realm continuum moving from more explicit to more subliminal: quotation to allusion to echo.

4. Recommended Labels for a Taxonomy of Forms

Before describing our recommended two-dimensional taxonomy, we need to define our form labels. In commenting on his taxonomy of terminology (which is much like the linear continuum just discussed), Stanley Porter remarks, “I have tried to define the categories used to describe the use of the OT in the NT. I realize that these categories themselves are problematic, yet I offer them as an incentive for further discussion of what continues to be a problematic area of NT studies, both methodologically and in terms of the actual results.”¹³ What we offer here is a taxonomy that is similar to Porter’s, but a bit more specific at points. Ours utilizes a few more categories (eight over against Porter’s five) and suggests some changes in label titles. Naturally, we want to utilize some of the same labels already utilized in the discussion; but in hopes of greater clarity at the lowest levels of taxonomy of labels, we have tried to avoid using single-word labels that might be mistaken for an unintended category. Furthermore, our recommendation is that the taxonomy be envisioned on a multi-level continuum so as to overcome some of the drawbacks of envisioning the taxonomy on a linear continuum. In doing all this, we mean to take up Porter’s invitation to offer further refinement of the language used in this field of study.

We distinguish eight basic form classifications for the New Testament’s use of the Old clustered under the two broad categories of *citations* and *allusions and verbal parallels*. We will provide here brief definitions for each of these broad and more specific categories.

4.1. The Broad Form Category of Citations

Citations are quotations and paraphrases of prior texts. We use the term *citation* to describe when a NT author, in order to move his argument or narrative forward, was specifically setting out to cite a particular passage of the Old Testament. Most citations in the New Testament are introduced in some fashion (e.g., “It is written ...” or “David said about him ...”), which confirms the author’s intention to cite a specific OT passage. But some citations are not formally introduced.

Furthermore, we label some citations *quotations* where the OT vocabulary and word order are largely preserved; and other citations are labeled *paraphrases* where the NT author appears to be rephrasing the OT passage using synonyms, different verb tenses, altered word order, etc.¹⁴ This has led us to four subcategories for the *citations* form classification section of our taxonomy with two kinds of formal citations (i.e., those with introductory formulae) and two kinds of informal citations (i.e., those without introductory formulae).¹⁵

¹³ Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 46.

¹⁴ We recognize that some differentiate between *citations* and *quotations* as parallel categories, with a citation having an introduction (e.g., “it is written”) and a quotation lacking such an introduction; e.g., Kenneth Duncan Litwak, “The Use of the Old Testament in Luke–Acts: Luke’s Scriptural Story of the ‘Things Accomplished among Us,’” in *Issues in Luke–Acts: Selected Essays*, ed. Sean S. Adams and Michael Pahl, Gorgias Handbooks 26 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2012), 148. Nevertheless, we prefer to use the labels *quotations* and *paraphrases* as parallel subcategories of *citations* and to recognize the presence of an introduction as a separate factor.

¹⁵ See the discussion of the labels *formal* and *informal* in Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, reprint ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 16–17.

1. **Formulaic Quotations** largely retain the wording of the source text and are introduced by the NT author as citations of a prior text. For example, the citation of Isaiah 61:1–2 in Luke 4:17–19 matches the OT text precisely (LXX) and has a rather formal introductory statement (i.e., “the scroll of the prophet Isaiah ...”).
2. **Introduced Paraphrase** citations are introduced by the NT author as citations of a prior text, but reformulate the source text by means of synonym substitutions, altered word order, etc. For example, the citation of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:15–18 clearly paraphrases the OT text (scholars debate whether the paraphrase is dependent upon the LXX and/or the MT) and yet the citation has a formal introductory statement.
3. **Unintroduced Quotations** largely retain the wording of their source texts but lack any introductory formulae identifying the citations as coming from a prior author; the NT author simply quotes the prior text directly as part of his own text. For example, Jesus’s citation of Psalm 118:26 [LXX 117:26] in Luke 13:35 matches the OT text precisely (LXX) but lacks an introductory statement.
4. **Unintroduced Paraphrase** citations are places where a source text is clearly utilized in a reformulated way by means of synonym substitutions, altered word order, etc., but lack any introductory formulae identifying the citations as coming from a prior author. For example, Jesus’s last words on the cross in Luke 23:46 are a recognizable paraphrased citation of Psalm 31:5 [LXX 30:6] even though they have no introduction.

4.2. The Broad Form Category of Allusions and Verbal Parallels

Allusions and verbal parallels are places in the New Testament that indirectly borrow upon the words and/or ideas of Old Testament passages.¹⁶ As a broad grouping, allusions and verbal parallels in our taxonomy is divided into two categories that are each divided into two subcategories with more precise definitions that are of greater importance. The first two subcategories are kinds of recollections; the last two subcategories are kinds of allusions.

What we call recollections are passages that do not have any blatantly shared language structures with the prior text, but where the NT author, nevertheless, makes his intentional reference to the prior text clear enough with something of an introduction. Thus, recollections are something akin to a kind of authorially intended cross-reference, and the category is further divided into the subcategories of *Scripture summaries* (focused on teaching content) and *reminiscences* (focused on people and/or events).

Unlike recollections, which are kinds of introductions without any blatantly shared language structures with the prior text, the last two subcategories belong to a converse grouping that we call allusions, which *do* have limited borrowed language from a prior text but *without* any introductory statements. Allusions are shorter and subtler references to prior texts than citations are. Some scholars

¹⁶ As already noted, the title of this broad category is drawn from the otherwise undefined index heading in the UBS⁵ (over against its separate “Index of Quotations”). See the definition of “allusion” in William Harmon and Clarence H. Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 10th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006), 15. Porter identifies five significant elements in this definition: the reference (1) may be to historical or literary entities, (2) is indirect, (3) is intentional, (4) might go unrecognized by a reader, (5) is most effective when the author and reader share the body of knowledge involved with the allusion; Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 37.

suggest that, in order to qualify as an allusion, a text must contain at least three but no more than five words in a combination unique to the prior text.¹⁷ But instead of counting the number of words, we follow the more general suggestion of Beale: “The telltale key to discerning an allusion is that of recognizing an *incomparable or unique parallel in wording, syntax, concept, or cluster of motifs in the same order or structure*.”¹⁸ The two subcategories of allusions that we recommend have the labels specific allusions and thematic echoes. Our suggestion is that a specific allusion contains parallel wording to a *specific* prior text (similar to a citation but less extensive), whereas a thematic echo more subtly shares an idea or thematic parallel with a *set* of multiple prior texts.

Here then are the more precise definitions of the four form classifications under the broad category of allusions and verbal parallels (numbered here as 5–8 so as to distinguish them from the four form classifications of the broad citations category that are numbered 1–4 above).

5. **Scripture Summaries** are recollections of the teachings of prior Scriptures with a very limited use of similar language and yet some kind of introductory statement. For example, Luke 24:25–27 records Jesus’s interaction with the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (cf. 24:32, 44–47). Paul similarly tries to convince the Jews in Rome “about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (Acts 28:23).¹⁹
6. **Reminiscences** are recollections of people and/or events recorded in prior texts with a very limited use of similar language and yet some kind of introductory statement. For example, in Luke 6:3–4 Jesus introduces a particular event (i.e., “Have you not read what David did ...”) reminiscing about David eating the bread of the Presence (see 1 Sam 21:1–6), but does so without any quotation or even paraphrase of that prior Scripture.²⁰

¹⁷ See Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 17–20; cf. Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 35–36.

¹⁸ G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31 (emphasis original).

¹⁹ Cf. Steve Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 130. What we call *recollections*, Dennis MacDonald calls the “reference” category; MacDonald, “A Categorization of Antetextuality in the Gospels and Acts,” 212. Hays and Green have something similar to our *recollections* category that they title “summaries of OT history and teaching” (a title that apparently allows for two subcategories akin to what we call *reminiscences* for historical events and *Scripture summaries* for teaching); Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 127.

²⁰ Albeit in a broader sense, Bovon also uses the term “reminiscence” in distinction from “quotations”; François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950–2005)*, rev. ed. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 118. Likewise, Berding uses the term “reminiscence” more broadly, covering this sixth category together with our eighth category of “thematic echoes”; Kenneth Berding, *Polycarp and Paul: An Analysis of Their Literary & Theological Relationship in Light of Polycarp’s Use of Biblical & Extra-Biblical Literature*, VCSup 62 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 32. Thompson (*Clothed with Christ*, 30) also lumps together “echo” with “reminiscence.” Our classification of recollections (with both “reminiscences” and “Scripture summaries”), as a subcategory of allusions is most similar to what Porter labels in a narrow sense “allusion”; Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 36–37, “the indirect invoking of a person, place, literary work, or the like, designed to bring the external person, place, literary work, or similar entity into the contemporary material” (p. 39).

7. **Specific Allusions** involve intentional references to specific OT passages by means of borrowed phrases or similar wording but without any introductions. For example, when Jesus references “the Son of Man” coming in “a cloud” with “power and great glory” in Luke 21:27, it is difficult not to think specifically of Daniel 7:13–14, even though Jesus is not quoting or even paraphrasing that passage. With this restricted use of the label *specific allusion*, if the collocation is not specific enough to identify just one OT passage, we give it the label *thematic echo*.
8. **Thematic Echoes** use themes or ideas or structures that occur in multiple prior texts. For example, the birth narrative of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah in Luke 1 echoes the OT stories about divine intervention in the pregnancies of Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 18, of Rebekah and Isaac in Genesis 25, of Rachel and Jacob in Genesis 30, of Manoah and his wife in Judges 13, and of Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samel 1–2.²¹ Thus, as the metaphor implies, thematic echoes in this narrow sense are ideas heard over and over again in prior texts.²²

²¹ See Kenneth Duncan Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke–Acts: Telling the History of God’s People Intertextually*, JSNTSup 282 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 55. Hays and Green use the label *type-scenes* for this specific kind of thematic echo; Hays and Green, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” 127–28.




²² While used in earlier works, the metaphorical term *echoes* for references to the OT found in the NT has come to the fore with the work of Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. The impact of Hays’s book is evidenced by the fact that it precipitated the publication of an interactive set of essays from the Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity section of the Society of Biblical Literature: Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, eds., *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). Even though Hays leans upon John Hollander’s *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), where echo is a distinct “mode of allusion” (see pp. ix, 75, 103, 125, passim; esp. 72: “Echo, allusion, and quotation, then, are forms of citation that are clearly related and clearly distinct”), Hays tends to use the label *echo* in a broader way as if it were synonymous to the label *allusion*; so also Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke–Acts*. By utilizing the more detailed labels *specific allusion* and *thematic echo*, we intend to maintain a distinction between these form classifications. This follows somewhat Beetham, who more clearly distinguishes between *allusions* and *echoes*; Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, 20–24; cf. 34. See also Porter’s plea to distinguish between these labels; Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the New Testament*, 46–47.

Figure B

CHARTING THE FORM CLASSIFICATIONS FOR THE NT USE OF THE OT

		WORDING		
		SAME	SIMILAR	DIFFERENT
INTRODUCTION	YES	Formulaic Quotations	Introduced Paraphrases	Scripture Summaries Reminiscences
	NO	Unintroduced Quotations	Unintroduced Paraphrases Specific Allusions	Thematic Echoes

NT passages utilizing the OT can be mapped on this diagram according to the similarity of their wording (left-to-right movement) and according to the degree to which the reference is introduced (up-and-down movement). The more similar the wording, the further left the passage would be plotted on the diagram; the more extensive the introduction, the higher the passage would be mapped on the diagram. The broad category of "Citations" (with its various subcategories) is to the left, and broad category of "Allusions" (with its various subcategories) is to the right. The more debated texts tend to be at the borders of various classification sectors.

-  — **CITATIONS:** The label covering authorially intended quotations or paraphrases of specific OT passages, whether they occur with formulaic introductions (i.e., "Formulaic Quotations" and "Introduced Paraphrases") or without (i.e., "Unintroduced Quotations" and "Unintroduced Paraphrases").
-  — **ALLUSIONS & VERBAL PARALLELS:** The broad use of this category label covers authorially intended references to specific OT passages that nevertheless are not citations (i.e., "Specific Allusions"), recollections of particular OT people or events (i.e., "Reminiscences") or of scriptural teaching (i.e., "Scripture Summaries"), as well as references to broader scriptural themes (i.e., "Thematic Echoes"). Some scholars use the term "echoes" for this broad category.
-  — **RECOLLECTIONS:** A subcategory of Allusions & Verbal Parallels for items that have introductions but very limited similarities of language such that they refer to people or events (i.e., "Reminiscences") or to summaries of scriptural teaching (i.e., "Scripture Summaries").

5. A Recommended Two-Dimensional Taxonomy of Forms

Given our eight specific classifications under two broad categories, for greater clarity we have employed a diagram to illustrate the relationships between the various form classifications in the taxonomy. The diagram attempts to represent the complexity of relationships between the forms on a multi-level continuum rather than on a line (see Figure B). That is, rather than merely moving left and right, classification also moves up and down. Like the simple linear diagram, this diagram has left-and-right movement according to the similarity of wording with the OT passage: *quotations* have much the same wording, *paraphrases* and *allusions* have similar wording, and *recollections* and *thematic echoes* have somewhat different wording. This diagram, however, adds another level of complexity based upon the presence or absence of an introductory formula, or (in recognition of a continuum) the degree to

which the reference is introduced. The more extensive the introduction, the higher the citation would be plotted on the diagram. Finally, the chart's dotted lines between classification regions acknowledge that scholars differ on such things as the number of same words required for using the label *quotation* instead of *allusion* and how formal an introduction must be in order to count as *formulaic*.

So, for example, because the citation of Isaiah 61:1–2 at Luke 4:17–19 matches the OT text precisely as we have it in the LXX along with a rather formal introductory statement, that citation would be firmly plotted in the “Formulaic Quotations” sector of the diagram.²³ Similarly, the citation of Psalm 118:26 (LXX 117:26) in Luke 13:35b also matches the OT text as we have it in the LXX, but it lacks an introductory formula and would thus be firmly plotted in the *unintroduced quotations* sector. Nevertheless, both of these citations would be labeled *quotations* because they have the same wording as the LXX.

On the other hand, Jesus's unintroduced citation of Psalm 31:5 (LXX 30:6) in Luke 23:46 might be labeled an *unintroduced quotation* by some, but because it has one tense form change when compared to the LXX text, it might be labeled an *unintroduced paraphrase* by others. Thus, it can be plotted near the border between the “Unintroduced Quotations” and “Unintroduced Paraphrases” sectors. Meanwhile, the more clearly paraphrased citation of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:15–18 has an equally clear formal introductory statement, so it can be firmly plotted in the “Introduced Paraphrases” sector. Each of these passages—with introductions and without—fall into the same general area designating *citations* of the Old Testament (the gray zone of the diagram; see Figure C).

Outside of the *citations* area and within the *allusions and verbal parallels* area of the chart (the blue zone of the diagram; see Figure C), a text such as Luke 6:3–4 has an introduction but no citation (reminiscing about David in 1 Samuel 21:1–6), so it can be firmly plotted with “Recollections,” specifically in the “Reminiscences” sector. On the other hand, Luke 24:46–47 is less firmly plotted, for its clear the introductory formula has led some scholars to suggest it is *paraphrase* of Hosea 6:1–2 and others to suggest that it is a *Scripture summary* of the teaching of several OT texts (e.g., Isa 52:13–53:12 along with Hos 6:1–2). Thus, Luke 24:46–47 might best be plotted on the border between the gray zone and the blue zone, between the “Introduced Paraphrases” sector and the “Scripture Summaries” sector. Clearer is Luke 21:27, which has no introductory formula but enough shared vocabulary with Daniel 7:13 to recognize it as a *specific allusion*. And the birth narrative of John the Baptist in Luke 1 has a clear *thematic echo* of several OT birth narratives (e.g., those in Gen 18, 25, 30, Judg 13, and 1 Sam 1–2).

²³ Luke 4:18–19 also contains a *specific allusion* to Isa 58:6; on this, see note 25 below.

Figure C

PLOTting SOME EXAMPLES ON THE CHART OF FORM CLASSIFICATIONS

		WORDING		
		SAME	SIMILAR	DIFFERENT
INTRODUCTION	YES	★ Formulaic Quotations	★ Introduced Paraphrases	★ Scripture Summaries ‡ Reminiscences
	NO	✦ Unintroduced Quotations	✦ Unintroduced Paraphrases ◆ Specific Allusions	■ Thematic Echoes

 — CITATIONS
  — ALLUSIONS & VERBAL PARALLELS
  — RECOLLECTIONS

Utilizing this more complex charting of the various form classifications for the NT use of the OT, we offer here some examples of these forms from Luke–Acts. Some of these are clear examples of particular forms and plotted accordingly; others are debated examples and are thus plotted along the borders between the various form sectors on the chart.

- ★ — The citation of Isa 61:1–2 at Luke 4:18–19 matches the OT text precisely (LXX) and has a rather formal introductory statement (Luke 4:17); it is a *formulaic quotation*.
- ✦ — The citation of Ps 118:26 (LXX 117:26) in Luke 13:35 matches the OT text precisely (LXX) but lacks an introductory statement; it is an *unintroduced quotation*.
- ★ — The citation of Amos 9:11–12 at Acts 15:15–18 paraphrases the OT text and has a formal introductory statement; it is an *introduced paraphrase* citation.
- ‡ — The unintroduced citation of Ps 31:5 (LXX 30:6) in Luke 23:46 has one tense form change from the LXX, so some might classify it as an *unintroduced quotation*, and others might slot it as an *unintroduced paraphrase* citation; but either way, it belongs someplace in the unintroduced citation zone of the diagram.
- ★ — Luke 24:46–47 has an introductory formula but no clearly referenced OT passage; some suggest it is a very free paraphrase of Hos 6:1–2 (i.e., an *introduced paraphrase*) and others suggest it is a *Scripture summary* of passages like Isa 52:13–53:12 along with Hos 6:1–2 (i.e., a kind of *recollection*).
- ‡ — Luke 6:3–4 has an introduction reminiscing about David in 1 Sam 21:1–6 but no citation (neither quotation nor paraphrase); it is a *reminiscence* (i.e., a kind of *recollection*).
- ◆ — Luke 21:27 has no introductory formula but enough shared vocabulary with Dan 7:13 to recognize a clear, *specific allusion* to that passage.
- — Luke 1 offers a birth narrative of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah that echoes the childbearing themes in the OT stories of Sarah and Abraham (Gen 18), Rebekah and Isaac (Gen 25), Rachel and Jacob (Gen 30), Manoah and his wife (Judg 13), and Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam 1–2); thus, it is classified as a *thematic echo*.

In this manner, our recommended charting gives space to plot clear examples of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament as well as allows the illustrative plotting of debated passages. It is also worth noting that the two-dimensional diagram has intentionally made room for the *specific allusion* classification to touch directly the *unintroduced quotation* classification even as does the *unintroduced*

paraphrase classification, as this area is a nexus of discussion for assigning particular passages.²⁴ While this organizational charting of the forms for the New Testament use of the Old Testament may need further refinement, it attempts to go beyond overly simplistic explanations such as systems that suggest all *quotations* have introductions and those without introductions are to be classified as *allusions and echoes*.²⁵

6. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the following broad guidelines provide helpful distinctions between the form classifications we have suggested for the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. A *citation* (whether formally introduced or directly cited without introduction) is an intentional excerpt of a specific passage in a prior text—whether that is a word-for-word rendering (i.e., a *formulaic quotation* or an *unintroduced quotation*) or a reworded rendering (i.e., an *introduced paraphrase* or an *unintroduced paraphrase*) of that prior text.²⁶ Over against the extended shared wording found in citations is the broad category of *allusions and verbal parallels*, which has two bifurcated subcategories. *Recollections* are references to prior texts—introductions, if you will—but without much borrowed language, and they come in two varieties: a *Scripture summary* is a reference to the teaching of a collection of OT texts, and a *reminiscence* is a reference to a person and/or event found in a prior text. Finally, the common and perhaps overly stretchy term *allusions*—variously vague references without introduction—has two varieties: a *specific allusion* involves enough minimal borrowed OT language pointing to a specific OT passage, and a *thematic echo* is less particular and carries forward ideas and themes found in multiple places in the Old Testament.

²⁴ Of course, we readily admit that this charting has difficulty capturing all the complexities in the discussion of form classifications for the NT use of the OT. For example, the classifications of *specific allusion* and *unintroduced paraphrase* share space in the category chart with both describing unintroduced references of similar wording; the difference between these two classifications seems related to intention as much as to form.

²⁵ E.g., Peter R. Rodgers, *Exploring the Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2012), 11; cf. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 30; Travis B. Williams, “Intertextuality and Methodological Bias: Prolegomena to the Evaluation of Source Materials in 1 Peter,” *JSNT* 39 (2016): 175–76.

Another issue to be faced in charting a taxonomy of forms is the question of where to slot compressed citations, i.e., when a NT author quotes several key phrases from a particular OT source text while eliminating certain parts of the quotation. This notion of “compressed citation” comes from Berding, *Polycarp and Paul*, 31. Berding distinguishes between a “true citation” (what we call here a *quotation*), a “loose citation” (what we call here a *paraphrase*), and a “compressed citation” (which for convenience some consider as a kind of “paraphrase,” although perhaps some of these such passages would best be placed directly on the dotted line between Quotations and Paraphrases in Figures B and C).

Likewise, problematic is the question of composite citations or conflated passages, i.e., when a NT author cites two (or more) different passages (even from different OT books) as if they are one passage. Linking texts on similar subjects is not merely an ancient practice (commonly identified with rabbinic exegetical methods); modern interpreters regularly engage in this practice as part of “doing theology.” Pragmatically we treat such conflated passages here in separate fashion, e.g., the *formulaic quotation* of Isa 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19 has a *specific allusion* to Isa 58:6, so we acknowledge them each in their own categories.

²⁶ One rule of thumb might be to note that a citation is intentional enough that it would be placed within quotation marks (“”) in modern English translations. But, of course, there are differences between modern English translations on what OT citations are to be recognized in the NT with quotation marks.

Not surprisingly, and as already indicated in the discussion above, some texts are difficult to classify because they have features that seem to qualify them for two different form classifications. Our layout of the forms on a multi-level continuum is an attempt to allow for some of this ambiguity. For example, how dissimilar must the wording of a citation be before it moves from being labeled a *quotation* to being labeled a *paraphrase*? How dissimilar must the wording of an *unintroduced paraphrase* be before it is classified as a *specific allusion* instead? How many borrowed words and phrases must a *specific allusion* have? Indeed, the nature of such questions about a particular text may push the charting of that text to the fuzzy boundary between two neighboring zones of the chart.

Indeed, the primary contribution of this article is the visual charting of form classifications of the NT authors' use of the OT on a two-dimension continuum that clarifies the potential overlap between classifications. The two-dimension continuum charts the presence of introductory formula on one axis and the level of verbal similarities on the other axis. On the one hand, this layout of the forms on a multi-level continuum is an attempt to allow for some of the ambiguity that seems inherent in discussions of particular NT passages. On the other hand, this charting of the different form categories in their overlapping spatial interrelations may well help scholars see that their differences in classifying particular NT uses of the Old may not be as far apart as previously imagined. Thus, the recommended two-dimension continuum gives scholars the opportunity to map their disagreements in such a way as to discover more agreement. If nothing else, one benefit of the suggested multi-level continuum for plotting these forms is having a playing field for scholarly discussions regarding the proper application of their form classification labels.

Jesus, “Adopted Son of God”? Romans 1:4, Orthodox Christology, and Concerns about a Contemporary Conclusion

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Abstract: Rooted in readings of Romans 1:4, some recent evangelical theologians have advocated for the claim that Christ was “adopted” by God while still seeking to align their position with classical Christology. This article argues that these attempts to hold Jesus’s adoption and the christological affirmations of the ecumenical councils together are unsuccessful. Specifically, we suggest that this affirmation of Jesus’s adoption by God rests upon unwarranted soteriological premises, implies unwanted christological implications, and is exegetically unnecessary. Ultimately, the good news of our adoption is rooted in the immutable foundation of Christ’s eternal Sonship.

Paul’s christological claims in Romans 1:4—of the “Son, who was descended from the seed of David according to the flesh and was appointed/declared [ὀρισθέντος] Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness at [his] resurrection from the dead”—have sparked polemical fires throughout the centuries of Christian history.¹ By the end of the 20th century, one theologian said that “more has been written [about Romans 1:3–4] than about any other New Testament text.”² More

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own.

² Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 59. See Joshua W. Jipp, “Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations of Romans 1:3–4: Reception History and Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009): 241–59.

recently, Michael Bird calls it “ground zero” for the “debates about adoptionist Christology.”³ While the history of this text in both ancient and modern discussions has frequently pitted the claims of orthodox Christology (which holds that Christ is the pre-existent Son) against the heterodox position (which holds that Christ is adopted into a divine status), there has been a recent trend to bring these two claims together. They suggest that we can—indeed, must—speak of Christ being “adopted” while still affirming orthodox Christology. Paul, they suppose, spoke of the eternally divine Son’s “adoptive divine sonship.”

This article will engage these recent proposals, passing over the heat and light of the earlier adoptionistic Christology debates, and instead ask if orthodox Christology is indeed compatible with Christ’s adoption as these interpreters suppose. We will argue against their compatibility, by demonstrating that Jesus’s adoption by God rests upon unwarranted soteriological premises, implies unwanted christological implications, and is exegetically tenuous and unnecessary. We will first survey the main arguments for this position (section 1), then propose the theological concerns it raises (section 2), and finally exegetically demonstrate the inadequacy of appealing to the concept of adoption in Romans 1:4 (section 3).

1. Survey of Contemporary Advocates

We will begin by surveying each of the three most prominent advocates of viewing Jesus’s resurrection as his adoption, addressing each in chronological order and noting their distinct contributions as we proceed. Each of these thinkers holds to Jesus’s resurrection as constitutive of Jesus’s “adoption as the Son of God” (at least in part) from Rom 1:4. However, it ought to be clear that they ought not be considered guilty of “adoptionism”—a heresy that they themselves repudiate.⁴

1.1. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.

Among those seeking to combine christological orthodoxy with the affirmation of Jesus’s *adoptive* divine sonship, Richard Gaffin stands out as one of its most prominent and earliest defenders. In *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology*, Gaffin claims that “the resurrection of Jesus is his *adoption* (as the second Adam).”⁵ Gaffin presents lexical, literary, and theological justifications for this conclusion.

Gaffin’s lexical argument from Romans 1 depends on the translation of the adjectival participle ὁρισθέντος in Rom 1:4—whether it should be translated “declared” (ESV, NASB, NKJV, HCSB) or

³ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus the Eternal Son: Answering Adoptionist Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 11; citing Käsemann, Schweizer, and Stuhlmacher as evidence.

⁴ So affirmed by David Garner in his contribution to the Festschrift for Richard Gaffin, “The First and Last Son: Christology and Sonship in Pauline Soteriology,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, edited by Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 256. For a historical summary of the various forms of Adoptionism in the early church period, see James L. Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 11–44.

⁵ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 118, italics his.

“appointed” (NIV11 [a change from NIV84], CSB, NET).⁶ He argues that the translation “appointed” suggests that at Jesus’s resurrection he entered into a “new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship” that did not pertain prior to that moment.⁷ On the other hand, it is argued that the translation “declared” suggests that at his resurrection Jesus’s divine sonship was simply demonstrated publicly—it “brought out into plain view who and what Christ really was.”⁸ There was no change or “new phase” to Jesus’s divine sonship. On the basis of wider usage in the New Testament, Gaffin opts for the translation “appointed,” which, he is quick to add, also contains an “unmistakable juridical tone.”⁹ In other words, the resurrection does not merely declare Jesus as the Son of God but constitutes such divine sonship. Something forensic or judicial takes place. Nevertheless, he thinks a complete separation between “appointed” and “declared” is untenable.¹⁰ “The resurrection,” he says, “is a judicially constitutive *declaration* of sonship.”¹¹

With such an understanding of ὀρισθέντος in place, the stage is set for conceiving of Jesus’s resurrection as his adoption. This becomes clear when we examine two important assumptions at this point in his argument that allow him to align resurrection with adoption. First, he seems to assume that adoption is also a “judicially constitutive declaration of sonship.” Second, he assumes that “Son of God,” as a messianic title, inherently implies an adoptive relationship. This is clear in his statement that ὀρισθέντος [appointed] underscores what is already intimated in recognizing that ‘Son of God’ is a messianic designation: the resurrection of Jesus is his *adoption*.¹²

His second argument we have labeled “literary” due to the fact that he brings in another text—namely, Romans 8:23—to defend the link between resurrection and adoption. There, Paul says that “we ourselves [believers], who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption [υἰοθεσίαν], the redemption of our bodies [τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν].” Gaffin highlights the fact that “the redemption [τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν] of our bodies” is in simple apposition to “adoption [υἰοθεσίαν],” thus providing a more precise definition of adoption here.¹³ Such a close link (maybe even identification) between resurrection and adoption for believers leads him to conclude the same pertains for Christ. “The inherently forensic concept of adoption,” he says, “fulfills itself in the somatic transformation of resurrection, so that in view of the (Adamic) unity of the resurrection of Christ and

⁶ When it comes to commentators on Romans, a general tendency can be observed: the majority of more recent interpreters (e.g., Douglas Moo, Thomas Schreiner, and Michael Wolter) opt for “appointed” whereas the majority of earlier interpreters (e.g., Chrysostom, Calvin, and Warfield) generally opted for “declared.” See below for more detail on Romans 1:3–4.

⁷ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 111.

⁸ B. B. Warfield, “The Christ that Paul Preached,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 233–52, 244.

⁹ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 118. The remaining NT uses are found in Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26, 31; Hebrews 4:7.

¹⁰ Gaffin more or less agrees (*Centrality*, 118 n. 125) with K. L. Schmidt, who says: “The exegetical dispute whether R. 1:4, according to usage attested elsewhere, is a declaration or decree concerning Christ, or His appointment and institution to a function or relation etc., is not a matter of great urgency, since a divine declaration is the same as a divine appointment: God’s *verbum* is *efficax*” (*TDNT* 5:453).

¹¹ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 118, italics ours.

¹² Gaffin, *Centrality*, 118, italics his.

¹³ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 119.

believers, what is true of the latter holds for the former.”¹⁴ We have already seen how he thinks Jesus’s resurrection, on the basis of ὁρισθέντος in Rom 1:4, is a judicial and constitutive declaration of divine sonship. Now, with the link between resurrection and adoption made explicit (at least in the case of believers), he subsequently connects them for Jesus. The basis for this move is his appeal to what he calls the “Adamic unity of the resurrection of Christ and believers,” which we take to mean the unity believers have with Christ by virtue of their shared humanity. As a result, what is true of believers—that resurrection consummates adoptive divine sonship (Rom 8:23 [cf. 8:15])—must also be true of Jesus.

Finally, he makes a brief theological argument as to how Jesus’s resurrection can be understood as his adoption without diminishing his ontological status as the preexistent divine Son, a truth he clearly affirms. “Christ’s resurrection,” he clarifies, “is not evidential with respect to his divinity but transforming with respect to his humanity.”¹⁵ In other words, there is an important distinction between what he elsewhere refers to as Jesus’s “ontological” sonship and his “economic” sonship. Such a limitation of Jesus’s *adoptive* divine sonship to his “incarnate existence” (economic sonship) becomes explicit in his comments on the two dominant interpretations of Rom 1:3–4: “The insuperable obstacles for this view [ontological] are the ‘aeonic’ nature of the πνεῦμα-σάρξ antithesis and the economic rather than purely ontological character of the designation “Son of God” (v. 4). Instead, the contrast is between two successive phases in Christ’s history, implying two successive modes of *incarnate* existence.”¹⁶ Therefore, with respect to his status as the Davidic messiah, Jesus really does enter “a new mode of incarnate existence”—a new phase of divine sonship—at the resurrection. This is what it means for Jesus to be “appointed Son of God in power.” And this is none other than his adoption.

1.2. James M. Scott

Roughly fifteen years after Gaffin’s book, James Scott published his dissertation on Pauline adoption and, with respect to Romans 1:3–4, came to the same conclusion (though independently of Gaffin’s work)—namely, that Jesus’s appointment to the status of “Son of God in power” at his resurrection (Rom 1:4) is to be understood as his divine, messianic adoption.¹⁷ Scott employs two of the same arguments that Gaffin used before him. First, he agrees on the translation of ὁρισθέντος as “appointed” and that such an appointment unto divine sonship suggests its synonymity with adoption.¹⁸ Second, he also

¹⁴ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 119.

¹⁵ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 105.

¹⁶ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 112, italics his.

¹⁷ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus*, WUNT 2/48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 244. He also makes explicit his belief, like Gaffin before him, that such a view “has nothing to do with the adoptionism which explicitly denies the preexistence of Christ” (p. 244).

¹⁸ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 244. He elsewhere claims that the language of Romans 1:4 is “adoptionistic language” (p. 236). To further substantiate this point he argues that some early church fathers (e.g., Severian, Cyril of Alexandria, and Apollinaris of Laodicea) also understood ὁρισθέντος in Romans 1:4 to denote adoption, a conclusion supposedly demonstrated by the arguments generated by those very writers to the effect that this text, though perhaps suggestive of adoption, should not in fact be so understood (pp. 221–23).

draws attention to Rom 8:23 to support the link between resurrection and adoption, but does so as part of a larger argument concerning the participation of believers in the eschatological sonship of the Son.¹⁹

Scott’s main argument, however, for understanding Jesus’s resurrection as his adoption is that “τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ in Rom. 1:4a ... is a circumlocution for the Adoption Formula in 2 Sam 7:14a.”²⁰ There are two basic moves to this argument. First, he argues that 2 Samuel 7:14a (“I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me [אני אהיה לו לאב והוא יהיה לי לבן]”) is properly understood as an adoption formula.²¹ In context this “son” is identified as a future Davidic descendant whose rule and kingdom will last forever (2 Sam 7:13). Significantly, then, this text combines the concepts of Davidic rule and divine sonship into one unified concept—adoptive/messianic divine sonship.²² Second, on the basis of the appearance of the same concepts in Romans 1:3–4 (Davidic descent and divine sonship), he argues that 2 Samuel 7:14 is the proper background informing Paul’s language here.²³ If that is so, then the confluence of Jesus’s Davidic descent with his “appointment” to divine sonship in Romans 1:3–4 suggests that such divine sonship should also be understood in the manner argued for in 2 Samuel 7:14—namely, as adoptive divine sonship. Therefore, Scott concludes, Jesus’s “appointment to sonship is virtually synonymous with adoption.”²⁴ Such sonship is adoptive because it is messianic; the latter includes the former. And this divine sonship is messianic because it is Davidic. Overall, then, Romans 1:3–4 is all about identifying Jesus as the Davidic Messiah (the adopted son of God) and thus, the one who, on account of his resurrection, “fulfills the messianic expectation of the Old Testament.”²⁵

1.3. David B. Garner

Finally, we come to David Garner, who is the most recent and most forceful proponent of the claim that Jesus’s appointment to divine sonship at the resurrection must be understood as his adoption. Drawing explicitly on the work of both Gaffin and Scott before him, he claims that “without the human

¹⁹ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 245–59. More specifically, he maintains that “the sons who share in the messianic inheritance and reign with the Son (vv. 17b, 32b) are adopted on the basis of the same Davidic promise as the Son, because they participate in the sonship of the Son. This future, resurrection aspect of the υἱοθεσία of believers corresponds to the ὀρισθείς of the Son” (pp. 255–56).

²⁰ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 242.

²¹ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 96–104. He believes that both the context of vv. 11d–16 and lexical evidence substantiate this claim. Contextually, the fact that “the divine sonship applies to David’s own progeny ... at a time after David’s death” suggests that the “father-son relationship between Yahweh and the Davidide might well be described as adoptive” (p. 100). Lexically, he appeals to Exodus 2:10, which contains “precisely the same construction as in 2 Sam 7:14a” (102). If, as he believes, Exodus 2:10 “refers to the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh’s daughter, then the same formula in 2 Sam. 7:14a refers to adoption of the Davidide by Yahweh” (p. 102).

²² For Scott, the shift from “Davidic” to “messianic” in “adoptive/messianic divine sonship” results from Jewish tradition stemming from 2 Samuel 7:12—that “the Messiah would come from the ‘seed’ (σπέρμα, זרע) of David (cf. 4QPB 4; PsSol 17:4; 4Qflor. 1:10f.)” (*Adoption as Sons*, 237–38).

²³ “The traditional basis,” Scott says, “for this climactic parallelism in Rom 1:3–4 is none other than 2 Sam 7:12, 14, which promises that the Messiah from the ‘seed’ (σπέρμα) of David would be adopted as Son of God” (*Adoption as Sons*, 241).

²⁴ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 242.

²⁵ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 244. Again, for Scott, this is why such an adoption has nothing to do with the heresy of adoptionism (p. 244).

biography of Christ Jesus, capped by his own *adoption as the Son of God*, there is no salvation.”²⁶ He even goes so far as to affirm that “[Christ’s] adoption *is* our adoption, his holy sonship our holy sonship.”²⁷ Now, because he is drawing on Gaffin and Scott, he shares many of the same lexical, literary, and theological arguments that we have already delineated above—especially concerning Romans 1:3–4. Whereas Scott further developed Gaffin’s argument concerning the nature of *messianic* divine sonship as inherently adoptive, Garner’s unique contribution comes in two ways: first, by further developing Gaffin’s distinction between “ontological” and “economic” divine sonship, and second, by explicitly articulating and defending what seems to be a governing soteriological axiom for them—namely, that believers enjoy no blessings of redemption that Christ himself did not attain.²⁸

Reflecting Gaffin’s distinction between Jesus’s “ontological” and “economic” divine sonship, Garner employs a similar framework with slightly different linguistic garb: “Jesus is the Son of God, but not only by ontological stasis. Sonship is ontological, eternal, and archetypal; it is also functional, regal, ectypal, temporal, and eschatological. It is no less than divine and eternal, but in Christ’s mediatorial capacity, sonship is also no less than humanly developmental.”²⁹

It is not entirely clear from this statement if the distinction he is making with respect to Jesus’s divine sonship refers to his two natures—divine and human—or to his whole person viewed from different perspectives—one eternal, the other temporal. Judging from the contrast between “ontological, eternal, and archetypal,” and “functional, regal, ectypal, temporal, and eschatological,” it seems to be the latter. Yet, on the other hand, the contrast between “divine and eternal,” and “*humanly* developmental,” suggests the former.³⁰ In any case, he is careful to maintain that, whatever the precise nuance of the distinction, the two belong inseparably together. “In Christ’s filial identity [Son of God],” he remarks, “lies a constellation of features, divine and human, none of which may be wholly extracted from the others.”³¹ This distinction allows Garner to predicate *adoption* to Jesus’s “functional,” “eschatological,” “regal,” or “human” aspect of sonship and not to his “ontological,” “eternal,” or “divine” aspect of Sonship. He, like Gaffin, understands Romans 1:3–4 to be making precisely this point. “Romans 1:3–4,” he says, “is an epochal designation of *historically attained sonship rather than an ontological one* concerning the hypostatic union.”³² This means that Jesus’s *adoptive* divine sonship is, therefore, properly predicated

²⁶ David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 195, italics his. Similar statements about the negative implications of denying Jesus’s *adoptive* divine Sonship abound throughout the book. To take but one more example: “A failure to understand the Father’s adoption of the Redeemer will render misunderstanding of the Father’s adoption of the redeemed. Such a consequence is simply unavoidable” (p. 195).

²⁷ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, xxv, italics his.

²⁸ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203.

²⁹ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 195, italics his.

³⁰ This ambiguity shows up elsewhere as well. For example, he affirms that “Chalcedonian-Nicene orthodoxy grounds a proper understanding of Christ’s divine and *human* sonship,” which certainly seems as if the distinction with respect to Jesus’s divine Sonship is between his divine and human natures (Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 194, italics his). But, on the other hand, the very next paragraph seems to suggest the more “perspectival” or, perhaps better, “redemptive-historical” nuance: “Christ attains no functional, eschatological sonship unless he *came from heaven* as first the eternal Son, precisely as expressed in historic Christology” (p. 194, italics his).

³¹ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 194.

³² Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 195, italics ours.

only to this “eschatological” sonship; it would not be a proper designation for his “ontological” Sonship. In an emphatic summary of this point, he says, “*The Son of God has become the Son of God in an eschatologically, covenantally, and redemptively requisite way*. He remains forever now the *adopted* Son of God.”³³ Garner’s attention to this “requisite” christological truth is offered with an eschatological, covenantal, and redemptive soteriological principle, or axiom, in mind.

Garner argues for a fundamental axiom that claims that believers receive no soteriological benefit that Christ himself did not attain.³⁴ It is found throughout the book and described in various ways. With respect to adoption in particular, he says, “Christ brings *no* privilege of eschatological sonship (adoption) to believers if *he himself* has not attained to eschatological sonship (adoption) himself.”³⁵ In other words, if Christ was not himself adopted, then the adoption of believers is pure “filial fiction”—a notion that truly “delivers deleterious soteriological consequences.”³⁶ And not only would it deliver disastrous consequences with respect to the adoption of believers, it would also compromise the efficacy of Jesus’s entire saving work. “Without the improvement of the Son unto eschatological-adoptive sonship,” he says, “his life lacks soteric efficacy!”³⁷ This axiom seems to motivate Garner’s bold christological claims, despite the potential dangers, that Jesus was also adopted as God’s Son. Without it, he suggests, soteriology crumbles and the death of Jesus is a tragedy instead of a triumph.

Garner expresses the logic of this axiom thus: “Yet if the gift in redemption is Christ himself, he cannot give what he does not possess; he does not yield what he does not attain.”³⁸ The inference, then, is that in order for Christ to grant any redemptive benefit to believers *in union with him as the ultimate gift*, he himself must have already “attained” it. In other words, there is “*no* soteriology apart from Christology; there is no benefit gained than that benefit acquired by the Redeemer. To insist otherwise is to divorce soteriology from Christology.”³⁹ With respect to adoption, then, in Christ “there is adoption of the sons only because of the Son of God’s own adoption.”⁴⁰

2. Theological Concerns

With the authors’ claims briefly surveyed, we turn to the theological concerns that arise with this position. Specifically, we will argue that claiming that Jesus is adopted by God rests upon unwarranted soteriological premises and implies unwanted christological implications.

³³ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 196, italics his.

³⁴ He states the general axiom thus: “For redemption—in all its specific features—to be applied, redemption had to be accomplished—in those same specific ways” (Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203).

³⁵ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 194, italics his. Elsewhere, he says, “For the redeemed sons of God, adoption’s comprehensive benefits come by participation in the resurrection/adoption of Christ, and *no other way*” (8, italics ours).

³⁶ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 195. The words “filial fiction” come from another passage in which the same point is made, but in a positive way: “The redeemed are *in fact* adopted sons of God. Their sonship is as real as is that of their Elder Brother, because their sonship is shared with and in his adopted sonship. Solidaric union repudiates filial fiction” (252, italics his).

³⁷ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203, emphasis his.

³⁸ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203.

³⁹ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203.

⁴⁰ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 314.

2.1. Unwarranted Soteriological Premises of Christ's Adoption

Taken in their entirety, the texts that we are engaging in this article are primarily oriented toward an understanding of the soteriological concept of adoption, such that the claims of Jesus's adoption are frequently the means for another theological end: believers' adoption.⁴¹ As such, the soteriological premises of these projects radically shape and orient their claims of Jesus's adoption; accordingly, our critiques must deal with their soteriological premises. We will argue that there are unwarranted soteriological premises by, first, raising a concern about the underlying definition of adoption and then raising a concern with the motivating soteriological axiom operative in some of these accounts.

2.1.1. Defining Adoption

Each of the above thinkers seems to be operating on the premise that adoption is sufficiently defined by Gaffin as "a judicially constitutive declaration of sonship."⁴² We do not take issue with this definition as a *component* of adoption and, thereby, agree that adoption *involves* "a judicially constitutive declaration of sonship." However, we argue that while this is a necessary component, it is not a sufficient definition and that additional criteria need to be added to adoption if it is to be properly understood.

Specifically, a proper definition of adoption requires that the adoptee first exists outside a filial relationship with their adoptive parent prior to the act of adoption. In order for a judicial declaration of sonship to "constitute" one person as a "son" or "daughter" that person must initially exist outside of that familial relationship. So, for example, this means that a biological child cannot be adopted because they never existed outside of that familial relationship, even though they do begin to exist in that family. Conversely, when we define adoption properly—i.e., as the socio-legal process by which an adoptee receives a new status and identity within a new family of which he or she did not originally belong—we see that adoptees lived some portion of their lives outside of their new families and only after their adoption were constituted as members of those families.⁴³

This means that Jesus is not properly said to be adopted by God (when defined rightly), since orthodox Christology insists that Jesus Christ is eternally the Son of God—never existing outside of a familial relationship with his Father. There was no point at which Jesus existed and was "not the Son of

⁴¹ This is true both propositionally (i.e., within specific claims above) and structurally (i.e., within each book the chapters on Christology serve to support and argue toward a soteriological point).

⁴² Gaffin, *Centrality*, 118.

⁴³ Though ancient adoption differs in significant ways from modern adoption, this core component remains the same. For example, in the Greco-Roman world adult males were the most common adoptees for reasons having to do with inheritance laws and the ongoing credibility of the family name. Nevertheless, the potential male adoptees, by definition, were not the biological sons of the adopting father. Adoption was a mechanism designed precisely to deal with the problem of a father without a biological son or with one deemed unworthy to carry on the family name—a serious problem for a society governed by patriarchal norms and customs. It is this component of adoption that is the same in our own day and the one that, in our view, must be taken into account if one wishes to use the terminology for Jesus. Furthermore, this component is also clear in the instances in Paul's letters where he actually uses the specific language of adoption—something he does explicitly only for believers. For succinct summaries of adoption in the Greco-Roman world, see Mark Golden, "Adoption, Greek," *OCD* 12–13, and A. Berger, B. Nicholas and S. Treggiari, "Adoption," *OCD* 13. On the abiding distinction between natural sons and adopted sons in the Roman world, see esp. Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

God.”⁴⁴ Even if one wanted to say that the Son’s assumption of a human nature was “adoption,” this would also fail a proper definition since the humanity of Jesus transitioned from “non-existence” (as a human) to “existence;” rather than transitioning from “existing outside of God’s family” to “existing inside of God’s family” (as is the case for adoptive children). Adoption is constitutive, yes; but it is also inherently relational. Therefore, the only possible means to affirm Jesus’s adoption is to deny that Jesus was the Son of God before the resurrection—a claim that is thoroughly inconsistent with orthodox Christology.

It seems that the accounts from section 1 are not arguing for Jesus’s “adoption” when defined this way (i.e., on a fuller, proper definition of adoption). The kind of “transition” that the above accounts are purporting is one of “maturity” or “stages.” For example, Garner says, “The preincarnate Son became the incarnate Son, and then at his resurrection was adopted as Son of God in power.”⁴⁵ Yet, he also says that “in each stage of his development, Jesus remains the Son of God.”⁴⁶ Even if we permit “development” or “filial maturity” in Jesus’s life, this is not “adoption”—since adoption requires a transition from outside to inside a familial relationship. Drawing an example from our own nuclear families—both of which include adopted daughters—if one of our daughters matures in her behavior such that she goes from doing things very unlike her adoptive family (e.g., eating mustard), to cooking a meal that is part and parcel of the behavior of her adopted family (e.g., drowning meat in BBQ sauce), we can speak of a maturation or a “new phase.” However, we would not speak of adoption occurring at that point. In summary, non-sons can become sons; natural sons cannot be adopted as sons by that same parent. Therefore, predicating “adopted by God” of Jesus is not proper if orthodox Christology is to be maintained.

2.1.2. Soteriological Axiom

Likely in part due to the soteriological orientation of each of these projects, there is an underlying soteriological axiom that motivates the claim that Jesus is adopted by the Father. We see the orientation of their Christologies toward soteriology in some of the key claims in their work. For example, Garner says, “If the filial status of the Son with the Father is not vitally changed by the resurrection in history, of what real significance is the resurrection for the adoption of the redeemed?”⁴⁷

This axiom may be summarized as follows: “That which Jesus has not attained, the redeemed do not attain.”⁴⁸ Garner’s affirmation that whatever is yielded to the people of God is attained by Christ is mirrored by Gaffin, who says that “in view of the (Adamic) unity of the resurrection of Christ and believers, what is true of the latter holds for the former.”⁴⁹ Notice that for both thinkers there is an assumption that believers only receive what Christ has “attained.” Therefore, they reason, if believers are adopted, then Jesus must also have been adopted.

While there is something that we strongly agree with about this axiom in general, we have concerns about the way it is employed by these thinkers and in this context. Specifically, it seems that the way this

⁴⁴ We might construe this as something of a riff off the anti-Arian claim, “there was no time when the Son was not” to be anti-adoptionist: “there was no time when the Son was not a son.”

⁴⁵ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 183.

⁴⁶ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 199.

⁴⁷ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 204.

⁴⁸ The similarity to the Nazianzen dictum is intentional here (Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ, The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, Popular Patristics Series 23 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 2002), 158.

⁴⁹ Gaffin, *Centrality of the Resurrection*, 19; see also Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203.

axiom is employed, it is not only necessary that Jesus *attain* redemption (in the sense of accomplish or establish), but that he must also “experience” redemption “in all its specific features.”

However, it seems that Jesus need not attain (in the sense of “experience” himself) every feature of redemption in the same way we do. For example, redemption includes “repentance” and the experience of having “sins blotted out” (Acts 3:19) by virtue of the grace of God, yet Jesus did not repent nor have his sins blotted out. Likewise, believers uniquely experience being “transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13) and uniquely experience being “once slaves of sin ... [and yet] having been set free from sin” (Rom 6:17–18). This does not mean that Jesus’s death and resurrection do not “attain” (i.e., accomplish or establish) these benefits received (see Rom 6:1–11), yet it does mean that Jesus does not “experience” these benefits that we uniquely receive.

So while there is much to appreciate in their soteriological emphasis (e.g., the centrality of Jesus and the importance of his historical acts),⁵⁰ we wonder if they have not blurred the lines between the “exclusive representation” of Christ and the “inclusive participation” of believers in Christ such that the two categories are one and the same.⁵¹ The refutation of the claim, “what is true of the latter [believers] holds for the former [Jesus]” through the above clarifications and counter-examples means that the soteriological axiom is an unwarranted premise. Further, if these premises (i.e., the improper definition of adoption and soteriological axiom) are unwarranted then the conclusion of Christ’s adoption is unnecessary.⁵²

2.2. Unwanted Christological Implications of Christ’s Adoption

Having established concerns from the premises of these arguments, we now turn to the implications of their claims upon Christology. Specifically, this section argues that the kinds of claims made regarding Christ’s adoption inevitably lead to christological conclusions that are incompatible with orthodox Christology⁵³—minimally defined as the Christology affirmed by the first four ecumenical councils.⁵⁴ Here we will provide a brief survey of the grammar of orthodox Christology and then indicate the christological implications of affirming Jesus’s adoption by the Father.

⁵⁰ For example, we say yes and amen to Garner’s quote of Calvin whereby Calvin says that “the cause and root of adoption is Christ” (Garner, “The First and Last Son,” 276).

⁵¹ The distinction between “exclusive representation” and “inclusive participation” is drawn from Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

⁵² Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 203.

⁵³ There is a difference, in our opinion, between “unorthodox implications” and something as strong as “heresy”—which requires awareness and acceptance of unorthodox positions. We are, therefore, in no way accusing these thinkers of propagating heresy.

⁵⁴ This is a nearly unanimous definition of “orthodox Christology” and it is one that these authors seem to agree with (Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 173–76, 178 on the Nicene and Chalcedonian). Such affirmation need not, however, imply historical univocity or variation. Instead, it suggests that the creed of Nicaea and ecumenical councils (e.g., Chalcedon) represent affirmations of consensus that define the parameters of orthodox Christology (Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition,’” in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. C. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002], 143–63).

2.2.1. *The Grammar of Orthodoxy*

The first affirmation of orthodox Christology is drawn from the Nicene Creed, in which Christ is affirmed to be of one substance and essence with the Father. It states that the “one Lord Jesus Christ” is “the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.”⁵⁵ This affirmation of God the Son is true as he is in the divine life—what is called the immanent Trinity or “Theology.” The Nicene creed follows this affirmation of God in himself with the affirmation of God the Son’s acts toward creation—what is called the “economic Trinity”—when it says, “Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven.”

When the Son “comes down from heaven” he assumed a human nature into himself. Yet he did so without “change or alteration” (as the anathemas of Nicaea state).⁵⁶ Not long after Nicaea, a mid-fourth century theologian, Hilary of Poitiers, says, “the Son of God becoming the Son of man did not lose what he was but began to be what he was not.”⁵⁷ That is, God the Son did not become human by subtraction (changing or lessening his divinity), but by addition (adding a human nature to himself).

The second affirmation pertinent here is that the Son does not assume a human “person” but a human “nature.” There is a single person “before” the hypostatic union and “after” the union. Chalcedon says, “the property of both natures ... comes together into a single person ... [not] divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son.”⁵⁸ Later theologians will say that when he assumed a human nature he assumed an “anhypostatic” nature (i.e., a nature that is *not* itself a *hypostasis* [person]) and united it to himself in the person of the Son.⁵⁹ Therefore, the “person” of Christ is a reference to God the Son—the one person.

In addition to the single “person” of Christ, Chalcedon goes on to affirm two “natures” that are united in him. It says that these two natures “undergo no confusion, no change, no separation, no division.”⁶⁰ As a result, we can speak of the one person of Christ *according to* either nature. So, Chalcedon says that “one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, [is] ... perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man ... consubstantial with the Father as regards [i.e., according to] his divinity, and consubstantial with us as regards his humanity.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:114; hereafter, *Decrees* followed by volume and page number.

⁵⁶ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:5. See also Gilles Emery, “The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the ‘Suffering of God,’” in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 27–29; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 111–14.

⁵⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 3.16 (NPNF² 9:66). This line is repeated nearly word for word by several patristic theologians; for example, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 29.19 (NPNF² 7:308); Leo, *Sermons* 21.2 (NPNF² 12:129); and it is repeated by later Protestant theologians (e.g., John Owen, *Christologia*, 1:46).

⁵⁸ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

⁵⁹ For a helpful survey of this christological concept see Fred Sanders, “Introduction to Christology: Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Intermediate Christology*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 1–43.

⁶⁰ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

⁶¹ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

This means that when we speak of Jesus of Nazareth, we speak of the same person who was begotten of the Father from eternity. Yet, this one person has two natures and, therefore, receives predicates to his person according to either nature. Therefore, we can speak of the one person in distinct ways according to his distinct natures. For example, the one person of Jesus is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8) according to his divine nature and can “grow in wisdom” (Luke 2:52) according to his human nature. However, because the “person” of Jesus is the same *person* as God the Son, we can validly say “God the Son grows in wisdom,” and “is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

When applied to the sonship of Jesus this “one and the same Son” is the one who is begotten of the Father from eternity and also the one born of the virgin Mary.⁶² Yet, notice that two things change when understanding this twofold birth of the one person: (1) the referent relationship changes (i.e., begotten of the *Father*, born of *Mary*) and (2) the nature by which this is true of the person changes (i.e., the Son is begotten *according to his divinity*; born *according to his humanity*).

With this understanding of christological grammar in place, we come to evaluate the orthodoxy of the claims that Jesus is adopted by the Father. These contemporary authors have indicated their strong affirmation of the divinity and preexistence of the Son. Therefore, we do not have concerns that these accounts lead to traditional versions of “adoptionism.”⁶³ Instead, here we argue that claiming that Jesus is adopted by God leads to unwanted christological implications. Specifically, on the basis of their affirmation of (1) the Father as the referent in the Son’s natural and adoptive sonship and (2) lack of clarification according to either nature, the logical conclusion of their position is *either* to (A) institute a change in the divine Son (contrary to Nicaea) or to (B) indicate that there are “two sons” (contrary to Chalcedon).

2.2.2. A Changing Son

As we examine the logical consequences of Jesus’s adoption for Christology, the first potential problem is the implication of a Son whose divinity changes or is altered. If the claim that Jesus is adopted leads to this conclusion, then it seems to be in conflict with the Nicene anathema that “affirming that the Son of God is subject to change or alteration—these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes” and the Chalcedonian claim that Christ’s two natures are “without change ... but rather the property of both natures is preserved.”⁶⁴ Likewise, in the documents accepted at the third ecumenical council (Ephesus, 431 CE), Cyril says that “God the Word ... was called son of man, though all the while he remained what he was, that is God (for he is unchangeable and immutable by nature).”⁶⁵

We see evidence of something like this alteration of the Son in Gaffin’s argument that Romans 1:4 “teaches that at the resurrection Christ began a new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God ... has become what he was not before.”⁶⁶ Gaffin assigns this change to the “eternal Son” and his “divine sonship” (rather than his humanity) and thereby seems to fall into the ditch of a

⁶² A twofold birth is affirmed multiple times by the councils (e.g., Tanner, *Decrees*, 77, 86, 114) and is understood with reference to either nature.

⁶³ Even though there might be an argument to be made for it being prudent to avoid the language “Jesus’s adoption by God” for the sake of its connotations.

⁶⁴ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:5.

⁶⁵ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:72.

⁶⁶ Gaffin, *Centrality*, 11.

Son whose divinity changes.⁶⁷ Likewise, Garner says that the Son “enters a personally ... different stage of sonship” and that he undergoes a “personal change” in his adoption.⁶⁸ Because the “person” of Christ is fundamentally the divine Son, this seems to imply a change in his divinity. Likewise, Garner says that “The eternal Son became the incarnate Son. The incarnate but unqualified (inexperienced) holy Son in time became the qualified (mature and vindicated) holy, messianic Son.”⁶⁹ Each of these quotations indicates a change in Jesus according to his divine nature. Such a change is not permissible according to the decrees of the ecumenical councils and is, therefore, an unwanted christological implication to claiming that Christ was adopted.⁷⁰

2.2.3. *Two Sons*

A defender of Jesus’s adoptive Sonship could respond to the above critique and say, “The change (and, therefore, the adoption) of Christ is not according to his divine nature but his human nature.” To such a rebuttal we will argue that this proposed solution has its own set of problems. Specifically, this putative defense leads to the unwanted implication of indicating “two sons,” two distinct persons.

Orthodox Christology strongly resists the affirmation of “two persons” or “two Sons.” This is made most famously against the theology of Nestorius—who refused to affirm that Mary was the theotokos, bearer of God—at the council of Chalcedon (451 CE). Cyril, Leo, and the bishops at Chalcedon were concerned that if we could not say that Mary was the “bearer of God (i.e., God the Son),” then we were referring to two “persons”—one who was the eternal Son, the other who was born of Mary. Additionally, the language of “two Sons” became prominent at the fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople II, 551 CE) where they anathematized “those who assert that there exist two sons and two Christs.”⁷¹ Likewise, the Greek Father Gregory of Nazianzus claimed that “if any introduce the notion of Two Sons” then they will (ironically) “lose [their] part in the adoption promised to those who believe aright.”⁷²

Yet, in these accounts which assert Jesus’s adoption, there are implications that incline toward affirming two sons, two persons. For example, Garner says that “Jesus remains the Son of God” (potentially unchangeable according to his divine nature) and yet Garner continues on to say that the Son’s life has “markers of his filial and covenantal progress.”⁷³ If Jesus “remains the Son of God” (who does

⁶⁷ Gaffin shows that he is aware of, and willing to, predicate particular attributes to Jesus according to one nature and not the other (Gaffin, *Centrality*, 105). Yet, he (curiously) does not make these same qualifications for adoption.

⁶⁸ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 196.

⁶⁹ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 198; cf., p. 214.

⁷⁰ These accounts could appeal to some version of Kenoticism, which attests to its own space within orthodoxy, in order to avoid this problem. However, they have not (yet) provided the necessary theological mechanics to make such an account work and there are concerns about the coherence and orthodoxy of Kenoticism (see these concerns raised and addressed in Stephen T. Davis, “Is Kenosis Orthodox?,” in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans [New York: Oxford University Press, 2006], 112–38; see an evangelical critique in Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016], 395–420).

⁷¹ Tanner, *Decrees*, 109.

⁷² Gregory of Nazianzus, *To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius* (NPNF² 7:439). We include this anathema not to indicate that it includes the authors above, but in order to show the severity with which Gregory viewed this discussion.

⁷³ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 199.

not change according to his divinity) then it seems as though the only way to speak of filial progress is to introduce a second Son. Elsewhere, Garner affirms the “preexistent *eternal* sonship of Christ,” and yet also claims that Christ “remains forever now the adopted Son of God.”⁷⁴ However, if Christ is eternally Son and “forever” the adopted Son, then it seems as though we are dealing with two Sons—one who is eternally Son and the other who begins to be a Son and continues as adopted Son for eternity. This is *unlike* the affirmations of orthodox Christology (e.g., Christ as begotten of the Father and born of Mary) because the referent relationship has not changed. For advocates of adoptive Sonship, the eternal Son remains the natural Son of the Father and the “economic Son” becomes an adopted Son of that same Father. The implication here is that “eternal Son” and “economic Son” are distinct persons, two Sons.

3. Exegetically Unnecessary Conclusions of Christ's Adoption

Yet as Protestants committed to the ultimate authority of Scripture, the above theological argumentation is of little value if Romans 1:3–4 does indeed teach that Jesus was adopted as God's Son at his resurrection. We cannot provide an exhaustive interpretation of this passage, but instead seek to demonstrate an “appreciative disagreement” with our interlocutors' three fundamental exegetical arguments. You could roughly characterize our response to the exegesis of Gaffin, Scott, and Garner: “sure, *but* that does not mean that Christ is ‘adopted.’”

The first argument of the above position was the meaning of ὁρισθέντος—that it should be understood as “appointed” instead of “declared.” The implication is that upon his resurrection Jesus entered into a new phase of sonship that did not pertain previously. And this appointment, it is argued, is equivalent to adoption. To such an argument we want to offer appreciative disagreement from the text. Along with the majority of commentators, including our interlocutors, we agree that this participle should be translated “appointed.” The basic meaning of ὁρίζω is to “mark out” or “fix” a boundary.⁷⁵ In its seven other occurrences in the NT, it always bears the meaning “determine, appoint, or fix.”⁷⁶ There is nothing linguistically or contextually that would demand a different understanding of its use here. Therefore, we agree that Paul means to say that Jesus was “appointed [by God the Father] son of God in power” upon his resurrection. Yet the change is not in the divine nature or in the Son's relationship to the Father, but in Christ's role in redemptive history. Therefore, we disagree that such an appointment is equivalent to adoption, at least as Paul and his readers would have understood the concept. For starters, it looks as if arguing that ὁρίζω in Romans 1:4 is equivalent to adoption commits the fallacy of appealing to an unknown or unlikely meaning.⁷⁷ There is simply no other evidence in Greek literature that ὁρίζω was used in adoption contexts. If Paul wanted to clearly articulate an adoption for Jesus here, there were ample ways to do so beyond the word υἱοθεσία, none of which he employed. Our answer as to why will be fleshed out as we address their other two main arguments.

⁷⁴ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 193, 196.

⁷⁵ E.g., LXX Numbers 34:6; Ezekiel 47:20. See also BDAG, though they evidently and a bit curiously suggest “declared” as the proper translation here.

⁷⁶ Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26, 31; Hebrews 4:7.

⁷⁷ On this fallacy, see esp. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 37–41. No Greek lexicon we consulted (BDAG, LSJ, Louw & Nida, *NIDNTTE*, *TDNT*) yielded any texts that would suggest the translation “adopt” for ὁρίζω. Nor does Scott include it in the rather complete semantic field he articulated for υἱοθεσία (*Adoption as Sons*, 13–57), on which see below.

Their second exegetical argument was the link between this appointment and Jesus’s resurrection in v. 4b with Paul’s explicit link between adoption and resurrection in Romans 8:23 for believers. It is argued that this creates a parallel between Jesus’s appointment to divine sonship at his resurrection and believers’ future adoption at their resurrection, which suggests “appointed” (ὀρισθέντος) in Romans 1:4a is equivalent to “adoption” (υἰοθεσία) in 8:23.⁷⁸ Again, we offer appreciative disagreement, since we agree at one level—i.e., that Paul describes the consummation of believers’ adoption (υἰοθεσία) in terms of bodily resurrection in Romans 8:23, and that this is linked to Jesus’s own bodily resurrection as the Son of God. However, we disagree as to the nature and significance of that link. In the flow of thought from Romans 8:12–30 there is a clear correlation between the sonship of believers and the sonship of Jesus, manifested in a variety of ways. The question, though, is whether such correlation demands Jesus’s acquiring of divine sonship by the same means as believers—namely, adoption (υἰοθεσία). We argue that it does not because of the theological reasons above, yes, but also because of additional exegetical reasons within Romans 8 itself. First, Paul deliberately brackets his entire discussion of believer’s adoptive sonship with references to Jesus’s sonship, which serve to both distinguish his from ours and ground ours upon his. In Rom 8:32, Jesus is called “his own son” (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ). Even Michael Peppard, who agrees with our interlocutors that Romans 1:4 refers to Jesus’s adoption, recognizes this: “Although the word [ἴδιος] does not describe a particular process of acquiring sonship, it does express *in nuce* a distinction between the sonship of Christ and the sonship of Christians.”⁷⁹ We argue that the essence of that distinction is determined by Paul’s other specific reference to Jesus’s divine sonship in Romans 8:3: “God sent his own son [τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱόν] in the likeness of sinful flesh.” As Garner admits, “this sending *does not create sonship, but presupposes it*.”⁸⁰ Jesus is thus the preexistent Son of God.⁸¹ Therefore, simply to equate Jesus’s appointment at/on account of his resurrection with the adoption of believers is to be in danger of minimizing this textual distinction between his and our sonship maintained throughout Romans 8. Second, and even more pointedly, to say rightly that resurrection is a component of υἰοθεσία does not mean υἰοθεσία is reduced to, or sufficiently defined by, resurrection alone, such that the mere occurrence of resurrection intimates adoption.⁸² For Paul, it necessarily includes other features, not least of which is the new filial identity granted by grace to undeserving sinners who were previously *outside* of God’s family. This is how he uses explicit adoption language (Rom 8:15; cf. Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). In short, υἰοθεσία includes but involves more than resurrection. Therefore, the link between Romans 1:4 and 8:23 is not as straightforward as they suggest.

Their third argument seeks to appreciate the historical-redemptive nature of the text in contrast to the ontological reading of heretical “Adoptionism.” In essence, they claim that Rom 1:3–4 provides a

⁷⁸ See, for example, Gaffin, *Centrality*, 119.

⁷⁹ Peppard, *The Son of God*, 230, n. 34.

⁸⁰ Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 178.

⁸¹ For a persuasive argument on this, see esp. Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 245–47.

⁸² We might illustrate this point logically as well. To use an everyday example, just because the sidewalk gets wet when it rains, the simple fact that there is a wet sidewalk outside does not require that it is raining (e.g., I might have spilled my coffee on the sidewalk or a pipe could have burst). Likewise, just because resurrection is a key component of adoption, the simple fact of resurrection does not require that it is an adoptive resurrection.

redemptive-historical contrast that culminates with his adoption at/on-the basis-of his resurrection.⁸³ That is, they argue that because the divine sonship (υἱοῦ θεοῦ) contemplated in these verses is not his eternal divine sonship, but his messianic or economic divine sonship in fulfillment of the messianic expectation of the OT (cf. 2 Sam. 7:13–14; Ps. 2:7), they can hold to orthodox Christology while affirming Jesus’s divine adoption. Here again, we want to register appreciative disagreement. We agree that the distinction between Jesus’s Davidic descent κατὰ σάρκα and his appointment to divine sonship κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης is not antithetically contrasting Jesus’s human and divine natures (the so-called “ontological” approach),⁸⁴ or contrasting his “outward qualifications and his inward perfection of spirit” (the so-called “experiential” approach),⁸⁵ but narrating Jesus’s messianic pedigree, beginning with his “fleshly descent” from David,⁸⁶ and climaxing with his subsequent installment/appointment to the full exercise of that identity and position in relation to the world as the exalted Messiah and κύριος—the “son-of-God-in-power”⁸⁷ (the so-called “redemptive-historical” approach). Schreiner nicely captures this idea: “The new dimension was not his sonship but his heavenly installation as God’s Son by virtue of his Davidic sonship.”⁸⁸ In other words, we agree that references to Jesus’s divine sonship here (v. 3a, τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ; 4a, υἱοῦ θεοῦ) speak not to his divine nature (in contrast to his human nature) but to his identity as the messianic king (see 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). Jesus’s resurrection was the occasion of his heavenly enthronement as the Messiah (Son of God) and Lord. God’s promises to Israel of a future Davidic ruler have now been fulfilled in Jesus.

However, this historical-redemptive movement is not properly called adoption because (as we argued above) Christ’s *relation to God* as Son did not change—and this relationship is precisely what is

⁸³ The preposition ἐξ in v. 4b could be causal (“on the basis of”: see Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018], 47), temporal (“at”: see Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 240) or a combination of both (see Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 196). Michael Wolter perceptively wonders given the nature of the case if the difference would have any ultimate significance, and thus sees the choice between them as a false alternative: “Die Diskussion darüber, ob ἐξ temporal (‘seit’) oder kausal (‘aufgrund’) zu verstehen sei, arbeitet nicht nur mit einer falschen Alternative, sondern basiert auch auf einer unzutreffenden Zuordnung von Auferstehung und Einsetzung als Sohn Gottes” (*Der Brief an die Römer: Röm 1–8*, EKK [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2014], 89).

⁸⁴ As found in, e.g., Calvin, Hodge, and Warfield (for references, see Gaffin, *Centrality*, 100–2).

⁸⁵ As found in, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 49–57. The quotation is Thomas Schreiner’s summary of Dunn’s position (*Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018], 44).

⁸⁶ Such an emphasis on being from the offspring of David accords with the broader Jewish expectation that the Messiah would come from David’s line (see 2 Sam 7:12–16; Isa 11:1–5, 10; Jer 23:5–6; 33:14–17; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Psalms of Solomon 17.21–18.9; 4Qflor 1.11–13; 4QpGen^a 5.1–7 [on Gen 49:10]). Identifying Jesus as the offspring of David also corresponds to the rest of the NT (see esp. Matt 1:1; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 3:23–31; Acts 2:30; 13:22–23, 32–34; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 5:5; 22:16). On “fleshly descent,” see Christopher Whitsett, “Son of God, Seed of David: Paul’s Messianic Exegesis in Romans 2 [sic]:3–4,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 661–81, 675.

⁸⁷ With the majority of commentators, we take ἐν δυνάμει to be modifying υἱοῦ θεοῦ rather than ὁρισθέντος, yielding “son-of-God-in-power” in contrast to “appointed with power to be the son of God.” So Moo, *Romans*, 46; Schreiner, *Romans*, 42; Wolter, *Römer*, 90; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der Brief an die Römer, Kapitel 1–5*, HTA (Witten: SCM-Verlag, 2015), 105. Contra Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 107.

⁸⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 39.

at issue with the language and concept of adoption, both in Paul’s day and our own. Adoption necessarily includes the notion of relational change of status between persons. It does include other notions, but the relational register is essential, without which one does not have adoption. This probably explains why Paul does not use υἱοθεσία, or for that matter any word from its wider semantic field,⁸⁹ as a description of Jesus’s divine sonship. Instead, he is God’s Son before he is sent into the world (Rom 8:3); he remains God’s Son throughout his earthly life with all its Davidic pedigree (1:3; 9:5), including his death (8:32); and he remains now and forever God’s Son upon his resurrection (1:4ab) as the powerful, reigning Lord (1:4c). From beginning to end, he is God’s Son.⁹⁰ Doug Moo succinctly and memorably captures this dynamic when he says, “It is the *Son* who is ‘appointed’ Son,” thus ruling out any notion of adoption here.⁹¹

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the claim that Jesus is adopted by God rests upon unwarranted soteriological premises, implies unwanted christological implications, and is exegetically tenuous and unnecessary. After surveying the arguments of each contributor, we articulated those unwarranted soteriological premises (especially their insufficient definition of adoption and governing soteriological axiom) and unwanted christological implications (especially the Son’s changing divine nature and/or the affirmation of “two sons”). Finally, we articulated their tenuous and unnecessary exegetical conclusions on Romans 1:3–4 and briefly offered alternative explanations that maintained orthodox Christology alongside the contours of the text.

We might end with a brief illustration of the pastoral value of following our arguments here, maintaining that Christ is the Son of God by nature (not adoption). This illustration is personally significant for us because we both have adopted children into our families and both have also had biological (or natural) children. Within one of our families we might imagine adding another adopted child to the mix of natural and adopted children. That newest addition would expect to be able to call the other adopted children “sisters” (since they share the status of “adopted daughter” with the other adopted kids). However, the real joy and the true evidence of the intimacy and status that adoption brings is when that newly adopted member of the family can look at the biological (i.e., natural) child and say “sister!” Analogously, as we have argued here, when we look to Christ and we exercise the privilege of calling him “brother” (Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11), we are looking not at a fellow adopted son, but the natural, firstborn, and therefore preeminent, Son of the Father.

⁸⁹ For a thorough discussion of its semantic field (comprised of six word groups: εἰσποιεῖν, ἐκποιεῖν, τίθεσθαι, ποιεῖσθαι, υἱοποιεῖσθαι, and υἱοθετεῖν), see esp. Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 13–57. Interestingly enough, ὀρίζω is not included, casting more doubt upon their synonymity in Romans 1:4. Furthermore, no Greek lexicon we consulted (BDAG, LSJ, Louw & Nida, *NIDNTTE*, *TDNT*) suggests for ὀρίζω the translation “adopt.”

⁹⁰ See Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, NSBT 22 (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 105–7.

⁹¹ Moo, *Romans*, 46, italics his.

Exclusion from the People of God: An Examination of Paul's Use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians 5

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Abstract: 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 serves as a key text when speaking about the topic of church discipline. Verse 13 provides a crucial example of how the NT uses the OT. However, to understand its full significance for one's reading of 1 Corinthians 5, one must see how the quoted text is utilized within the book of Deuteronomy on numerous occasions. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Paul's exhortation to the church in Corinth is intensified in a distinctive manner when one understands how Paul is seeking to use the OT in his argument. Namely, this rebuke from the apostle reveals an eschatological trajectory for excommunication, which, as a present judgment by the church, serves as a declarative sign toward the future judgment of God.

The practice of church discipline, though not exercised by many modern-day churches, has deep biblical moorings that must be clearly seen and properly adhered to in order for a local church to function properly.¹ One biblical text that speaks unequivocally regarding discipline in the

¹ The following would be a starting point for those desiring to delve into this biblical doctrine in greater detail: Jay E. Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Right and Privilege of Every Church Member* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); Eric J. Bargerhuff, *Love That Rescues: God's Fatherly Love in the Practice of Church Discipline* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010); Mark E. Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001); Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling the Brother* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1979); Jeremy M. Kimble, *That His Spirit May Be Saved: Church Discipline as a Means to Repentance and Perseverance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014); Jeremy M. Kimble, *40 Questions about Church Membership and Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017); J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985); Mark Lauterbach, *The Transforming Community: The Practice of the Gospel in Church Discipline* (Carol Stream, IL: Christian Focus, 2003); Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); Thomas C. Oden, *Corrective Love: The Power of Communion Discipline* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1995); James T. South, *Disciplinary Practices in Pauline Texts* (Lewistown, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1992); Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Daniel E. Wray, *Biblical Church Discipline* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978).

church is 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, addressing specifically the topic of exclusion or excommunication. Here the apostle Paul is dealing with a particular issue in the church at Corinth and speaks to the need for that body of believers to exclude a certain individual from their midst because of his unrepentant sin. At the end of this discourse Paul tells the church to “Purge the evil person from among you,” which is a powerful use of the OT, specifically from the book of Deuteronomy.

One crucial aspect of the subject of biblical theology is the study of the use of the OT in the NT.² Rosner asserts this regarding Paul’s pronouncement to the church in 1 Corinthians 5:13 and its use of Scripture:

The use of Deut. 17:7, etc. in 1 Cor. 5:13 is one of the most impressive examples of the crucial nature of Old Testament context in the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. There is good evidence that the contexts of all six appearances of the Deuteronomic expulsion formula in their original contexts have exerted an influence on Paul’s instructions across the chapter.³

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Paul’s exhortation to the church in Corinth is intensified in a distinctive manner when one understands how Paul is seeking to use the OT in his argument. Namely, this rebuke from the apostle reveals an eschatological trajectory for excommunication, which, as a present judgment by the church, points as a declarative sign toward the future judgment of God.

This chapter from 1 Corinthians appears to contain various echoes from the OT, an allusion to the Passover celebration (5:6–8), and a quotation regarding expulsion from the people of God (5:13; Deut 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; cf. Judges 20:13). Most of the attention in this article will be given to the quotation in verse 13. After analyzing the surrounding context of the passage being investigated in 1 Corinthians, a fourfold methodology will be employed to best understand the significance of Paul’s use of the OT. First, the citation will be established by examining textual affinities with the OT passage. Second, the OT passage will be examined in a contextual and exegetical manner. Third, the citation will be viewed in light of Second Temple Jewish literature to see whether the saying has affinities with the writings of that time period. Finally, the OT citation will be examined in the context of 1 Corinthians, highlighting its exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological significance.

1. 1 Corinthians 5:13 in its Broader Context

As 1 Corinthians 5 is considered in detail, it will be helpful to briefly look at the context of the book as a whole to see the specific issues Paul is addressing. Paul begins his letter with a salutation (1:1–3) and a prayer of thanksgiving for the Corinthians (1:4–9). He then immediately delves into the issues facing the church that have come to his attention, starting with the problem of disunity (1:10–17). The apostle seeks to point out the folly of the wisdom of the world (1:18–25) and boasting in personal ability (1:26–31), pointing them instead to the power of God (2:1–5). He further contrasts spiritual and worldly wisdom (2:6–16), and then more specifically addresses the divisions that exist between them

² For further discussion of the varied ways in which the NT authors cited OT writings see, for example, G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

³ Brian S. Rosner, “Deuteronomy in 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *Deuteronomy in the New Testament*, ed. Maarten J. Menken and Steve Moyise, LNTS 358 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 122.

(3:1–9). All of the ministers in whom the Corinthians had been boasting were subject to evaluation by God (3:10–22), and thus there was no reason to boast in them. Paul then identifies himself as a model apostle (4:1–20) and as such the Corinthians should respect him as they would other leaders. The remainder of the letter is spent addressing specific moral issues, such as a disciplinary issue with an immoral church member (5:1–13), lawsuits amongst church members (6:1–11), sexual ethics (6:12–20), marriage and divorce (7:1–40), food offered to idols (8:1–11:1), matters related to Christian worship (11:2–34), spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), and the resurrection (15:1–58).⁴

Thus, as noted above, 1 Corinthians 5 is a rebuke of the church for not properly dealing with a specific issue of sexual immorality in the proper way. In summary, in 4:18–21 Paul threatens the Corinthians with stern discipline if they do not acknowledge his authority. In 5:1–2 he rebukes the Corinthians for their inaction in not removing a sinner from their midst. The apostle gives reasons for such an action in 5:3–5. He then offers further motivation, appealing to the spiritual self-interest of the Corinthian church (5:6–8). He clarifies in 5:9–11 that it is such offenders within, not outside, the household of faith whom they must expel. Finally, in 5:12–13 he asserts the Corinthians' responsibility to act and closes with a weighty command from Scripture.⁵

With the overall context and summary of the chapter in mind, the chapter will now be analyzed in greater detail to show the cohesion of Paul's argument for the exclusion of this individual in leading up to his OT citation in 5:13.

1.1. An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:1–2

Paul begins his confrontation by addressing the nature of the sinful deed itself, as well as the church's response. There is a kind of sexual immorality occurring within the church that is not even acceptable among the pagans,⁶ namely that a man "has his father's wife" (5:1). The issue of sexual sin was a cultural issue Paul addressed often in his letter,⁷ but Paul seems to be more forceful in his tone with this issue, and clearly states in this context that this should be a clear-cut conviction for the church. Naselli succinctly describes the issue:

The specific kind of sexual immorality is incest—a man is pursuing sexual relations with his father's wife. In the phrase "has his father's wife," *has* indicates ongoing sexual relations but does not specify if the two people have married or are cohabiting. Because

⁴ This summary of the 1 Corinthians derives in large measure from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 482–92.

⁵ See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 705.

⁶ Hays notes, "The word *ethnē*, translated by NRSV and most English translations as 'pagans,' is Paul's normal word for 'Gentiles' (i.e., non-Jews). His use of this term here offers a fascinating hint that he thinks of the Gentile converts at Corinth as Gentiles no longer (cf. 12:2, 13; Gal. 3:28). Now that they are in Christ, they belong to the covenant people of God, and their behavior should reflect that new status." See Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 81.

⁷ Fee asserts, "That is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually 'hung up,' nor because they considered this the primary sin, the 'scarlet letter' as it were. It is the result of the prevalence in the culture, and the difficulty the early church had experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 219.

Paul writes “his father’s wife” (rather than “his mother”), he probably refers to this man’s stepmother.⁸

This was egregious sin. What had been forbidden historically by both Jewish and pagans, namely, the cohabiting of father and son with the same woman, was happening in the church.⁹ Thus, this man was involved in a knowingly sinful relationship and committing an offense that should certainly be recognized by a Christian church.¹⁰

This, however, is not the case, as Paul indicts the Corinthians for being arrogant rather than mourning over this serious issue (5:2). “Given their theological stance articulated in 6:12–13 and their sense of superiority to Paul, and therefore to Paul’s ethical instructions given in his previous letter, it is just possible, nay probable it would seem, that this sin in their midst is something over which they have taken a certain amount of pride.”¹¹ When Paul tells the Corinthians that they ought to mourn rather than be arrogant, some take that to mean a mourning over the impending loss of the sinning brother.¹² However, the word is only used elsewhere in the NT in 2 Corinthians 12:21 where its sense closely parallels the concept of godly sorrow or repentance (cf. 2 Cor 7:8–11).¹³ Paul, therefore, appears to be imploring this church to mourn over this man’s sin, as well as their own sin of arrogance, for the majority of the chapter,¹⁴ because they are culpable and corporately responsible for the actions of individuals within their covenant community.¹⁵ The Corinthian church must take action and exclude this person from the community of believers.

⁸ Andrew David Naselli, “1 Corinthians,” in *Romans–Galatians*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary* 10 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 253.

⁹ Naselli, “1 Corinthians,” 220. Fee warrants this claim by citing both Jewish and Greco-Roman law regarding this type of sexual immorality, in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200–1 n. 24. See also Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 96; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 80–81.

¹⁰ Interestingly, while the man is singled out in this instance there is no mention of the woman involved in this sinful relationship. This, by implication, must point the reader to the fact that the woman surely was not a member of the community of believers. So Hays, *First Corinthians*, 81.

¹¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 221.

¹² So G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, EGT (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 808.

¹³ Ciampa and Rosner offer helpful commentary on the use of this word in the OT: “The use of ‘mourn’ in the LXX suggests that in 5:2a Paul thought that the Corinthians ought to mourn in the sense of confessing the sin of the erring brother as if it were their own (Ezra 10:6; Neh 1:4; 8:9; Dan 10:2).... Ezra 10 in particular is a distinct parallel to 1 Cor. 5. It is an Ezra-like-Paul who deals with the expulsion of the sinner. Just as Ezra mourned over the sins of the community, so also Paul enjoined the Corinthians to mourn over the sin of the incestuous man. Just as Ezra demanded that the sinners separate from their foreign partners or else suffer expulsion (10:8), so also Paul demanded the expulsion of the sinner unless he separate from his illicit partner.” Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 706. So also Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 82; Brian S. Rosner, “*Ouchi mallon epenthēsate*: Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 472.

¹⁴ Minear helpfully points out that, “in chapter 5 one verse deals with the incestuous person and twelve verses deal with the culpability of the congregation.” Paul S. Minear, “Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5–6,” *RevExp* 80 (1983): 343.

¹⁵ The OT is replete with examples of this. In Exodus 16:27–28 after some of the people had broken the Sabbath, God addresses the nation and asks how long they will refuse to keep his commandments and instructions. In Numbers 16:20–27 the people are warned to keep their distance from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, lest they

1.2. An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:3–5

Paul then exhorts the Corinthians to take care of this issue in a corporate fashion.¹⁶ Though he is not physically present, Paul states that he has already passed judgment on this individual (5:3), but this would not be sufficient. “For the discipline to be enacted properly and fully in accordance with Jesus’ teaching, the formal assembly of the church, along with its communal power and authority to bind and loose, must be formally instigated.”¹⁷ Thus, when they assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus, and the power of the Lord Jesus is with them (5:4), they are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, in order that he might ultimately be saved in the day of the Lord (5:5).

The content of 1 Corinthians 5:5 has been the subject of much debate as to its proper interpretation. While some commentators believe the “destruction of the flesh” (ὃλεθρον τῆς σαρκός) refers to a curse that leads to physical death,¹⁸ it seems more persuasive to read this text as referring to the man’s sinful nature being destroyed as he is excluded from the community of faith, an edifying and caring environment, and put back out into Satan’s domain.¹⁹ South contends for the latter interpretation, explaining that 1 Timothy 1:20 “is the only true verbal parallel to 1 Cor. 5.5 in the NT and it clearly excludes the ideas of the offenders’ deaths, since both Hymenaeus and Alexander are not expected to die but to learn something and correct their behavior.”²⁰ Another reason for espousing this interpretation is the fact that Paul is speaking of eschatological salvation. Thiselton rightly notes that if 1 Corinthians 5:5 is referring to an eschatological salvation, then the curse/death interpretation would seem to understand Paul as speaking of a post-mortem opportunity for salvation. This cannot be the case, and so it seems more likely that the verse is referring the man’s sinful nature that must be destroyed. Thus, “What Paul hopes will be destroyed is his attitude of self-congratulation, which deprivation from the respect and support of the church is likely to bring about.”²¹ The discipline enacted upon this man is, therefore, restorative and eschatological in nature.

also be swept away because of all their sins (note especially Moses’s prayer in 16:22). In Deuteronomy 19:13—a passage that will be considered in greater detail—the nation of Israel is instructed to purge a sinning individual from their midst so that it may go well with them in the land. Other such examples can be found in Deuteronomy 29:19–21; Joshua 7:1–26; Joshua 22:16–18; 1 Samuel 14:37–38; and Nehemiah 13:18. See Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 706; Rosner, “*Ouchi mallon epenthēsatē*,” 470–71.

¹⁶ The fact that the “assembly” deals with the sin issue in a corporate manner is comparable to the judgment scene found in Deuteronomy 19:16–20 (note also this text in Deuteronomy includes the command given in 1 Cor 5:13), where punishment takes place before the congregation (v. 20) and God v. 17; cf. Lev 24:14, 16; Num 15:35; 35:24). So Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 707.

¹⁷ Bargerhuff, *Love that Rescues*, 161–62. This is in keeping with Matthew 18:15–20, where heaven’s sanction reinforces the assembled, gathered church who excommunicates the unrepentant sinner, pronouncing divine discipline and judgment on sin. See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, 84.

¹⁸ See, for example, Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 97–98; David Raymond Smith, *Hand This Man Over to Satan: Curse, Exclusion, and Salvation in 1 Corinthians 5*, LNTS 386 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 57–182.

¹⁹ See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 169–77. For a comprehensive understanding of this interpretation see South, *Disciplinary Practices in Pauline Texts*, 38–68; South, “A Critique of the ‘Curse/Death’ Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1–8,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 539–61.

²⁰ South, “A Critique of the ‘Curse/Death’ Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1–8,” 551. So also Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 228–35; Rosner, “Drive Out the Wicked Person’: A Biblical Theology of Exclusion,” *EvQ* 71 (1999): 32–33.

²¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 399–400. So also Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 86.

1.3 An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:6–8

Thus far we have seen Paul's denouncement of the unrepentant sinner, as well as the church, and his calling for the expulsion of the sexually immoral man by the gathered assembly. In the final two sections of this chapter we begin to see Paul's rationale for such a seemingly harsh call to discipline. The apostle begins by reiterating that their boasting is not good, and asks rhetorically whether or not they know that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (5:6).²² Paul then commands the Corinthians to cleanse out the old leaven, and he grounds this command in the fact that Christ, our Passover lamb, has already been sacrificed (5:7), and thus they should "celebrate the festival" in the appropriate way (5:8).

First, as it relates to rightly interpreting this passage, one must take into account Paul's saying regarding leaven. "Leaven is a little portion of a previous week's batch of dough that had been allowed to ferment. When added to the next batch, the leaven made the bread rise. It carried with it the slight risk of infection, especially if the process was left to go on indefinitely without starting afresh with a completely new batch."²³ Each year the Israelites, in part perhaps as a health provision, had to cleanse their homes and the temple from all leaven (Exod 12:14–20; Deut 16:3–8). The unleavened bread from the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread would supply some "fresh" leaven and start the process anew for the next twelve months of baking bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day festival, including Passover, in which the Jews were forbidden to eat anything leavened, commemorates this event. Paul emphasizes (by emphatic word order in Greek) that although in only a "little" part of the church—one person in fact—the evil would inevitably, slowly but surely, spread through the whole community if left unchecked.²⁴ Thus, Paul is pointing to a pattern of cleansing, which in this case, connotes cleansing the church of sin.

Paul does not stop at highlighting OT festivals and unleavened bread; rather he calls the people of God a "new lump" of dough and points to Christ as the true Passover lamb (5:7). Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during a Passover meal with his disciples,²⁵ and pointed to the elements of the bread and wine as signifying his broken body and shed blood as a propitiation for sin (Luke 22:14–23).²⁶ This symbolic language is drawn from the heart of Israel's story, the celebration of the Passover commemorating Israel's liberation from bondage in the land of Egypt. Paul assumes not only that his Corinthian readers will understand this symbolism but also that they will identify metaphorically with Israel. "Christ, as the Passover Lamb, has already been sacrificed (cf. Exod 12:3–7), so the time is at hand for the Corinthians to carry out the major part of the festival, searching out and removing all 'leaven'

²² "The phrase 'do you not know' occurs ten times in 1 Corinthians and only once elsewhere in Paul's established letters (1 Cor 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 17; 9:13, 24; Rom 6:16)." Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 400. This is ironic for a church who seemed to claim a great deal of wisdom and knowledge for themselves.

²³ Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 708. See also John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 85.

²⁴ See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 401; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 178–81.

²⁵ For a detailed discussion affirming the fact that the Last Supper was a Passover meal see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal?," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 6–30.

²⁶ For a helpful summary of the typological movement of Passover and the exodus to the new exodus accomplished in Christ and signified in the Lord's Supper, see James M. Hamilton, "The Lord's Supper in Paul: An Identity-Forming Proclamation of the Gospel," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 86–88.

(symbolizing the wrongdoer) from their household (Exod. 12:15).²⁷ The Corinthians, in view of Christ's sacrifice, must repent of their sin and celebrate the festival with sincerity and truth by removing this sinful individual, who is considered "the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil" (5:8).²⁸

1.4. An Exegetical Analysis of Corinthians 5:9–13

Paul now comes to the final section of his exhortation to the Corinthians regarding this matter of unrepentant sin in the church, and it is the most pertinent section for our purposes. It appears that Paul had already written them a previous letter, telling the Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral people (5:9), but "their nonchalance about the man who entered into an incestuous relationship with his father's wife reveals that this warning was not taken seriously."²⁹ In addition to this, it appears that the Corinthians misunderstood Paul's admonition. While the Corinthian church thought Paul was referring to the sinful people of the world (5:10), Paul was in fact telling them to not associate, or even eat,³⁰ with unrepentant sinners who are within the church (5:11). Paul's demand did not refer to outward dealings with non-Christians, but to the question of order in the community: its intention is not to shut Christians off from the world, but to clarify their standing in the world.³¹

Regarding the list of sins Paul provides in this particular context,³² Rosner asserts that a distinct connection can be made between the sins recorded in 5:11 and the OT quotation given in 5:13.

The representative list of sinners that the church is to judge (5:12b) is in one sense a list of covenantal norms that, when broken, automatically exclude the offender. Paul

²⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 83.

²⁸ Hamilton notes that this admonition from Paul has a connection to excluding unrepentant sinners from the Lord's Supper. He refers to Christ, the Passover Lamb being sacrificed in 1 Corinthians 5:7, followed by the reference to celebrating the feast not with old leaven in 5:8. Since Jesus transformed the Passover into the Lord's Supper on the night he was betrayed, the feast in view would seem to be the Lord's Supper. All this is followed by the call in 5:11 not to eat with professing Christians who continue in unrepentant sin. These observations indicate that anyone who refuses to repent of the sins Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 (sexual immorality, greed, swindling others, idolatry, reviling others, and drunkenness [vv. 1–2, 9–11]) partakes unworthily. Indeed, Paul calls the church to 'purge the evil person from among you' (v. 13, quoting Deut 17:7). This indicates that individual members of the church should not only be concerned to partake in a worthy manner themselves, but the church as a whole should seek to keep unrepentant individuals from partaking in an unworthy manner." Hamilton, "The Lord's Supper in Paul," 95–96. See also Ray Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 378–79.

²⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 184.

³⁰ In reference to the final prohibition in 5:11, Naselli argues, "At a minimum, this means the church should not let such a person celebrate the Lord's Supper with them (cf. comments on 11:17–34). Further, what Paul prohibits applies to all meals in cultures in which sharing a private meal with such a person communicates to her or others that she is a genuine Christian (cf. Gal. 2:11–14). When a church member interacts with a former church member who has still not repented, the church member should not give the impression that all is well but should lovingly exhort the person to repent." Naselli, "1 Corinthians," 258. See also Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

³¹ So Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 100.

³² Fee notes, "This is the first of the so-called vice lists in the Pauline letters. Such lists were a common feature of Hellenistic Judaism, and they regularly recur in Paul in a variety of contexts." Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 246. For other such lists see 1 Cor 6:10–11; 2 Cor 12:20–21; Gal 5:19–21; Rom 1:29–31; Col 3:5, 8; Eph 5:3–5; 1 Tim 1:9–11; 2 Tim 3:2–5; Titus 3:3; cf. Mark 7:21–22; 1 Pet 2:1; 4:3; Rev 21:8; 22:15.

lists “sexual immorality” first, since that is the issue at hand. But what governs his choice of the next five vices in the catalog? Paul gives a clue in 5:13b: the sins to which the Deuteronomic formula “Expel the wicked person from among you,” which Paul quotes, is connected in Deuteronomy form a remarkable parallel to the particular sins mentioned in 5:11.³³

This claim will be teased out in greater detail when the OT context of Deuteronomy is in view, but it appears that Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to deal with the sin in their midst—while allowing God to judge those who are outside the church (5:11–12)—by expelling the unrepentant sinner from their midst, and this is in keeping with an OT pattern of exclusion.

2. *Specific Textual Details of 5:13*

Thus, after making his argument, Paul concludes that he does not judge outsiders, since that is God’s concern; rather he, and the church with him, are to judge those in the church (1 Cor 5:12). He then substantiates his case by quoting the saying from Deuteronomy: “Purge the evil person from among you” (v. 13). This phrase can be found in Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7 (cf. Judg 20:13), and it should be noted that the verb “expel” (ἐξάιρω) used in the LXX of these passages from Deuteronomy occurs only here in the NT.³⁴

In regards to the actual citation itself, “The texts in LXX Deuteronomy and 1 Corinthians are identical, apart from changes that suit Paul’s epistolary context: the verb changes from a singular future indicative to a plural aorist imperative.”³⁵ This particular quote is used a number of times in Deuteronomy, and thus it seems to form a particular pattern for the way in which Israel dealt with sinful members of the community. In order to ascertain the significance of this quote and its impact on how one conceives of the disciplinary situation in Corinth, the OT context must be considered at greater length.

3. *1 Corinthians 5:13 in its Deuteronomic Context*

Deuteronomy, the final book in the Pentateuch, is set directly prior to the people of Israel entering the land of Canaan. It is a crucial juncture in Israel’s history and appears to be significant theologically to NT authors, who cite the book numerous times.³⁶ Following the exodus, after the first generation of Israelites has died off due to their sin and lack of faith in God, Moses issues a retelling of the law to the people. The book begins with a recounting of Israel’s history (1:1–3:29), followed by the stipulations of the law (4:1–26:19), the specific blessings and curses that will accompany obedience to this law or lack thereof (27:1–30:20), and the arrangement of succession in leadership from Moses to Joshua (31:1–34:12). These stipulations found in Deuteronomy appear to flow from the command to love the Lord

³³ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 709. See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, 88; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 95–96; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7*, AGJU 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 68–70; Rosner, “Drive out the Wicked Person,” 30; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 417.

³⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 709.

³⁵ Rosner, “Deuteronomy in 1 and 2 Corinthians,” 121.

³⁶ For a helpful monograph on this subject, see Maarten J. Menken and Steve Moyise, eds., *Deuteronomy in the New Testament*, LNTS 358 (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

with their entire being (6:1–9).³⁷ In essence this is a book about a holy God who has elected a people for himself and made a covenant with them to bless and multiply them, if they put their faith in the Lord and obey his commands. The obedience of his people is a serious matter to the God of Israel.³⁸

The concept of exclusion due to unrepentant sin is a resounding theme in the history of the nation of Israel. The phrase Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 5:13 is used several times throughout the book of Deuteronomy to describe how the nation of Israel should deal with particular sin issues within the community.³⁹ The first use of this phrase is found in Deuteronomy 13:1–5, which is contained in a passage that speaks of how Israel should respond to false prophets in their midst. Here, and in all other instances of this phrase in Deuteronomy, the people of God are told to put the sinner, in this case the false prophet, to death. “The threat of execution for such an offender was designed to prevent the spread of infection and purge out the evil from the midst of Israel (cf. 17:12; 19:11–13; 21:18–21; 22:21–24; 24:7). The question was: how could the corporate life of Israel be kept true to Yahweh?”⁴⁰

A second use of this phrase is found in Deuteronomy 17:7 where the text speaks explicitly about the way in which Israel should deal with those who worship other gods (17:2). There had to be at least two valid witnesses against the accused person in order for a case to be established and the death penalty (17:5–7) to be put into effect.⁴¹ Having given true testimony, the witnesses cast the first stones, but shared the responsibility with the whole community. The capital punishment of the offender removed the evil, which had, by the nature of the crime, endangered the continuation of the covenant community of God (see especially 17:2 and the fact that this sin had violated the covenant of God).⁴²

After saying that a person can undergo capital punishment at the testimony of two or three witnesses in Deuteronomy 17, the next use of this saying is found in 19:19 in connection with false witnesses (19:15–21). If a malicious witness rises up against another person, and he is found to be a speaking liar about the other person, then *lex talionis* is to be put into effect, which could certainly include death for that individual, depending on the specific crime (19:19–21; cf. Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:17–20). In this

³⁷ So Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 483–86.

³⁸ For further commentary on these points see William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111–27; Tremper Longman and Raymond B Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 102–19; Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 479–511.

³⁹ Rosner states, “The foundational texts for a biblical theology of exclusion are found in Deuteronomy. Those guilty of idol worship, contempt of the Lord, sexual offenses and a variety of other social crimes are condemned with the formula, ‘you must purge the evil from among you’ (cf. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 24:7; cf. Judg. 20:13; 1 Cor. 5:13b), which signals the most extreme form of exclusion, namely execution.” See Rosner, “Drive Out the Wicked Person,” 27.

⁴⁰ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 174. See additionally Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 224; John Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Webster, NY: Evangelical, 2006), 261; Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 152.

⁴¹ One can see Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1, and 1 Timothy 5:19 for evidence of the principle of establishing a testimony on the basis of two or three witnesses carrying over into the NT.

⁴² Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 250–51.

way evil is removed from the community. This is done to deter a further breach of the covenant in the community, and instead encourage people to fear God and obey his commands (19:20).⁴³

In Deuteronomy 21:21, this phrase is again used in reference to a rebellious son who refuses to submit to the authority of his mother and father (cf. Exod 21:15; Lev 20:9). The parents, after seeking to discipline the son themselves, but making no progress, are to bring him before the elders of the city (Deut 21:18–20). This is so the parents can make the situation known to the leadership of their community and make known their efforts to bring the son into submission. At this point the men of the city are to stone the son to death, and thus purge evil from the midst of Israel (v. 21). This is done so that others will hear of it, and turn from their sin.⁴⁴

This particular expression is seen again in Deuteronomy 22 where it is cited for a number of offenses. All of these examples are seen in the context of the sin of sexual immorality (22:13–21). If a young woman is found to not be a virgin by a man who has taken her as his wife, she is to come to the door of her father's house where the men of the city will stone her to death (22:21). A second instance pertains to a man and a woman who commit adultery (22:22). As in the previous example, both of these individuals are to be put to death by the community. A final case dealt with in this chapter is an instance where a man commits sexual sin with a "betrothed virgin"⁴⁵ in the city (22:23–24). Both of these individuals are to be put to death, the woman because she did not cry out for help, and therefore it would appear to be a consensual act, the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. These commands in these three instances are to be followed so that the evil is purged from Israel.

Deuteronomy's final use of this phrase occurs in 24:7, which deals with one who seeks to steal a fellow citizen for the purpose of selling him into slavery (cf. Exod 21:16).⁴⁶ It appears that this offense may have been common in the ancient Near East, since other law codes legislate against such practices.⁴⁷ This offender must also die, as did the other sinners previously noted in the Deuteronomic context, in order that the evil might be taken out of Israel.

While it is helpful exegetically to think through these texts individually, it is also important to see how they cohere and what significance they possess when viewed in a more holistic manner. Rosner

⁴³ Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 709.

⁴⁴ Sailhamer makes this assertion when saying, "The stated purpose of the law was to eliminate the evil influence of such a child from among the people (Dt 21:21). Moreover, it was also to provide a warning to parents and children alike of the consequences of disobedience and rebellion." John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 460. This is important to keep in mind as one of the primary motivations for Paul in addressing the Corinthian church and commanding them to expel the evildoer was to prevent the sin from spreading any further in the community.

⁴⁵ It would be helpful to consider what is meant in this particular text by the phrase "betrothed virgin." "Betrothal status in Israel reflected a stronger tie and commitment than engagement in modern times. A contract has been made and a marriage price has been paid. The woman is still living in her father's house, yet she is treated as if she were already married." See Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 370. So also Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 195, who state, "Once a [marriage] agreement is in place, it is expected that other persons will respect the betrothed status of the woman as technically already married (see Gen 20:3). Thus the laws of adultery are in full force even before the actual ceremony and consummation of the marriage."

⁴⁶ Sailhamer interestingly notes, "The specific wording of the law is reminiscent of the story of Joseph, who was kidnapped and sold into slavery by his brothers (Ge 37:26–27; 40:15)." See Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 466.

⁴⁷ So Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 246.

conceives of these texts forming three distinct motifs that are noteworthy for rightly understanding the pattern set forth in Deuteronomy, and, consequently, Paul's citation of these texts in 1 Corinthians 5:13.⁴⁸ The first motif that is noted is the idea of corporate solidarity or responsibility.⁴⁹ "Not unlike the pagan sailors who felt compelled to eject Jonah in order to restore a safe passage for their ship, the people of God removed certain offenders as an exercise in corporate responsibility, in order to avoid impending judgment and to protect the felicitous existence of the community before God."⁵⁰ Though not cited previously, there is a phrase in Deuteronomy that is similar to the one focused on here, which states, "You shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst" (19:13; 21:9). In both cases this phrase expresses the penalty for the crime of murder. That "blood guilt" touches the whole community is made clear in Deuteronomy 19:13, where the motivation for the expulsion is so that it may go well with the nation (cf. 21:8). Thus, "The notion of 'blood guilt' introduces the motif of corporate responsibility, in which the community is held responsible for the sin of an individual."⁵¹ This reality is evident in the case of a man like Achan, who sinned against God's command by taking riches from Jericho. Not only did Achan suffer, he also brought trouble on the whole nation since there was a corporate solidarity in the sin committed (Josh 7:1–26).

A second motif that can be cited is that of maintaining the holiness of the nation.⁵² Holiness is an overarching theme that can be seen throughout the Pentateuch. Israel is the nation whom God has set apart for himself (Exod 19:5–6), and is called to be holy as God is holy (Lev 20:26). Therefore, when blatant, unrepentant sin comes into the community it must be removed, as these passages in Deuteronomy call for, in order that the nation might remain set apart to the Lord in accordance to His law. This motif can perhaps be seen most readily in Deuteronomy 13:5, where Israel is told to rid themselves of false prophets because they teach rebellion against the Lord who brought them out of Egypt and redeemed them from slavery. This verse closely parallels Exodus 20:2, where God reminds his people of their redemption and then proceeds to elucidate the law that is to be embraced. Thus, holiness is hinged upon God's people keeping the law, and when someone breaches that law they are to be purged from the community that the nation may continue on as holy to the Lord.⁵³

One final motif to be noted in this context is that of covenant-keeping.⁵⁴ People are expelled by these formulas in Deuteronomy for having breached the covenant of God. Deuteronomy 17:2–7 makes this abundantly clear (cf. Josh 7:15; 23:16).⁵⁵ The very reason for the execution of this individual is due to the fact that he is transgressing God's covenantal dealings with his people, specifically in the Mosaic Law (17:2). Another reason for excluding the transgressor is to deter other Israelites from committing a further breach of covenant. "Deuteronomy 19:19b–20a states: 'you must purge the evil from among

⁴⁸ See Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics*, 61–93.

⁴⁹ See Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 27–28. So also Calvin J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community: A Study of the Relationship Between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 116, who asserts, "The Old Testament often speaks of the judgment of an individual offender for the purpose of purifying the community, and how the entire community can be implicated by the sin of one of its own members."

⁵⁰ Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 27.

⁵¹ Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians" 709.

⁵² Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 28–29.

⁵³ See Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 223–24 for similar commentary on this section.

⁵⁴ See Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 29–30.

⁵⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians" 709. So also Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 30.

you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid and never again will such an evil thing be done in Israel.' The dissuasion to further sin is also a reason for expulsion in Deuteronomy 13:12–18; 17:2–7, 12–13; 21:18–21.”⁵⁶ Thus, while the focus of these texts is certainly upon the personal responsibility of the offending sinner, their effect on the community as a whole is never far from view.

Therefore, when viewing 1 Corinthians 5 and the quotation of this particular formula from Deuteronomy, the context of each of these passages must be considered and allowed to speak into the meaning found in Paul's admonition to the Corinthians. One can see an ample amount of significance in considering these Deuteronomic texts for the proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5, particularly regarding the three motifs cited and how this formula shifted from a call for execution to excommunication. Before considering this in greater detail, it is advantageous to view Jewish literature from the Second Temple period to see if and how this particular phrase was used.

4. An Analysis of Relevant Second Temple Literature

One can observe from the previous section that the primary way in which certain unrepentant sins were dealt with in the nation of Israel was by capital punishment. Thus, the phrase, “Purge the evil person from among you,” used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:13, is cited in reference to death as it pertains to its OT context. Evidence of a literal understanding of Deuteronomy's exclusion texts can be found in several early Jewish writings. For example, Sanhedrin 7:1–11:6 in the Mishnah references five capital offenses similar to Deuteronomy's exclusion pronouncements as crimes worthy of the penalty of death: idolatry (7:6); sexual relations with a betrothed girl (7:9); leading others to idolatry (7:10); rebellion against one's parents (8:1–5); and adultery (11:1). In the Temple Scroll, four violations are declared liable to capital punishment in ways corresponding to exclusion texts from Deuteronomy: leading others to idolatry (11Q19 54:19–55:1; cf. Deut 13:6–11); defying judge or priest in legal decisions (11Q19 56:8–11; cf. Deut 17:12–13); bearing false testimony (11Q19 61:7–12; cf. Deut 19:16–21); and having sexual relations with a betrothed girl (11Q19 66:1–4; cf. Deut 22:23–24).⁵⁷ Thus, there are certainly texts from this era that can be cited to show that the Deuteronomic formula was carried on in a literal fashion. However, it is also evident from other examples of Second Temple literature that capital punishment transitioned into excommunication as a way of dealing with certain sins in the community.

In citing this shift in understanding Rosner notes, “In the history of its transmission and interpretation, regularly in Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Sifre and usually in the LXX, a curse of exclusion is substituted for the death penalty in these formulae. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 5:13b we find ‘the evil man’ instead of the ‘the evil’ is to be ‘put away.’”⁵⁸ The literature from Qumran is another source from this time period that cites exclusion from the community as the disciplinary measure used for unrepentant sin.⁵⁹ Horbury, who works through the details of these documents and others (e.g., Josephus, 3 Maccabees), demonstrates that Paul's understanding of excommunication in 1 Corinthians corresponds with the practice of Second Temple Judaism, which regularly understood

⁵⁶ Rosner, “Drive Out the Wicked Person,” 30. Cf. Acts 5:1–11; 1 Tim 5:20.

⁵⁷ See Edwin G. Perona, “The Presence and Function of Deuteronomy in the Paraenesis of Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1–11:1” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), 67.

⁵⁸ Rosner, “Drive Out the Wicked Person,” 27.

⁵⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians” 709; Rosner, “Drive Out the Wicked Person,” 30.

exclusion as a surrogate or preparation for execution.⁶⁰ As has already been noted, Paul cites from the LXX rendering of the Deuteronomic formula in 1 Corinthians 5:13. “Paul does not quote the MT, which unambiguously signals execution. Paul’s understanding of excommunication in terms of exclusion is thus traditional, reflecting established rather than new procedure.”⁶¹ Why this transition from execution to exclusion took place remains to be seen, but for the present it is important for our purposes that several examples be cited from the literature listed above to give a sampling of how communities in the Second Temple era dealt with sinners in their midst.

One such document that gives an example of replacing execution with excommunication is the Damascus Document. Commenting on Numbers 15:32–36 where the man breaking the Sabbath by gathering sticks is put in custody and eventually put to death (15:34),⁶² this particular document does not call for the execution of the one who profanes the Sabbath. Rather it states, “But each man who errs and profanes the Sabbath or the holy days shall not be put to death, for he is to be guarded by the sons of man, and if he is healed of it, he shall be guarded for seven years; then he may enter the assembly.”⁶³ This text gives other examples of this practice, separating people who trespass against the Torah,⁶⁴ and calling for the “cleansing” of a person who has deliberately transgressed an ordinance.⁶⁵ Though there may not be immense amounts of data to draw from on this topic from the Damascus Document, the practice of exclusion is present nonetheless, and must be regarded as significant enough to receive commentary.

Further precedent for this practice of excommunication can be found in the Qumran community, most notably in the Rule of the Community (1QS). First, in regards to an individual who walks “in the way of wickedness,” this document tells the community that, “he shall keep far away from him in

⁶⁰ See William Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” *VT* 35 (1985): 27–30.

⁶¹ Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, 82. See also Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” 28, for further details regarding Paul’s use of the LXX in quoting the saying from Deuteronomy. He states, “The view that this Septuagintal rendering is associated with the use of a curse of exclusion as well as, or instead of, the death penalty is strengthened by the Pauline use of another interpretive translation which is common to both LXX and Targum. ‘The evil,’ which ‘you shall put away,’ in the Deuteronomic formula which concludes the prescription of the death penalty at Deut. xiii 6 (5), xvii 7 and elsewhere, is interpreted as ‘the evil *man*’ sometimes in the LXX, and regularly in Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, and in Sifre. St. Paul does the same, but uses the quotation (1 Cor. v 13, probably from Deut. xvii 7) to support an admonition not to mix with sinners, immediately following a sentence of excommunication (1 Cor. v 5). This application of the words, in a passage which seems, as already noted, to reflect established rather than new procedure, is itself likely to be traditional. Thus far, then, one well-marked interpretative rendering in the LXX and Targum, and the Pauline use of another, viewed together with Josephus’ interpretation of Deut. xiii as requiring execution or a surrogate, can all be said to make sense if exclusion did sometimes replace, or prepare for, the covenantal death-penalty.”

⁶² Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” 28.

⁶³ CD 12.3–6, cited from James Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, Volume 2: Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

⁶⁴ CD 9.16–22. Newton, commenting on this passage, notes that this action is not just about the offender in this case, but is also about the community as a whole. “The man is excluded from the ‘purity’ to prevent any chance of his polluting the community.” Thus, the action, like that Paul is admonishing the church in Corinth to take, is about dealing with individual sin and also maintaining the holiness of the community. See Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, 41.

⁶⁵ CD 10.2–3.

everything.”⁶⁶ It is also asserted by this community that those who lie about their property or income, has a stubborn spirit, or addresses his associate impatiently or with disregard are subject to a year of exclusion from the community.⁶⁷ Finally, those who transgress the Torah of Moses inadvertently will be separated from the pure food and not asked for judgment or counsel for two years, but if he transgressed the Torah deliberately or through negligence, he will be banished from the “Council of the Community,” and never come back again.⁶⁸ Again, one can see the emphasis on purity in the Qumran community, and this value appears to lead to the attentive practice of excommunication.⁶⁹

In addition to these sources, some of the targumic and early rabbinic literature attest to the exclusion of apostates, who by the nature of their offense should receive the death penalty under Mosaic Law (cf. Deut 17:2–7). “For example, those who commit this sin [of apostasy] are not allowed to eat the Passover (Ex 12:43 in Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan), or receive the help due to an enemy, according to Exodus 23:5 (Tos. B.M. 2.33), or offer a sacrifice with the children of Israel (Lev 1:2 in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Sifra).”⁷⁰ One other rabbinic source that appears to parallel Paul’s use of the OT in 1 Corinthians 5:13 deals with banning heretics from the synagogue (*m. Sanh.* 11.2).⁷¹

More examples could be cited from the literature of this time period, but the instances noted above indicate that expulsion from the community was a common practice, and seems in many cases to have replaced execution. The question must be asked as to why this shift took place from capital punishment to excommunication, and what significance this has for Paul’s use of the Deuteronomic formula in 1 Corinthians 5:13. Roetzel, showing connections between the NT and literature from the Second Temple period, provides what may prove to be significant assistance in answering that question.

Given the tendency in Jewish apocalyptic to shift judgment more and more into a realm beyond history, shifting the administration of the death penalty to God might be expected.... The new element in Paul, however, is his belief that the *final* vindication has already begun. Paul’s concern for the purity of the church resembles not only the emphasis of the priestly writers, but also the preoccupation of the Qumran community with purging the community of unclean members. Since membership in the Qumran sect was considered proleptic membership in the new covenant community of the

⁶⁶ 1QS 5.10–18, cited from James Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, Volume 1: Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

⁶⁷ 1QS 6.24–27. See also Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, 43–44.

⁶⁸ 1QS 8.20–27. For further explanation see Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, 42–43; Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, 47.

⁶⁹ For a helpful comparative analysis of pertinent Qumran texts (some of which have already been mentioned) and 1 Corinthians 5, see Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, “A Legal Issue in 1 Corinthians 5 and in Qumran,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge, 1995: Published in Honour of Joseph M. Baumgarten*, ed. Moshe J. Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen, STDJ 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 489–98.

⁷⁰ Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” 35:29.

⁷¹ See C. K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background: Writing from Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire that Illuminate Christian Origins*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 210–11; Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 384.

future, strict discipline was imposed to keep life in the present congregation consistent with membership in the future family.⁷²

Therefore, it seems that a trajectory can be noted in the literature from this time period, and even in the OT (cf. Ezra 10:6–8),⁷³ placing emphasis less on execution and more on exclusion from the community of faith as the primary practice, and this trajectory can be seen at in varying instances as eschatological in nature. For our purposes, it appears that in the NT this trajectory is rooted in the work accomplished by Christ, which produced a paradigm shift in salvation history.

5. *The Theological Significance of the Exegetical Data*

Rosner and Ciampa assert that Paul employs these texts from Deuteronomy to point out the threads of covenantal and corporate responsibility that run through the passage and complement his purposes for the church in Corinth. “Once again we see Paul using Israel as an analogy for the church. If God’s people in Israel expelled certain sinners, then God’s people in Christ should do no less.”⁷⁴ Certainly one must affirm that Paul is using this text in an analogous manner, and the themes of covenant and corporate responsibility are crucial to Paul’s argument. However, his purpose seems to extend beyond mere analogy. While God commanded Israel to rid themselves of unrepentant sinners through capital punishment in the OT, he now calls the church to remove the wicked person from the community of faith. What was once dealt with through physical death is now a declaration of eschatological judgment, if the individual under discipline does not repent.

Horton helpfully explains this reality regarding excommunication in a more comprehensive fashion: “Just as God’s future ‘intrudes’ on the present through Word and sacrament (the inauguration, sign, and seal of the new creation and the wedding feast), excommunication is an eschatological sign of the last judgment in the present. As a sign, however, it is declarative and not definitive: absolution is always held out as the end goal.”⁷⁵ Elsewhere, Horton makes this statement even more definitive.

Through preaching, baptism, and admission (or refusal of admission) to the Communion, the keys of the kingdom are exercised.... The “binding and loosing” involved in church discipline is at issue in every liturgical absolution, sermon, baptism, and Communion.

⁷² Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, 117.

⁷³ For some detail on this transition in the OT see Richard Haslehurst, *Some Account of the Penitential Discipline of the Early Church in the First Four Centuries* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 2–3.

⁷⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 710.

⁷⁵ Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 272. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 425–26, who says, “Exercising discipline in the church has nothing to do, however, with a literal repetition of divine wrath.... Historically the church has responded to heresy not with literal ‘wrath and fury’ but with what is perhaps the theological and ecclesiological equivalent: anathema and excommunication.... To excommunicate, then, is formally to recognize that a person has taken himself or herself out of the play of the divine communicative action.... To repeat: those who perform ‘some other drama’ take themselves out of the redemptive action. Excommunication is thus an outward or formal recognition of an inward reality, namely, the fact that the heretic is no longer oriented to the way, the truth, and the life. *Excommunication is a dramatic symbolic action that signifies a person’s lack of communion with God*” (emphasis original).

On all of these occasions, the age to come is breaking into this present age: both the last judgment and the final vindication of God's elect occur in a *semirealized* manner, ministerially rather than magisterially. The church's acts are not final—they do not coincide univocally with the eschatological realities, but they are signs and seals. Christ's performative speech is mediated through appointed officers.⁷⁶

In other words, exclusion in the NT as a present judgment by the church is also a declaration that the unrepentant individual is not demonstrating the lifestyle of a Christian in their actions, and as such if they do not repent they may likely find themselves under the final judgment of God (cf. Matt 7:21–23).⁷⁷ This may be one reason why Paul chose to cite this particular Deuteronomic formula, to remind the Corinthians that sinful individuals were executed in the nation of Israel for unrepentant sin, and now exclusion from the church signifies the reality of death, but it refers more poignantly to God's final judgment and spiritual death.

Textually, one can see the significance of Paul's call for excommunication in exactly these terms, particularly in 5:9–13. Paul had written to them previously not to associate with sexually immoral people (v. 9), which the Corinthians took as referring to those outside the church (v. 10). Paul, however, is referring to those inside the church who claim to be a "brother," but are guilty of sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, or falsehood (v. 11). The church is not called to judge people outside the church, but inside the church (v. 12). They are to purge the evil person from among them, and let God judge those who are outsiders (i.e., unbelievers, v. 13). When the Corinthians follow through with Paul's call for action the sinning individual in effect becomes an outsider due to their habitual transgressions and lack of repentance. A few verses later Paul uses a similar list of vices, though somewhat expanded, and tells the Corinthians, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (6:9). Thus, it appears that through the proleptic act of excluding a member from the congregation, a church is declaring the one who was inside is now outside, and this is due to their sin and lack of repentance, which demonstrate their lack of true faith in Jesus (cf. 5:5; 6:9–11).

One should note the reality of this judgment within the trajectory of salvation history. The Corinthian church is living in the era of the new covenant. As such the sinning individual is being confronted after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ has taken place. In the OT those who committed certain blatant sins were put to death, as is evidenced by the Deuteronomic formula to put the evil one out of your midst. Schreiner states, "Paul does not require, however, that the man committing incest be put to death (1 Cor. 5:13). Still, the OT requirement finds a new fulfillment in Christ. The unrepentant member of the church is to be excommunicated for his sin and failure to

⁷⁶ Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 243.

⁷⁷ While exclusion or excommunication can and should be considered a declarative, eschatological sign of God's future judgment in the present, South emphasizes, "The aim of such complete avoidance was to bring the offender to repentance and restoration to the body of the community. But Paul offers no guarantee that expulsion will have the desired effect. If it does not, the protection of the community from further moral and spiritual corruption becomes of primary importance." South, "Critique of Curse/Death," 559. See also Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 234–35; Rosner, "Drive Out the Wicked Person," 34.

repent.”⁷⁸ Therefore, since the law has reached its end and goal in Christ (cf. Rom 10:4), a law like this takes on a new and heightened reality.

One can actually see that Paul has already shown this type of pattern of OT reality and NT fulfillment in 1 Corinthians 5. Observing Passover is no longer binding for Christians, but that does not cancel out the significance of Passover. Christ fulfills the Passover sacrifice in his death on the cross (v. 7). Similarly, the command to remove leaven from houses is not mandatory for NT Christians (vv. 6–8). However, the command is relevant in that it symbolizes the need to remove evil from their midst and to live with sincerity and truth.⁷⁹

Because the law is fulfilled in Christ, there is a heightened relevance for the follower of Jesus in understanding how these commands apply to them. Thus, one must look at 1 Corinthians 5:13 not as a contradiction to the Mosaic law, but as the fulfillment of that law as it has come to us through the work of Christ.

Another helpful way to see 1 Corinthians 5:13 as being eschatological in nature is to think of exclusion in relation to the practice of church membership.⁸⁰ Jesus calls for his people to gather corporately (notice, for example, that most of the NT Epistles are addressed to specific churches), to submit to qualified leaders (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), to come under the teaching of the Scriptures and faithfully administer the ordinances (Acts 2:37–47; 1 Cor 11:23–26; 2 Tim 4:1–2), and to exercise the authority Christ has given to them (Matt 16:19; 18:17). Thus, a local church gathers for a specific purpose, and they do so as the people of God who have been redeemed through faith in Christ (Col 1:13–14). Excommunication, therefore, reveals the false nature of an individual member’s profession of faith due to their continual sin and lack of repentance. This present declaration by the congregation is a sign of God’s final judgment to come.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul calls on the Corinthian church members to protect the gospel by no longer identifying themselves with the man committing a sin that even non-Christians would question. They are the people in the city of Corinth who publicly assemble in the name of the Lord Jesus, and exercise the authority given to them by Christ (cf. Matt 16:19; 18:18; 28:18–20). Therefore, they are responsible on Jesus’s behalf to ensure that this man is not allowed to publicly identify himself with Christ. They should break his association to their corporate name, and, by implication, the name of Jesus. They should withdraw their affirmation and oversight. They should remove him from membership and exclude him. His profession of faith no longer appears credible because his life decisions have the appearance of someone on the path to damnation.

Paul cannot know for certain that this man is not a Christian, but the church still needs to speak on behalf of Jesus. Since this man is unrepentantly acting like a non-Christian, Paul, in love, exhorts them to treat him like one by removing him. Paul’s goal, clearly, goes beyond holding God’s people together. He is interested in marking off God’s people for the sake of Christians in the church, the Corinthian

⁷⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 654.

⁷⁹ Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 653. See also D. A. Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul’s Understanding of the Old and the New,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid WUNT 181 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 408.

⁸⁰ For a helpful study of church membership and discipline and their relationship to one another, see Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*.

public at large, the name of Christ, and this man—for the sake of preserving and protecting the gospel.⁸¹ Again, while this highlights a potential eschatological reality of judgment for this person, the hope is that the person will see the error of their ways and repent of their sins, so the church can ultimately receive them back (cf. 2 Cor 2:5–11).

6. Conclusion

The use of the Deuteronomic formula, “Purge the evil person from among you,” in 1 Corinthians 5:13, while simply used by Paul as a text to reiterate his call for the excommunication of the sinning individual in the church, also has important theological ramifications for the interpreter of Scripture. While the removal from the corporate life of the church is certainly in view, this action also has eschatological implications that point toward a person’s standing in the final judgment. Roetzel helpfully comments, “It hardly needs saying that Paul is calling for these rigorous measures [in 1 Corinthians 5] to equip the church to stand in the final Day. The first fruits of the Kingdom are tasted in the present, but these preliminary signs summon the church to special watchfulness.”⁸² This is so because excommunication serves as a declarative sign in the present of God’s final judgment to come.

This understanding of discipline has serious ramifications for the life and wellbeing of the church. Rightly understanding the use of the OT in the NT is a crucial discipline in grasping the trajectory of a particular doctrine and its implications for the present-day disciple of Jesus. In this particular instance, an accurate comprehension of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 5:13 dictates that we take seriously the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Nothing can be crueler than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.”⁸³ Thus, the call to discipline, and, if necessary, to exclude from the church is necessary for the health and vitality of the church.

⁸¹ Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 225. See also Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 567–68.

⁸² Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, 119.

⁸³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 107.

Diognetus and the Parting of the Ways

— Florenc Mene —

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Abstract: Is it possible to speak of a real separation between Jewish and Christian communities in the first two centuries of the Christian era? A major strand of scholarship denies the tenability of the traditional Parting of Ways position, which has argued for a separation between Christians and Jews at some point in the second century. The purpose of this article is to explore what the second-century Letter to Diognetus reveals about its author's attitude regarding the Jew-Christian relationship at that time and from that community's perspective. After exploring four of the document's features, which reveal the author's attitude regarding the Jew-Christian relations, this article concludes that Diognetus seems to reflect a historical situation where Jews and Christians were viewed as separate entities, at least for its locality.

In response to Adolf von Harnack's inadequate supersessionism—according to which Christianity emerged from its very birth as a separate entity from a dying Judaism—the mid-twentieth century saw the rise and dominance of the parting of ways (henceforth, PW) approach.¹ It affirmed Christianity's Jewish identity, emphasized Judaism's vitality, and posited a separation between the two at some point in the second century. In the last decades, however, this position has come under heavy attack. Its perceived weaknesses have led many scholars to doubt whether such a definitive parting of ways really (if ever) occurred.²

¹ PW proponents, such as James Parkes and Marcel Simon, have placed Christianity's genesis and early development firmly within Judaism. Later, the Jewish revolts (the latest being Bar Kochba's in 132–135 CE), the Jewish leaders' hatred and excommunication of Christians, as well as the latter's missionary zeal brought matters to a head. As a result, sometime in the second century, Judaism and Christianity parted ways, definitively becoming two completely separate religions (e.g., James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* [Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961]; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire [135–425]*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986]). See, however, 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 Press, 2006), for a more recent and cautious (if, perhaps, too tidy) defence of this position.

² Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, for example, has ventured so far as to say that the Judaism-Christianity separation, if it ever occurred, did so after 'late antiquity' and 'only ... by political fiat when one religion gained imperial power' ('Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian Anti-Judaism', in *A People's History of Christianity*, ed.

Different features of the classical PW position have also been critiqued in the recent book provocatively titled *The Ways that Never Parted*. Admittedly, its contributors belong to a spectrum of views regarding the eventual separation of Judaism and Christianity. Nonetheless, its overall aim is to demonstrate that the traditional PW position is no longer tenable as such.³ As evidenced in this volume, bound up with the critique of the PW are certain fundamental, if theoretical, issues related to identity and image/reality. For example, how can one meaningfully speak of a separation between Judaism and Christianity when such an identification and definition constitutes a theoretical impossibility? And how much does early Christian anti-Jewish polemic reflect the reality of the situation on the ground rather than an image forged by the early apologists in order to impose it on their readers?⁴

Daniel Boyarin, one of the volume's contributors and, likely, its source of inspiration, represents the more radical end of the spectrum. He would deem it impossible to argue for a meaningful differentiation between groups of people who appear to be separate. While he would grant that, eventually, Judaism and Christianity did part ways institutionally, this was arbitrarily initiated and accomplished by a Christian elite that was trying to create boundaries in order to legitimate itself as a separate entity from the Jews. To that end it employed heresiology. By defining the nature of heresy it constructed boundaries that excluded both Jews and those Christians who held a different opinion. In other words, Judaism, for

Virginia Burrus [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 2:254). Moreover, it now appears as if first and second-century Judaism and Christianity were not as monolithic as the PW approach makes them to be. Judith M. Lieu, in fact, argues that the idea of a universal separation must be laid aside and replaced with an exploration of 'a more nuanced analysis of the local and specific before we seek to develop models which will set them within a more comprehensive overview' (*Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*, SNTW [London: T&T Clark, 2002], 18). For a treatment of Diognetus on the issue of the forging of early Christian identity, see Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, 171–89.

³ Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 22–23. On the other hand, Dunn shows an awareness of nuances in the Jew/Christian categories and of gradations of their separation in the early period (James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, Christianity in the Making 3 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015], 598–602).

⁴ Daniel Boyarin, for example, deems it impossible to 'absolutely define who is a Jew and who is a Christian in such wise that the two categories will not seriously overlap' ('Semantic Differences; Or, "Judaism"/"Christianity"', 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], 78). He argues that only after Christianity became a state religion was it in a position to enforce an institutional separation from Judaism, although this did not necessarily change the situation on the popular level. See also Boyarin, 'Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to Which Is Appended a Correction of My Border Lines)', *JQR* 99 (2009), 28. Judith Lieu, on the other hand, has focused on the issue of image/reality. She defines image as 'the presentation, that which each text projects concerning Jews or Judaism', and reality as 'the actual position of Jews and the Jewish communities in the context from which the literature comes' (*Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996], 2). A clarification is in order here: Lieu uses 'image' and 'reality' to refer to how the nature of Jewish-Christian interaction may be understood, as well as to the extent in which Christian writings might allow us a glimpse into the Jewish reality. This article uses image/reality in a different manner (although not necessarily unrelated), to refer to whether the situation reflected in Diognetus betrays a reality of an actual Jew-Christian separation or an image constructed by its author.

Boyarin, was invented by Christianity in the latter's bid to forge its own identity. This was not a natural parting of ways, but an enforced partitioning.⁵

In the wake of Boyarin's critique, particularly as evidenced in his negation of an ideological Judaism-Christianity separation, the purpose of this article will be to explore what the second-century Christian document Letter to Diognetus (hereafter Diognetus) might reveal about its author's attitude regarding the Jew-Christian relationship in his time and from his perspective. In other words, does the author portray a separation between his Christian community and the second-century Jews, or was this simply an attempt at forging a reality that did not yet exist? The thesis of this article is that, despite its complexities, Diognetus does seem to reflect a situation where Jews and Christians were viewed as separate entities. It is, thus, viable to envision a separation sometime in the second century for the community that Diognetus represents.⁶

To achieve its purpose, after briefly mentioning the issue of dating Diognetus, this article will explore four of the document's features in order to reveal its attitude to the Jew-Christian relations in its locality. These characteristics are as follows: (a) the letter's striking silence regarding arguments from Scripture and prophecy; (b) its distanced interaction with Jewish worship; (c) by contrast, its more tangible interaction with pagan worship; and (d) its appropriation of the term *γένοϛ* to describe Christians. The first two features become even more accentuated when Diognetus is compared to other second century Christian apologists. The last two are not necessarily unique to Diognetus, but, in tandem with the first two, provide a clearer understanding of its author's position. Finally, a summary will be provided as to what may be deduced from the brief exploration of this letter.

1. Date and Integrity

Providing a date for Diognetus has proven an extremely difficult enterprise. Henri Marrou, for example, provides a broad gamut of possible dates from ca. 120 CE to 310 CE.⁷ Ultimately, he sides with a second century date because of the letter's close and numerous points of contact with writings of the apologists of this period (e.g., the Preaching of Peter, *Aristides*, Justin Martyr, Melito, etc.).⁸ Similarly, Henry G. Meecham, after providing a plethora of different dates assigned to this letter, favours a date

⁵ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1–6, 17, 27–29.

⁶ Diognetus seems a good choice particularly because it is only cursorily mentioned twice in Becker and Reed's *The Ways that Never Parted* (268 n. 37, 352). Likewise, it is never mentioned by Boyarin in his *Border Lines*. In adding the qualifying phrase 'at least for the community that Diognetus represents,' this article would concur with Lieu's conclusion that it is not possible to speak in universalistic terms regarding the separation between Christians and Jews in the early centuries (*Neither Jew Nor Greek*, 18). Further, this article does not attempt to debunk Boyarin's thesis wholesale, but rather to argue that Diognetus displays several key characteristics that should temper the more skeptical concepts about a separation between Jews and Christians in the first two centuries.

⁷ Henri Irénée Marrou, *A Diognète* (Paris: Cerf, 1952), 246.

⁸ Marrou, *A Diognète*, 251.

of c. 150 CE.⁹ Clayton N. Jefford, too, is inclined towards a ‘mid to late 2nd-century’ date.¹⁰ Thus, a second century date, while still a conjecture, appears more compelling than a later period. It is on this assumption that the argument of this article will proceed.

As to the unity of Diognetus the debate centres on whether the two final chapters (11–12) belong with the first ten. While some see the same hand behind the whole letter,¹¹ others detect two different authors.¹² Ultimately, Bart D. Ehrman’s conclusion that chapters 11–12 have come from a different hand seems to be the most plausible hypothesis.¹³ Thus, this article will only consider the argument of Diognetus 1–10.

⁹ Henry G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus: The Greek Text, with Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), 16–19. He suggests a 150 CE date because Diognetus does not extoll the ascetic life; sacerdotalism is absent; its Christology is not nearly as detailed as that of Origen; the Holy Spirit is never mentioned; it expounds on the Son’s late arrival, a motif that appears in Justin but not as much in later apologists; and it has been traditionally assigned with Justin’s writings.

¹⁰ Clayton N. Jefford, ed., *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus): Introduction, Text and Commentary*, Oxford Apostolic Fathers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28. See also Florenc Mene, *Letra drejtuar Diognetit*, Etërit Apostolikë 8 (Tiranë, Albania: Streha, 2016), 22.

¹¹ Most notably, Charles E. Hill has presented a meticulous argument as to why the whole of Diognetus constitutes a single unit. Hill lists a number of scholars who would concur about Diognetus’s integrity. These include E. B. Birks, Dom P. Andriessen, J. A. Kleist, Marrou, S. Zincone, Rizzi, and Townsley. See Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus’s Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of Ad Diognetum*, WUNT 186 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 106–27 (esp. 106 n. 40). Hill further argues that Polycarp was the author of Diognetus. His thesis hinges partly on his above-mentioned claim that Diognetus ought to be considered a single unit (i.e., including chapters 11–12). It is in this portion of Diognetus, in fact, that the term ‘disciple of apostles’ is mentioned (11.1), the same phrase that Ignatius employs regarding an unnamed Christian leader (*Against Heresies* 4.27–32), whom Hill identifies with Polycarp. Hill musters detailed evidence to identify possible correspondences between Diognetus’s contents and those of Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians* (*Lost Teaching*, 136–40), as well as other literature possibly related to Polycarp. He also presents credible evidence that the rare name Diognetus was used by two members of the same aristocratic family in second-century Smyrna (*Lost Teaching*, 160–65). Taken together, these factors make it plausible that Polycarp may have penned Diognetus. This, in turn, would push the composition date of Diognetus back to the first half of the second century (i.e., during Polycarp’s lifetime), which would be earlier than the date accepted by most scholars. In such a case, the evidence presented in this article would suggest that the separation between Jews and Christians was perceived by Diognetus’s author to have occurred even earlier than normally thought. However, as it is, Hill’s argument about the unity of Diognetus is not completely convincing not least because, as Jefford points out ‘some movement in literary form and approach is evident between chs. 10 and 11’ (Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 49). While Hill has presented a possible answer to this by positing a lost or misplaced sheet between what is now Diognetus 10 and Diognetus 11 (Hill, *From the Lost Teaching*, 110), these parts still read different from one-another. For this reason, this article will proceed on the assumption of a second-century date (not necessarily the first half of that century) and will consider only Diognetus 1–10.

¹² Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 43, provides five reasons why some posit that ch. 1–10 and 11–12 are not part of the same letter.

¹³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, LCL 24–25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124. This, according to him, accounts for ‘the sudden shift in content and presupposed audience in chapter 11–12, along with differences in vocabulary, writing style, attitudes toward Judaism (which become more positive, as in the affirmation of the law and prophets in 11.6), and genre (the final chapter appears to be a homily)’.

2. Four Revealing Features of Diognetus

Written to an unknown (possibly fictitious) pagan seeker and dignitary by the name of Diognetus, this letter gives an overview of its entire contents from the very beginning, particularly about (a) why Christians differ strikingly from both pagans and Jews in their group-identity and worship; and (b) why this religion/group came into existence so late in the world history: ‘which God they believe in and how they worship him ... neither taking into account those considered gods by the Greeks, nor observing the superstition of the Jews ..., and just why this new race or way of living came into existence now and not earlier’ (Diognetus 1:1).

Diognetus has many similarities to other second century Christian writings, in particular to Barnabas, Ignatius, *Aristides*, Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, and the Preaching of Peter.¹⁴ These apologists were trying to create space for Christianity as a separate entity from Judaism and paganism. There are, however, two striking differences in Diognetus compared to the apologists, which might serve to highlight its author’s position on the relations between Jews and Christians: its absence of explicit quotations from the Jewish Scriptures and its indifference towards Jewish practices. These two features will be considered first, before addressing the letter’s interaction with pagan worship, and its use of the γένος language.

2.1. Absence of Arguments from Scripture

Early Christian apologists generally focused on the Jewish scriptures to legitimate Christian identity. Barnabas, for instance, uses Scripture extensively, albeit giving it a different interpretation from the Jews. To its author, the Scriptures do not belong to Jews, but to Christians (Barnabas 13; 14.1–4); thus, for him, ‘covenant people’ ‘is a title exclusively reserved for the Christians.’¹⁵

The Preaching of Peter, likewise, exhibits a willingness to interact with Jews by means of Scripture in order to prove Jesus’s claims. For instance, it notes that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection were all to be found in the prophets and it emphasizes that Christians ‘say nothing apart from the Scriptures’ (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.15, quoting from the Preaching of Peter). Scriptural fulfilment is ‘a significant, if not central, aspect of [this] work.’¹⁶ Furthermore, the Preaching of Peter cares enough about the Jews to call on them to repent, believe in Jesus, and be forgiven. Justin, too, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, quotes Scripture extensively to prove that it spoke of Christ, that the true people of God are now the Christians, and that Jews simply do not want to understand the scriptures.¹⁷ He, too, nonetheless, concludes with a call to Jews to believe in Jesus (*Dialogue* 142).

Diognetus, on the other hand, is closer to *Aristides* in that ‘both ignore the Old Testament as far as actual citation is concerned, and neither uses the argument from prophecy.’¹⁸ *Aristides*, however, does

¹⁴ While space would not permit an in-depth comparison of Diognetus with these apologists, a few striking differences might suffice to show Diognetus’s attitude towards Judaism. As to similarities among apologists and the nature of their anti-Jewish arguments, see Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 155–90.

¹⁵ James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, WUNT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 69.

¹⁶ Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 237.

¹⁷ Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 241–44. Dunn (*Neither Jew Nor Greek*, 562–64), provides more than seventy direct quotations mentioned on the first day of Justin’s purported dialogue with Trypho.

¹⁸ Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 59.

not completely disregard Jews. It admits that they are nearer to the truth than other groups, and that Jesus was Jewish. At this point, Diognetus parts ways with *Aristides* too. Despite speaking about Jesus and his mission at length (chs. 7–8), Diognetus fails to mention Jesus’s Jewishness, or at least that he came to the Jews first. Its Jesus is purely the revealed Son of God sent to ‘us,’ the entire world. Christ comes across as having descended from heaven unexpectedly, rather than as the fulfilment of prophecy. Such is Diognetus’s lack of overt interaction with the Jewish Scriptures.

It might be, as Michael F. Bird has pointed out, that Diognetus’s content echoes Jewish Scriptures and even New Testament writings.¹⁹ However, while its author may have used Old Testament-like forms of critique against pagan sacrifices and idolatry, it is striking that he never quotes Scripture explicitly when he addresses Jewish practices—despite the fact that these writings constituted the lowest common denominator between Christians and Jews.²⁰

2.2. A Distant Interaction with Jewish Practices

Diognetus’s scriptural silence becomes even more telling in view of a second feature: its author’s indifference to Jewish practices. Early church literature, in general, interacts with Jewish practices while ultimately denying their legitimacy.²¹ Some consider Jewish worship unacceptable on the grounds that Jews had misunderstood Scripture (e.g., Barnabas 2.4). Others, like Justin, maintain that Jewish sacrifices, feasts, the Sabbath, and circumcision were truly commanded by God but only because of the Jews’ idolatrous tendencies (*Dialogue* 19), or in order to mark them out for punishment by Rome (*Dialogue* 16), or because of their ‘hardness of heart’ (*Dialogue* 18). At any rate, whether they consider Jewish practices as wrong-headed by nature or as being superseded by Christ’s arrival, the apologists do try to engage with Jewish concepts. The Jew, even if indirectly, is given a voice in the polemic.

The author of Diognetus, however, is again markedly different from second-century apologists. He is polemical against Jews but not in the way one might expect. For example, he ignores the fact it might be expected of Christians to deal with Jews differently than with pagans. He simply lumps these two groups together (e.g., Diognetus 3.5, speaking about the Jews and their sacrifices: the Jews ‘do not seem to me different at all from those who show this same reverence to the deaf images: the latter, to those unable to receive this honour, and the former [i.e., the Jews] think they are offering it to Him how needs nothing’) and equates those who worship the wrong gods (pagans) with those who worship God wrongly (Jews). His anti-Jewish rhetoric (chs. 3–4) is indeed present but lacks the urgency of other apologists, such as Barnabas or Justin’s *Apology*. For Diognetus, Jewish sacrifices, rites, and circumcision are simply obtuse and absurd on grounds of reason, not revelation (Diognetus 4.1–6).²²

¹⁹ See Michael F. Bird, ‘The Reception of Paul in the Epistle to Diognetus,’ in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, LNTS 412 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 70–90. After perusing the evidence, Bird concludes that Paul was ‘clearly the most formative intellectual force’ behind Diognetus’s theology (p. 87).

²⁰ Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 96.

²¹ See, for example, Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 95–96.

²² Contrast this with Barnabas 2, which after criticizing Jewish sacrificial rites, resorts to Scripture as proof by quoting Isaiah 1:11–13 and Jeremiah 7:22–23. Also, Barnabas 9, in criticizing Jews for their views on circumcision, employs Scripture to refute them (e.g., Jer 4:4; Deut 10:16). Diognetus’s indifference is, thus, possibly the residue of what was once a more detailed interaction between Jews and Christians that now has become almost non-existent.

The objection could be raised, however, that Diognetus protests too much. For example, its inclusion of Jews in an appeal addressed to pagans is curious. Why mention them at all as a third party if they are unimportant? Does this not look as though the separation that Diognetus portrays is more artificial than real? In addition, at one point, its author gives Jews precedence over pagans by mentioning them first (5.17: 'By the Jews they are attacked as foreigners, and by the Greeks they are persecuted'). Jews, thus, seem to be very much present in Diognetus's thought, possibly betraying a reality of a relationship that defies boundaries. Such an objection, however, is not unanswerable when two factors are considered. First, in all other cases Diognetus begins its discussion with the pagans first and the Jews second (e.g., 1.1, Christians do not reckon as gods those considered so 'by the Greeks ... nor do they observe the superstition of the Jews'; cf. chs. 2–3). Possibly, this single reversal of this normal order at the end of its discussion of pagan and Jewish practices (5.17) might be a rhetorical strategy to bring its anti-Jewish and anti-pagan polemic to a close. In other words, having started its denunciation with pagans, it also concludes it with them, before proceeding with an explanation of Christianity's distinctive character (ch. 6–10).

Secondly, the mention of Jews in an address to pagans is not too surprising when it is remembered that Diognetus's author was, after all, a Christian writer. He belongs to a line of first and second-century Christian literature that, on different levels, interacted with the Jews in order to refute them. Beginning with Paul's letters, and continuing with Barnabas, Justin, *Aristides*, and up to Diognetus, one notices a spectrum of Christian engagements with the Jews. On the other hand, in view of its silence on Scripture and prophecy, and its interaction with the Jewish practices, Diognetus seems to belong to the opposite end of this spectrum as compared, for example, with Justin. True, Diognetus—in the long line of Christian apologetics—does not fail to mention its traditional opponents, the Jews. Nonetheless, the striking omission of traditional Christian arguments against Jews might be a sign that, for its author, Jews and their religion are a shadow from the past, rather than a present threat.

Tobias Nicklas has argued that Diognetus's dismissal of Jewish praxis is to be explained by its focus on pagans. According to Nicklas, a sign that Diognetus's primary readership was pagan is its use of Greco-Roman anti-Jewish motifs.²³ Diognetus was conscious that 'the pagan world mistrusted and ridiculed the Jews, and such writers as Cicero, Juvenal, Martial, Galen, Tacitus, Manetbo of Egypt, Seneca, Suetonius, Ovid, Plutarch, and Marcus Aurelius had little good to say about them.'²⁴ Jews were disliked for their isolated living, rituals, and circumcision; in other words, for being different from those around them. For this reason, since (according to Nicklas) Jews had become a liability to the Christian identity after the Diaspora War, Diognetus uses pagan anti-Jewish rhetoric to assert Christianity's separate entity and to endear it to pagans.²⁵ Being thus conscious of the Christians' nearness to Jews, as

²³ Tobias Nicklas, 'Epistula Ad Diognetum (Diognetus): The Christian "New Genos" and Its Construction of the Others', in *Sensitivity towards Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, ed. Jacobus Kok, Tobias Nicklas, Dieter T. Roth, and Christopher M. Hays, WUNT 2.364 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 490–504. See also, Tobias Nicklas, 'Identitätsbildung durch Konstruktion der "Anderen": Die Schrift Ad Diognetum', in *Early Christian Communities Between Ideal and Reality*, ed. Mark Grundeken and Joseph Verheyden, WUNT 342 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 216.

²⁴ Lee Martin McDonald, 'Anti-Judaism in the Early Church Fathers', in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 222.

²⁵ Nicklas, 'Epistula Ad Diognetum', 500–1.

Bernd Lorenz would put it, Diognetus drew some borders in order to separate Christians from Jews in the eyes of pagans.²⁶

While Nicklas's view has its merits, it is not entirely convincing. Diognetus's silence on Scripture cannot be accounted for simply by the fact that it is addressed to pagans. After all, another second-century Christian writer, Theophilus of Antioch, quotes Scripture extensively even though his addressee is a pagan friend, Autolytus (e.g., Theophilus, *Autolytus* 1.7; 1.11; 2.10; quoting Ps 3:3; Prov 24:21–22; 8:27; Gen 1:1). It might be more probable to explain Diognetus's lack of interaction with Jews because they were a distant memory for its author. This does not necessarily mean that the Jewish community's presence at the time had waned as Nicklas proposes.²⁷ Incredible distance often exists between two cultural/religious entities even if they live in 'geographical proximity'.²⁸ This might reflect the situation in Diognetus's time.

Additionally, contra Nicklas, Diognetus's anti-Jewish rhetoric seems more in the line of Christian polemics than in that of pagan anti-Jewish rhetoric. Diognetus's critique, for instance, is not characterized by the common pagan anti-Jewish vitriol, which accused Jews of being Egyptians who had been cast out of the land for contracting leprosy, of looking beggarly, of doing anything for money (including magic), or of being haters of humankind.²⁹ Its critique is almost benign compared to such pagan rhetoric, reflecting traditional Christian anti-Jewish polemic. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, Diognetus's clear distance from some salient features of such Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric might reflect a separation between Christians and Jews in its day.

2.3. Interaction with Pagan Worship

In view of its lack of interaction with both Scripture and Jewish worship, it is noteworthy to observe a third feature of Diognetus: its somewhat more tangible interaction with pagan practices. This is not to say that it accurately represents the pagan perspective, but simply that it interacts with a popular concept of paganism: the worship of idols as conscious entities. Diognetus declares that idols are manmade, perishable, and have no real existence (2.3–4: 'Are not all these made of perishable material? ... shaped by their [i.e., craftsmen's] skills into their particular forms.... Are they not all deaf, blind, soulless, without feelings, unmovable?'). As such, no one in their right mind would worship them. While some pagan intellectuals might have objected to such a caricature of paganism, Diognetus's argument is perhaps acceptable if viewed as a critique of the common people's concept of idol worship.³⁰ It, thus, appears

²⁶ Bernd Lorenz, ed., *Der Brief an Diognet*, Christliche Meister 18 (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1982), 52.

²⁷ E.g., Nicklas, 'Epistula Ad Diognetum', 502.

²⁸ T. M. Lemos, *Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine: 1200 BCE to 200 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16.

²⁹ Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22. He cites Diodorus Siculus, who said that Jews were originally Egyptians cast out from the country having contracted leprosy. Schäfer (*Judeophobia*) and Menahem Stern (*Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, Volume 2: From Tacitus to Simplicius*, Fontes Ad Res Judaicas Spectantes [Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980]) mention numerous examples of vilification of Jews by ancient Greek and Latin authors of the first centuries of the Christian era. Juvenal, for example, disparages Jews as anti-social and accuses them of strange worship and of 'beggarly manners' (*Satires* 3.10–16, 296; 14.96–106). He claims that they would even stoop to magic and fortune-telling to make some money (*Satires* 6.542–47). Their customs, according to Tacitus, were deemed 'base and abominable' (*Histories* 5.1–13).

³⁰ Nicklas, 'Epistula ad Diognetum', 494.

that Diognetus interacts with pagan worship at a more meaningful level than with Jewish practices. Although such anti-pagan polemic might not be considered to be in-depth or possibly even-handed, it is nonetheless emphatically present.

By comparison, the letter's argument against the Jews (ch. 3–4) is more muted. Even when, for instance, it states that Jewish boasting in circumcision as a sign of election is ridiculous (4.4), Diognetus does not offer a theological answer. For its author, such a claim is invalid simply on the grounds that it puts 'the mutilation of the flesh' (4.4) on a pedestal. While this is a logic that many pagans might have supported, it constitutes no meaningful interaction with Jewish practices. He is even more dismissive when he declares Sabbath-keeping, feasts, or Jewish sacrifices as unacceptable.

To conclude this section, Diognetus's absence of arguments from Scripture and prophecy, its lack of interaction with Jewish practices, and its more meaningful interaction with the pagan worldview could be evidence that there is a certain level of separation between Jews and Christians by Diognetus's time. All that the author reserves for the Jews is cold indifference, a sign that possibly, for him, these opponents are now a distant memory.

2.4. The γένος Language

There is a final feature that, added to the above-mentioned three, could lend even more weight to the impression of a real Jew-Christian separation in Diognetus: the concept of γένος. One of the purposes of the letter is to address the pagan concept of Christians as a different race from Jews and pagans (Diognetus 1:1: 'you are greatly interested in learning about the Christians' religion ... specifically ... why has this new race [γένος] or way of life come into existence').³¹ Marrou opines that Diognetus protests against such a designation as race 'vigorously ... Christians are not a "people", a particular race of men, like the Jews were, for example'.³² Yet the letter's argument does not imply such resistance.³³ Diognetus no more protests against this pagan portrayal of Christians than it does against the pagans' impression that Christians love one-another (Diognetus 1). It seems, rather, that it takes it for granted that Christians are a race, standing apart from both Jews and Greeks. As such, the author sets out to explicate this race, rather than deny such a concept.³⁴

Three observations may be of interest here. Firstly, in his eulogy of the Christian race (chs. 6–10) Diognetus's author repudiates any common religious background with the Jews. For example, he describes Christianity in apocalyptic terms, as distanced from its Jewish background. For him, the Christ event occurred unexpectedly and unannounced (e.g., 8.9–11: 'he communicated [his plan] only to his Child.... But when he revealed [the plan] through his beloved Child and made manifest the

³¹ Author's translation. The mention of race is not unique to *Diognetus*. See also, *Aristides*, *The Preaching of Peter*, or Justin's *Dialogue*. For further discussion: Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 239–68; Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 239–68.

³² Marrou, *A Diognète*, 131. Author's translation of 'avec vigueur ... les Chrétiens ne sont pas un "people", une race d'hommes particulière, comme étaient par exemple les Juifs'.

³³ Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 32.

³⁴ Dennis Kimber Buell explains that, in the Greco-Roman world of that period, race did not denote mere ethnicity and it was often expressed through religion. As such, race was not immutable. Christianity could, thus, rightly be described as a 'race'. See Buell, 'Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition', *HTR* 94 (2001), 449–76, as well as *Why This New Race*.

things prepared from the beginning, he granted [them] all at once to us ... which none of us has had ever expected"). Hans Conzelmann describes this as 'a perspective in which "salvation history" is not only ignored but excluded. This denial is a basic motif of the whole letter.'³⁵ Conzelmann's description is perhaps somewhat too categorical; for instance, a term like 'his wise plan' (8.10) shows some connection to Jewish categories of thinking, although such language could also have come from the NT (e.g., Acts 2:23; 4:28). Nonetheless, a clear sense of distancing from Jews is noticeable in Diognetus.

Secondly, it appears that Christianity as a separate race is not Diognetus's invention. It seems from Diognetus 1 that the author's pagan readership already considered Christians as a separate race, a concept that is already present in the New Testament. For example, 1 Peter 2:9 identifies the church as 'a chosen race' (γένος ἐκλεκτόν) and 'a people for his own possession' [λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν], alluding to designations for ethnic Israel in Isaiah 43:20 LXX.³⁶ *Aristides* reflects the same impression. Thirdly, it may also be noted that even first and second-century pagans often viewed Christians and Jews as different, even if related, entities.³⁷ While Boyarin would insist that an absolute definition of Jews and Christians is a theoretical impossibility,³⁸ pagans and Christians (and possibly Jews) seem to have drawn such a distinction regardless. At least, on a practical level, they seem to have acknowledged that Christians and Jews were not the same entity. This implies that Judaism (for lack of a better term) might have been more than just a Christian construct.

As a result, Diognetus's claim that Christians are a race, acknowledged as such by pagans, and opposed as such by Jews (ἄλλόφυλοι, 5.17),³⁹ may be more than just an image that its author is striving to impose on his readers. It might rather depict a reality of separation between Jews and Christians, at least for his time and location. When added to the other three factors explored above, the γένος concept, while not unique to *Diognetus*, seems to further corroborate a state of separation between Jews and Christians.

3. Summarizing the Evidence

It was beyond the scope of this article to conduct an in-depth study and critique of the different positions related to Jewish-Christian relations in the first two centuries, nor was it its goal to completely disprove Boyarin's claims. Its aim was rather to isolate a Christian witness from this period and to

³⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 287.

³⁶ See David G. Horrell, "Race", "Nation", "People": Ethnic Identity-Construction in Peter 2.9; *NTS* 58 (2012): 123–43. Many thanks to Brian J. Tabb for pointing me to this article, and for his other helpful suggestions; I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewer for their valuable feedback.

³⁷ See, for example, the quoted portions from Celsus or Porphyry in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors: Volume 2* (e.g., 269, 277, 286–87 [Celsus], 432 [Porphyry]).

³⁸ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 21.

³⁹ As Claudia Setzer suggests, ὡς ἄλλόφυλοι is best translated, not '*as if* [they were] foreigners', but 'as [the] foreigners [that they are]'. Diognetus 'does not imply elsewhere that Christians really are not outsiders to Judaism and the Jews are mistaken in treating them so' (*Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30–150 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 214 n. 3, emphasis original). Interestingly, even such a first century Jewish writer as Josephus describes Christians as a φύλον (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.64), i.e., as a tribe different from the Jews.

explore its implications for Boyarin's hypothesis. So what inferences might be drawn from the analysis of Diognetus as outlined above?

As evidenced, there is a striking silence regarding use of Scripture, a lack of interaction with Jewish worship, but a somewhat more meaningful interaction with pagan practices. Diognetus does not present the Jews as present enemies but as a distant memory, a ghost from times past. When to this is added its concept of Christianity as a *γένος*, it seems that a separation between Jews and Christians has already occurred.

While such an analysis does not refute Boyarin's position, it would suggest that his approach be considerably tempered. And while Diognetus's situation does not easily fit within a clear-cut PW approach, it is still possible to deduce that there was, at least in his perception, a meaningful separation between Jews and Christians. It would be worthwhile, then, to keep exploring Diognetus for further insights into the complex Jewish-Christian relations in the first two centuries of our era.

To return to Boyarin's position, which served as the primary challenge for exploring Diognetus in this article, theoretical questions as to an absolute definition of 'Jew' and 'Christian' are admittedly difficult (if not impossible) to answer. On the other hand, it looks like, for Diognetus, as well as for many pagans of this period, such a distinction certainly was made, however it may have been defined. That Diognetus is able to speak of 'us' and 'them,' of 'Jews' and 'Christians,' demonstrates that, at least on a practical level, such a separation was visible enough to the parties involved. This is also borne out by the fact that pagans, too, were often able to distinguish between these two groups.⁴⁰

As to the issue of image and reality that keeps haunting the PW position, it is not easy to distinguish one from the other in Diognetus. However, claims that would suggest that the Jew-Christian separation is just an image created and imposed by proto-orthodox Christian elites are faced with an important question: how, then, was it possible that such an image became so quickly a widespread reality in Christian communities in different regions?

If the observations above hold any value, Judaism does not appear to have been, as Boyarin argues, simply an entity created by Christian elites. Rather, by Diognetus's time, it was already viewed as a separate group from Christianity. Ultimately, whether this was the result of a long boundary-drawing process on the part of Christian elites, or of a natural process of identity formation and separation, is not fundamental to this analysis. What is to be noted is that, by Diognetus's time, and for its specific location, such a separation had apparently become a historical reality. Thus, it would seem that Judaism's identity

⁴⁰ Three examples will suffice. First, the Roman historian Tacitus (ca. 56–106 CE) distinguishes between Christians and Jews. He describes the Jews by saying that 'as a race [*gens*], they are prone to lust.... They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference' (*Histories* 5.5.2). Tacitus, thus, is aware of circumcision as a special mark of the Jews. Moreover, they are deemed a separate race and people. On the other hand, he deems the Christians a new "superstition" that, though born in Judea, had later spread to the capital of the world's strongest empire, Rome (*Annals* 15:44.2–5). Second, the emperor Nero (ruled 54–68 CE) also considered Christians a different group from the Jews. He was able to exclude them from the Jews, identify them as the arsonists that had purportedly set fire to Rome, and execute them. As Stern notes, this constitutes 'the earliest evidence of the treatment of the Christians as a group to be differentiated by the Roman government from the main body of the Jewish nation, thus requiring measures that would not include the Jews who remained outside the sphere of Christianity' (*Greek and Latin Authors*, 2:91). Finally, Augustine (*City of God* 19.23) quotes the pagan philosopher Porphyry (c. 234–305 CE) as follows: 'In these verses Apollo made manifest the incurable weakness of the Christian belief, saying that it is the Jews who uphold God better than the Christians.' Porphyry, then, distinguishes Christians from Jews, preferring the latter over the former.

was formed long before Christianity became an institution sponsored by the Empire, armed with the authoritarian arsenal to enforce, as Boyarin argues, a partitioning between the strong and the weak.

4. Conclusion

From the above, it may be concluded that Diognetus appears to reflect a situation where the separation between Christians and Jews is an historical reality rather than an image, although not necessarily to the complete exclusion of the latter. This separation, on the other hand, may well be local, and not as clear-cut or hermetic as the PW approach would wish it to be.⁴¹ There might have been more Jew-Christian interaction on a popular level than is reflected in the extant literature. Nonetheless, Diognetus's description does seem to reflect a real separation rather than simply an attempt at creating such. Jews and Christians—notwithstanding the difficulties involved in defining these categories—are perceived as separate entities. To Diognetus and its second-century community, Jews and Christians held beliefs that were so much at odds with each-other that Christians were held in contempt by the Jews and were treated as a foreign, despised entity. Conversely, as far as Diognetus's Christian community is concerned, Jews are as much foreign to God's kingdom as the pagans. If there was any communication between these two groups by Diognetus's day, it was not one between fellow—but misunderstood—'cousins' in the monotheistic faith of Abraham, but between the saved and the unsaved.

This has direct implications for Western Christianity's efforts at interfaith dialogue with other faith communities in general and with Judaism in particular. While Christians and Jews have much in common, they are not one and the same community. In our time, interfaith dialogue has become a very fashionable term, even in Protestant circles. However, dialogue must not mean acceptance of the other's position as just as correct as one's own. Communication should not lead to compromise. Rather, it should lead to a real understanding of what others believe, so as to offer them lovingly, but uncompromisingly, the message of Jesus of Nazareth as the only viable way to inclusion into God's community of the saved. Just as Diognetus explains, Christians must be willing to serve others selflessly, but also to suffer for Christ rather than compromise their message. Diognetus is an indictment of boundary-erasing, faith-merging ecumenism, which asserts that what unites monotheistic religions is more important than what divides them. Such a view makes a mockery of all the sides involved. All who care about the teachings of their respective religions know that compromise is not the answer. No wonder that Paul, a consummate Jew and a believer in the Jewish Messiah, went to all races and people-groups preaching that 'there is no other name [but Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:2). Diognetus's author would have fully agreed. If we love our neighbours, whether those of faiths nearer or farther away from ours, interfaith dialogue is healthy only if it leads to clarity of gospel-communication, not to erasure of faith boundaries.

⁴¹ It must be noted that Dunn and Parkes, two PW proponents, have long acknowledged the complex nature of the Jew-Christian separation. For a fresh defence of PW in the wake of *The Ways that Never Parted*, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, 'The Ways that Parted: Jews, Christians, and Jewish-Christians ca. 100–150 CE', in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The Interbellum 70–132 CE*, ed. Joshua J. Schwartz and Peter J. Tomson, CRINT 15 (Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL, 2018.), 307–39. Most recently, Doosuk Kim ('The Parting of the Way: A Survey of the Relationship between Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries CE', *Themelios* 46 [2021]: 79–98) has presented a nuanced argument about the Parting of Ways as a gradual process that began in the first century and came into clearer view by the second century.

Beginning at the End of All Things: Abraham Kuyper's and Klaas Schilder's Eschatological Visions of Culture

— Dennis Greeson —

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Abstract: Abraham Kuyper's theology of culture is gaining interest in the English-speaking world, especially among those outside the Dutch Reformed tradition. Historic debates in the Dutch Reformed tradition over Kuyper's hallmark doctrine of common grace often seem parochial or irrelevant to contemporary engagement with his thought. Revisiting one figure in those debates, this essay argues that Klaas Schilder, one of Kuyper's most vocal critics, offers an important counterbalance to problematic features of Kuyper's theology. While the divide between Kuyper and Schilder has historically been severe, consideration of their similarities regarding their eschatological vision of Christian cultural creation offers a way to harmonize their differences.

“Kuyperians were pluralists before pluralism was cool,” writes James K. A. Smith.¹ Indeed, neo-Calvinists in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) display a marked fondness for stressing the possibility and imperative of shared cultural labor between Christians and non-Christians in society.² Christians can work alongside non-Christians to create God-glorifying artifacts of culture, such as art or music, as well as less tangible elements of culture, such as shared values, language, philosophic systems, or social and political institutions. While Smith certainly appreciates such contributions of the

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Cultural Liturgies 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 131.

² Kuyperian “principled pluralism” holds that institutions and associations should be free to orient themselves unto the teleological and metaphysical ends which they see fit, without interference from the state. For helpful articulations of “principled pluralism,” see Jonathan Chaplin, “Rejecting Neutrality, Respecting Diversity: From ‘Liberal Pluralism’ to ‘Christian Pluralism,’” *Christian Scholar's Review* 35 (2006): 143–75; Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of the State and Civil Society* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 5–19; Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

Kuyperian tradition, his critique aims at correcting what he perceives to be far too great an interest in the *commonness* which Christians share with the rest of society, at the expense of neglecting their distinctiveness. Neo-Calvinists have lost a sense of Christianity's prophetic cultural witness, he argues. Or, to put it in more Kuyperian terms: neo-Calvinists have neglected the ecclesial contours of the *antithesis* between Christ's work of redemption and humanity's rebellion in sin. More specifically, they have failed to live out the active ministry of the institutional church of shaping communities in the distinctiveness of Christian liturgical life, which in turn is to serve as a leavening force in society for civic virtue.³

To rekindle the force of the Kuyperian antithesis, Smith has shown interest in the lesser known influence of Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder (1890–1952). Schilder, a strident critic of Kuyper and his legacy, provides what Smith sees as an element lacking in many contemporary neo-Calvinist theologies of social and cultural life. This is namely a “dispositional deflection” away from public life steeped in non-Christian principles, while at the same time providing a call to remain faithfully present within society, for its good and for Christ's glory.⁴ Smith is not alone in recognizing the value of the greater emphasis Schilder puts on what neo-Calvinists call the antithesis, the epistemic and existential divide between regenerate Christians and the unregenerate, especially concerning social and cultural cooperation. A growing group of Kuyperians have begun to look to Schilder in an effort to strengthen their Kuyperian heritage.⁵

This willingness of those sympathetic to Kuyper's theology of culture and common life to reach across what has been a bitter divide in the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition represents a promising new

³ Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 142, 144.

⁴ James K. A. Smith, “Reformed Monasticism? Klaas Schilder for the 21st Century,” in *Wie is die man? Klaas Schilder in de eenentwintigste eeuw*, ed. Marius van Rijswijk, Marinus de Jong, Pieter Kars van de Kamp, and Maarten Boersema, Ad chartas-reeks 22 (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2012), 202. Smith describes his turning to Schilder as motivated by his dissatisfaction with certain Kuyperian tendencies: “I began to worry that ‘common grace,’ while often invoked to encourage Christians to ‘transform culture,’ was actually functioning as a license for assimilation to culture.” Smith, “Reformed Monasticism?,” 197.

⁵ Two other Kuyperians who have expressed an interest in Schilder are Richard Mouw and Henry Van Til. Although avowedly critical of many elements in Schilder's thought, Mouw shows an interest in Schilder's provision of a corrective to what he sees as a “triumphalist spirit and a too-easy accommodation to the patterns of non-Christian thought and action” owing to certain elements internal to Kuyperian theology. Richard J. Mouw, “Klaas Schilder as Public Theologian,” *Covenant Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 287. In his forward to Schilder's *Christ and Culture*, Mouw expresses appreciation for Schilder's eschatological realism which, more so than Kuyper's thoughts on culture, see history culminating towards a cultural darkening in the rule of the antichrist prior to Christ's parousia. Richard J. Mouw, “Forward,” in *Christ and Culture*, trans. William Helder and Albert H. Oosterhoff, by Klaas Schilder (Hamilton, ON: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2016), viii. Mouw also sees, as argued in this essay, some similarities between Schilder and Kuyper. Both take seriously the call to cultural obedience on the basis of God's purposes with humanity. However, regarding their eschatological vision of the end of history, Schilder anticipates only the weakening of common grace such that as God's restraints on sin decrease, lawlessness and eventual cataclysm emerge. For Kuyper, common grace continues in its fullness and leads the best of this creation into the new creation, even if the end will come with greater degrees of lawlessness and sin because the blessings of common grace can enable expressions of both virtue and extraordinary wickedness. Richard J. Mouw, *All that God Cares About: Common Grace and Divine Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020), 108–112.

Henry Van Til echoes Mouw's sentiments, and despite his disagreements regarding Schilder's theological ground for Christian cultural life, he praises Schilder for being on stronger exegetical ground than Kuyper in his view of the enduring eschatological significance of human culture. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 154.

chapter in the conversation. Schilder rejected Kuyper's foundational doctrine of common grace with great skepticism, and any effort to harmonize their thoughts must begin elsewhere. This essay proposes to put Kuyper and Schilder in conversation yet again, seeking to find some constructive unity in their varied understandings of culture, the antithesis, and common life shared between Christians and non-Christians. Whereas much of this discussion has historically focused on areas of disagreement, little serious effort has been given to those areas where Schilder and Kuyper's theology bear similarities and can in fact work well together. The way to do this, this study proposes, is to begin where these similarities are the strongest.

For various reasons, Kuyper and Schilder disagree about much regarding creation, divine providence, and doctrines which serve to construct a "protology," that is, a doctrine of the axiomatic beginning of all things. However, their eschatological vision for culture and human life does possess some crucial harmony. This study will therefore begin at the end, so to speak, examining both Kuyper and Schilder's eschatological visions of culture, in order to discern how Christians in the present ought to understand their cultural task in light of the future. To frame this proposal, this study will survey the nature of the divide between Kuyper and Schilder on culture and common grace, before turning to their respective eschatological visions for culture to begin to work of synthesizing their views.

1. The Nature of the Divide

Beginning with the end of all things is a fitting endeavor in the study of Schilder's theology of culture. "All threads of life and revelation," he says, "lead in the end to heaven."⁶ Though his thoughts on the cultural life of the eschaton certainly diverge from Kuyper's, they do find significant common ground here as well. Schilder's main conflict with Kuyper concerns instead the beginning of history. Kuyper is famous for his expansion of the doctrine of common grace in Reformed thought as the basis for his theology of cultural life. For Kuyper, God's design for his creation is for humanity, his vice-regents, to develop the hidden potential sown into the created order as seeds awaiting germination.⁷ Cultural life, that is, the fruit of human labor as they interact together with God's created order, is but one element of this latency.⁸ Humanity is charged with the task of creation's development in Genesis 1:26–28 as part of God's command to both fill the earth and to subdue it. The fall and the entrance of sin into the life of humanity, however, raises the question of how such a task and humanity's capacity to

⁶ Klaas Schilder, *Wat is de hemel* (Kampen: Kok, 1935), 87. Cf. L. Doekes' discussion in, "Van de Alpha Tot de Omega," in *K. Schilder: aspecten van zijn werk*, ed. J. Douma, C. Trimp, and K. Veling (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1990), 127. Schilder insightfully quips, "Eschatology has to do with the end of all things, but also the beginning and the middle of history. We can only explain God's alpha in and with the other letters of his alphabet." Klaas Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden: Overwegingen van het Lijdensevangelie*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1951), 68.

⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. Van der Maas (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016–2020), 1:536.

⁸ Kuyper nowhere clearly articulates a proper definition of culture. Part of this is owed to the fact that Kuyper sees the term "culture" as fundamentally anthropocentric, focused on what humans can do with the raw materials of creation, rather than theocentric and focused on the development of what God has already sown into the fabric of material reality. N. H. Gootjes, "Schilder on Christ and Culture," in *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 37, 54–55 n. 7. Van Til helpfully summarizes Kuyper's view that "culture includes all man's labor for the development and maintenance of the cosmos, and the results of that labor, both in nature and man." Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 118.

fulfill it is affected by so deep a rift in God's design for things. For Kuyper, God's common grace accounts for the existential reality that humanity has indeed been able to develop creation's latent potentials, sometimes for better though often for worse. Common grace, therefore, serves as Kuyper's account for how cultural life remains possible, and reveals that God's design for his creation has not been aborted, but continues to unfold and advance in this life prior to its consummation in the eschaton.⁹

Schilder, writing a generation after Kuyper, rejected Kuyper's accounting for human cultural life in common grace, partly because of what he saw as problems inherent in Kuyper's doctrine of divine providence. While both Kuyper and Schilder adamantly embraced a supralapsarian vision of God's eternal decrees, the nature of Schilder's critique highlights the supralapsarian tendency to frame the situation in more absolute terms.¹⁰ For Schilder, it cannot be the case that what allows both sinful humanity and the redeemed to both seemingly develop culture can be called grace.¹¹ In reality, what Kuyper calls "grace" is simply the prolonging of judgment that will ultimately result in grace for the elect but condemnation for the reprobate, justified by reprobate humanity's sinfulness manifest and magnified by their cultural labors.¹² What accounts for present cultural life is a common "tempering" of God's judgment against sin, so that his equal plans of both grace and wrath might come to completion in history.¹³

Despite such a dire prognosis, Schilder does retain a fundamentally positive view towards human cultural life, going so far as to call cultural abstention on the part of Christians a sin against God's creational calling.¹⁴ For Schilder, cultural life is one area of responsibility for humanity under God's covenant of works, which God entered into with the whole human race via Adam in paradise. This covenant bears actual expectations for faithfulness, namely to live out the fullness of the *imago dei* for which God created humanity and to the development of creation's latencies in cultural life—covenant expectations which remain in force for all humanity even today.¹⁵

⁹ For an in-depth summary of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace, along with an outline of critical responses to him, see Jochem Douma, *Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin: Exposition, Comparison, and Evaluation*, ed. William Helder, trans. Albert H. Oosterhoff (Hamilton, ON: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017), 3–127.

¹⁰ Richard Mouw helpfully examines the ways one's precommitments to supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism will affect the way one approaches a theology of cultural life. Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace: The 2000 Stob Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 53–74.

¹¹ For Schilder, God must be seen not only as universally loving creator, but more properly in the dualistic role of both elector and reprobator. *Heidelbergsche catechismus: zondag 1–4*, 1:309, 372–73; *Heidelbergsche catechismus: zondag 8–9*, 3:427.

¹² Schilder explains in relation to Kuyper's "single-track theology" which only emphasizes God's purposes of grace in preserving creation, that his "deepest tendency has always been ... to show that even after the fall continued existence of nature and man must not be characterized 'unilaterally' by the term 'grace,' because the continuation of the two on the part of God was necessary, that is, that he would have a substrate for blessing and for curse. For in order to 'realize' heaven with the full number of God's elect, as well as to 'reach' hell according to the number of his rejected ones, continuation of nature and man, and therefore history, was made possible." Klaas Schilder, "Kerkeluk leven: gebrek aan ernst," *De Reformatie*, 14 February 1948, 23e Jaargang, 159.

¹³ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 86–93, 110.

¹⁴ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 136–41.

¹⁵ Each of these elements is present in Schilder's lengthy definition of culture and humanity's cultural task, which has been summarized throughout this paragraph. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 77.

2. One Culture or Two?

One can begin to see in the above outline of Schilder's thought the emergence of his emphasis on the antithesis. For Schilder, to properly speak of culture in its present reality is to speak only in connection with its ultimate *telos*. The problem of the fall is that it detaches human cultural striving from its proper integration with right orientation of cultural life, which hinges on right worship of God.¹⁶ The hope of the work of Christ is that regeneration restores the possibility of properly integrated cultural labor, that is work which sees "every part in its proper place in the whole"—even if this is only provisionally possible this side of the eschaton.¹⁷ The recognition this brings is that according to Schilder's thought the vast majority of cultural development throughout history is debilitated by sin, even if cultural life as such remains inherently good according to God's designs.

This raises an important question, with profound implications for conceiving of the Christian's role in society. Categorically speaking, is there one type of culture, or two? If only Christian cultural development bears the possibility of being properly integrated with God's creational design, what is to be said of non-Christian culture and any commonality that the two communities share? Do God's designs for the development of culture throughout history come about through the endeavors of humanity in general, or only through his work of saving grace? Or, to put it differently, does the antithesis bring about a qualitative or quantitative distinction between the cultural lives of those united Christ and in rebellion? Kuyper and Schilder each give emphases in their theologies of culture that fall towards one of these poles or the other. The remaining aim of this study will be to highlight how each of their respective emphases are both helpful and yet not beyond critique in their own way.

3. Areas of Agreement

Before moving to a more detailed discussion of Kuyper and Schilder's respective eschatological visions, something needs to be said regarding some other broad ways Kuyper and Schilder find agreement. To this end, it is helpful to work backwards through the major plot movements of the biblical narrative. Beginning with the new creation, central to both Kuyper and Schilder's theology is the assertion that human cultural life plays an important role in the eschaton. Both agree that culture and its artifacts will be present in the new creation, and while they generally disagree on what cultural products will be in present in the eschaton and how they come to be there, this gives both viewpoints a fundamentally positive outlook on present cultural life in connection to the world to come. If culture matters to God in the eschaton, it matters now as well. Second, pertaining to the plot movement of redemption as highlighted above, both view the work of Christ as axiomatic for Christian cultural life, and while they differ on the nature and extent both hold to a resultant division between Christian and non-Christian culture. Finally, regarding the fall, both theologians place a very strong emphasis on God's will that his creational designs for culture continue to develop in spite of the disastrous effects of sin. These points therefore form the broad contours around which to parse their disagreements.

¹⁶ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 81–85.

¹⁷ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 84.

4. *Kuyper's Eschatological Vision for Culture*

A hallmark of Kuyper's eschatology is the transference of cultural life from the present creation to the new creation. In the new creation, the fruit of common grace that is the development and maturation of culture along God's creational design, "does not simply perish and is not simply destroyed in the universal cosmic conflagration, but such profit will have an abiding significance for the new Jerusalem ... for [the] honor and glory attained by our human race will be carried into this new Jerusalem."¹⁸ Though Kuyper embraces a catastrophic climax to history in which the present reality will be purified with fire, he is convinced that elements of the present life transfer across into the next. For Kuyper, this transfer gives significance and "abiding profit" to cultural life in the current dispensation, for if it were not so, the particulars of this life would dim in their eternal importance: "If nothing of all that developed in this temporal life passes over into eternity, then this temporal existence for eternal life leaves us cold and indifferent."¹⁹ For Kuyper, what transfers is more than simply the reality of embodied and enculturated lives, but also the "hidden germs of life" of actual cultural artifacts and institutions, purified in their forms by the work of God, but recognizable no less in their connection to the developments of present realities.²⁰

This transference of culture raises a question, however: Whose hands cultivate those cultural elements that transfer into the new creation? Kuyper is clear that he envisions the contributions of common grace as a whole making it into the eschaton, which implies developments from the hands of both Christians and non-Christians on the condition that they align with God's creational designs. Indeed, the preservation of history under common grace, leading to the development of the "honor and glory of the nations" is from God and not from Satan.²¹ Kuyper describes this "honor and glory" as "the degree of general development achieved by the nations in the course of history. Nothing need be exempted from this," including social life, art, political organization, law, etc., so long as it conforms to God's creational designs.²²

However, despite the fact that what is brought into the new Jerusalem comes from the nations in general, Kuyper asserts that the division within humanity which results from Christ's work in the plot movement of redemption leads to the pinnacle of cultural development being wrought by Christians.²³

¹⁸ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 1:49.

¹⁹ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 1:543.

²⁰ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 1:544.

²¹ Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 175.

²² Abraham Kuyper, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 326–27. Kuyper goes so far as to say that "the triumph of Christian Europe is absolute." Quoted in Cornelis Van der Kooi, "The Concept of Culture in Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Karl Barth," in *Crossroad Discourses between Christians and Culture*, ed. Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Wessel Stoker, Currents of Encounter 38 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 42. Kuyper's imagery of the "honor and glory of the nations" comes from Revelation 21:24–26, which pictures the "kings of the earth" bringing "the glory and honor of the nations" into the new Jerusalem.

²³ Kuyper argues that in the new creation there will be cultural differences between individuals depending on their prior context in the old creation, and that those Christians who lived in less culturally developed contexts, on account of a lack of Christian influence on the principles of the culture, will need to be "made up." Kuyper, *The Revelation of St. John*, 333–35.

The reality is, the majority of what constitutes the highest development of cultural life is brought about because of Christ's work of special grace. This is a point perhaps often neglected by Kuyper's followers.²⁴ Kuyper subscribes to "principal thinking" whereby he sees the actions and attitudes of individuals, and even on the macro level the values and products of states or institutions, as the outworking of foundational "life principles."²⁵ This leads him to see a division within humanity on account of Christ's work of *palingenesis*. That is, a new humanity reborn by the Spirit and endowed with the ability to rightly orient cultural life unto God's designs, and the old humanity remaining in sin. The result of this, however, is not an ontological dualism between the two humanities, but rather, as Nicolas Wolterstorff makes clear, an epistemological divide coupled with a firm embrace of metaphysical realism.²⁶ Sin and the fall bring their effects to bear not on objects of knowledge, but upon knowing subjects. However, since reality truly carries meaning external to the individual, sin does not preclude all possibilities of true knowledge, but rather only what Kuyper describes as "higher" forms of knowledge which involve a proper integration of that knowledge with God's rule.²⁷ While common grace maintains the conditions for knowledge, and therefore cultural creation, in the use of empirical faculties, particular grace brings about the possibility of knowledge and culture that are truly integrated with God's creational designs.²⁸

Kuyper therefore emphasizes a single line of development of culture throughout history which, though Christians serve to rightly orient and therefore lead culture to its highest forms, is brought about by the contributions of all humanity in general. The purposes of culture in God's economy are therefore to lead to the flourishing of God's church, and to lead to the maturation of the seeds implanted in creation for God's glory, both in the present and especially in the future age. Common life takes on an important role in this paradigm, for Christians really do work alongside non-Christians for God's purposes. This has led to a wealth of social thought for Western democracy emerging from the

²⁴ Perhaps the most prominent treatment of the subject among contemporary Kuyperians is Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). His thoughts, however, are oriented towards the transference of human culture in general, regardless of its Christian or non-Christian origins.

²⁵ James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 17–18; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931). Kuyper's preeminent example of principalism is seen in his *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

²⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "What Is the Reformed Perspective on Christian Higher Education?," in *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, ed. Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 284.

²⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library, 2011), 79. In lower forms of knowing, such as mathematics or sense perception, the subject supplies little information in the conception of what is received, according to Kuyper. With higher forms, such as theology, philosophy, and art, where the subject plays a greater role in perceiving the connection of an object to its *telos*, and therefore to its spiritual significance, the antithesis is seen to be absolute between sinful humanity and the redeemed, for only the redeemed can properly know God, and therefore have a sense of an object's proper relation to him. This has significant implications for understanding and creating culture for Kuyper.

²⁸ This creates for Kuyper four "terrains" contingent upon the degree to which particular grace is brought to bear upon the realm of common grace. In the highest terrain where "personal confessors of Jesus in their own circle allow the life of common grace to be controlled by the principles of divine revelation" culture reaches its highest form of development. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 199–200.

Kuyperian tradition, yet it has also, as critics have pointed out, often resulted in a neglect of the degree to which the antithesis should highlight the distinctiveness of Christian culture. It is for this reason that some Kuyperians see in Schilder a welcomed counterbalance.

5. *Schilder's Eschatological Vision for Culture*

Beginning with Schilder's vision of the new creation, while he agrees with Kuyper that human cultural life in some way transfers to the eschaton, he vehemently denies that the reference in Revelation 21:26 concerning the "honor and glory of the nations" speaks of cultural products. Rather, Schilder sees this as referring to believers gathered from all nations to inhabit the new Jerusalem.²⁹ Like Kuyper he sees the new eschatological age being ushered in not through a gradual evolution of cultural development, but in a catastrophic instant. This "catastrophe" will not "destroy any seed" implanted in the created order, but will purify it in its transference to the new creation.³⁰ The continuity brought about by such "seed" however, is not to be found in what humanity has developed throughout history, but rather in what God has implanted in the beginning with the original creation. What emerges is not new, but only perfected by the work of Christ in his fulfillment of the cultural mandate where humanity has failed.

In the plot movement of redemption, therefore, what Christ accomplishes is the taking up and the fulfillment of the office given originally to Adam.³¹ For Schilder, "Christ is the key and clue to culture."³² For Christ is the one who ultimately gives culture its value, which he does in two ways. First, Christ in his work exemplifies the integrity for which cultural labor was mandated, namely adherence to creation ordinances within the proper liturgical frame of right worship of God—the crucial element of cultural life missing since the fall. Second, Christ returns to creation in the parousia as both the "Savior-Redeemer" and "Savior-Avenger," having allowed cultural life to continue so that harvest of the elect and reprobate may have their full number.³³ Thus Schilder sees culture as the medium through which history progresses towards God's dual purposes of both grace and wrath.

The clue that Christ provides therefore is that at the fall humanity became destined to be split in two, and with them, human cultural life. This does not mean, however, that all cultural labor on the part of Christians is necessarily rightly integrated, for the antithesis remains as a divide cut across every human heart in this life. Christians are able to rightly direct cultural life only in part while they remain not fully sanctified, this side of the eschaton. Thus, both Christian and non-Christian cultural labor can result only in "truncated pyramids." These are constructions of culture using the "remnants" and "vestiges" of creation's potential which will ultimately not reach high enough to fulfill on their own the consummation of God's designs.³⁴ Such role is fulfilled only by Christ and his redeeming work. Where does this leave Christians? For Schilder it orients Christians to the fact that the imperative towards cultural labor remains in their calling under God's covenant of works to glorify him by being

²⁹ Schilder, *Wat is de hemel*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1954), 194; cf. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 149.

³⁰ Klaas Schilder, *Wat is de hemel*, 214.

³¹ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 60.

³² Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 142; Douma, "Christus en cultuur," 177.

³³ Klaas Schilder, *Christus en cultuur*, 5th ed. (Franeker: T. Wever, 1978), 75.

³⁴ Douma, "Christus en cultuur," 175; Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 115, 126.

his imagers, yet without the expectation that what Christians build or develop will endure. Rather, the purpose of cultural life is to proclaim Christ's sovereign rule over his creation.

What does this mean for an understanding of culture in general and for common life? Schilder does not hold that cultural labors of Christians and non-Christians will be dissimilar or that they cannot be mutually constructive, for the raw materials and the laws governing the development of God's creation remain the same across both communities.³⁵ Thus shared life and work is both necessary and inevitable. However, that God's cultural mandate calls for "teleologically directed cultural construction" which the antithesis precludes means that Christians bear a particular mission with cultural life which calls for a being-apart even as they remain in the present age of the mixed *saeculum*.³⁶ Namely, Christians are to create culture which leads communities to worship God. As they do so, such work strengthens both the church, and common life, for rightly oriented cultural life flows along God's creational designs according to which human life was meant to flourish. Thus, for Schilder, that there are distinctly two different types of culture should lead not to the neglect of common life, but rather to its strengthening.

6. Conclusion

It has been argued that a change in approach to the Kuyper-Schilder debate can provide new traction in overcoming what has been an intractable divide in order to resource Schilder for a Kuyperian theology of culture. In surveying their eschatological vision of culture and the resulting imperative for Christians to be diligent in the cultural labors out of a sense of calling in light of God's future work of recreation, Kuyper and Schilder impel Christians towards similar ends. Further, their respective differences, owing to divergences in their understanding of God's purposes in creation, can help strengthen the others' view by adding a counter-stress against where they each descend into problematic conclusions.

In Kuyper's paradigm, it has been seen that Kuyper provides a fundamentally positive account of cultural life, along with a strong foundation for Christian collaboration with non-Christians in common cultural endeavors. The dangers of this, however, have also been seen, as Kuyper leaves the door open for the downplaying of the antithesis. Schilder returns a theology of culture to a strong emphasis on the antithesis, and in so doing helps orient Christians to their prophetic and missional purpose in common cultural endeavors. The means by which Schilder does so, however, serves to absolutize the divide between Christian and non-Christian in God's economy in ways non-supralapsarians would find disconcerting. Can it be that God's purposes with culture necessitate an equal emphasis on wrath as with grace? Such a duality of divine purposes would be appealing only to the more extreme forms of divine determinism.

Abraham Kuyper and his theology are presently experiencing a resurgence among English-speaking evangelicals. The historic, and what often seems parochial, debates among Dutch Calvinists over Kuyper's legacy offer necessary nuance to his thought from which those eager to embrace a revived Kuyperianism should seek to learn. This study is an initial proposal of one way such debates can produce a constructive harmony which addresses several dangers in Kuyper's approach to culture. May there be more to come.

³⁵ J. P. de Vries, "Schilders betekenis voor het politieke en sociale leven," in *K. Schilder: aspecten van zijn werk*, ed. J. Douma, C. Trimp, and K. Veling (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1990), 206–7.

³⁶ Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 126.

Stories that Gleam like Lightning: The Outrageous Idea of Christian Fiction

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Abstract: We live our faith “in a condition of doubt and uncertainty,” writes Charles Taylor. Even, it seems, literary artists. In this article we argue that much contemporary fiction conforms to Taylor’s concept of secularity. We consider the relative absence of stories that dramatize spiritual realities consistent with Scripture, and we note a tendency to qualify robust Christian perspectives by means of historical context. We then propose an unapologetically Christian fiction, one that offers fictional worlds harmonious with a biblical picture of reality and that resists conformity to secularity’s spiritual ambivalence. Such Christian storytelling has the potential to transform the imagination and remind us that this world is a theater bursting with God’s glory.

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the Dutch pastor, prime minister, and theologian who founded the Free University of Amsterdam, established two newspapers, and penned countless works across multiple fields, was converted through reading a novel. Charlotte Yonge’s British best-seller, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, came out in 1853; after reading it, Kuyper “started going to church again and looked forward to taking the Lord’s Supper. Small wonder that he came to rank *Redclyffe* ‘next to the Bible in its meaning for my life.’”¹ Kuyper is just one of the many people for whom “imaginative literature ... played a crucial role in their coming to salvation in Christ,” to use Leland Ryken’s expression.² Such experiences suggest that along with fiction’s ability to entertain and delight, it has the capacity to shape one’s understanding of the world.

¹ James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 39.

² Leland Ryken, “Calvinism and Literature,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 98. For ways in which literature is instructive for the church specifically in an American context, see Stanley Hauerwas and Ralph Wood, “How the Church Became Invisible: A Christian Reading of American Literary Tradition,” *Religion & Literature* 38 (2006): 61–93.

In light of this capacity, the present article examines contemporary fiction to consider some of the ways that Christianity manifests itself in twenty-first century literature. Using Charles Taylor's and James K. A. Smith's work on secularity, we identify the predominance of secular features in contemporary fiction, as well as a tendency to qualify robust Christian perspectives by means of historical context, making them part of an unrecoverable past.³ Finally, we describe an unapologetically Christian fiction, one that offers fictional worlds harmonious with a biblical picture of reality and that resists strict conformity to secularity's spiritual ambivalence. This potentially provocative call for Christian fiction has implications for writers, readers, and teachers of literature.

1. Christian Faith in Mainstream Fiction

To what extent does Christian faith manifest in contemporary mainstream fiction?⁴ Paul Elie's 2012 *New York Times* essay "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?" is a prominent, recent answer to this question, and Elie prompted a wide-ranging discussion about Christian belief in fiction.⁵ He wrote that "if any patch of our culture can be said to be post-Christian, it is literature," and he ended the essay by hoping for a writer "who can dramatize belief the way it feels in your experience."⁶ Reactions to Elie's essay included one letter to the *New York Times* that noted the beautiful-if-fictitious and increasingly irrelevant stories of the Christian religion.⁷ Another letter said with terse irony, "Thank God" fiction writers with Christian convictions are on the way out.⁸ Whether or not one agrees with Elie's assessment, what this discussion reveals is the centrality of belief to assessments of Christianity's relationship to fiction: determining whether contemporary literature is "post-Christian" means focusing on fictional perspectives where concerns about plausibility and credulity play out in the theater of a character's viewpoint. Quoting Flannery O'Connor, Elie suggests that fiction accommodating a faith perspective is about making "belief believable."⁹

Elie's characterization of religious belief in fiction, responses to his essay, and much of the fiction that the debate appeals to, all seem to confirm Charles Taylor's concept of secularity profiled in *A Secular Age* and helpfully explicated in James K. A. Smith's *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. As Taylor argues and Smith emphasizes, the contemporary world is an age of contested belief

³ "Secular" is a complicated term with multiple meanings. We use Taylor's conception of "a secular age" ("secularity (3)"), which is "an age of contested belief, where religious belief is no longer axiomatic. It's possible to imagine not believing in God." This definition is from James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 142. For recent discussions of secularity and contemporary literature, see the articles in *Christianity & Literature* 69.1 (2020).

⁴ While "mainstream" and "literary" are distinct terms (one suggesting readership and the other artistic quality), we use both of them below in order to contrast fiction intended for a broader contemporary audience with the "Christian" fiction subcategory; occasionally, these two terms are used with only slightly different inflection.

⁵ The journal *Christianity & Literature* was among the responders to Elie's ideas, devoting an entire issue to the essay in the summer of 2014. See *Christianity & Literature* 63.4 (2014).

⁶ Paul Elie, "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?," *New York Times Book Review*, 23 December 2012, 15.

⁷ Jim Lange, letter to the editor, *New York Times Book Review*, 13 January 2013, 6.

⁸ Andy Davis, letter to the editor, *New York Times Book Review*, 13 January 2013, 6.

⁹ Paul Elie, "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?," 14.

“where religious belief is no longer axiomatic”; it is now possible to imagine not believing in God.¹⁰ With the removal of the obstacles to unbelief, and a modern conception of autonomous selfhood, a “secular” age features an “explosion of different options (‘third ways’) for belief and meaning.”¹¹ As a result, the *feel* of belief is often characterized by a distinct kind of ambivalence—what Taylor calls “cross-pressure,” which is “the simultaneous pressure of various spiritual options; or the feeling of being caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive toward *immanentization*” (that is, seeking meaning and significance within a naturalistic—or, immanent—universe).¹² As Taylor puts it, we are “on the one hand drawn towards unbelief, while on the other, feeling the solicitations of the spiritual—be they in nature, in art, in some contact with religious faith, or in a sense of God which may break through the membrane.”¹³ Thus, faith and doubt are commingled in a cross-pressured era.

For a recent example of literary fiction that demonstrates cross-pressure, take *Perfume River*, the 2016 novel by Pulitzer Prize-winner Robert Olen Butler. Here, religion is present in the way that Taylor and Smith describe. One character struggles with his mortality and wonders about death and what happens after; he frames confident rejection of an afterlife as a “faith in nothingness,” while another character has an abstract rendition of Catholic eschatology and unconfessed venial sins that she believes must be accounted for after death.¹⁴ When it comes to religion, then, *Perfume River* exhibits the kind of belief described by Taylor. Religion is invoked as a possible means of addressing mortality and transcendence; its invocation is provisional, even as characters entertain skepticism *and* longing. Cross-pressured fiction like *Perfume River* is common in the contemporary literary landscape.¹⁵

1.1. “Believable Belief” in a Cross-Pressured Era

In such a cross-pressured literary landscape featuring stories like *Perfume River*, Elie’s question whether there is contemporary fiction that expresses Christian belief should be answered with a definitive, “Yes.” Nevertheless, it is cross-pressured belief, characterized by commingled faith and doubt.¹⁶ If we think of a writer training his or her attention on the feel of faith in the present day, it makes sense that cross-pressured perspectives would predominate—even in fiction by writers who adhere to

¹⁰ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 142.

¹¹ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 12.

¹² Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 140–41.

¹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 360.

¹⁴ Robert Olen Butler, *Perfume River* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2016), 95.

¹⁵ Other examples of mainstream writers whose work features belief in the cross-pressured mode are Jamie Quatro and Chigozie Obioma. For example, Quatro’s short story “Belief,” a 2018 Pushcart Prize winner published in *Tin House*, exemplifies the cross-pressured dynamic that Charles Taylor describes: the story is divided into a treatment of the narrator’s days of belief and unbelief. “Some mornings I wake up a Christian”; “Some mornings I wake up an atheist,” as the narrator puts it. See “Belief,” *Tin House* 17 (Spring 2016): 33–36. Set in contemporary Nigeria, Obioma’s *An Orchestra of Minorities* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019) is told by the main character’s chi, a spirit in the pre-Christian Igbo worldview, but the novel also has Catholic characters, as well as Jamike, a repentant convert to Christianity. These examples represent the kind of cross-pressured belief found in contemporary fiction.

¹⁶ Taylor characterizes cross-pressured faith like this: “We live in a condition where we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on. We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 11.

a Christian viewpoint. A cross-pressured secular era clarifies the challenge for Christian writers who nevertheless write mainstream fiction for contemporary audiences but remain committed to—among other things—a full-orbed, biblically supernatural view of life.¹⁷ As Piers Paul Read puts it, “Catholics do believe that God responds to prayers, that he intervenes in our lives, that there are miracles ... [including] little miracles in our everyday life. Unless they are to write exclusively for fellow believers, the Catholic author must now offer his readers an alternative explanation for what he might see as an act of God.”¹⁸

One example of contemporary authors who depict cross-pressured Christian belief is Daniel Taylor. As a number of responders to Elie’s essay observed, a fuller treatment of faith in contemporary fiction would consider genre fiction, and Taylor offers just that with his two detective novels, *Death Comes for the Deconstructionist* and *Do We Not Bleed?* In the disillusioned character of Jon Mote, the protagonist of both novels, Taylor creatively depicts the conventional world-weary detective. Mote investigates mysteries accompanied by his developmentally-disabled sister Judy who has suffered terribly alongside Jon, but whose love and kindness attend his depression and maladjustment.

These two novels focus on Mote’s vision of the world as he reckons with a tragic past including the death of his parents and trauma from an abusive uncle, suicidal thoughts prompted by voices in his head, and his sister’s abiding faith in Christ—all of which produce a cross-pressured outlook. Jon regularly engages with Judy’s faith and his own religious past, but his despair and inability to believe in anything yield an equivocal perspective. As a result, when a suicidal Jon enters a church and experiences an exorcism at the end of *Death Comes for the Deconstructionist*, he later describes it obliquely, confirming Piers Paul Read’s observation that novelists need to give readers an alternate account for such a miraculous occurrence. Jon describes the event as follows: “I don’t pretend to know what happened.... I’m sure any self-respecting psychotherapist could give an extended opinion. But I’ve no interest in analyzing it. I’ve been down that road. All I know is I went in feeling dark and came out feeling lighter. I felt a kind of melting in me—but I can’t say exactly what it was.”¹⁹ Based on Mote’s disillusioned attitude—even as he is paired with his believing sister Judy—his version of this event conforms to the cross-pressured paradigm: it is a willing suspension of belief that leaves open the possibility of the supernatural. While Judy is a moving representation of Christian faith with whom a reader may identify, Jon’s cross-pressured perspective is the primary vantage point of the novel and governs the portrayal of events in the story.

1.2. Qualified Christian Visions

Regardless of how one might explain the presence of cross-pressured secularity in fiction (for instance, attributing it to the influence of secularity on authors of faith or as a way to accommodate

¹⁷ Theologians sometimes worry that the designation “supernatural” is implicitly dualistic, deistic, or just outright unbiblical (e.g., recent Roman Catholic debate has been shaped by Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* [New York: Crossroad, 1998]). Those are fair concerns. However, the term “supernatural” as we use it signals the dimensions of biblical reality touching on God’s miraculous presence and activity—but in no way do we exclude or minimize God’s immanence and ordinary providence. For discussion, see Robert Larmer, *The Legitimacy of Miracle* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), and C. John Collins, *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God’s Action in the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

¹⁸ Piers Paul Read, “What the Novelist Knows,” *First Things* 267 (November 2016): 38.

¹⁹ Daniel Taylor, *Death Comes for the Deconstructionist* (Eugene, OR: Slant, 2014), 192.

secular audiences), believable belief alone—cross-pressured or not—does not rule out other ways of identifying an authentically Christian perspective. Surely there are other criteria for recognizing how Christian faith can manifest in modern stories.

The stress on belief in discussions of Christianity's relationship to contemporary fiction overlooks a key aspect of fiction: fiction involves not merely inhabiting characters' perspectives but also their fictional *worlds*. This cosmological focus offers another way of addressing how the Christian faith shows up in contemporary literature. Of course, the mere fact that a fictional world portrays reality more robustly than a naturalistic perspective does not automatically imply compatibility with orthodox Christianity. As John McClure has shown, based on what he terms "postsecular fiction"—including the works of Don DeLillo, Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison, Michael Ondaatje, Thomas Pynchon, and Leslie Marmon Silko—there is a tendency in contemporary fiction toward a coherent position, namely its opposition to orthodox religion, even as it features supernatural elements. As McClure puts it, "Gods appear, but not God. Other realms become visible but either partially and fleetingly or in bizarre superabundance. Miracles and visitations suggest that the laws of nature may be contingent but without providing any clearly coded alternatives."²⁰ This fiction may be "shot through with mysterious agents and energies," and yet it serves a "religiosity with secular, progressive values and projects."²¹

There are nonetheless contemporary stories that afford an imaginative experience of thicker cosmologies *consonant* with Scripture and not merely the presence of believable believers. One twenty-first century novel that gives a moving Christian vision is Marilynne Robinson's 2005 Pulitzer Prize winner *Gilead*.²² In his essay, Paul Elie calls the Reverend John Ames—the protagonist in *Gilead*—"the most emphatically Christian character in contemporary American fiction."²³ Written in Robinson's wonderful prose, *Gilead* is an extraordinary novel, which, as Elie notes, foregrounds Ames's deeply pious view of life and not just his occasional discrete thoughts about religion.²⁴

Nevertheless, contemporary novels like *Gilead* that robustly picture a life harmonious with Christian belief are often contextualized in such a way as to qualify the perspective. These novels are situated in the past, which sometimes has the effect of marginalizing the Christian vision as an artefact from a bygone era. For example, *Gilead* gives John Ames's understanding of everyday life through a commitment to Christianity and the lens of earnest piety. But *Gilead* circumscribes Ames's religious perspective, for the novel is "set in the past, concerned with a clergyman, presenting belief as a family matter, animated by social crisis."²⁵ *Gilead* is framed as John Ames's autobiographical reflection, and the novel's retrospective and valedictory character can temper the novel's picture of the world.²⁶ As Robert Alter notes, *Gilead* is "a book in which a spiritually serious person is trying to take stock of his life," but the novel's setting and form can limit the assumed relevance of John Ames's outlook—as if such a Christian perspective

²⁰ John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 4.

²¹ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, 2, 3.

²² Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Picador, 2004).

²³ Elie, "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?" 14.

²⁴ For Robinson's debt to the prose style of the King James Bible, see Robert Alter's *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 162–70.

²⁵ Elie, "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith?" 14.

²⁶ Alex Engebretson says that subjectivity is one of the essential elements of *Gilead*. See *Understanding Marilynne Robinson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 28.

is moving but nevertheless possible only in an earlier era.²⁷ Douglas Walrath describes this aspect of the novel as follows: “[John Ames] and Gilead are already relics from another time. Gilead is clearly a world that was. It is not a world that others can join—though Ames’s experience may inspire others to find faith in their own Gilead.”²⁸ Based on its retrospective quality, *Gilead* resembles other contemporary literary fiction with a Christian view of the world, but set in the past.²⁹

Another example is Eugene Vodolazkin’s novel *Laurus*, which tells the story of a fifteenth-century Russian saint.³⁰ The medieval elements—plagues, medical remedies that include physical and spiritual components, holy fools, gritty realities of medieval life—are all delightfully depicted, and the novel makes Laurus’s theocentric life and vision of the world compelling. But the archaic elements of an alien past make his perspective exotic. Similarly, in Samantha Harvey’s recent novel, *The Western Wind*,³¹ the protagonist priest John Reve and his fellow villagers reckon with the death of a community member in medieval England, and Harvey offers a gripping first-person perspective with Reve’s description of God, time, “airborn spirits,” and the church. But again, this vision of reality that includes spiritual elements is far removed from the world of the reader.³² Such historical visions offer persuasive pictures of the Christian worldview.³³ Nevertheless, historical contextualization can temper the immediacy of the Christian outlook. Even as characters move within a thicker universe, redolent of supernatural realities, there can be an implicit message that the perspectives on display are mere timepieces, unsustainable in the twenty-first century because our world is so different.

²⁷ Alter, *Pen of Iron*, 163.

²⁸ Douglas Alan Walrath, *Displacing the Divine: The Minister in the Mirror of American Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 289.

²⁹ In her essay “Who Was Oberlin?” Robinson says that the fictional town of Gilead is modeled on Tabor, Iowa, which she argues is connected to a misapprehended yet profoundly influential past (see Marilynne Robinson, *When I Was a Child I Read Books* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012], 180–81). Although we stress *Gilead*’s retrospective quality, Alex Engebretson argues that “*Gilead*’s presentation of religion is best considered within the frame of U.S. cultural and political history after 9/11. That is, *Gilead* can be read as a response to anxieties surrounding the nation’s religious-secular divide.” *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 36. While we agree with Engebretson’s assessment that *Gilead* has connections to “contemporary and political history” (as with the novel’s treatment of race, for example), Ames’s Christian faith is nevertheless represented as an artefact from an earlier era.

³⁰ Eugene Vodolazkin, *Laurus* (London: Oneworld, 2015).

³¹ Samantha Harvey, *The Western Wind* (New York: Grove, 2018).

³² These works may be contrasted with, for example, Bruce Holsinger’s medieval mysteries *A Burnable Book* (New York: William Morrow, 2014) and *The Invention of Fire* (New York: William Morrow, 2015), which give rich cultural and political details from fourteenth-century England but with a more modern, skeptical depiction of religion.

³³ Here and elsewhere in this article, we use the language of “worldview.” Aficionados of James K. A. Smith’s work might fault us for holding dodgy, post-Enlightenment sensibilities. Although we are pursuing a different project from Smith, it bears noting that his helpful defense of pre-cognitive desires and Taylor’s social imaginaries “doesn’t require rejecting worldview-talk, only situating it in relation to Christian practices” (*Desiring the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 11). See also his “Two Cheers for Worldview: A Response to Elmer John Thiessen,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 14 (2010): 55–58. In one sense, our argument draws attention to the rich possibilities for situating—indeed enriching—the worldview of readers in relation to the “practices” of robust Christian fiction.

To summarize our sketch of contemporary fiction, while mainstream fiction includes examples of compelling Christian belief, these are often characterized by “cross-pressure,” Charles Taylor’s term for the feeling of tension between a sense of transcendence and a naturalistic outlook. Furthermore, the fiction that has a more cosmologically oriented and biblically consonant perspective is often qualified by its historical setting, which can suggest obsolescence. In light of this literary landscape, one can imagine Christian fiction developing thicker, more robust, biblically informed worlds, which are unqualified, representative of the present, and unconstrained by the strictures of cross-pressured secularity. What follows is our sketch of this kind of fiction.

2. *An Outrageous Idea for Christian Fiction*

The best stories have the singular ability to transport us from the confines of our immediate perspectives and represent other worlds. The different genres of fiction, ranging from contemporary realist to historical to sci-fi, all have the potential to render the glory of God through the fine colors of human storytelling despite prevailing plausibility structures. Yet such storytelling possibilities highlight a curious incongruity: the moniker “Christian” denotes a provincial literary subgenre with negative connotations.³⁴ The list of grievances against so-called “Christian” fiction is long.³⁵ For example, in her discussion of the twelve-volume Christian fiction series *Left Behind* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, as well as the authors’ follow-up collaboration *The Jesus Chronicles*, Magdalena Mączyńska recognizes two premises in particular that undergird mainstream Christian novels: “the unproblematic factuality of the Bible and the representational neutrality of novelistic realism.”³⁶ This tendency to simplify in both directions—with regard to Scripture and with regard to fiction—epitomizes the shortcomings of much “Christian” fiction.³⁷

Though biblically informed fiction that is unskillfully handled can produce regrettable results, to its credit the traditionally labeled “Christian” subgenre attempts to convey two aspects of Scripture that

³⁴ For a sympathetic approach to Christian fiction and the story of American evangelicalism told through the creation, publication, content, and reception of five popular Christian novels—Janette Oke’s *Love Comes Softly* (1979), Frank Peretti’s *This Present Darkness* (1986), Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’s *Left Behind* (1995), Beverly Lewis’s *The Shunning* (1998), and William Paul Young’s *The Shack* (2008)—see Daniel Silliman’s book *Reading Evangelicals: How Christian Fiction Shaped a Culture and a Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

³⁵ The grievances are longstanding, as well. As Clyde Kilby put it decades ago, “the people who spend the most time with the Bible are in large numbers the foes of art and the sworn foes of imagination.... Christians often turn out to have an unenviable corner on the unimaginative and the commonplace.” See Clyde Kilby, “The Aesthetic Poverty of Evangelicalism,” in *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*, ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2002), 277–78.

³⁶ Magdalena Mączyńska, *The Gospel According to the Novelist: Religious Scripture and Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 108.

³⁷ Mączyńska’s point about the way Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’s work simplifies the Bible into “colloquial prose” highlights another incongruity regarding “Christian fiction”: the radical separation of so-called religious fiction from mainstream authors at the height of their craft (see Mączyńska, *Gospel According to the Novelist*, 108). Such authors generate the kind of *literary* fiction devoured by book lovers and critics; their words sing and they sting. Their stories typically explore the ordinary, broken lives of protagonists, characters wading through a fallen world with glimpses of redemption, conveyed with arresting prose. In our judgment, the best literary fiction is not limited to the usual suspects (for example, the Pulitzer and Man Booker Prize) but also includes so-called genre fiction—the kind of fiction recognized by the Hugo, the Edgar, the Ned Kelly awards, and the like.

are unfortunately neglected in a secular era: (1) we inhabit a universe that includes the supernatural, and (2) faith includes the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1). A Christian fiction that accepts these two aspects of biblical reality, and yet also avoids the pitfalls that Mączyńska and others describe based on naive conceptions of Scripture and fiction, could contribute vitally to the contemporary literary scene. While such fiction will not be persuasive to everyone, it is a legitimate expression of a Christian perspective largely unaddressed in contemporary literature, and its scarcity suggests creative possibilities for Christian fiction writers.

As Taylor and Smith argue, the conditions of modernity affect everyone, so the cross-pressured representation of faith is an apt literary feature that speaks to our age. But it should not be the whole story. As with the passage alluded to in our title—an encounter outside of Christ’s empty tomb with two angels whose clothes “gleamed like lightning” (Luke 24:4 NIV)—Scripture invites an acceptance of supernatural realities that impinge on mortal life, from dreams and visions to angelic encounters, all of which suggest a world saturated with mystery and wonder. Since fiction entails a kind of world-building, the Christian fiction we envision represents worlds that engage with this mystery and wonder without the strictures of a naturalistic perspective and the associated spiritual ambivalence. To put it another way, if cross-pressured fiction depicts the feel of faith in an era dominated by naturalistic plausibility structures, the outrageous fiction that we are advocating depicts the feel of life revealed in Scripture, including those aspects of life often neglected in contemporary fiction.

We do not mean to suggest that contemporary fiction written by avowed non-Christians does not, at times, convey scriptural principles; it often does.³⁸ Nevertheless, the correspondence we envisage differs from cross-pressured fiction, which despite its strengths still tends to accommodate a this-worldly naturalistic sensibility. In addition, cross-pressured fiction often emphasizes brokenness and the consequences of the fall. To use the terms of Frederick Buechner’s literary meditation on the gospel in *Telling the Truth*, the fiction we describe here features the logic of tragedy, but comedy and fairy tale, as well. Certainly, such fiction can address doubt, skepticism, and struggle—indeed, these elements are often necessary for compelling stories.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Christian fiction we describe need not be weighted in favor of cross-pressured ambivalence. Since literature can help us “grasp the essential nature of reality,” as Leland Ryken puts it, we propose fiction with a thicker view of reality, one in which cross-pressure is not the final horizon of the narrative frame.⁴⁰

This kind of fiction would dramatize biblical realities, not systematically in a paint-by-numbers way, but rather transmuted according to artistic vision and literary form. The content of such fiction may include dreams and visions, transcendent moments, supernatural encounters, or the everyday goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Whatever the case, consistent with Scripture and the ways in which particular ecclesial traditions interpret Scripture, these stories will imply a universe charged with the

³⁸ On fiction as secular parables, see William Tate, “Karl Barth’s Secular Parables,” *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* 2 (2012): 23–29.

³⁹ As Cliff Foreman notes, traditionally conceived Christian fiction often “gives us goodness without the complications of our human fallenness and pain.” Cliff Foreman, “A Meditation on Boring Stories” (unpublished manuscript), n.p.

⁴⁰ Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 22. On this point, we openly admit to a commitment to the primacy of Scripture when appraising literary worlds. See Leland Ryken, “Calvinism and Literature,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 95–113, esp. 108–11.

glory of God. Even though Harold Bush focuses on the miracles in *Peace Like a River* and *Mariette in Ecstasy*, he describes how the seemingly mundane natural world can nonetheless suggest biblical supernaturalism:

Mariette shares with *Peace* a powerful expectation of discovering the presence of God in everyday nature, one that may remind readers of the Transcendentalists. Both novels prepare us through lovely natural description for the further uncovering of the divine in the details of both stories. This imagery, often recited at the beginning of chapters in Whitmanesque catalogues of the simple images surrounding the convent, such as insects, birds, flowers, or trees, encourages the reader to expect even more beneath the surface of things.⁴¹

Such descriptions would be essential to the kind of fiction that we are calling for given Scripture's picture of the world, exemplified by Psalm 19:1–2 (NIV):

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.⁴²

Our conception of Christian fiction is not tied to any particular hermeneutical approach to the Bible as such. We are assuming a broadly orthodox understanding of the Bible and the world it depicts. In fact, we are assuming that the author is a Christian of some kind (e.g., Lutheran, Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian, or Pentecostal) and that he or she will craft a story that renders the world as understood through his or her tradition *believable*—"believable" in the most compelling way that modern fiction can muster. Put another way, each orthodox tradition conceives of the world in a distinctive way, a way that assumes a wide range of realities expressed in Scripture—including the triune God, quotidian holiness, supernatural entities, the fallenness of the world, the glory of Christ's atonement, justification, the forgiveness of sins, the challenges of living in a secular world, the temptations of the devil, and a thousand other things. The dilemma is that readers and authors live in an era that challenges the reality assumed and depicted by their respective traditions. A very good Christian novel—in the sense we're calling for—will likely appeal to a wide range of Christian readers precisely because we share so much about the way we see the world, despite differences of tradition.

⁴¹ Harold K. Bush, "Miracles and the Postsecular: Some 'Unscientific' Thoughts on *Peace Like a River* and *Mariette in Ecstasy*," *Christianity & Literature* 69 (2020): 119.

⁴² To use a term from Charles Taylor's work, we are calling for fiction that features "enchanted" worlds, but enchanted in a biblically informed way. Describing the pre-modern world in Western society, Taylor defines enchantment as follows: "People lived in an 'enchanted' world. This is perhaps not the best expression; it seems to evoke light and fairies. But I am invoking here its negation, Weber's expression 'disenchantment' as a description of our modern condition. This term has achieved such wide currency in our discussion of these matters, that I'm going to use its antonym to describe a crucial feature of the pre-modern condition. The enchanted world in this sense is the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in." See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25–26. For discussions of secular "enchantment," see Simon During's *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Michael Saler's *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Others have challenged the disenchantment narrative; for example, see Joseph A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Certainly there are texts that incline in the direction we envision. For example, while *Gilead*'s setting and form qualify John Ames's perspective, Robinson gives a remarkable and moving picture of the blessedness of life, a kind of quotidian holiness commensurate with Scripture.⁴³ Moreover, as Robert Alter shows, John Ames's very manner of expression reflects a biblical vision of the world with his syntactical patterns, a style that is "not merely a constellation of aesthetic properties but is the vehicle of a particular vision of reality."⁴⁴ In addition, the exorcism scene in *Death Comes for the Deconstructionist*, while equivocally characterized by Jon Mote, nevertheless acknowledges supernatural entities at work in this world. This feature does not make it a compelling story; other elements do. But even while observing the cross-pressured dynamic and the feel of faith in a secular world, *Death Comes for the Deconstructionist* draws attention to the limits of mere physical existence in a way that resonates with the Christian Scriptures. The kind of fiction we are describing here would do this too—and then some.

Other examples are Brett Lott's *Jewel*, Lee Smith's *Saving Grace*, Leif Enger's *Peace Like a River*, and Bo Giertz's *The Hammer of God*, because each of these engages more fully with a biblical frame of reference, imaginatively embracing and expressing it—as with *Jewel*'s relationship with her daughter Brenda Kay, which is shaped by prophecy and tragedy in *Jewel*; Florida Grace Shepherd's path to redemption, punctuated by her prescient visions and the dramatic exploits of her evangelist father in *Saving Grace*; Reuben Land's adventure with his younger sister Swede and father Jeremiah in *Peace Like a River*, with its miracles and astonishing vision of heaven; and Giertz's *Hammer of God*, translated from the original Swedish, a theological novel narrated like a mystery thriller and disclosing the power of God's grace through the lens of Lutheran spirituality.⁴⁵ Our list is idiosyncratic, and none of these is a perfect example, but as we see it, this form of fiction would resist qualifying its picture of the world and accommodating a strictly naturalistic outlook that can undermine a distinctly biblical vision. Examples here are limited because we have only caught glimpses of this type of fiction within contemporary literature, which they never completely exemplify. While there may be other writers currently creating this type of fiction, such stories are relatively scarce, and we hope that this article might play a small role in prompting more fiction in this mode.

Although contemporary realist fiction would be the most obvious candidate for this form of storytelling, our notion of Christian fiction can deploy other genres of fiction in service of this aim, building spiritually fertile worlds with the brick and mortar of historical, crime, science fiction, or any other literary genre. That holds true for fiction in the mode of the "fantastic" because the best of such stories capture truths of the human condition, thereby offering parched readers a well of contemporary

⁴³ The following memory from John Ames is representative: "There was a young couple strolling along half a block ahead of me. The sun had come up brilliantly after a heavy rain, and the trees were glistening and very wet. On some impulse, plain exuberance, I suppose, the fellow jumped up and caught hold of a branch, and a storm of luminous water came pouring down on the two of them, and they laughed and took off running.... It was a beautiful thing to see, like something from a myth. I don't know why I thought of that now, except perhaps because it is easy to believe in such moments that water was made primarily for blessing, and only secondarily for growing vegetables or doing the wash" (Robinson, *Gilead*, 27–28).

⁴⁴ Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron*, 4.

⁴⁵ Although Bo Giertz's *The Hammer of God* was first published in 1941 and, thus, is more dated than the other three titles, we include it because the revised English edition came out in 2005—and because many modern readers remain unaware of this classic Christian novel.

relevance that never runs dry.⁴⁶ Our proposal, then, does not rule out stories that are contextualized in otherworldly settings. After all, there is no such thing as context-less fiction; *all* fiction is contextualized, from contemporary realist to historical fiction. Stories that draw on realist *or* non-realist themes are legitimate instances of the kind of Christian fiction we are advocating, as long as they unambiguously infuse the fictional narrative with a view of life as it is revealed in Scripture (as interpreted by tradition), and suggest, to some extent, that the perspective is existentially and even metaphysically plausible in the twenty-first century.⁴⁷ This dynamic, we claim, could animate writers of such fiction who will likely be at the margins of mainstream fiction (though there are happy exceptions). Ideally, Christian novelists who write in this mode should be free to write stories drawing on all that they know and have experienced while walking with the living God.⁴⁸

Consider the example of C. S. Lewis. As Thomas Shippey notes, Lewis knew and loved ancient texts, and he worked this love into the architecture of his fiction, using an older view of the universe to critique the modern perspective.⁴⁹ Lewis's fictional worlds with their biblical congruity and literary heft are unusual in a contemporary literary landscape that often tends toward cross-pressure. These elements contribute to his remarkable and persistent popularity across various audiences, but especially among Christian readers. As is the case with Lewis's fiction, a story's engagement with transcendence cultivates verisimilitude for those who ascribe to such reality.

Are we back to the unfortunate stereotype of Christian novels excoriated by the criticism mentioned above? Not at all. Yes, we need spiritual stories that are self-consciously Christian, but those stories should be told well, beautifully, artfully.⁵⁰ To be sure, God may strike straight blows with crooked sticks. The gospel can shine resplendent despite the safe, clichéd tropes of religious bestsellers, but that speaks to the enduring power of the gospel, and of God, rather than to the value of mediocre fiction.⁵¹

⁴⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are classic examples in this vein. See the insightful remarks in Thomas A. Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

⁴⁷ Here, we should note that there are obvious differences in historical expressions of Christianity. Nevertheless, continuity between these expressions is central to our proposal: manifestations of the faith across time are committed to truths expressed in Scripture, which can be explored imaginatively in contemporary fiction. Our argument is that Christian fiction need not be circumscribed by our historical moment—shaped yes; but not absolutely determined—and it will have continuity with past expressions of the faith even as it engages with the present.

⁴⁸ Flannery O'Connor's conception of realism is helpful here: "All novelists are fundamentally seekers and describers of the real, but the realism of each novelist will depend on his view of the ultimate reaches of reality." See Flannery O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 40–41.

⁴⁹ See Thomas A. Shippey, "The Ransom Trilogy," *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, ed. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239–40. For Lewis's rationale, see "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 217–25.

⁵⁰ On the aesthetic question, see Franky Schaeffer, *Addicted to Mediocrity: Twentieth Century Christians and the Arts* (Westchester, NY: Crossway, 1981); Frank Gaebelien, "The Aesthetic Problem: Some Evangelical Answers," *Christianity Today* 9.11 (26 February 1965): 3–6; Frank Gaebelien, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1985).

⁵¹ As O'Connor notes, "We have plenty of examples in this world of poor things being used for good purposes. God can make any indifferent thing, as well as evil itself, an instrument for good; but I submit that to do this is the business of God and not of any human being." Flannery O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 174.

Some might worry that we are arguing for gospel tracts in the language of fiction. On the contrary. Rather, we agree with Micah Mattix:

Each genre has different goals and capacities. The evangelistic sermon is for making direct Scriptural, emotional, and logical appeals to follow Christ. The philosophical essay is for defining and examining the nuances of virtue, vice, and metaphysical truth. Gospel tracts are for providing a short expression of the Gospel for someone you do not know. If you use one of these forms for a goal to which it is not suited, you are in trouble.... *Yet, strangely, we as Christians often demand that so-called "Christian" fiction or poetry be as unambiguous as a Gospel tract. The result is a novel or a poem that is not a very good novel or poem.*⁵²

The fear that Christians will turn fiction into evangelism seems unwarranted when it comes to the type of stories we are describing. While evangelistic tracts make for bad novels, there is nothing wrong with fiction whose aim is to harness Scripture more fully for its literary artistry, possibly drawing readers closer to the living God and the world of Scripture. If potential readers are estranged from our Father in heaven, why not expose them to stories imbued with divine presence? For readers who are already Christians, such fiction could invigorate their faith amidst a secular age.

From Walker Percy to Frederick Buechner, many Christian authors of literary fiction have said that art should not be so programmatic or doctrinaire as to *set out* to see the world Christianly, as if the whole project is about trying to convert or console.⁵³ Instead, art should tell the truth. But would Christian fiction as we conceive of it here be less than truthful, or worse, telling a lie? Would it fall short of bearing witness to truth as we know it in the real world, truth as we experience it as limping sinner-saints? This worry over truthfulness is understandable, but it risks assuming a reductive notion of truth. After all, Christian novelists are able to convey more than the narrow, myopic truth of post-Christian secularity. One might even argue that the "orientation to truth is essentially a religious act. It implies an act of faith in the truth and of constancy in devotion to it."⁵⁴ Christian novelists are poised to address some of the most important truths there are—about the triune God, supernatural reality, and divine things—and they can probe these themes unapologetically, with biblical fidelity, and in deep, rich, and imaginative ways.

Another fear regarding this potential direction for contemporary fiction is that "Christian" fiction in any guise is simply promoting an ideological perspective. While we agree that a heavy ideological hand is fatal to good fiction, there are nuanced, more subtle ways of storytelling that should alleviate these concerns. Besides, we would argue that all fiction ultimately has an agenda, and rather than propositions, syllogisms, or scientific proofs, fiction uses the narrative and figurative arts at its disposal. Great fiction has a more subversive agenda that does not always appeal to our obvious capacities. As Joseph Conrad

⁵² Micah Mattix, "On Christian Literature," *Comment*, 3 December 2010, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/on-christian-literature/> (our emphasis).

⁵³ See Barbara King, "Walker Percy Prevails," in *Conversations with Walker Percy*, eds. Lewis A. Lawson and Victor A. Kramer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 89, and Nancy Tischler, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Fiction: From C. S. Lewis to Left Behind* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2009), xviii.

⁵⁴ D. S. Savage, *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), 14.

describes the artist: “His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring—and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever.”⁵⁵

We are not limiting what it means to write fiction well, to tell stories that are pleasing to the Lord. In fact, much contemporary fiction written by non-Christians depicts realities and experiences consistent with those depicted in Scripture, even if those same authors self-consciously reject the triune God. Fiction comes in all shapes and sizes, in different modes and for different audiences. There is more than one way to write good fiction. The same principle applies to readers—Christians are free to read and enjoy many different kinds of books, from bestsellers to classics.⁵⁶ Lest we be misunderstood, then, we emphatically reject binding readers to a literary elitism or to the dubious idea that Christian writers must only write “Christian” fiction. Part of the beauty of literature is that it can do many things. We can have perceptive stories that portray the ambiguities of life under the sun, and evangelical niche fiction written by evangelicals for evangelicals—indeed, let a thousand stories bloom, the more the merrier!

Even so, our proposal argues on behalf of a particular kind of storytelling that is conspicuously underrepresented in our cultural moment. Despite the challenge of secular readership, fictional visions of the world these days are often unfortunately circumscribed—even if excellently rendered. Modern fiction tends to emphasize the human drama through the lenses of creation and the fall. Such themes of finitude and fallenness are eminently Christian, and Scripture includes representations of God’s seeming absence. And yet, there is more to holy writ than the book of Ecclesiastes! Christian fiction, we claim, should also plumb the depths of *redemption* and *consummation*. Isn’t there a place for a more theocentric, spiritual, supernatural fictional reality, one that corresponds to those aspects of Scripture? Must we always go to earlier eras to find it? The outrageous idea suggested by our title is that some Christian writers should write fiction that draws on *everything* they know—from experience and from divine revelation.⁵⁷ As Chad Walsh remarks, “Christian faith is no substitute for talent, for genius. But if a writer has that, the new eyes can aid him in seeing more, understanding more, saying more.”⁵⁸

Admittedly, the invitation to this kind of fiction can only be accepted by writers, and we are speaking here primarily to critics and readers. Still, our readership also includes teachers at institutions with emerging writers. In an attempt to encourage this direction for fiction as an ideal to which some Christian writers should aspire, we began hosting an undergraduate writing contest at Covenant College that called for precisely these types of stories. The results have been encouraging, and the winner gives a public reading at an awards ceremony each year. After the ceremony, the contest entries are made available in our college library in a bound edition for the enjoyment of the campus community. Our

⁵⁵ Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* (New York: Amereon, 1978), 7. These well-known remarks were originally published in 1897. Thanks to KJ Gilchrist for bringing this book to our attention.

⁵⁶ On this point, see Alan Jacobs, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁷ Here, we echo Alvin Plantinga who said, “Christian philosophers should display more autonomy: they have their own fish to fry, their own projects to pursue, (or their own axes to grind, as some might prefer to put it).” Alvin Plantinga, “Augustinian Christian Philosophy,” *Monist* 75 (1992): 291. Our essay draws part of its inspiration from Plantinga’s seminal work in Reformed epistemology. Pride of place goes to his “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 253–71, based on his 1984 inaugural address as the John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. In addition, the “outrageous” descriptor of our title alludes to George Marsden’s *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁸ Chad Walsh, “The Advantages of the Christian Faith for a Writer,” in *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*, ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2002), 173.

experiment suggests a rich potential for this kind of fiction. In the contemporary literary scene, which is circumscribed in the ways suggested above, this model offers the prospect that such fiction will find readers.⁵⁹

This experiment also points to the *pedagogical* implications of our proposal. For example, the contemporary literary scene can encourage students to think in binary ways, such that anything ostensibly “Christian” is somehow subpar or fundamentally flawed; instead, we can encourage our students to reconsider such perceptions and recognize the dominant conventions of current fiction. Additionally, it is sometimes objected that “Christian” fiction is a flawed self-descriptor: that is, people do not ordinarily talk about “Christian” carpentry or “Christian” painting; such modifiers are misguided. However, we think that literature is closer to philosophy, say, than to carpentry; hence, *Christian* philosophy and *Christian* fiction make sense in a way that *Christian* carpentry does not. We suspect that has something to do with the noetic effects of sin; as Emil Brunner, Abraham Kuyper, and others argue, the more a discipline engages with areas of the human person or God, the greater the potential conflict with Christian faith.⁶⁰

Granted, an undergraduate fiction prize is one thing, but in the broader world of literature we should not underestimate the challenges facing an explicitly Christian mode of storytelling. In many respects, living in an age of cross-pressure militates against the kind of fiction we are commending. Mainstream publishers can be ideologically opposed to publishing “Christian” fiction, which places an unfair or even impossible burden on aspiring writers. As Viet Thanh Nguyen points out, “The decisions that publishers and editors make determine what readers see when they go to the bookstore or look for work online. It is hardly a surprise that the worldviews of publishers and editors influence their literary taste and judgment; those worldviews are influenced by privileges, assumptions, and prejudices that are often invisible to those who hold or benefit from them.”⁶¹ While we have no ready answers to this complex situation, perhaps Christian scholars should create new avenues of publication taking on all the attendant responsibilities, including marketing. Perhaps writers from religious institutions could form a publishing group, seeking funding from their institutions and other interested donors to pursue such initiatives. The point is that if options are limited in our present culture, then maybe we should create new publishing cultures to enable the writing of fresh stories that gleam like lightning.⁶²

As to the actual process of composition, our description of this type of fiction is not meant as a set of prescriptive rules. On the contrary, we intend this proposal to *liberate*. Evidence suggests that writers are more constrained than they realize, and we have tried to highlight thematic content possibilities that are excluded by prevailing conventions. To put it another way, these are possibilities of content, not the means of assigning value to stories; our proposal is an invitation for writers to draw on all

⁵⁹ On this question of readership, evidence suggests there is an enormous appetite for faith-based fiction of any kind. Ask Francine Rivers! As Nancy Tischler remarks, “The real wonder of contemporary Christian writing is the sheer mass of it. Clearly the world is hungry for conversations about ultimate reality—even if the stories are encumbered by mundane descriptions of food and clothing” (*Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Fiction*, xix).

⁶⁰ See Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2000).

⁶¹ Viet Thanh Nguyen, “Introduction,” *Ploughshares* 45 (2019): 9.

⁶² Along these general lines, see Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). We thank Jill Baumgaertner for pressing this point in correspondence.

of Scripture for their creative visions. Christian faith encourages a view of literature as God-given, composed by image-bearers who create stories as part of their image-bearingness and who will write according to their particular vocations. A writer will create as he or she sees fit, in the way that he or she can. Nevertheless, the artistic vision of believers committed to Christianity need not be limited by what the contemporary literary scene displays. Faith can set you free.

3. Conclusion

For the record, we recognize God's pervasive goodness and the importance of listening to voices outside of the church to learn from them, prompted by God's common grace.⁶³ Books of all kinds beautifully depict aspects of life and offer salutary fictional experiences. In God's providence, such experiences can come from the most unusual places.⁶⁴

The literary trends we have traced invite speculation about the extent to which we are all shaped by a secular social imaginary, one that constrains artistic and readerly sensibilities.⁶⁵ It is even possible that we are so influenced by secularity that we lack the capacity to be stirred by fiction with a distinctly biblical view of reality. However, these trends also suggest opportunities for contemporary fiction. Although it is presently underrepresented, one can imagine contemporary fiction that offers a fuller picture of the world resonant with Scripture. Recognizing that everyone—believers and unbelievers alike—can feel the pull toward faith *and* doubt, we suggest the possibility of Christian writers not merely reflecting this ambivalence, but creating fictional worlds that see beyond the conditions of modernity. Novelists from the majority world who are less impacted by Western secularity will likely be the leading lights in this mode of Christian fiction.

Admittedly, "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will," as Percy Shelley famously put it.⁶⁶ But could we not encourage people committed to Scripture's revealed picture of the world—which is characterized by mystery, wonder, and God's glory—to see the world that way by means of their art? Not every Christian novelist will have that calling, and some will disagree with the kind of Christian fiction we are defending. As long as a few Christian scholars and novelists find our argument persuasive, that is more than enough. Ultimately, this "outrageous" idea

⁶³ For discussion, see Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶⁴ We are reminded here of a passage from Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (New York: William Morrow, 2013), 57–58, which features the following glimpse of shalom: "I have dreamed of that song, of the strange words to that simple rhyme-song, and on several occasions I have understood what she was saying, in my dreams. In those dreams I spoke that language too, the first language, and I had dominion over the nature of all that was real. In my dream, it was the tongue of what is, and anything spoken in it becomes real, because nothing said in that language can be a lie. It is the most basic building brick of everything. In my dreams I have used that language to heal the sick and to fly; once I dreamed I kept a perfect little bed-and-breakfast by the seaside, and to everyone who came to stay with me I would say, in that tongue, 'Be whole.' and they would become whole, not be broken people, not any longer, because I had spoken the language of shaping."

⁶⁵ Regarding the term "social imaginary," which is "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings," as Charles Taylor puts it, and the term's implications, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171–72, and Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 143.

⁶⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D: The Romantic Period*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 8th ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), 846.

for fiction encourages an imaginative apprehension of the world portrayed in Scripture and mediated through the specific ecclesial traditions of believers, which includes a God who is real, who is good, and who is holy.

As many Christian traditions remind us, the liberal arts can help to deepen our engagement with and understanding of Scripture. John Calvin said as much: “Indeed, men who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the secrets of the divine wisdom.”⁶⁷ Ours is a prompt to consider this kind of fiction: stories that open up windows into the world as it really is, a world of angels and demons, a world of good and evil, a world of heaven and hell, a world charged with the grandeur of God, like shining from shook foil,⁶⁸ a world without end.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.5.2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960). John McNeill’s editorial gloss on this quote is helpful: “To Calvin, liberal studies were an aid to comprehension of the divine wisdom conveyed in the Scriptures” (p. 53 n. 6).

⁶⁸ The lines “the grandeur of God” and “like shining from shook foil” are from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem “God’s Grandeur.”

⁶⁹ We are grateful for helpful discussion with participants at the “Illuminating Darkness: Literature in an Age of Unbelief” conference at Colorado Christian University and at the “Revenants: Christ, Time, and the Twenty-First Century” conference at Lee University, both sponsored in 2019 by the Conference on Christianity & Literature, where early versions of the paper were presented. Our thanks, too, to Jill Baumgaertner, Jack Beckman, Bill Davis, Luke Ferretter, Cliff Foreman, KJ Gilchrist, Joshua Hill, Jennifer Holberg, John Holberg, Sarah Huffines, Travis Hutchinson, Gwen Macallister, Rebecca Miller, Luke Mills, Jason Ney, Joshua Privett, Jamie Quatro, Jonathan Sircy, John Sykes, Bill Tate, and several anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier drafts.

A Tale of Two Stories: Amos Yong's *Mission after Pentecost* and T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Peaks of Faith*

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Abstract: This article contrasts two books on missiology: Amos Yong's *Mission after Pentecost* and T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Peaks of Faith*. The author argues that Yong's approach, shaped by a post-colonial hermeneutic, dismisses the urgency of verbal witness, the significance of eschatological judgment, and the need for conversion. Thus, Yong falsely asserts the modern missions movement is dead. However, in *Peaks of Faith* T'ien Ju-K'ang offers a well-documented account of the powerful impact of the gospel in Southwest China from 1880 to 1985. The story of missions that T'ien tells is radically different from the caricature produced by Yong's post-colonial critique.

I recently read Amos Yong's new biblical theology of missions, explicated through a focus on the work of the Holy Spirit. The title of the book reveals its approach: *Mission after Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation*.¹ I read this provocative and meticulously researched book (it reads like a bibliographic essay) shortly after re-reading T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Peaks of Faith: Protestant Mission in Revolutionary China*.² I first encountered *Peaks of Faith* about twenty-five years ago, not long after it was published. I was impressed with it then and, in my re-reading, was again deeply moved by its powerful description (again, meticulously researched) of the positive social impact made by Protestant missionaries serving among the minority groups in Southwest China prior to the communist revolution of 1949. These two books present two very different stories and they are based upon vastly different presuppositions. These stories, and the presuppositions that shape them, are worth considering.

Every good tale has a hero and a villain, and this tale of two stories is no exception. In this tale T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Peaks of Faith* is the valiant hero. Yong's *Mission after Pentecost*, although voluminously researched and not without its strengths, serves as the villain. In every gripping tale there is a problem

¹ Amos Yong, *Mission after Pentecost: The Witness of the Spirit from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), referenced throughout this article with in-text citations.

² T'ien Ju-K'ang, *Peaks of Faith: Protestant Mission in Revolutionary China* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

or crisis, generally provoked by the villain, which the hero helps the heroine (I don't mean to be sexist here) overcome. The problem in this tale is clear from the outset. Simply put, according to Yong, the modern missions movement is dead. We now live in a post-colonial, post-modern, and post-Christian era (pp. 2–22). There is no looking back and thus we should probably even abandon the term “Christian missions” altogether (pp. 2–5). Additionally, from Yong's perspective, we need not wait for the door to slam shut before we exit the failed project that has been called “Christian missions.” It was tainted by all the negative aspects of colonialism and modernity, including arrogance, self-serving motives, and racist attitudes. So, we live in a post-Christian world, and we had better get used to it.

Yong's uncritical acceptance of this exceedingly negative picture of the modern missions movement is fundamental to our tale's problem. Perhaps it should not surprise us, for Yong's perspective simply mirrors attitudes prevalent in contemporary American culture. Indeed, in this book Yong is incredibly “politically correct.” He doesn't capitalize “spirit,” refers to the [S]pirit with feminine pronouns, “she” (p. 191) or “her” (p. 208), and constantly emphasizes the economic and political nature of the mission of Jesus and the early church (pp. 278–79). This socio-political emphasis can be traced throughout the book, but it is clearly articulated in his conclusion: “The church bears witness not just *to* ... but *in* ... society. Chiefly, I suggest that our post-Pentecost perspective foregrounds the socioeconomic domain.... [They] ‘had all things in common...’” And just so we don't miss the point, he adds, “The socioeconomic and the political are intertwined; this means that there is no *missio Dei* that is not political in some respect” (p. 278).³ Unfortunately, the specific nature our political involvement is to take is never clarified. Rather, we are simply told that Christians are called to work for peace and justice through political means (p. 279). At the same time, verbal witness is relegated to the back of the bus. Missions, we are told, “is less the verbal proclamation to nations as such than the call to believing faithfulness amid a watching world” (p. 279). This theme is pervasive: verbal witness is unimportant; rather, living out political convictions that support peace and justice, this is the real stuff of missions (pp. 278–83). Finally, no contemporary diatribe would be complete without the charge of racism, and here again Yong does not disappoint. He speaks negatively about “whiteness” (p. 3), reading the Bible from a perspective of “white dominance” (p. 184), and “white normativity” (p. 226).⁴ He contrasts his own vision of the church's mission with the former, flawed approach of the modern missions movement by declaring, “Gone are the pretensions of a modernized version of a ‘white’ gospel” (p. 283). It all adds up to a stinging indictment of the modern missions movement—an indictment that features contemporary leftist tropes articulated with a distinctively post-colonial accent.

Although Yong's critique echoes themes ubiquitous in our culture, it is still surprising nonetheless. Since the past century has witnessed the emergence of the Pentecostal movement, which most would recognize as having its roots in the West and all would agree as having been enormously successful, one would anticipate that Yong, a self-described Pentecostal, might be more upbeat. Why embrace the tired, Marxist-inspired and anachronistic post-colonial lens for analyzing the past? This question becomes especially pertinent when we recognize the inherent contradictions in Yong's critique. To begin with,

³ Yong also states that to engage in mission is to reshape the “history, society, and the present world economic order” (*Mission after Pentecost*, 240). For an alternative vision of the church's mission, and one that in my opinion more faithfully reflects the biblical witness, see John Nugent, *Endangered Gospel: How Fixing the World is Killing the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

⁴ Yong asks, “If the postcolonial moment is in quest of the end of whiteness, does that not also mean that a mission paradigm facilitated by whiteness is coming to an end, if not already finished?” (*Mission after Pentecost*, 3).

this critique misses the fact that Pentecostals have rarely, if ever, been closely identified with people in positions of power, whether it be in Europe, America, or beyond. Furthermore, Pentecostals have never bought into the rationalism promoted by the Enlightenment; rather, they have embraced the worldview of the Bible that expects and delights in God's powerful presence manifest in our midst. Finally, the dramatic growth of Pentecostal churches around the world during this past century—virtually all of which are solidly committed to the traditional concept of missions as centering on verbal witness—calls into question Yong's fundamental presupposition. This fact alone suggests the modern mission movement is not dead; but rather, very much alive.

Although Yong's acceptance of the "modern missions is dead" position may be at first glance surprising, it can be explained. In fact, Yong himself elucidates the reasons for his provocative stance. It all boils down to his hermeneutic. Yong explains, "I have moved from a Pentecostal interpretation of scripture to a theological but even more explicitly pneumatological and day of Pentecost approach to scriptural interpretation" (p. 12). This statement confirms my earlier judgment that Yong's theology is better described as "pneumatological rather than Pentecostal" and has "more in common with mainline or ecumenical theologians than" his evangelical or Pentecostal colleagues.⁵

What is a theological approach to Scripture? Yong discusses his approach, which he terms, "theological interpretation of scripture," in the early pages of the book (pp. 10–15). While this approach seeks to benefit from modernist approaches (historical, grammatical, and textual criticism), it also consciously draws from the reception history of the biblical text (how it was read by various theological traditions). This, of course, means that Yong's hermeneutic is not really rooted in the historical meaning of the text—he no doubt would reject this notion as a product of the modernist mind—and thus the meaning of the text becomes, drawing from here or there, essentially whatever he wants to highlight. The pneumatological orientation that he describes adds yet another analytical lens that provides further room for his creative mind and imagination to work. There are really few constraints placed on the interpreter in this approach. Evangelicals in general and Pentecostals in particular will do well to emphasize, by way of contrast, historical meaning and focus on the early church as our model. Thus, we need to resist the siren voices calling for us to abandon reading Scripture from "a modern missions" point of view and to embrace a political or ethnic reading of the sacred text (p. 8). This is especially evident in this case, for, as we have noted, Yong also adopts a post-colonial hermeneutic and all of the negative assumptions about the past 200 years of missionary endeavor that come with it.

Yong's adoption of a post-colonial reading of the modern (or post-1792)⁶ missions movement is not without precedent, even among Pentecostal scholars.⁷ Note, for example, how Allan Anderson, one of the leading Pentecostal historians, describes early Pentecostal missionaries in a recent lecture

⁵ Robert P. Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 137.

⁶ 30 May 1792 was the date William Carey, with his famous call, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God," launched the Baptist Missionary Society. This date is widely cited as the beginning of the modern missions movement.

⁷ I use the term "Pentecostal" here loosely. It is not always clear if a scholar actually identifies with the Pentecostal movement and shares its theology and values or if a scholar is simply studying the Pentecostal movement as an outside observer. For my understanding of Pentecostals as a subset of evangelicalism, see Menzies, *Christ-Centered*.

on “Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal.”⁸ After correctly noting that the early Pentecostals “believed in the Bible literally” and were “premillennialists,” Anderson describes the perspective of early Pentecostal missionaries in negative and condescending tones. He ridicules their conviction that “the poor heathen in darkness had to be evangelized quickly before the soon return of Christ.” In Africa, Anderson states, the Pentecostal missionaries confronted “what they thought was devil worship” and in Latin America they mostly denounced Roman Catholic Christians and what they saw “as its dangerous images of the crucifix and the virgin Mary.” In Asia, Anderson declares, the missionaries “displayed general ignorance of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism” and “in most cases there was great prejudice.”

This same highly critical and distorted assessment of Pentecostal missionaries is also displayed in Anderson’s widely-influential book, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*.⁹ Anderson points to missionary letters and writings, which often reflect a deep sense of urgency for their evangelistic efforts due to widespread spiritual “darkness” and the fact that so many they encounter are “lost,” as evidence of “religious intolerance” and “bigoted ignorance.”¹⁰ One wonders how Anderson would assess the apostle Paul? To the Colossians, Paul declares, “He has rescued us from *the dominion of darkness* and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col 1:13 NIV). In a similar vein, to the Ephesians Paul states, “you were once *darkness*, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8 NIV).¹¹ We might also ask Anderson what he would make of the words of Jesus, who declares, “the Son of Man came to seek and to save *the lost*” (Luke 19:10 ESV)?¹² It is hard not to come away from reading portions of Anderson’s book and wonder if he truly believes that, apart from Christ, people are indeed “lost.” As for Pentecostals, we have always been clear on this matter.

Unfortunately, as we have noted, Yong follows in Anderson’s footsteps by adopting the same post-colonial hermeneutic and assumptions. This stance and its associated presuppositions are reflected in three themes that run throughout *Mission after Pentecost*.

1. *The Call to Verbal Witness Diminished*

First, Yong consistently diminishes the New Testament’s emphasis on the content of the gospel and verbal witness.¹³ One reason for this stance is Yong’s post-modern approach to the biblical text that questions any normative understanding or interpretation of it. For example, in a section on Paul’s letter to Titus, which contrasts the Cretan liars and passion-driven lifestyles with the life of God’s grace, Yong writes this:

⁸ Allan Anderson, “Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal” (lecture in Baguio City, The Philippines, 24 August 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/c6jb74d9>.

⁹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Cf. Joseph L. Castleberry’s fine book review, “Pentecostal History from Below Should be Fair to Missionaries Also,” *Pneuma* 28 (2006): 271–74.

¹⁰ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 179.

¹¹ For “darkness” with reference to judgment: Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13. For references to spiritual “darkness”: Matt 6:23; Lk 1:79; 11:34; John 1:5; 3:9; 8:12; 12:35, 46; Acts 26:18; Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:8, 11; 6:12; Col 1:13; 1 Thess 5:4; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 John 2:8, 11.

¹² Cf. Matt 10:6; 15:24; Lk 15:4, 6, 24, 32; 19:10.

¹³ See especially *Mission after Pentecost*, 178, 217, 225, 257–59, 264, 279.

Part of the contemporary challenge is that in a postcolonial context, truth claims are more often than not expressions of the will to power rather than the correspondence of speech with reality. Missional declarations are as likely to deploy sacred texts to underwrite and authorize so-called ‘mission’ practices that benefit missionaries rather than support those whom missionaries are serving.... If Christian mission is to be credible in the present age, those who bear witness must testify in their bodies and not just by their words ([Titus] 1:8, 16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 14). (p. 225)

Here we have a patently obvious truth (we need to walk the talk) stated in an incredibly cynical manner, one that buys into a post-modern view of language and the Marxist critique of the church.

This theme of denigrating or, at the very least, downplaying, verbal witness runs throughout the book, but two other examples will serve to illustrate Yong’s approach. On the basis of his summary of the Paraclete passages (esp. John 15:26–27 and 16:8–11), Yong concludes, “In sum, the Advocate or Comforter is sent both directly to the world and indirectly to that arena through the messianic followers as a holy and set-apart community of witnesses” (p. 257). It is important to note two phrases here, “directly to the world” and “indirectly ... through a holy ... community.” Both phrases serve to mute John’s real focus—the Paraclete’s inspiration of the disciples’ bold, verbal witness in the face of opposition: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will *testify* about me. And you also must *testify*, for you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27 NIV).

This assessment of Yong’s perspective is confirmed as we read further. On pages 258–59, Yong speaks of the mission of the church in somewhat cryptic terms as proclaiming forgiveness and loving others, both tasks embrace those in the church and those outside the church. What does Yong mean when he says that we are to proclaim forgiveness to non-Christians? I would suggest that the lack of clarity here is intentional. In other words, as we shall see, Yong does not feel that a response to the gospel is actually necessary for people to experience God’s saving grace. Yong’s ambiguous summary here misses the clarity of John’s declaration that belief in Christ is essential for eternal life (John 20:31) and that the proclamation of this message is the chief result of the Paraclete’s inspiration (John 15:26–27).¹⁴

Finally, in his conclusion, Yong predictably declares that the biblical call to mission “is less the verbal proclamation to nations as such than the call to believing faithfulness amid a watching world” (p. 279). This is a striking statement in a book about the mission of the church. Yong emphasizes “presence” evangelization and responding in a loving way to others, but he largely ignores the mandate to proclaim the gospel. No doubt, he sees the call to verbal witness as a central part of the outdated and discredited missions movement’s vision for the mission of the church. The problem for Yong, however, is that inspired verbal witness was also central to the mission of Jesus and that of the early church.

2. The Significance of Future Judgment Denied

If the proclamation and reception of a specific message (i.e., the gospel) is, in good post-modern fashion, devalued in Yong’s theology, this is largely related to the fact that the notion of a future, final

¹⁴ For a detailed defense of this understanding of John’s pneumatology, see Robert Menzies, “John’s Place in the Development of Early Christian Pneumatology,” in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler*, edited by Wonsuk Ma and Robert Menzies, JPTSS 24 (New York Continuum, 2004), 41–52.

judgment (especially eternal judgment) is largely rejected. This reluctance to speak forthrightly about this major biblical theme is the second significant theme that shapes Yong's work.¹⁵

Yong rejects an emphasis on the imminent return of Christ and "missionary efforts [that] are motivated by the concern that those who have not heard have to be given a chance to turn to Christ before the parousia" (p. 242). There are actually two issues here and Yong, as is often the case, is (intentionally?) not clear concerning to which he objects: (1) the timing of Christ's return; and (2) the reality of judgment for the lost.¹⁶ Yong here seems to scoff at this notion, but he does so in a more veiled way. For example, Yong references 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with *you*, not wanting any to perish, but *all* to come to repentance" (italics his). He then explains that "the more exclusive *you*" in this text "opens up to the universal call of the gospel that extends to *all*" (p. 243, italics his). Does he simply mean that our mission involves proclaiming the gospel to all people, to the ends of the earth? Or does he mean that God will ultimately save all regardless of their hearing or even response to the gospel? The larger context of Yong's book suggests he has the latter view in mind.

It should be noted that Yong offers a tepid rejection of universalism (p. 270). Nevertheless, the way Yong frames his discussion question on p. 248 (Question 3), points in this direction. Yong queries, "The modern missionary movement was based in part on preaching the gospel to those who had never heard it, so that they would be given the opportunity to repent and confess Jesus Christ before the parousia and the end would come. Does your reading of the general Epistles and Catholic Letters support such an eschatological approach to Christian witness?" For Yong, the obvious answer is "no."¹⁷

The rejection of any sense of urgency with reference to final judgment is reiterated in his section on Revelation. Of the call to "come" (Rev 22:17), Yong cryptically asks: "Does this invitation only echo throughout the present dispensation, prior to the coming down of the new Jerusalem from heaven to earth (21:2), or does the missional summons persist throughout eternity?" (p. 267). Yong doesn't provide an answer, which is telling. However, the New Testament does, and the answer is as clear elsewhere (Heb 9:25–28) as it is in Revelation. There is a decisive end to the opportunity to respond to God's gracious invitation (cf. Rev 14:17–20; 15–16; 19–20). Yong's question here implies the absence of final judgment, a theme that pervades his work.

3. The Importance of Conversion Dismissed

This leads us to the third theme that defines *Mission after Pentecost*. Yong consistently minimizes the need for conversion to the Christian faith and, as a result, he downplays the differences between

¹⁵ The fact that God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (Acts 17:31) is frequently affirmed in the New Testament. Numerous texts refer to the final judgment, "the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom 2:5). See, for example, Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; 25:31–46; Rom 2:5–7; 1 Cor 4:5; Heb 6:2; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 20:11–15.

¹⁶ For careful discussion of the eschatological motivation for missions, see C. J. Moore, "Can We Hasten the Parousia? An Examination of Matt 24:14 and Its Implications for Missional Practice," *Themelios* 44 (2019): 291–311.

¹⁷ Can a book on the Spirit and missions that does not once refer to Acts 4:12 or Romans 10:14–15, and only tangentially to Acts 4:29–31 (once, and not with reference to "speaking the word boldly"), really be considered evangelical or Pentecostal?

Christians and non-Christians. Thus, he frequently refers to the Spirit's work outside the Church, among non-Christians. This emphasis is seen in subtle ways, but it is also stated more forcefully.

In a more veiled reference, Yong declares, "Truly, the *missio Dei* in Christ and spirit have overcome the enmity between Jew and gentile, not erasing their differences but enabling gentiles to 'become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel' ([Eph] 3:6)" (p. 203). However, it should be noted that the Spirit does not just overcome alienation between groups of people, but fundamental to this unifying work of the Spirit is the fact that in Christ the Spirit enables us to overcome our alienation from God. This victory over alienation from God is not a theme that Yong emphasizes, at least not to the extent that he stresses the Spirit's work in overcoming our alienation from others and other groups.

We might be encouraged to overlook these more ambiguous statements if it were not for the more overt ones. For example, speaking of Johannine pneumatology, Yong declares,

The pluralistic pneumatology also opens up to an expansive theology of missions across the Johannine materials. In fact, in few other places in the Bible is the *world* as a whole as much an object of divine concern as here. The missiological relevance of this point is obvious, but what may be less obvious from a modernist mission perspective is that John is relatively less concerned about the salvation of individual souls than about the redemption and renewal of all things. More pointedly, the world that God wishes to save is also a world opposed to God. (p. 250, italics his)

This appears to lead Yong to a radical form of inclusivism if not outright universalism: "The missiological implications of such an apocalyptic cosmology are profound and will require extensive and intensive engagement before a new theology of Christian witness plausible for a post-mission era will be born" (p. 251).

Yong concludes his section on 1 John in a similar vein:

For us who are sent on the path of apostolic mission two thousand years later, we can be grateful that faithful Christian witness involves both the spirit's ongoing testimony to the life and death of Jesus and the spirit's unceasing enablement of our forgiving sins—of those within the fellowship of the believing community, of those on its dynamic and fluid margins, and of those also in the world—in his name. (p. 263)

Does this not imply that a positive response to the gospel or identification with Christ is not necessary in order to receive forgiveness of sins? It would appear that for Yong missions becomes loving others and declaring God's peace rather than calling for any kind of repentance or response. Repentance, at least for those outside the church, and the call to a life of discipleship seems to be missing here. One might ask, is this really the gospel and is this really the Christian mission? It sounds like we are back in the days of Adolf Harnack, the prominent advocate of liberal theology in the early twentieth century, who emphasized that Jesus taught nice ethical platitudes such as the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.¹⁸ Yong's incredibly optimistic view (naïve?) of the human condition renders

¹⁸ Although Yong clearly rejects the modernist assumptions of the liberal theology espoused by Harnack, there are striking similarities in several unifying themes: the rejection of Christianity's claim to be the sole possessor of truth; the elevation of other religions as essentially equal to Christianity; and an emphasis on mission as benevolent action rather than proclamation of a message, especially future judgment. So, actually none of Yong's emphases are new, although they are now dressed in post-modern garb. Note for example, Paul A. Varg's descrip-

repentance and transformation through the Spirit unnecessary. Sin or alienation from God is really not a central concern. The horizontal dimensions of salvation seem to obliterate the vertical.

This raises an important question for Yong and all of his readers. The apostolic church's message and mission centers on how people can have access to God. This access enables relationship that is described in familial, national, and religious language with metaphors like "children," "fellow citizens," and building blocks in God's "temple" (cf. Eph 2:11–22). The New Testament declares that this marvelous access to God which enables filial relationship with him is now available, but that it is only available in a salvific and meaningful sense (as described with the metaphors above) to those who are "in Christ." Can we not all agree with this basic understanding of the gospel?

Yong's radical inclusivism appears to suggest otherwise. It is most clearly expressed in his conclusion: "The conversion of others happens, not in any unidirectional manner that makes 'them' to be 'us,' but in the sense of a mutual transformation that draws us into the presence and activity of the divine breath" (p. 282).

4. Concluding Comments on Mission after Pentecost

The three themes that characterize *Mission after Pentecost* outlined above, rooted as they are in a post-colonial view of recent missions history, in my opinion undermine one of Yong's concluding exhortations. Yong admonishes, "The call to witness and the sending on mission are therefore not an initiation to comfortableness but an invitation to persecution and suffering" (p. 276). Yes, this is true, but what in Yong's understanding of mission would motivate one to take up this call? After all, if mission is dialogical (we're all simply fellow spiritual travelers, right?), largely based on our "presence," and ultimately not decisive for the religious "other's" eternal fate or their relationship with God, then why bother to go to difficult places, or anywhere beyond home for that matter? Why speak boldly when verbal witness isn't really that important? People might get upset. In short, there is very little in Yong's understanding of mission that instills confidence or inspires sacrifice. It rather seems to suggest that we should all sit tight, be nice to one another, and try to get along. Adolf Harnack would be very pleased.¹⁹

Yong's appropriation of a post-colonial hermeneutic also undermines his ability to speak with credibility when he admonishes, "we must be cautious about *demonizing human others*: those of other ethnicities, languages, cultures, (dis)abilities, and even religious traditions and sexual orientations" (p. 274, *italics mine*). Although this is all very true and well said, it doesn't seem to apply to those who have served as missionaries over the past two centuries. They can be unfairly castigated, defamed,

tion of the 1930 report issued by the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. The inquiry was commissioned by seven major denominations, chaired by William E. Hocking (a Harvard Professor), and its report was published in a book entitled, *Re-Thinking Missions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932). Varg writes: "*Re-Thinking Missions* was the high watermark of Protestant liberalism. In the dynamic world of the past one hundred years, stated the report, science, historical studies, and philosophic activity had brought progress in concepts of religious experience. Stress on future punishment had given way to a stress on beneficence.... Christianity would no longer view itself as the sole possessor of truth; it must now accept the fact that it was only one among equals in the field of religions groping for higher concepts of the meaning of the universe.... [Christianity] must recognize that it had no especial claim to revelation and should join hands with those same religions for the purpose of strengthening spiritual values" (Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats* [New York: Octagon, 1977], 167).

¹⁹ Actually, Yong's work may be aptly described as an attempt to blend the voices of Charles Parham and Harvey Cox. Unfortunately, the end result sounds more like Bishop K. H. Ting than William Seymour.

and verbally abused. Their motives can be impugned and their actions assailed with anachronistic, sweeping, and unsubstantiated slander. This is especially true if they happen to be white and hail from Europe or America. Obviously, the absurdity of these sweeping criticisms of missionaries, past and present, strikes a nerve in me. Since I have served as a missionary for over 30 years, have parents who served as missionaries later in life, and my in-laws served as missionaries for over 45 years in Latin America, I am not entirely objective on this point. Nevertheless, I believe I can speak with considerable experience, first-hand knowledge, and thus confidence when I reject the post-colonial perspective on the modern missions movement and the missionaries associated with it as ignorant, biased, distorted, and largely false.

5. Peaks of Faith: Another Perspective

My tale is not yet finished. It is, after all, a tale of two stories. If Yong's *Mission after Pentecost* presents the dilemma, a negative assessment of the modern missions movement, T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Peaks of Faith: Protestant Mission in Revolutionary China* provides the remedy, a well-documented and positive appraisal of the impact of missionaries in the pre-communist era of Southwest China (roughly 1880–1949). The book also traces the on-going influence of the Christian faith, transmitted to the minority groups of Southwest China by missionaries, during the often difficult and challenging post-revolutionary years (roughly 1949–1985). This book is not hagiography but rather well-researched and sober history. Nevertheless, it is history that is not filtered through the lens of Marxist or anti-Christian ideology. The result is an amazing, often inspiring account of how the gospel was transmitted to, received by, and thus impacted seven minority groups in Southwest China: the Miao of Wuding; the Yi of Luquan; the Lahu of Langcang; the Wa of Cangyuan; the Lisu in the Salwin Valley; the Hani of Mojiang; and the Jingpo of Dehong. In this study T'ien seeks to answer two questions: "What were the historical and geographical factors that inclined these minority people to embrace Christianity?" (p. 1), and "How did these people ... maintain their Christian faith during the catastrophic years, particularly during the Cultural Revolution?" (p. 2). T'ien traces the remarkable people movements that resulted in large swaths of these minority groups, especially among the Miao and the Lisu, coming to faith in Christ. He states the matter bluntly: "The rapid mass movement flourishing in the minority regions of Yunnan must be ascribed to the unflagging efforts of dedicated missionaries" (p. 28). T'ien records the sacrificial manner in which the missionaries lived, served, and loved the people, many whom had been treated with utter disdain by the dominant Han majority. The portrait of the missionaries that T'ien paints is quite different from the caricature offered by the post-colonial critique. In contrast to charges of arrogant and self-serving domination, T'ien writes,

The despairing minorities were greatly moved with high regard for the early missionaries' faith and self-denial. It was through this kind of inspired and reciprocal affection that the congregations over the remote mountainous regions were bound together. The deeply felt love of these simple people for their missionaries was enduring. They would pray audibly for the missionaries whom they had not seen for many, many years. (pp. 37–38)

When the missionaries were forced by the government to leave the Miao of Sapushan (Wuding) in 1950, many of the Miao brothers and sisters "were grieved to tears and could not eat for several days.

Tears displayed their gratitude for the uplifting of the down-trodden, obscure, and suffering masses on the remote mountains” (p. 38).

I have two special memories that support T’ien’s conclusions. Some years ago, in the northwest part of Yunnan Province, near the border with Myanmar, I visited a group of faculty members at a Lisu and Jingpo Bible School located there. We began to discuss the history of Christianity in their region and our conversation naturally turned to a discussion of the missionaries who brought them the gospel and served among them. I will never forget how the leading pastor, a fine Lisu brother, with tears in his eyes looked at me and declared with great emotion, “We have not forgotten one missionary that served here.”

The second memory was generated during my visit to a church near the city of Qujing in Yunnan Province. This church was established by Pentecostal missionaries, Max and Emily Bernheim, in the 1930s. The Bernheims, along with one son, were murdered by bandits in 1940. This tragic event left their five remaining children orphans. The bodies of Max, Emily, and their son, David, had not been found until late in 2015. The church discovered the site of their burial and moved their bones to the church’s current location in 2016. A Chinese Christian brother informed me of this more recent development and asked if I might somehow notify the family. So, along with a group of friends, I visited the burial site and found a beautiful memorial stone marking the Bernheim’s grave. More significantly, I found that the church they had planted—there were about 50 believers in 1940—is vibrant and thriving. The local Chinese believers repeatedly expressed their thankfulness for the Bernheim’s ministry and sacrifice. The church now numbers over 700 and the church leaders were deeply aware of their rich legacy. They noted with thankfulness the truth of Tertullian’s words, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” which they had engraved on the Bernheim’s memorial stone.

I share these recollections to emphasize that a very different assessment of the modern missions movement and its missionaries may be found through a careful and critical assessment of missions history. It is true that missionaries were not devoid of faults or weaknesses. As might be expected with people of strong character and convictions, they had their share of disagreements. Haven’t we all? It’s comforting, though, to consider that Paul and Barnabas also disagreed and parted ways. Nevertheless, for all of their foibles and humanness, these were (and are) by in large an amazing group, noted for their godliness, willingness to sacrifice, and love for people. If you are tempted to accept the post-colonial line, I challenge you to read books on the history of missions. Whether it be more inspirational works, such as Becky Croasmun’s *Legacy of Faith*, which chronicles Max and Emily Bernheim’s story, largely through their own notes and letters,²⁰ or more academic works, like T’ien’s *Peaks of Faith*, I believe if one reads with an open mind, the power and impact of these lives dedicated to Christ will become evident, as will the fruit of their labor.²¹

²⁰ Becky Croasmun, *Legacy of Faith* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011). Becky Croasmun is Max and Emily Bernheim’s granddaughter.

²¹ With respect to the post-colonial critique, I believe Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s essay, “The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism,” in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, edited by John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 336–73, is telling. Schlesinger examines the charge that Protestant missionaries in China were imperialists through three specific lenses (or theories of imperialism): economic; political; and cultural. He concludes that the missionaries were not economic or political imperialists: “the missionaries themselves remained a force independent of, and often at odds with, both the white trader and even more the white settler” (p. 346). After noting the apolitical stance of Rufus Anderson, the corresponding secretary of the American Board [of Missions] from 1832 to 1866, he quotes as representative the findings of the Hocking Commission in 1930, which concluded that the Protestant missionaries they studied were “in no sense

6. Conclusion

So, my tale of two stories must come to an end. It is a tale, however, that can be read at two levels. At one level, it is a tale of two very different stories. One story, *Mission after Pentecost*, I fear, might divert a vital evangelical movement away from the theological commitments and values that have made it a powerful force for Christian mission. If Yong's message is uncritically accepted by evangelical pastors and teachers, I do believe that, like the Pied Piper, it will lead the movement's children on a journey to irrelevance. The road Yong calls us to travel is not new, but rather the old, well-worn route the mainline denominations have trod throughout this past century. Its destination, then, should not surprise us.

There is another, more hopeful story, illustrated by the work of Chinese scholar, T'ien Ju-K'ang. His *Peaks of Faith* offers a very different reading of the modern missions movement. It is a story that is rooted in a clear message and a divine call. It speaks of the transforming power of the gospel and its glorious impact on people without hope. This is a story that instills confidence in the biblical message and inspires faith in a God who delights to call, send, and empower missionaries. Increasingly, it is also a story that will be repudiated, denounced, and, if possible, silenced. In fact, my own recently purchased, "used" copy of *Peaks of Faith* was marked as "withdrawn" from the Vancouver School of Theology (VST) library. As far as I can tell, the VST library no longer carries this carefully researched and skillfully written book. Why would they discard it? I can only conjecture on this point, but I believe that the reason is clear. This book, unlike *Mission after Pentecost*, does not fit their own post-colonial interpretation of the missionary movement. It may not be too long before it will require real courage in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom to write a book like *Peaks of Faith*. It will take even more courage to follow in the footsteps of its subjects.

My tale can also be read at another level. At this second level, my tale, let us call it, "Missions after Pentecost," is a glorious story, filled with suffering and joy, persecution and victory. It is not simply a story of missionaries sent out by missions societies and churches, but it is a story that includes this noble enterprise. It is a story that is patterned after the ministry of Jesus and which was given birth by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 13:1–3). It is a story, you might say, about the best of times and the worst of times (Rev 11:1–10), but it is a story that continues and is destined to have a glorious end (Rev 11:11–12; cf. Rev 21–22).

apologists for, nor promoters of, any political or economic system, or interest" (p. 360). Schlesinger then argues that the missionaries were, however, cultural imperialists, a charge which tells us more about Schlesinger's theology than it does about the missionaries' actual practice. Varg also refutes the imperialist charge, concluding that "there is no evidence to support any general thesis that the missionary enterprise was merely a tool of the middle class to prepare the way for the exploitation of China" (Varg, *Missionaries*, 85).

The Making of Biblical Womanhood: A Review

— Kevin DeYoung —

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Abstract: Beth Allison Barr’s influential book *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* sets out to demonstrate the historical roots of “biblical womanhood,” a system of Christian patriarchy that is not really Christian. This review article poses two key questions, both of which point to significant weaknesses in Barr’s argument. First, does Barr, as a historian, deal fairly and accurately with the proponents of “biblical womanhood”? Second, does Barr, as a historian, deal fairly and accurately with the historical evidence she cites in opposition to “biblical womanhood”? Specific examples of historical half-truths reveal a more comprehensive problem with Barr’s methodology, which reflects a “heads I win, tails you lose” approach to history.

“Patriarchy may be a part of Christian history, but that doesn’t make it Christian. It just shows us the historical (and very human) roots of biblical womanhood.”¹ In two sentences, this is the central argument of Beth Allison Barr’s popular book *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*.

The idea of “biblical womanhood” is nothing other than Christian patriarchy, and the only reason it continues to flourish is because women and men blindly continue to support it (p. 216). For too long, Barr argues, the system of Christian patriarchy has “place[d] power in the hands of men and take[n] power out of the hands of women.” It has taught “men that women rank lower than they do.” It has taught “women that their voices are worth less than the voices of men” (p. 18). At bottom, Christian patriarchy is no different from pagan patriarchy. Both are rampant in the world. Both have been around for a long time. And it’s time for both to end.

Although in many ways a learned book with hundreds of endnotes and plenty of academic citations, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* is anything but a dry, dispassionate work. From the first sentence of the Introduction (“I never meant to be an activist”) to the numerous references in the Acknowledgments to those who “believed in this project” and “stood by me” and “fought for me” and “gave me the courage

¹ Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Brazos Press, 2021), 37.

I needed to be braver than I ever knew I could be,” this is a work of vigorous advocacy (pp. viii–x). Barr is not simply arguing for a theological or historical interpretation. The stakes are much higher than that. She is “fighting for a better Christian world” (p. x). She is fighting for evangelical Christians to finally be free (p. 218).

1. A Work of History

The Making of Biblical Womanhood straddles several different genres. It is part personal history, with Barr’s own painful interactions with patriarchy (as she sees it) looming large in the background (and in the foreground). Woven throughout the book is the story of Barr’s husband being fired as a youth pastor for challenging his church’s leadership over the role of women in the church. We also hear of disrespectful male students in her classroom and of a scary relationship she had with a boyfriend years ago. Barr acknowledges that this experience with her boyfriend, along with the experience of her husband’s firing, “frames how I think about complementarianism today.” These “traumatic experiences” mean that she is “scarred” and “will always carry the scars” (p. 204). Those sympathetic to Barr’s perspective will likely resonate with the personal narrative, considering it one more reason to dismantle patriarchy once and for all. Others, however, might be curious to know if there is another side to these stories (Prov 18:17) and, more importantly, might wonder whether the author’s scars get in the way of giving complementarianism a fair hearing.

The book also contains elements of a typical egalitarian apologetic. As an exegetical work, there is little in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* that hasn’t been said many times over the past 40 years. Anyone familiar with egalitarian arguments will not be surprised by the main exegetical claims: Paul’s commands are culturally bound; husbands and wives both submit to each other; Phoebe was a deaconess; Junia was a female apostle; Mary Magdalene preached the gospel; Galatians 3:28 obliterates gender-based hierarchy. I won’t repeat Barr’s arguments, nor will I attempt a point-by-point rejoinder. If anyone wants to look at the same issues from a different perspective, my new book *Men and Women in the Church* is meant to be a concise overview of complementarian convictions and conclusions.²

What makes Barr’s work unique is her work as a medieval historian. It’s this new angle that prompted so many rave (if sometimes clichéd) reviews: “readers should be ready to have their worlds transformed” (Tisby); “absolute game changer” (Du Mez); “this book is a game changer” (Fea); “convincing and moving” (Jenkins); “I have waited my entire adult life for a book like this” (Merritt); “a brilliant, thunderous narrative” (McKnight). With a PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and now as an associate professor of history and associate dean at Baylor University, Barr has an impressive academic pedigree. No one can question that Barr writes as a well-trained historian, something she reminds the reader of often:

- “As a historian...” (p. 6)
- “Listen not just to my experiences but also to the evidence I present as a historian” (p. 9).
- “Even from my early years training as a historian...” (p. 12)
- “Here I was, a professor with a PhD from a major research university...” (p. 56)
- “Because I am a historian...” (p. 56)
- “So as a historian...” (p. 60)

² Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

- “Instead, I taught the narrative I had learned from my training as a historian...” (p. 107).
- “My training as a historian...” (p. 107)
- “My medieval history-trained eyes...” (p. 125)
- “But as a historian...” (p. 127)
- “As a medieval historian who specializes in English sermons...” (p. 132)
- “Yet, as a medieval historian...” (p. 133)
- “So let me tell you what I know as a historian...” (p. 133)
- “As a historian who studies manuscript tradition...” (p. 143)
- “To my women’s history-trained ears...” (p. 171)
- “As a medieval historian...” (p. 183)
- “As a church historian...” (p. 194)
- “At least to my historian’s mind...” (p. 197)
- “I am a historian...” (p. 205)

With this relentless emphasis on writing “as a historian,” we would do well to evaluate *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* first of all as a work of historical scholarship.

Along these lines, let me raise two questions, both of which point to significant weaknesses in Barr’s argument. First, does Barr, as a historian, deal fairly and accurately with the proponents of “biblical womanhood”? Second, does Barr, as a historian, deal fairly and accurately with the historical evidence she cites in opposition to “biblical womanhood”?

2. Dealing Fairly with Our Opponents

One of the difficulties in evaluating Barr’s arguments against “biblical womanhood” is that she never provides a definition of what exactly she means by that pejorative label or how she has determined who counts as authoritative spokesmen for the concept she rejects. The closest she comes to a definition of biblical womanhood is when she observes that she grew up learning that “women were called to secondary roles in church and family, with an emphasis on marriage and children” (p. 1). Along the same lines, she defines complementarianism as “the theological view that women are divinely created as helpers and men are divinely created as leaders” (p. 5). The problem with both of these definitions is that they don’t come from anyone in the “biblical womanhood” or complementarian camp. That’s not automatically a problem. There’s a place for summarizing big, broad movements in our own words. But for a whole book against “biblical womanhood,” one would have expected a substantial and sophisticated analysis of the theological, exegetical, and cultural vision laid out in *the* book with biblical womanhood in its title, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.³ One would have hoped for a careful look at the Danvers Statement or an evaluation of the “Mission & Vision” of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Instead, Barr’s version of “biblical womanhood” relies heavily on her personal experience, broad generalizations, and bite-size quotations from people as diverse as Tim LaHaye, James Dobson, Bill Gothard, Russell Moore, Owen Strachan, John Piper, and Wayne Grudem.

I hope most history departments would insist that the best research tries to present historical subjects and ideas in ways that would be familiar to them. That is, before moving to critical evaluation, historians should try to make sense of what people in the past have believed, on their own terms, and

³ John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991). Crossway released a revised edition in 2021.

why they came to the conclusions they did. While Barr demonstrates admirable sympathy for her medieval subjects (the women at least), she makes little effort to understand her “biblical womanhood” opponents or to look for much more than gotcha words and phrases. For example, Barr often mentions a 2006 article from Russell Moore where he talks favorably about the word “patriarchy.”⁴ (Incidentally, it’s ironic that Moore, because of an article 15 years ago, has become the chief culprit in advocating patriarchy when many would regard him as the type of complementarian *most* sympathetic to many of Barr’s complaints.) Barr also quotes Owen Strachan using the p-word (patriarchy). Citing Moore’s article, along with one line from Strachan, Barr insists, “Not long ago, evangelicals were talking a lot about patriarchy” (p. 12). Two examples hardly seem like a lot, especially considering the word complementarian was coined specifically to get away from words like patriarchy.

It should be stated that patriarchy, by itself, is not a bad word. If we have God as our heavenly Father, we all believe in some kind of patriarchy. Personally, I don’t tend to use the word because of all the negative connotations. But just because someone uses the word *patriarchy* doesn’t make them—or an entire movement—guilty of those negative connotations. In fact, as Barr points out, Moore is careful to distinguish Christian patriarchy from “pagan patriarchy” and “predatory patriarchy” (p. 16). Barr admits that Moore’s stance has been “women should not submit to men in general (pagan patriarchy), but wives should submit to their husbands (Christian patriarchy)” (p. 17). That seems like a significant and helpful distinction. But in her next line, Barr takes away the distinction Moore tries to make: “Nice try, I thought. Tell that to my conservative male student.” Does one rude college student mean that all patriarchy is pagan patriarchy?

At times, Barr’s takedowns feel more like political oppo research than careful academic reasoning. For example, she tells her students “how easily a study of Paul overturns John Piper’s claim that Christianity has a ‘masculine feel.’” After all, she argues, Paul describes himself as a pregnant mother, a mother giving birth, and even a nursing mother (p. 52). I don’t expect Barr to like the phrase “masculine feel,” but Piper’s argument does not rest on whether Paul ever uses female imagery. Piper argues that God has revealed himself to us in the Bible pervasively as King, not Queen, and as Father, not Mother. He argues that the Son of God came into the world as a man, that the priests in Israel were men, that the apostles were all men, that men are given the responsibility to lead, protect, and provide. Piper acknowledges that emphasizing a “masculine ministry” can be seriously misunderstood and misapplied. He also underscores several times that a “masculine ministry” is for the flourishing of women and that women contribute in fruitful partnership to the work of ministry. Again, Barr has every right to disagree with Piper’s vision for ministry, but that disagreement should deal with his specific arguments and proposals, not with one phrase she feels is particularly laughable.

Or to cite another example involving Piper, Barr claims, “Even John Piper admitted in 1984 that he can’t figure out what to do with Deborah and Huldah” (p. 36). But if you look up the citation, here is the totality of what Piper said:

I admit that Deborah and Huldah do not fit neatly into my view. I wish Berkeley and Alvera would do the same about 1 Timothy 2:8–15 (etc.!). Perhaps it is no fluke that Deborah and Huldah did not put themselves forward but were sought out because of their wisdom and revelation (Judges 4:5; 2 Kings 22:14). I argued in March (pp. 30–32) that the issue (in 1 Cor. 11:2–16) is *how* a woman should prophesy, not whether she

⁴ Russell Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 569–76.

should. Are Deborah and Huldah examples of *how* to “prophesy” and “judge” in a way that affirms and honors the normal headship of men?”⁵

That presents a different picture than Barr’s “he can’t figure out what to do with Deborah and Huldah”—not a befuddled complementarian, but someone trying to deal with the strongest arguments of the other side and provide a response. Surely, this is a good model for all of us to follow.

Similarly, Barr chides Capitol Hill Baptist Church for one of their Sunday school classes. “To this day,” she writes, “I grind my teeth over the church history series used by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It paints a grim picture of a sordid, corrupt medieval church in which few people, except for a remnant of ‘scattered monks and nuns,’ found salvation” (p. 137). Barr is free to argue that the curriculum is too negative about the medieval church, but she ought to at least note the first two sentences of the lesson: “Common belief is that the Middle Ages was a truly horrible time period with no redeeming qualities. But the more we examine [we] realize just how rich some of the theology was, and how important many of the people and events are during this time period.”⁶

Whether because of her own pain, or maybe because of her stated aim to fight for a better world, Barr is frequently guilty of reading material from the other side with a hermeneutic of suspicion. For example, she states matter-of-factly that the ESV translation of Junia as “well known to the apostles” instead of “prominent among the apostles” was “a deliberate move to keep women out of leadership” (p. 69). How she has confidently ascertained the inner workings of the ESV translation committee is not stated. Likewise, she cites an ESV resource as saying, “The union of one man and one woman in marriage is one of the *most basic* and *most profound* aspects of being created in the image of God.”⁷ Barr concludes from this one sentence: “because we are created in the image of God, implies the ESV resources, we desire the union of marriage. Marriage—from the evangelical perspective—completes us” (p. 112). I can’t imagine many other readers jumped from “marriage is one of the most basic and most profound aspects of being created in the image of God” to the relational philosophy of *Jerry Maguire*. It is worth noting as well that the ESV resource in question was written by Yusufu Turaki, a pastor and scholar from Nigeria. Does Barr mean to lampoon the evangelical *African* perspective on marriage and singleness? And all of this is to say nothing of the fact that *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* specifically begins with a Foreword addressing single men and women—the eighth point of which states, “Mature manhood and womanhood are not dependent on being married.” While you will find many complementarians celebrating the goodness and design of marriage, I doubt you will find any insisting that single persons are incomplete without it.

Before moving on to the next heading let me make clear: I don’t believe complementarianism and “biblical womanhood” are above critique. I don’t agree with everything I’ve seen over the years from CBMW. I have cringed at certain comments complementarians have made on Twitter. There have been rhetorical blunders in the complementarian world and some theological mistakes. Like many others, I share Barr’s concerns with tying gender roles to the eternal subordination of the Son—a view I’ve critiqued before (though Barr unfairly equates ESS with Arianism). This review isn’t about circling

⁵ John Piper, “Headship and Harmony: Response from John Piper,” *The Standard* 74.5 (1984): 39–40, available at *Desiring God*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/headship-and-harmony>.

⁶ “Class 5: The High Middle Ages,” *Capitol Hill Baptist Church*, 24 June 2016, <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/class-5-the-high-middle-ages/>.

⁷ Yusufu Turaki, “Marriage and Sexual Morality,” *ESV.org*, <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/marriage-and-sexual-morality>, Barr’s italics.

the wagons and disallowing any criticism of Piper or Grudem or Dever (or DeYoung for that matter). But complementarians should recognize the arguments being critiqued, and they should know the intellectual reasons why fringe figures like Bill Gothard are often referenced when serious mainstream complementarian scholars like Doug Moo or Don Carson almost never are (let alone magisterial theologians like Augustine or Aquinas or Bavinck, all of whom interpret and apply the biblical passages on men and women differently than Barr does). One could be forgiven for thinking that words like “biblical womanhood” and “patriarchy” are not careful representations of cogent theological positions or discernible ecclesiastical movements as much as they are catch-all terms for whatever ideas about men and women that the author (and, likely, his or her colleagues) disdain. Would that our academic historians might treat their ideological opponents with the same level of integrity and sophistication they no doubt insist upon from their students in other historical matters.

3. Dealing Fairly with the Historical Evidence

As a work purporting to be serious history, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* contains more than a few historical oddities. I don’t know that any other historian has ever referred to John Calvin and John Knox as “radical Puritan translators” (p. 145), given that the term “Puritan” began as a term of derision in the Church of England and barely existed before Calvin and Knox died. Likewise, Barr mistakenly claims that the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion was “the first American Calvinist denomination” to emerge from the evangelical revivals (p. 177), when, in fact, the Anglican breakaway group was English not American. Barr also evinces an amateurish view of the Arian controversy, equating the error of eternal subordination with the teachings of Arius (when someone like Origen would have been more accurate) and stating incorrectly, “When everyone else in the Christian world got wind of what Arius was teaching, they reacted with horror” (p. 194). This is hardly an accurate reading of the back-and-forth theological and geopolitical debate that ensued after Nicea and prompted the council in the first place.

More important than these mistakes, Barr often employs ambiguous language and selective information in presenting the heroes and heroines of her cause. For example, she observes triumphantly that Chrysostom interprets 1 Timothy 3:11 as a reference to deaconesses. This shows, on her reading, that the golden-tongued preacher clearly supported “female leadership” in the church (p. 68). But is “female leadership” the best description for the order of deaconesses that emerged in the third and fourth centuries? Early church documents like the *Apostolic Constitutions* explain that deaconesses were to visit women in their homes, help bathe infirm women, and assist the presbyters in baptizing women so as to maintain proper decorum. Robert Cara’s summary is apt: “there were two gender-separate ordained deacon bodies in at least part of the church during the third and fourth centuries AD and no example of a mixed-gender diaconate. The ordained deaconesses had restricted responsibilities compared to the male counterparts.”⁸ If deaconesses were “leaders” in the church, Barr should explain what that leadership looked like, lest we commit the historical fallacy of anachronistically reading modern notions of “female leadership” back into Chrysostom’s sermons.

⁸ Robert J. Cara, “Justification of Ordained Office of Deacon Restricted to Qualified Males,” *Reformed Faith & Practice* 5.3 (2020): 38–39, <https://journal.rts.edu/article/justification-of-ordained-office-of-deacon-restricted-to-qualified-males/>.

Moreover, before we make Chrysostom an opponent of “biblical womanhood,” we should note what he says in his other homilies on 1 Timothy. According to Chrysostom, women in the church must “show submission by their silence. For the sex is naturally somewhat talkative; and for this reason he restrains them on all sides.” A little further in the same sermon we read: “He wishes the man to have the preeminence in every way.” And later: “The woman taught once and ruined all. On this account therefore he saith, let her not teach. But what is it to other women, that she suffered this? It certainly concerns them; for the sex is weak and fickle, and he is speaking of the sex collectively.”⁹ The point is not that Chrysostom is right about everything—I’m embarrassed by some of his language too—but intellectual honesty demands that we represent historical figures as they were, not as we wish them to be.

Or take the example of Genovefa of Paris, whom Barr calls the “defacto ecclesiastical leader of Paris” (p. 88). Leaving aside the fact that what we know about many of Barr’s medieval heroines come from hagiographical sources often written centuries later, is it fair to say Genovefa was the “defacto ecclesiastical leader,” when she did not ordain anyone, did not administer the sacraments, did not hold ecclesiastical office, and did not preach in the church? It is said that Genovefa prayed for the city when attacked by the Huns and encouraged the citizens of Paris not to flee. She reportedly received numerous visions of saints and angels. She erected a chapel in honor of Saint Denis. At one point, the bishop appointed her to look after the consecrated virgins. This is a kind of leadership to be sure, but not what most people hear in the term “ecclesiastical leader.”

Even more telling is Barr’s use of Brigit of Kildare. Whereas “Genovefa acted like a bishop,” Barr maintains, “Brigit of Kildare (according to hagiography) was actually ordained as a bishop” (p. 89). There is a story in one lone hagiographical source of a bishop presiding over Brigit’s consecration, and while chanting the liturgy of consecration, he got so intoxicated with the grace of God that he mistakenly read the episcopal ordination ceremony instead and made Brigit a bishop by accident. To her credit, Barr mentions the unusual circumstances surrounding Brigit’s “ordination.” What Barr doesn’t mention is what the source she cites says next: “Within this hagiographical episode, the saint herself did not acknowledge the unique event but instead accepted a donation of land.”¹⁰ In other words, Barr’s example of a woman having “received ordination like a man would have” (p. 89) is anything but. The ordination was an accident; Brigit refused to accept it; and the whole incident may not have happened in the first place.

We could cite other examples. Barr maintains, “Even Calvinist evangelicals of the past have affirmed women’s calling by God as public ministers” (p. 177). Her one piece of evidence in support of this claim is the aforementioned Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. To be sure, Selina was a remarkable woman. In fact, the conservative Calvinist publisher Banner of Truth released a book about her.¹¹ The Countess supported George Whitefield, gave generously of her family fortune to start a training school for ministers, and established a number of chapels in England, over which she exercised close superintendence. While Reformed Christians of the past (and present) have celebrated the Countess of Huntingdon as playing a pivotal role in the evangelical awakening, this is a far cry from suggesting that

⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* 9 (NPNF¹ 13:435–36).

¹⁰ Citing Lisa M. Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints: How Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare Built Christianity in Barbarian Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 180.

¹¹ Faith Cook, *Selina: Countess of Huntingdon: Her Pivotal Role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001).

Calvinistic Methodists in the eighteenth century affirmed Selina as a public minister, something she was not and something she would not have claimed.

And then there is Margery Kempe, the medieval English mystic who appears in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* more than any other historical person. Barr tells of the time Margery was arrested, in 1417, in the town of York and brought before the archbishop. “The archbishop knew Margery was traveling around the countryside without her husband; he knew she was acting like a religious teacher without any training” (p. 73). And yet, when confronted by the archbishop of York, “she stood her ground in a room full of masculine authority” (p. 73). A priest read aloud one of the passages commanding the silence of women, but Margery was undeterred: “She preached from the Bible to a room full of male priests—including the archbishop of York—defending her right to do so as a woman” (p. 74). As Barr puts it later on the same page, “For this medieval woman, Paul didn’t apply. She could teach the Word of God, even as an ordinary woman, because, she argued, Jesus endorsed it” (p. 74).

Two pages later Barr explains that at another point in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery hears God make a promise to come to her aid “with my blessed mother, and my holy angels and twelve apostles, St Katherine, St Margaret and St Mary Magdalene, and many other saints that are in heaven” (p. 76). According to Barr, “Margery Kempe stood with a host of female witnesses who helped authorize her voice, pushing back against male authority and even the limitations placed on her” (p. 99). Barr harkens back to Margery’s “great cloud of female witnesses” many times in the rest of the book (pp. 76, 77, 88, 96, 99, 181, 183). Crucially, the example of Margery Kempe was a key factor in motivating Barr to fight for the liberation of women and to challenge complementarian teachings about women in the church (p. 72).

The Book of Margery Kempe is a fascinating and sometimes bizarre autobiography of a remarkable medieval woman who hears from God in intimate conversation, receives frequent visions, prays and fasts to the point of exhaustion, cuts off sexual relations with her husband because she wishes to be a virgin, enters into spiritual marriage with the Godhead, is told by Jesus to lie in bed with him and kiss his mouth as sweetly as she wants, is assaulted by the devil with visions of male genitalia and tempted to have sex with various men of religion, cries uncontrollably over the course of a decade, constantly interrupts worship services with shrieking and wailing, berates people on the street for their oath-taking and bad language, and speaks to people of every rank about her messages from God whether they want to hear from her or not.

Margery is many things, but she is hardly a rebel against male authority. Her *Book* is filled with good priests, confessors, and friars whom Margery seeks out for counsel and assistance and who, in turn, provide Margery with protection and support. In keeping with the expectations of her age, Margery seeks permission from religious leaders before traveling and receives a male escort to guard her on her journeys. She even describes her husband—with whom she will not have sex for several years—as a kind man who stood by her when others let her down. If there is an overarching theme to Margery’s *Book* it is the pursuit to find from (male) religious figures approval for her insights and validation for her unusual life.

When Margery appeared before the archbishop of York, it was one of many encounters like this throughout her life. Half the people who met her thought she had a special gift from God, and the other half thought she had a devil. The anger from the archbishop was not because she was a woman bucking patriarchal authority. She was accused of being a Lollard and a heretic. To be sure, she defended her right to speak as a woman, but as Barr herself notes, Margery explicitly denied preaching. “I do not

preach, sir,” Margery stated before the archbishop, “I do not go into any pulpit. I use only conversation and good words, and that I will do while I live.”¹² This is not exactly saying “Paul doesn’t apply.” It’s more like saying, “I listen to Paul, and I’m not doing what he forbids.” A few chapters later, Margery says to the archbishop, “My lord, if you care to examine me, I shall avow the truth, and if I be found guilty, I will be obedient to your correction.” Margery did not see herself as a proto-feminist standing against the evil forces of patriarchy. She saw herself as an orthodox Christian who was sharing her visions and revelations in the midst of antagonism and support from both men and women.

I can see why Margery (minus all the weird stuff) might be an inspiring figure for women. She is bold, passionate, and intensely devoted to God. But she was a medieval woman, not a twenty-first century one. Barr insists that Margery calls upon St. Margaret, St. Katherine, and St. Mary Magdalene because “the medieval church was simply too close in time to forget the significant roles women played in establishing the Christian faith throughout the remnants of the Roman Empire” (p. 88). Leaving aside the fact that the saints mentioned above were more than 1,000 years removed from Margery—indeed, we are much closer in time to Margery’s age than she was to St. Katherine or St. Margaret—isn’t the simpler explanation that Margery was a medieval Catholic who prayed to and called upon numerous saints? At other times in her *Book*, Margery prays to St. Augustine, and frequently she prays to St. Paul. Her “great cloud of female witnesses” (which included many men) was ordinary medieval piety, not a defiant repudiation of male authority.

Barr imagines that if Margery—who cared for her husband in his old age, was pregnant fourteen times, and spoke extensively about her son and daughter-in-law in part two of her *Book*—had a Twitter profile, “I doubt Kempe would include any reference to her family or her husband” (p. 168). It seems to me historians can’t be overly confident about the imaginary social media habits of medieval Christians. Speculating about Twitter profiles likely says more about us than our historical subjects.

Elsewhere Barr lauds the example of St. Paula, “who abandoned her children for the higher purpose of following God’s call on her life.” After the death of her husband, Paula set sail for Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, “leaving three of her children alone, crying on the shore” (p. 79). For Barr, this is the kind of womanhood we need more of in the church. I think most Christians today, outside of the enclaves of highly educated Westerners, would agree that if female liberation looks like mothers abandoning their children alone and losing all sense of calling as wives and mothers, then the cure for biblical womanhood is worse than the disease.

4. Heads I Win, Tails You Lose

These specific examples of historical half-truths reveal a more comprehensive problem with Barr’s methodology. Barr could have made a compelling case that women throughout history have been key players in the story of the church and have often acted in ways that contemporary Christians might find surprising. If this were the story, we could then explore how to understand these women in their historical context, how they understood themselves, how others viewed their ministries, and in what ways their examples are worth emulating today. That would be a worthwhile discussion—one that would likely provide evidence “for” and “against” current assumptions about biblical womanhood.

¹² Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Barry Windeatt, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin, 2000), 164.

But that is not the book Barr has given us because that is not the historical method she employs. In Barr's hermeneutic, all the evidence she likes counts as a blow to "biblical womanhood," while all the evidence she doesn't like counts as patriarchy. Time and again, Barr quickly pushes aside any evidence that might challenge her thesis. What's left is a "heads I win, tails you lose" approach to history.

- "Echoes of human patriarchy parade throughout the New Testament—from the exclusivity of male Jews to the harsh adultery laws applied to women and even to the writings of Paul. The early church was trying to make sense of its place in both a Jewish and Roman world, and much of those worlds bled through into the church's story. At the same time, we see a surprising number of passages subverting traditional gender roles and emphasizing women as leaders" (p. 35).
- "Patriarchy exists in the Bible because the Bible was written in a patriarchal world. Historically speaking, there is nothing surprising about biblical stories and passages riddled with patriarchal attitudes and actions. What is surprising is how many biblical passages and stories undermine, rather than support, patriarchy" (p. 36).
- "The New Testament household codes tell a story of how the early church was trying to live within a non-Christian, and increasingly hostile, world. They needed to fit in, but they also needed to uphold the gospel of Christ. They had to uphold the frame of Roman patriarchy as much as they could, but they also had to uphold the worth and dignity of each human being made in the image of God. Paul gave them the blueprints to remix Roman patriarchy" (p. 54–55).
- "Of course, I told my students, not everyone in the early church supported women in leadership. The office of presbyter testifies loudly to how patriarchal prejudices of the ancient world had already crept into Christianity" (p. 68).

This line of argumentation is key to Barr's entire project. Patriarchy is a shapeshifter (p. 153). It is ever present, always evolving and changing as history changes (p. 169). Patriarchy is like racism (pp. 186, 208). It never goes away. It just adapts to a new world. Consequently, anything that smacks of "biblical womanhood" is just one more indication how pervasive patriarchy has been in the world.

Who is to blame for "biblical womanhood"? Almost everyone. The Babylonians introduced patriarchy from the very beginning (p. 24). Then it was the Roman Empire that colored the New Testament in patriarchal hues (pp. 46–47). After Abelard valiantly fought for the ordination of deaconesses, the church acquiesced to worldly conceptions of power and pushed out women from positions of power (p. 114). Then the Reformation tragically cemented the idea that women should be wives and mothers (p. 123). Later the Victorian age introduced unbiblical notions of modesty and purity (p. 156). Finally, the early twentieth-century doctrine of inerrancy created an atmosphere of fear and proved the perfect weapon against women's equality (pp. 190, 196). Patriarchy is the villain with a thousand faces.

Let me say one more time, if Barr simply wanted to demonstrate that "biblical womanhood," as some conservative Christians understand and practice it, has been shaped over the centuries by ideas and forces other than the Bible, that would likely be a convincing argument. But this would require Barr to admit that the current fervor *against* "biblical womanhood" is culturally situated as well, comfortably resembling the spirit of *this* age.

It would also require a better, fairer, and more intellectually rigorous approach to history itself—an approach that doesn't resemble a Grand Monocausal Theory of Everything whereby every piece of historical evidence already has a predetermined meaning. So, if the biblical patterns of leadership

and biblical descriptions of God sound overly masculine, don't worry—that's patriarchy. If Jesus chose only male apostles and Paul commanded women to submit to their husbands, don't be surprised—that's patriarchy. If the Reformers championed marriage and motherhood, of course they did—that's patriarchy. The historical deck is stacked before the scholarly game is even played.

Barr's historical argument "works" because it is impossible not to work. Whatever evidence one might produce—from the Bible, from theologians across the ages, or from human nature itself—in support of male authority in the church and in the home, or for the high calling of motherhood, or for the general principle that men ought to lead, protect, and provide, all of this can be dismissed as patriarchy. By contrast, any evidence that shows women teaching others or exercising leadership—no matter what kind of leadership or what kind of teaching it might be, no matter the historical context or the reliability of the historical sources, and no matter how much the women themselves made a point not to transgress proper lines of authority—all of this counts as resistance to patriarchy. Given this hermeneutic—and with the entire canvass of human history to work with—Barr's thesis, and those like it, cannot fail. It is not falsifiable. Every bit of patriarchy means she's right, and every bit of not-patriarchy means she's right too.

That's one way to do history. But surely there is a better way.

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— OLD TESTAMENT —

M. Daniel Carroll R. *The Book of Amos*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2020. xxx + 574 pp. £36.73/\$52.00.

Daniel Carroll R. has produced a wonderful commentary for engaging the many scholarly questions that surround the book of Amos—and often issues more general to the life and world of ancient Israel. Amos has not been overly blessed by the commentaries, especially ones that are both academically astute and from a broadly conservative/evangelical standpoint. And this book will be a first point of reference for students and scholars entering into the debates or needing help in particulars of a complex and engaging (if neglected) corner of our Bibles.

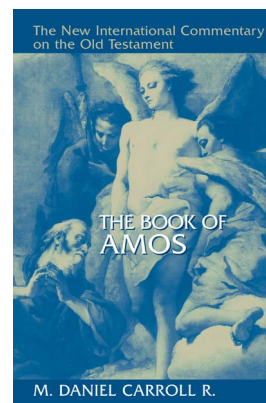
Carroll R. situations the various oracles in Amos to roughly the first half of the 8th century BC (the era pointed to by the text itself). He presses against the impulse of critical scholars to pronounce numerous layers and grounds and ideologies around layers of redaction, rightly pointing out the paucity of evidence on which such work is carried out regarding Amos (as, we might add, most of the prophetic literature). But the character of the discussion in these matters is nothing like such dogmatic assertions. The author, in standard academic prose, offers a patient walk through various sides of the question. He names the issue, walks through proposed options and problems with these proposed solutions, then offers either a synthesis or defense of his own solution.

The outcome is a thoughtful, thoroughly engaged scholarly work that ought to be the first stop of reference for students beginning academic study of the prophets. The volume continues the impressive recent additions to the NICOT series, which has always been focused on the academic student and ensuring conversational fluency with the relevant critical scholarship. The result here is certainly thorough—he opens with 112 pages of introduction, and only gets through two verses before entering his first lengthy excursus. And while it's true that the scholarly literature is largely of the same sort—classical critical scholarship, rather than any engagement with the plethora of other more recent reading practices (whether feminist, from the social science fields, or theological), or figures from the history of interpretation—that also fits the basic history of the series. The classical critical field covered so well in this volume remains the backbone on which all kinds of readings are pursued in academic work.

For all that, however, I must admit that I finally completed the volume with some disappointment. Not with regard to the academic engagement or the judgments made—naturally, there are moments where I disagreed or thought a different option would help—but rather with the somewhat tiring effort it takes to engage.

Nowhere else in Scripture are we faced with rhetorical pugilism of the sort we find in a book like Amos. It is a lively book, sparkling with fight and force, leaving readers with the sense that this particular prophet believed that *everything* was on the line when the people of God are confronted with their unfaithfulness. To move from the text to the commentary feels like someone throwing on the handbrake from 60 mph. We almost get the idea that being confronted with the prophets is a take-it-or-leave-it affair, one that is rightly handled in the impersonal voicing of professional academia.

I say “almost” because I know from Carroll R.’s other works and his teaching that this would be a deeply unfair conclusion to the scholar or his desire in his work. In fact, in the commentary there are



moments when the passion (rightful, in my view) shunts the impersonal voice to the side. Take this striking aside from the introduction, speaking of the urgency in Amos's words: "Those who live or have lived in the Two-Thirds (or Majority) World can readily identify with these kinds of images and the intent of the dramatic language: The harsh reality of poverty and the multiple abuses by economic and government elites produce shock and anger" (p. 25).

His sensitivity—born from experience—to a world not often entertained in classical critical library-writing, occasionally felt as if it was bursting to emerge. Yet we only get passing references to it. Later, he rebukes one older commentator who famously wished the prophet to address the sins of the "lower stratum of society," with precisely the steel and passion I was hoping to see more often: "This commentator misses the depth of righteous anger. The sight of widespread suffering while elites coldly enjoy the comforts obtained on the back of others' misery triggers the outcry. This does not mean that the oppressed are idealized" (p. 377).

And while it is not the author's fault that the work was released on the heels of such upheaval as we have seen in the last years, the above quote sounds particularly poignant in a post-George Floyd culture. Think again of that dynamic in our current moment: one critic minimizes Amos because the prophet fails to expose and rebuke the wrongs committed by the oppressed. And Carroll R. responds by focusing attention on the real experience of those suffering under the oppressive hand of those who built their social position on the back of others' misery. It sounds eerily poignant for good reason. Yet we have almost to scour the lengthy work for these moments.

To name the personal disappointment, I have a longing for the prophets to be preached again, especially in majority-white churches. The last year, especially here in Minneapolis, has only solidified that need, so that discussions of "systems of oppression" can be engaged in biblically and theologically faithful ways. Amos was not a Marxist nor the son of a Marxist. Yet I don't know of a more poignant voice than Amos for confronting the reality of often-oppressive systems where those in power are afraid of losing that power to those on whose backs they have built their wealth. One need not idealize the oppressed to expose oppression.

I hope many preachers will want to engage the questions of social injustice in the context of divine justice, and when they do, they should turn their own thoughts and those of their congregations to Amos. They will want Carroll R.'s work next to them as they begin that work, because there is not another commentary so thorough in its discussions of a complex and sometimes confusing book. But the commentary reads more with an assumption that it will live on library shelves for student use, rather than impelling a new generation of preachers towards hearing the prophetic voice of God through Amos in the midst of such a chaotic cultural moment.

Of course, this should not cloud either the excellence of the work for what it is, or appropriate admiration for the author. In fact, the disappointment comes as a function of my regard for the author: his works on immigration, race, and the importance of non-majority world voices all led me to expect this commentary to be a magisterial dialogue between Amos and the realities faced by the preacher in trying to shepherd people faithfully in our world. What I received instead was an excellent conversation between Carroll R. and the traditional literature of academic prophetic studies, with the text of Amos as the topic *du jour*. For what it is, it is immensely helpful, and students will be in his debt for a generation.

Yet I fear it will not prove the help I was expecting for pastors and preachers who want the church to hear the prophetic voice of Amos in today's fraught moment.

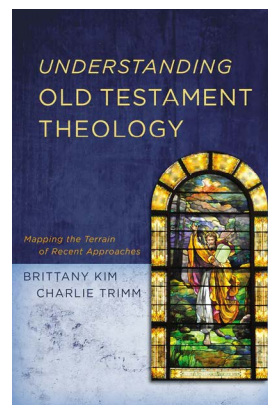
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Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm. *Understanding Old Testament Theology: Mapping the Terrain of Recent Approaches*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. xi + 177 pp. \$12.99/\$19.99.

Having known each other since their days as doctoral students at Wheaton College and collaborated on a previous publication, Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm team up again to produce a concise, valuable guide to Old Testament theology that focuses on surveying, organizing, and selectively analyzing recent works on the subject. As the authors explain (pp. ix, 7–8) and as those familiar with Old Testament theology know, Gerhard Hasel's standard work, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) is about thirty years old. This means that its survey of literature needs updating, and Kim and Trimm meet this need admirably.

As for the contents of the book, its brief introduction (pp. 1–10) provides a working definition for Old Testament theology, identifies contested issues that have led to a diversity of approaches, gives a brief history of the discipline (with references to more detailed treatments), and explains how Kim and Trimm classify various approaches to Old Testament theology and how each chapter is organized. Focusing on works from the past thirty years (p. 8), approaches to Old Testament theology are classified into three broad categories—those that emphasize history (whether biblical or a historical-critical reconstruction), theme(s), or context (whether canonical, Jewish, or personal/postmodern). Each chapter begins with a definition (i.e., summary description) of a particular subcategory of approaches (e.g., single theme) and a listing of representative works, with the bulk of each chapter explaining common features and points of tension within this subcategory. Each chapter concludes with a test case, which consists of a brief survey of how various scholars in this subcategory treat Exodus.

The major categories of history, theme, and context can be quite broad. The “theme” category is the most homogeneous, with the main variation being whether a scholar emphasizes a single theme or multiple themes. The “history” category, on the other hand, covers salvation-historical approaches, narrative approaches, and approaches based on historical-critical reconstruction. The “context” category likewise spans the literary-social context of canon, the context of Jewish scholarship, and various approaches involving the context of the individual interpreter and the group of people the interpreter represents. As a member of an ethnic minority (in America), I appreciate the special effort that Kim and Trimm make to include less commonly heard voices, whether Jewish, Korean, Chinese, Hispanic, Indian, African, or others. One minor point of correction is that Jackson Wu is not a “Chinese” scholar (p. 132), as the name is a pseudonym, although he has extensive experience and knowledge of Chinese culture.



A more important issue is the major categories themselves and the categorization of various approaches. Kim and Trimm acknowledge that their way of classifying approaches to Old Testament theology is not the only one and that some approaches could be classified under more than one category (p. 10). They cite Walter Kaiser as an example, whose work emphasizes the theme of promise and hence is categorized under theme rather than history, even though his presentation follows historical order (e.g., Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978]). Examples like these could be added, such as Dempster who is classified under theme (p. 73) but who also emphasizes narrative storyline and canon and so could fit under history or context also (Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003]). Kim and Trimm graciously apologize to authors who feel that they have been miscategorized. At the same time, they believe that something like this is inevitable “no matter how the categories are defined” (p. 10).

The root issue seems to be the eclectic nature of many approaches to Old Testament theology (e.g., historical and thematic, and sometimes also canonical) and the either-or impression given (even if unintended) by classification into one of these three categories. Although an alternative of not classifying approaches at all (or doing so purely chronologically) is probably even worse, the frequently mixed nature of approaches to Old Testament theology still could be made more prominent throughout the book. Another alternative is Sailhamer’s use of feature analysis to classify approaches to Old Testament theology that highlights multiple features of a particular approach at once (John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 29–35). Granted, there is an inherent tradeoff here between the simplicity of having a small number of categories and the precision of feature analysis. The authors (and perhaps the publisher) may have chosen to prioritize simplicity, but readers should bear in mind the difficulty of classifying such multifaceted approaches in a simple manner.

I believe that this book, especially the updated survey of literature, is helpful to readers and merits consideration by instructors as a required textbook alongside Hasel for courses on Old Testament theology. Hasel (or the like) continues to have value for its more detailed discussion of methodology and the history of the discipline, even as Kim and Trimm’s book meets a real need today.

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Nathan Lovell. *The Book of Kings and Exilic Identity: 1 and 2 Kings as a Work of Political Historiography*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 708; London: T&T Clark, 2021. £90.00/\$115.00.

Is the book of Kings a mish-mash of inconsistent accounts of incidents in Israel's monarchy? Why have scholars ended up with widely divergent views on what the author of Kings was endeavouring to do? How does Kings relate to the rest of the Primary (or Deuteronomistic) History?

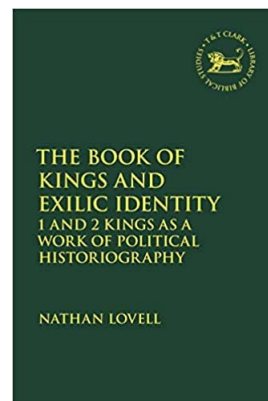
In this work, which began life as a PhD thesis, Lovell sets out to address these questions and to demonstrate that Kings is a finely crafted piece of history writing that serves a political agenda. While we are offered insightful readings of key episodes, Lovell's focus is on the big picture.

Though Lovell makes appropriate use of intertextual connections with other parts of Israel's history, particularly Joshua, his treatment of Kings predominantly as a book in its own right (as distinct from a segment of a larger historiographic project) is welcome. Lovell sees two mutually interpretive sections, Inner Kings (1 Kgs 16:23–2 Kgs 15:38 with its account of the Omride dynasty and the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha), and Outer Kings dealing with the account of the two kingdoms in relation to YHWH's promise to David. This intercalation, or sandwich structure, is evidenced in the prophecy–fulfilment accounts that begin and end in the outer layer, or are contained within the inner layer, but do not cross the boundary between them.

Lovell's main idea, that Kings is a work of political historiography, is not new. Many have seen it as a rationale for the debacle of the demise of the states of Israel and, more particularly, the Davidic kingdom of Judah. Others see elements of hope beyond exile. Lovell's approach is that, in a sense, the book is designed to create the nation which in exile is bereft of a national identity, furnishing the deportees with a sense of who they are, their continuity with the past, the land and its institutions, and providing hope for the future in the face of the absence of the key symbols of nationhood. They are to aspire to the ideal of Covenant-Israel.

Lovell's method is primarily that of final-form literary criticism (with juxtaposition as a key feature), with some attention to redaction criticism, though he is rightly skeptical about reconstructing layers of redaction with discernible ideological tensions among them. Lovell supports the traditional view that the exile is the most feasible context against which to read the book (with use of earlier source material). The author addresses a people deprived of land, cult, and monarchy, and (from longer ago) of the unity that should constitute "Israel." There is a helpful section on the theme of the centralization of worship in which we are reminded that the problem addressed in Kings is apostasy, not decentralization per se. The exiles can be encouraged that, while not ideal, non-Jerusalem altars can be legitimate (as Elijah's on Carmel).

The categories of the covenant, the name Israel, the land, and rule provide the elements for building a sense of who the nation is. There is a dialectic between the Mosaic covenant and the David promises that grapples with the seemingly both conditional and unconditional nature of God's commitment to this people. How is Israel to be defined in relation to the post-Solomon schism? Are they one nation or two? And when God is observed operating outside of the land at various stages, can this provide hope for the situation the exiles find themselves in? Lovell's answer is a decided "Yes." The exile is restorative, and, by the narrative shaping, Israel should expect YHWH to raise up a deliverer.



Since the writer of Kings pays so much attention to the reign of Solomon at the outset, these first eleven chapters are considered key to his agenda. Lovell rightly, in my view, sees the indications from the beginning that, despite all that he had going for him, Solomon is a flawed king in the one area that matters, and that this does not bode well for the nation. He out-Egypt Egypt in many respects, not a promising scenario for the king whose temple construction is given as the culmination of the exodus (1 Kgs 6:1). It is his lack of covenant faithfulness, rather than his wealth or international prestige, that will be his lasting legacy, for a trajectory to exile is established with the warnings of 1 Kings 9:6–9.

Conflicts, particularly between king and prophet like that of Elijah's conflict with Ahab which looms large in the inner core, serve to differentiate competing visions of who Israel is. Likewise, the various responses to the Assyrian threat should serve as studies in the results of different stances with regard to foreign powers. Should exilic Israel come to an accommodation with international agendas, or seek to return to uncompromising covenant faithfulness? Covenant-Israel, as Lovell portrays it, is not only an ideal, but a destiny (p. 114). While the outline of an argument is present, I could have wished for more substantiation on this latter point.

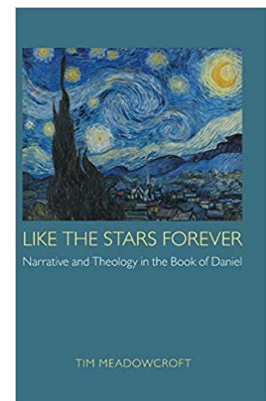
In keeping with the series, the work is well written and edited, substantially free of errors, though a few kings have their names slightly garbled (a pity when we need all the help we can get in sorting these kings out!): Je(ho)ash for J(eh)oash (pp. 55, 207, 208), Je(ho)ram for J(eh)oram (p. 63), and Jeroabom for Jeroboam (p. 122). A number of diagrams and tables help the reader navigate the structures Lovell is suggesting.

Lovell has done a superb job of showing us how to read Kings against its exilic setting. This is a worthy contribution to Kings scholarship, one that should be read by all who wish seriously to grapple with its message.

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Tim Meadowcroft. *Like the Stars Forever: Narrative and Theology in the Book of Daniel*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 90. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020. 172 pp. £65.00/\$85.00.

Tim Meadowcroft is a fine New Zealand evangelical scholar who has taught Old Testament at Laidlaw College, Auckland (formerly called the Bible College of New Zealand) for 25 years. His main scholarly focus has been on the book of Daniel, and eight of the nine chapters in this book have been previously published between 1997 and 2017. This means that the book will not always interact with the most recent scholarship, but it is much more cohesive than many collections of essays since its key argument is that the visions of the second half should be read as an extension to the story of Daniel in the first half. The introduction attempts to tie all the essays together, showing the progressive development of the author's ideas. Inevitably, there is some unevenness of coverage in a collection of originally unrelated essays, so a reader should not expect that every part of the book will be covered. All of the essays deal with Daniel, although two-thirds of the book deals with the second half of Daniel.



In relation to the first half of Daniel, this is introduced by one chapter on narrative point of view, developing the analogy of the “camera angle” (ch. 1), followed by a thoughtful exploration of metaphor, especially in Daniel 2–5. Both these chapters offer astute insights into the literary features of the text. The only drawback here is that these chapters were published in 1997 and 2000. While they still provide useful interpretive insights, the choice not to update the essays means that there is no interaction with more recent scholarly sources. Chapter 3 rounds off consideration of the first half of Daniel. While its title may imply a narrow focus on one verse (4:9), it is actually a broad-ranging coverage of wisdom in Daniel 1–6. Unlike the earlier two chapters, this was first published in 2016, and so represents the author’s increasing focus on reading the book theologically.

Chapters 4, 5, and 8 can be dealt with together, as they originally appeared between 2001 and 2004 and all seem much less focused on the issue of the connection between Daniel and wisdom. Chapter 4 explores the difficult passage of Daniel 9:24–27. It is quite detailed and technical, arguing for a community understanding of the holy of holies and the anointed one/messiah. Chapter 5 explores the identity of the princes of Persia and Greece, concluding they are human figures taking part in a celestial battle. Neither of these chapters deal in any substantial way with the issue of wisdom, but they are part of his argument that the visions of Daniel need to be understood as an extension of the court tales (conflicts and contests) of the first half of the book. Chapter 8 similarly focuses on a specific passage (11:40–45), drawing out the tension between historical and eschatological readings. Much of the discussion concerns the difficulties of 6th and 2nd century datings of the section (he adopts a late date for the book in general), and the author argues for a literary solution.

While it is difficult to review nine separate essays, it is a very helpful collection of studies on Daniel. I will focus in my evaluation on the key argument in the book—that Daniel is portrayed as wise. This argument is largely found in chapters 3 and 6, with some threads drawn together in chapter 7, all of which were published in 2016 or 2017. Thus, while his earlier work (1997–2004) concentrates on more literary matters, his recent essays explore this more theological issue of the connection between Daniel and wisdom (hence the book’s subtitle, “Narrative and Theology in the Book of Daniel”). He argues that Daniel sets out the programmatic wisdom categories, which run through not only Daniel 2–7, but even 8–12. He proposes that participation in the divine life (for him, a way of re-conceptualizing wisdom) in Daniel 1–6 concerns wise action, but in the latter part of the book it “leads to wise affiliation, to loyalty, and to faithfulness” (p. 124).

Chapter 9 is the most recently written (an earlier form of it was presented as a conference paper in 2018) and interacts with systematic theologians over the issues of eschatology and election. Yet it also contains a useful recap of his argument about wisdom (participation in the divine life) in Daniel 8–12, as well as suggesting that insufficient attention has been paid to the continuity between the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and the emergence of Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God, which has ethical implications (p. 152). The brief epilogue draws out several prominent concepts in Daniel, arguing that 12:3 is the capstone to the story.

This is a thoughtful book, which shows sensitivity to the literary features of Daniel, while highlighting the value of theological readings of the text. It is not polemical but irenic, using the force of his arguments to convince readers. He helpfully draws out the community focus of several key ideas in the book (son of man, eschatology, even resurrection), and grounds his reading on a strong continuity between the court tales of Daniel 1–6 and the visions of 8–12, with chapter 7 operating as a literary and theological hinge (p. 109)

As someone with a particular focus on wisdom, I would like him to justify more his view that wisdom can be categorized as “participation in the divine life.” There was little mention of how this concept fits the foundational wisdom book of Proverbs, and it sounds much more like a Greek than a Hebrew idea. The second idea that I think needs further exploration is the link between wisdom and eschatology. While von Rad has suggested that apocalyptic has emerged out of wisdom, very few have followed his lead since the key wisdom books—and especially Proverbs—have a “this-world” focus, expecting wrongs to be righted and good actions rewarded in this life, not in the far distant future. This has rightly been seen as one of wisdom’s distinctive ideas. Wisdom undergoes some changes in the late intertestamental period (e.g., the fusion of wisdom and law in Ben Sira), but further argument needs to be provided to establish that this is also happening with wisdom and eschatology.

Yet, notwithstanding these under-explored issues, this book makes a serious and original contribution to scholarship on Daniel. It would be a useful reference for scholars and theological libraries. The book has a nine-page bibliography, as well as indexes of biblical (and some extra-biblical) references and authors.

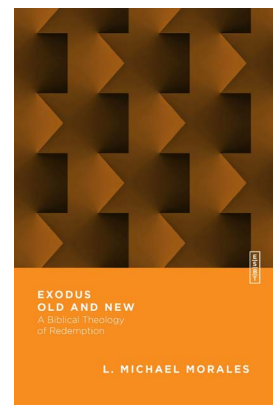
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L. Michael Morales. *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*. Essential Studies in Biblical Theology. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020. xiii + 196 pp. £16.99/\$22.00.

Exodus Old and New is a wonderful addition to a recent series, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology. Like other books in the series, this work intends to provide a succinct overview of an essential biblical theme (pp. ix–x). In this case, that theme is the exodus. Due to its inherent space constraints, Morales does not examine his theme through all of the Bible, but he explores the various “mountain peaks” of the exodus theme in both testaments.

Morales begins by showing exodus themes in the primeval history of Genesis. The story of creation, fall, and re-creation (through the flood) is told in exodus language, with God controlling the chaotic waters to bring life, then delivering mankind through waters of judgment (p. 49). After the fall, “the restoration of humanity must be in the form of an exodus back to God” (p. 8). Next, Morales shows the exodus pattern in Abraham’s life. His focus is Abraham’s “Passover,” the binding of Isaac. He claims that the entire OT sacrificial cult is based on this event (p. 31), but perhaps it is better to simply say that Isaac’s binding *prefigures* and illustrates the cult.

After this, Morales moves to the book of Exodus. In chapter three, he discusses the plagues, showing how they reveal YHWH as Creator God, and how each plague is a steady de-creation of Egypt (p. 44). In the next chapter, Morales argues that the sea crossing is a slaying of the sea dragon, pointing back to creation. He shows Egypt as Sheol with Pharaoh as the sea dragon. Chapters 5–7 continue with Exodus. Morales gives a wonderful description of the Passover’s significance, continues with exploring Moses as mediator, then shows how the sacrificial cult reflects the Exodus pattern.



Part 2 of the book covers the post-Pentateuch OT. Morales begins by discussing the temple and exile, showing a need for a second exodus. Although Morales mentions relevant psalms, I wish he had made some mention of exodus language in the wisdom literature. Next, he explores the prophets' expectations of the second exodus, including two chapters on the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, the slain lamb through whom Zion would be transformed.

Part 3 moves on to the NT. Two chapters examine the Gospel of John as a representative sample. First, John presents Jesus as the Passover lamb. He also speaks of his death as a "departure." Then, Morales shows how the resurrection is the new, greater exodus, restoring the world from its Edenic fall via a new creation. He then devotes a chapter to Jesus pouring out the Spirit for a new creation, the ultimate deliverance out of the wilderness into the promised land. The book concludes with a more sermon-like rendition of Christ's resurrection, in Pauline literature, as an exodus that gives new life to God's people.

Morales is a noted scholar of the Pentateuch (see *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* [Leuven: Peeters, 2012] and *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 [Nottingham: Apollos, 2015]) and is ably qualified to write about the exodus. In addition to his scholarly acumen, his eloquent writing particularly stands out. Consider the sentence, "Every fiber and molecule of the new creation will have been led through the passage of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of the Son—in whom they hold together—into new life" (p. 188, emphasis original). Such wordsmithing, however, buttresses his strong arguments, rather than distracting from or covering for any weak points.

One minor point of critique is that Morales treats the exodus theme in quite broad terms, never really specifying what makes up the "exodus theme." The sense from the book is that humanity is alienated from God in exile, and the exodus is their return to Yahweh's presence. This includes themes of substitution and miraculous deliverance. But these elements are not quite explicitly formulated as *the* theme. One example from the book that raised this question was the section on John's Gospel. There, Morales does not mention the Red Sea crossing. Yes, Jesus's death is that of the Passover Lamb. Yet is his death not also a "baptismal" exodus through the waters of judgment, coming out victorious on the other side? Morales demonstrates Eden and Sabbath connections in reference to Christ's death and resurrection, themes related to the exodus, but foregoes discussion of deliverance through the Sea. The question, again, is what must be included to be defined as the exodus theme—return from exile, a sacrificial lamb, the Sea crossing, or delivery from bondage? Do they all have to be present to have the "exodus theme"?

Notwithstanding this small issue of a more specific definition, Morales's book is a feast of biblical theology. He creatively and devotionally shows many profound connections between biblical texts. His book will provide depth of insight for teaching the Bible more richly. For example, he presents Egypt as Sheol, a "watery womb of exile" (p. 38), an idea that will provide texture for one teaching on Egypt throughout the OT. This work, therefore, is highly recommended for pastors and Bible teachers who wish to enrich their knowledge of Scripture. For biblical scholars, this is a valuable resource on the exodus theme and a beautiful example of how to trace a theme through the canon.

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Paul R. Williamson and Rita Cefalu, eds. *The Seed of Promise: The Sufferings and Glory of the Messiah: Essays in Honor of T. Desmond Alexander*. GlossaHouse Festschrift Series. Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2020. xxv + 396 pp. £28.12/\$34.99.

The Seed of Promise is a treasure trove of gold nuggets for all diggers of biblical theology to mine. The volume consists of a series of essays written in celebration of T. D. Alexander's 65th birthday and in recognition of his contribution to the scholarship of biblical theology. Included are seventeen essays by world-class scholars, many of whom were students of Alexander. These articles hone in on the specific theme of "the seed promise in Genesis 3:15" (the Protoevangelium) and "the suffering and glory of the Messiah" (p. xv).

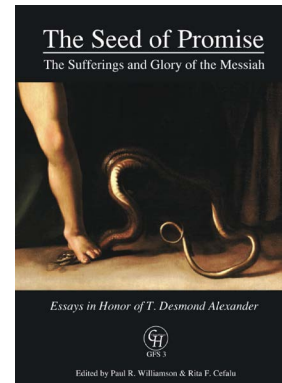
The essays are distributed proportionally and in the order of the books of the Bible, with eleven essays covering the OT and six essays on the NT. Methodologically, the volume is diverse. Some look at texts philosophically or macro-structurally; others focus on analyzing a single figure or verse in the Bible. Several contributors also compare texts across several books. But common across the contributors is that they all recognize the presence of the seed promise of the Messiah in the text they worked on.

In the opening essay, James Hamilton traces the motif of "head crushing seed of the woman" across the Bible with fascinating insights. David Baker then discusses "Weal and Woe in Genesis," and argues that economic blessing is rooted in a right relationship with the creator, and is not always predicated on ethical actions.

Four further essays track the book's theme in the Historical Books. In an insightful chapter, Sarah Dalrymple tracks the development of two royal-messianic trajectories represented by two leading tribes, Judah and Ephraim, across the books of Joshua and Judges. She shows convincingly that Ephraim's leadership becomes increasingly weak and the Judahite leadership is ultimately shown to be Yahweh's choice by the end of the book of Judges. By looking at the genealogy in the book of Ruth, James McKeown argues that the line of messianic promise is not based on ethnicity as reflected in the Tamar and Ruth narratives (p. 89). J. Gary Millar examines how three kings, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah, are significant for the reading of 1–2 Kings. While they are hailed as good kings, text snippets of their weakness point to the need for a king who is greater than all of them. Stephen Dempster focuses his attention on the last man of the Davidic dynasty in the last four verses of Kings (2 Kgs 25:27–30)—Jehoiachin, who is a foil to the true son of David, Jesus—"the last man [and] the first man of a new humanity" (p. 141).

In the only essay addressing the Psalms, Philip Johnston reviews some messianic psalms and reiterates the need to view these psalms through Jesus and to recontextualize them through the lens of the New Testament. Next, by tracing wisdom and creation motifs in the Wisdom Literature and various prophetic eschatological texts, Graeme Goldsworthy shows how the new creation is brought about by redemption through the suffering and exaltation of the Messiah.

This is followed by two essays on Isaiah that build on one another. J. Gordon McConville examines the rhetoric of Isaiah by its use of power language and imagery to generate a perception of truth (p. 188). Hearers, situated between a "war of words" with Yahweh on one side and the taunt of the nations on the other, ultimately need to recognize the messianic signs and decide whom to believe and trust. John Oswalt further emphasizes from the book of Isaiah that God's promised messiah will not deliver



through the powers of this world. In the final essay on the OT, Anthony Petterson traces the messianic kingship motif across the Book of the Twelve and sees a storyline of God's judgment on Israel, followed by her exile and restoration. But hope remains for a future Messiah whose portrait is most clearly seen in Zechariah 9–14.

In the first of six essays on the New Testament, Dane Ortlund argues that the macrostructure of the Gospel of Mark identifies the glory of the Messiah in the first half and his suffering in the second half. Significantly, the transfiguration account in 9:1–13 functions as “a microcosm of Mark's Gospel as a whole” (p. 242). Andreas Köstenberger sees that the cosmic battle between believers and Satan's minions today reflects “the two warring ‘seeds’—the seed of Satan and the seed of the woman” (p. 283). This is based on connections between the Protoevangelium and the Johannine in 1 John 3:9 and Revelation 12:17.

Rita Cefalu examines the importance of redemptive-historical motifs in Peter's speeches in Acts 2–3. She argues that 2 Samuel 7:12–13 is the basis for Peter's understanding of Psalms 16:8–11 and 110:1, which bear witness to the suffering and glory of Jesus Christ. Brian Rosner focuses on Romans 16:20a, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” and argues that this is a summary statement of key texts in Romans and Paul's “second peace benediction in the Romans letter closing” (p. 314).

In the first of two essays on the General Epistles, Stephen Motyer argues that Melchizedek's priesthood, as seen in the book of Hebrews, is not only distinct from the Aaronic, but it undermines and perfects the office of priesthood through the person of Jesus Christ. In the final essay, Paul Williamson leads us from the serpent in Genesis 3 through ambiguous chaos-creature like Rahab, Leviathan, and references to “satan” in OT texts, and argues that the Devil's unambiguous association with the dragon of Revelation came about only in the intertestamental era (p. 349).

This volume may seem to appear as a narrow appeal to confessional evangelicals, but its scholarship can withstand the most rigorous of critiques. These essays show high sensitivity to the character of the texts, identifying significant motifs and their echoes throughout the OT and the NT. Careful attention given to macrostructural features and development of motifs across books offers extremely perspicacious insights (e.g., Dalrymple's treatment of Joshua and Judges). Despite the methodological diversity, the essays cohere well, reminding me of a single beam of white light shone through a glass prism, splitting into seventeen different trajectories of development and yet, one of the same. This book is fairly accessible for beginners, but for those familiar with T. D. Alexander's works and students of biblical theology, this book is a keeper.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Gary M. Burge. *The New Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 152 pp. £9.99/\$18.00.

Gary M. Burge is visiting professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, having previously taught for twenty-five years at Wheaton College. This book draws on his experience as a teacher, both in an academic context and on as a member of the teaching roster in his own local church. Its goal is to help the reader obtain an “aerial view” of the New Testament (p. 2), viewed through the prism of seven biblical texts that he has selected as entry-points into the seven major themes on which he focuses: fulfillment, kingdom, cross, grace, covenant, Spirit, completion.

Chapter 1 (Fulfillment) says that Paul’s ministry inspired the church to revisit Jesus, which led to the writing of the Gospels. One of the primary ideas that the Gospels affirm is that Jesus is an anointed one of God and thus the fulfiller of the messianic hope. But the Gospels make a further claim that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

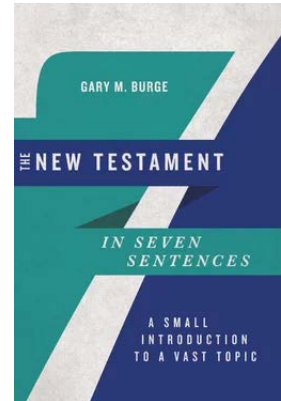
In Chapter 2 (Kingdom), Burge emphasizes the centrality of the notion of kingdom in Jesus’s teachings. The mysterious nature of Jesus’s kingdom, however, caused anxiety among the authorities. Burge rightly stresses that Jesus’s kingdom—while it already is on earth—is not centered on restoring the prosperity of a political Israel. It does not necessarily mean, however, that his kingdom is something private and individualistic. Burge underscores that we all are agents of God’s kingdom because we are living in the reality of inaugurated eschatology.

Chapter 3 (Cross) shows that, while no one expected the fulfiller of the messianic hope to die, Jesus kept making predictions of his death as a ransom. So, Paul correctly understands that Jesus’s death is “a key to the gospel” (p. 52). Jesus’s cross also indicates a move from “a ritual sacrifice” to “an act of personal redemption” (p. 55). It is emphasized again that the cross is not submissive but rather subversive because it shows us how we ought to live.

In chapter 4 (Grace), Burge recognizes grace as central to the story of the New Testament. Burge traces the presence of grace in the Old Testament by showing that Abraham, too, was justified by grace. It is in Jesus, according to Burge, that we see the reappearance of this grace (p. 67). Furthermore, Paul is the “chief spokesperson of grace in the New Testament” (p. 70), which explains Paul’s dismay at the people’s relapse into self-righteous legalism (pp. 74–76). The principle of grace that God takes the initiative to be gracious toward us still holds true.

Chapter 5 (Covenant) argues that the Abrahamic covenant did not just pertain to Israel. Abraham continues to be a central figure in the New Testament primarily because it is faith that is required to belong to the lineage of Abraham (p. 87). This then implicates the Gentiles’ “full inclusion into Abraham’s family” (p. 88). Therefore, the church is now the covenant community rooted in God’s covenant (pp. 90, 93).

In Chapter 6 (Spirit), Burge claims that, while Spirit-experience was limited and selective in the Old Testament, the early church was full of it (p. 97). The expectations for the Spirit were fused into the messianic hope (p. 104). But the experience of the Spirit was promised for the Messiah’s people, too.



Jesus came as “the bearer of God’s long-awaited Spirit in the world” (p. 107) after the Spirit is active throughout the entire New Testament.

Chapter 7 (Completion) pertains to the eschatology that we find in the New Testament. The New Testament challenges Jewish eschatology by claiming that “the future has arrived in the present,” i.e., “the beginning of the end” (p. 121). The apogee of “the end of the end” (p. 125) is the return of Jesus (pp. 127–28).

One of the recurring patterns in this book is that Burge accentuates the contrast between two sides, i.e., “sin management” versus “kingdom building” (p. 41). The reader may get the impression that the faith of those who belong to the so-called “sin management” camp is simply private (p. 39) and that they are mindful only of a simple work of salvation (p. 58). Furthermore, Burge says that teachings that fail to see the larger picture of God’s theological project are “incomplete and tragically short-sighted” and run the risk of misrepresentation and reductionism (p. 134). By contrast, Burge argues that those who understand “the great theological panorama” (p. 134) know that Jesus’s cross is not only a “work of salvation” but also “a mandate for how his followers ought to live” (p. 58). They are thus those who work untiringly “to transform the world so that creation itself begins to align with God’s purposes” (p. 95). I would cautiously suggest, however, that this dichotomy is a bit too sharply drawn, and that it would seem more reasonable to assume various stances on a continuum, characterized by a variety of ways in which these two biblical themes are integrated.

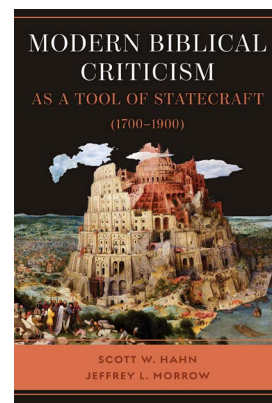
As the title itself says, this book is an ambitious project that attempts to deal with a vast topic. It is laudable, therefore, that Burge has successfully provided a sound overview of the New Testament in just seven key terms. The reader will benefit from the impressive proposal of the seven interpenetrating themes of the New Testament: fulfillment, kingdom, cross, grace, covenant, Spirit, and completion.

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Scott W. Hahn and Jeffrey L. Morrow. *Modern Biblical Criticism as a Tool of Statecraft (1700–1900)*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020. 328 pp. £42.49/\$59.95.

This well-written and important book tells a familiar story: how Western civilization went from venerating the Bible to doubting much of what it claims. The beginning of this story was told by Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker in their prequel, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture, 1300–1700* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2013). We now await the end of the story in the sequel to the book under review, which promises a volume showing (among much else) how, when it comes to interpretation of the Bible, “the universities were transformed in the modern period into the secular magisterium that they function as now, in our present day” (p. 229).

In *Modern Biblical Criticism as a Tool of Statecraft (1700–1900)*, Jeffrey L. Morrow replaces Wiker as co-author with Scott Hahn. As volume 2 in this trilogy, it brings the narrative up to about the end of the nineteenth century, when the influence of Julius Wellhausen in Old



Testament and Heinrich Holtzmann in New Testament was hitting its stride, and when Robinson Smith was mediating the results of biblical scholarship in Germany to the English-speaking world (though this process was underway long before Smith). It tells the story with the twist implied in the second half of the title. For many interpreters, the Bible comes to be no longer a revelation from God; it rather serves as a tool to support the political meaning, or irrelevance as the case may be, assigned to it by secular overlords, individual and institutional, enforcing the will of the *polis* rather than proclaiming the gospel of the *ekklesia*.

As one would hope, this history draws heavily on the works of other scholars with specialties in this or related fields of study: William Baird, Colin Brown, Anders Gerdmar, J. C. O'Neill, Henning Graf Reventlow, John Rogerson, Thomas Römer, Magne Sæbø, and Rudolf Smend, to name major players. Eighty pages of the book are devoted to bibliography and indexes. The index of names runs to well over five hundred. There are 742 footnotes, some of them lengthy, on just 225 pages. Hahn and Marrow have read deeply and widely.

Chapter 1 reviews high points of the earlier study, *Politicizing the Bible*, tracing a line from Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham through (somewhat incongruously) John Wycliffe to Machiavelli and Luther, who is accused of “handing over the temporal order” to non-church rulers, a rather limited interpretation of this Reformer’s contribution. A downward spiral (which is construed as the march of progress by most today) continues with England’s split from Rome under Henry VIII and then the work of Descartes, Hobbes, and finally Spinoza. Chapter 1 ends by previewing the eight chapters of the book under review. Hahn and Marrow argue that historical criticism as it emerged over time was never, either in design or in execution, a neutral enterprise aiming to grasp and pass along what the Bible says. Rather, and increasingly during the two centuries surveyed, scholars were influenced most of all, not by the text and context of the object they were interpreting (the Bible), but by “specific philosophies, theological leanings, and political motivations” (p. 23). It is the political dimension, Hahn and Morrow find, that has been most overlooked in previous research. They wish to show how biblical scholarship as it gradually took shape served the interests of the political order of the critics’ respective times and social locations. A secular order replaced the sacramental order of previous times.

Chapter 2 explores how classical scholarship in eighteenth century Germany set the stage for the biblical criticism that followed in its wake. An ideal of disinterested scholarship arose that sought to draw resources from ancient Greece and Rome for the building of German social institutions. Classical antiquity was to be studied “completely separate and autonomous from theology and Christianity” (p. 46). This movement had a strong effect on the University of Göttingen and future scholars like Johann Salomo Semler, Johann David Michaelis, and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. Chapter 3 centers on Semler, with a lengthy prelude devoted to Johann Lorenz Schmidt and the Wertheim Bible, which was never completed but which contained Schmidt’s translation of the Pentateuch with skeptical and rationalist commentary reflecting the views of Richard Simon and Spinoza. Schmidt’s work is said to have laid the groundwork for Hermann Samuel Reimarus and his deist approach to Scripture, which many view as the beginning of Life of Jesus studies. The remainder of chapter 3 is devoted to Semler (pp. 60–69) and his fateful severing of the link between theology and the Bible.

Chapter 4 turns to a figure who, in Hahn and Morrow’s telling, was even more influential in transforming the scholarly study of Scripture: Michaelis. He was “a key figure in what we might call the secularization of biblical exegesis” (p. 73; cf. p. 95). He “transformed the study of the Old Testament into the study of the dead Hebrew classical civilization,” parallel to that of the equally dead pasts of Greek

and Rome (p. 95). This move also paved the way for anti-Jewish sentiments to find scholarly support (p. 94), in a different way but with an effect no less deleterious than Luther's screeds against the Jews had two hundred years earlier.

In chapter 5, Michaelis's student Johann Gottfried Eichhorn takes center stage. "His work was pivotal both in the history of what would come to be called the Documentary Hypothesis of Pentateuchal origins, but also in the development of theories concerning the composition of the Gospels" (p. 99). Building on the work of the French scholar Jean Astruc, Eichhorn, along with his student J. P. Gabler, introduced the idea that much of the Bible was mythical—it describes how primitive people perceived things, though from a modern viewpoint those things might not have happened in ways we would perceive or affirm. Eichhorn applied his theories and views to the New Testament too, applying surreptitiously a thoroughgoing rejection of miracles in favor of myth. He championed a scholarship that he hoped would use history to bring about "the progress of human culture" and "the perfection of human nature" (pp. 117–18).

Chapter 6 highlights the work of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (along with Romanticism and a number of lesser scholars like Alexander Geddes, Hermann Hupfeld, and Heinrich Ewald). Hahn and Morrow show how skepticism toward a realist and theological reading of the Bible hardened, exacerbated by social and political pressures placed on scholars in their capacity of civil servants in state-supported universities. There was "an increasing drive away from explicitly theological exegesis and more towards exegesis as secular *Wissenschaft* [scholarship]" (p. 151). Chapter 7 traces a similar process in the field of New Testament studies, moving from Hermann Samuel Reimarus to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Jakob Griesbach and concluding with substantial treatments of F. C. Baur and David Friedrich Strauss. This part of the story has been retold frequently from several angles, but Hahn and Morrow bring in fresh perspective and detail along with the fruit of recent scholarship.

Chapter 8 concludes, as noted above, with treatments of Wellhausen and Holtzmann (along with Robertson Smith). Still today, the results of biblical scholarship as taught "across the globe typically mirror the nineteenth-century work of these scholars" (p. 188). This is "despite the fact that few specialists in the field actually follow these original formulations in every detail!" (p. 188). Chapter 8, like previous chapters, provides evidence for the book's thesis that biblical interpretation was becoming distant from (and even hostile to) the way the church (in this book meaning the Roman Catholic church) read and taught the Bible.

A brief review cannot do justice to the richness and detail of this book. It amply fulfills its aim of providing in historical form "a criticism of criticism" (p. 229). The authors state, "Scripture is theology's soul, and it is fundamental to the Christian life" (p. 229). Confessing Christians of all stripes should agree with that. This volume, along with the earlier one, provides a basis for the provocative assertion that the two books together "answer the question of how we got to the twenty-first century where Bible scholars in Protestant, Catholic, and public colleges, universities, and seminaries—across the globe—take for granted methods that were forged in the anti-Church, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic theological conflicts of the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries" (p. 229).

No history that attempts so much will please all readers at every point. I do not share the authors' loyalty to the papacy or their high view of Roman Catholic tradition (which they sometimes capitalize). The argument can be made that the Bible's saving message under the Catholic magisterium is suppressed as severely as it is under the secular magisterium documented in this book. This book completely skips the substantial pushback and correction that "modern biblical scholarship" has received in all

generations from numerous quarters by pietist, confessional, and evangelical scholarship. The book could give the impression that there have been basically just two main approaches to the Bible: the historical critical, and (in this book constantly in the background) the faithful Catholic.

But the authors seek primarily to highlight the ways and extent to which modern biblical criticism developed, functioned, and grew into “a tool of statecraft” in the 1700–1900 era. In this aim they learnedly and valiantly succeed.

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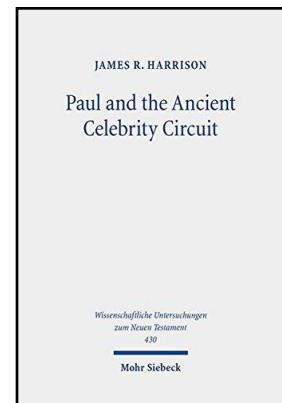
James R. Harrison. *Paul and the Ancient Celebrity Circuit: The Cross and Moral Transformation*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 430. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019. 449 pp. £105.00/\$188.00.

Few people consider the link between celebrity culture and Pauline theology. A noteworthy exception is James Harrison, professor of biblical studies and the research director at the Sydney College of Divinity. His extensive study of various sociological dynamics in the ancient Greco-Roman world uniquely positions him to shed light on an oft-neglected dimension of biblical studies. This work synthesizes a wide range of scholarly material to demonstrate how Paul contextualizes and ultimately subverts the celebrity culture of his age.

Harrison opens by juxtaposing ancient and modern versions of celebrity. In so doing, he corrects the potential misimpression that the ancient world lacked celebrities due to differences in media then and now. Inscriptions, coinage, sculptures, and iconography are a few ways that a person’s public fame could spread in antiquity. Besides military victors, athletes such as gladiators and charioteers were ancient predecessors to today’s YouTube celebrities. Certain artists gained celebrity status for their entertainment skills, whether in performing pantomime, music, drama, or even comedy. He documents important distinctions of ancient celebrity from its modern forms. For example, ancient celebrity could not be separated from Greco-Roman elitism; additionally, it was bound up with the perpetuation of ancestral glory.

Each of the eight chapters at the book’s core begins the same way. First, Harrison reviews relevant literature highlighting some facet of celebrity in antiquity. Second, he shows how Paul exploits or subverts conventional notions of celebrity for the sake of his gospel ministry. From multiple angles, Harrison spotlights “an outworking of the work of the cross that inverts social relations in unexpected ways, unleashing a moral transformation that challenges the hierarchical, celebrity-and-status mores of the ancient and modern worlds” (p. 46).

Paul’s tactics are as subtle as they are subversive. His emphasis on the “body of Christ” reorients the social context dominated by Rome’s body politic. He topples the social strata that exclude those without the privilege of wealth or birth. The benefaction system, central to ancient celebrity, is reconfigured by Paul such that Caesar becomes a “servant” and God, through Christ’s church, is exalted as the supreme



benefactor. Furthermore, the “reluctance” of Augustus to assume power seems a parody in light of Paul’s boasting in his inadequacy and of Christ’s weakness.

Much like today, ancient Greco-Romans lauded their athletes, whose victories were marked with a crown. In 1 Corinthians, Paul urges readers to invest the same effort exercised by celebrity athletes yet for the sake of a greater, lasting crown. Likewise, one function of ancient Greek education was the acquisition of skills required to secure glory. These entailed the capacity for civic leadership. Whereas the gymnasiarchs accentuate the past glory of ancestral tradition, Paul looks forward to true glory, enjoyed in the eschaton.

Harrison also notes the frequent theme of imitation among ancient writers. Roman leaders aspired to imitate the beneficence of ancestors. By extending grace to others, the “great man” would display his strength and generosity; more importantly, he would put the public in his debt within a culture where faithful reciprocal exchange was an essential virtue. By contrast, Paul calls churches to imitate him in his suffering. This entails boasting in weakness. Yet, emptying oneself—like Christ on the cross—would be seen as the antithesis of greatness according to ancient standards. Harrison offers footnotes during the discussion on benefaction and reciprocity. Still, readers would benefit from a more extensive discussion on the meaning of grace in Paul’s context. Harrison directs our attention to his *Paul’s Language of Grace in its Graeco-Roman Context*, WUNT 2/172 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) and to John Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

Paul does not discourage the pursuit of honor, Harrison reminds us. Rather, Paul seeks the praise that comes from God above the applause of a world that does not follow Christ. For Paul, this change in perspective involves a change in collective identity. Civic associations were sprinkled across the Greco-Roman world. It was in these communities that members fostered virtue and secured social status. Harrison contrasts this social reality with Paul’s vision for the church. Rather than assert self-sufficiency and engage in rivalry, believers are “encouraged to act in a unified manner amidst their diverse giftedness. The only way for that to happen without competition and division is for the least honoured in the Body of Christ to become the most honoured in social interactions” (p. 286).

As with other volumes in the WUNT series, *Paul and the Ancient Celebrity Circuit* is a dense work of scholarship. Its chapters complement one another and paint a vivid picture of ancient celebrity as well as Paul’s reappropriation and reconfiguration of its cultural values. While Harrison constructs a coherent argument in defense of his thesis, non-specialists will find his book daunting in its detail. He revisits several themes at different points in the book. However, some degree of redundancy is expected in a work like this. Readers will also notice periodic but not rare typographical errors throughout the text. In multiple places, the author could have stated his arguments with a bit more concision, but these are minor quibbles. Harrison fills a lacuna in academic literature. One can only hope that this book will spur greater reflection concerning how the insights from this work apply to our contemporary celebrity-crazed culture.

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Joshua W. Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. xi + 484 pp. £35.24/\$50.00.

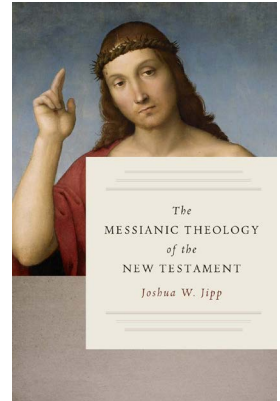
According to Joshua Jipp, the field of New Testament theology has fallen on hard times. The postmodern predilection for diversity has largely curbed the output of integrative New Testament theologies. Furthermore, the few that have been written in recent decades (often in evangelical-friendly circles) have not exhibited the same degree of rigorous and vibrant creativity which marked the mid-twentieth-century contributions of Rudolf Bultmann and George Ladd. Jipp seeks to remedy the situation on both fronts with this substantial (though still relatively short) volume, aimed primarily at theological students and well-trained pastors.

Jipp's distinctive approach is signaled by the adjective "messianic" in the title. His aim is to root a synthesis of the New Testament canon in the vocation of Jesus as the promised king of Israel. He writes, "The central argument of this book is that the messianic identity of Jesus of Nazareth is not only the presupposition for, but is also the primary (though certainly not exclusive) content of, New Testament theology" (p. 3). In other words, Jipp argues that "messianic discourse" (portrayals of Jesus as Israel's royal king) should be the starting point for theological reflection. The foundational claim that "Jesus is the Christ" profoundly shapes everything the New Testament has to say about God, salvation, the church, and other theological loci.

Jipp is careful to qualify, however, that the New Testament writings do not express Jesus's messianic identity in line with an artificial "preformed messianic pattern or idea" (p. 7). Jipp tries to rigorously respect the diverse ways in which the New Testament speaks about Jesus. He therefore lays out three methodological criteria for identifying messianic discourse: (1) the use of royal honorifics to refer to Jesus, (2) the presence of a scriptural citation or allusion which appeals to a messianic or ideal kingly figure, and (3) the activation of a messianic scenario or image (pp. 16–17).

With this foundation in place, Jipp organizes the book into two main sections. Part 1 consists of nine chapters (289 pp.) in which Jipp leads the reader on an exegetically rich tour of messianic discourse in Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, John, the Pauline corpus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation. To provide a few examples, Jipp maintains that Jesus's conversation with his disciples about servanthood and authority in Mark 10:42–45 portrays Jesus as embodying the characteristics of an ideal king (pp. 67–69). Jipp reads the temple scene in John 2 as an example of the expectation in Second Temple Judaism that the messiah will construct the eschatological temple (pp. 132–37). Finally, Jipp situates the Christ-hymn in Colossians 1 within the tradition of singing praises to kings in the ancient world. He shows that the hymn itself not only contains royal honorifics but also resonates with scriptural promises for a royal Davidide and an Adam-like ruler (pp. 234–38). To sum up, Jipp makes a compelling case that the New Testament compositions should be read as "creative expansions upon the earliest Christian confession that Jesus is the Messiah of God" (p. 3).

Jipp begins the task of synthesizing this material in Part 2. Over the course of five shorter chapters (91 pp.), he unfolds implications for the loci of Scripture, Christology, soteriology, sanctification/ecclesiology, and politics/power/eschatology. To provide just one example, Jipp enters the ongoing debate regarding early high Christology. He boldly affirms, "Jesus Christ's identity as Israel's messianic king plays a significant role in the early Christian conception of Jesus as divine and as worthy of



receiving worship alongside the God of Israel” (p. 336). Following the lead of scholars such as Wesley Hill and Matthew Bates, Jipp gently but firmly critiques Richard Bauckham’s notion of “divine identity” as insufficiently nuanced. Instead, Jipp argues that the right starting point is the personal relation between Jesus and the God of Israel, with a key element of this relation being Jesus’s messianic vocation. Jipp maintains, “There is no a priori reason why we should reject the possibility that early Christian Christology developed, in *part*, through reflections upon Jesus’s identity as Israel’s singular messianic king” (p. 341, emphasis original).

The strengths of this volume are many. Jipp displays a thorough and careful handling of the biblical text. His index of the canonical Scriptures comprises twenty-four pages by itself, not counting non-canonical and other ancient sources. Theological students will find Jipp’s footnotes to be a veritable treasure trove of secondary literature, reflecting an immense breadth of research. Moreover, the study of Jewish messianism has often been fraught with exaggerated claims (everything is secretly messianic) or wide-ranging denials (there was no coherent messianic expectation in Second Temple Judaism). By comparison, Jipp follows thoughtful criteria and offers fulsome yet reasonable conclusions. Jipp’s synthetic chapters likewise provide fresh takes on a number of classic problems in New Testament theology, providing much grist for the mill for both theologians and pastors.

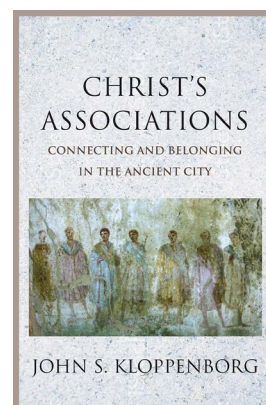
The weaknesses of the book are relatively minor and somewhat unavoidable with a work this ambitious. The messianism of the Catholic Epistles could have been explored in greater depth (though his two pages on the messianism of James [pp. 281–82] are insightful). Similarly, one wishes he could have expanded his synthetic chapters to cover more theological ground. Nevertheless, Jipp’s *Messianic Theology* will prove useful for students and pastors for years to come.

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John S. Kloppenborg. *Christ’s Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. xxxii + 497 pp. £30.00/\$40.00.

John Kloppenborg has been engaged for some years in studying ancient associations—groups of people bound together by a common concern. In this substantial and important book, he directs his studies toward the earliest Christian communities in order to see what we might learn about them from studying ancient associations. Professor Kloppenborg has already put us in his debt in this area through a number of articles, an edited book, and another co-edited collection of translated ancient sources on associations (Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland and John S. Kloppenborg, eds. *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012]).

Professor Kloppenborg’s focus is comparison of the Christ assemblies with ancient associations. He clarifies the nature of his project carefully, to avoid misunderstanding. By comparing the Christ assemblies with ancient associations, we can use the associations to set parameters for our thinking about the Christ assemblies, where we have significant gaps in our knowledge—for example, with the probable size of the Christ assemblies, or their financial



practices. He is not claiming that our knowledge of the associations provides a total explanation of all the phenomena of the Christ assemblies—exceptions include the Christ assemblies' intellectual culture, and the construction of their theologies, and their "bookishness." For these exceptions, other ancient groups provide better analogies (such as philosophical schools, Jewish synagogues, and Roman elite reading practices). Nevertheless, the associations provide a valuable heuristic comparison.

Professor Kloppenborg rightly states that our modern term "religion" is anachronistic if used for the ancient world. He prefers "cultic" for "practices which are associated with devotion to a deity" (p. 10) and highlights that ancient "religion" is less about a person's "inner life" or beliefs and vastly more a matter of social praxis, a manifestation of ancient Mediterranean cultural collectivism. Specifically, "faith" was a term of social relationships, denoting loyalty and trustworthiness (p. 15). Arising from this discussion, Professor Kloppenborg rejects the view that the Christ assemblies' origins should be seen exclusively in the Jewish (he prefers "Judean") synagogues, or that the Christ assemblies might best be compared to "religious" associations. Rather, at any point of comparison, it is worthwhile to study a wide range of ancient associations in conversation with our knowledge of the Christ assemblies. The following chapters then paint a picture of the ancient associations in comparison with the Christ assemblies.

Chapter 1 outlines key features of the associations. These groups were distinct from the civic bodies of Graeco-Roman cities and very varied. They could be: ethnic, drawing a group of immigrants together (such as synagogues); trade-based; cultic, united by devotion to a particular god or hero; including slaves alongside citizens; for people living in a particular neighbourhood; or the members of one extended household. We know of these associations from their bylaws, foundation documents, membership and contribution lists, accounts, decrees to honor members or patrons, dedicatory inscriptions, endowments provided by members or patrons, subscription lists, funerary monuments, and some publicly-held document registers. These are a mixture of papyri and inscriptions. For a given association, our sources may be fragmentary, but the wide range of these sources enables us to build up a picture of association life.

Chapter 2 addresses how to model the Christ assemblies. A key characteristic of ancient associations was that they gave *connectivity* with others. Professor Kloppenborg studies six associations which each compare with Christ assemblies, drawing particularly on membership lists (*alba*) and records of meetings. Among other things, he draws on network visualisations (e.g. pp. 61, 67) to see how social connectivity worked. He relates his findings to the Philippian, Corinthian, and Thessalonian Christ assemblies thoughtfully (en route, he is rather skeptical about the evidence of Acts, generally doubting its information can be trusted—this features throughout the book). Some may doubt his claim that the Thessalonian assembly was entirely male (including this reviewer), but he makes a case. He then turns to consider the significant social capital which could accrue to an association member by being connected to others through the association. That connectivity generated trust among members. This social capital is more significant, he argues, in assessing social standing than income.

The following chapter considers the physical spaces in which associations met (ch. 3), *inter alia* arguing that the numbers of members of associations imply that Christ assemblies would be relatively small (up to thirty—see his valuable table of association sizes, pp. 124–30) and would meet (as Eddie Adams has suggested) in dining and meeting spaces and perhaps workshops, as associations did.

"Belonging" is the focus of chapter 4, considering ways in which belonging to an association was seen and expressed. A key difference with the Christ assemblies is that we lack membership rosters,

which we have for many associations. Otherwise, many “belonging” features carry over to the Christ assemblies: meals, rules, expected attendance—and baptism is a distinctive membership rite.

The urban economy was central to the ancient world. Chapter 5 reviews debate over the socio-economic status of believers, coming down close to the “new consensus” that there were some sub-elite people in the Christ assemblies (but no true elite members), and drawing out the implications for the nature of those groups. Chapter 6 reviews the social level of Christ assemblies, assessing evidence from the (undisputed) Pauline letters. Particularly helpful is his discussion of different kinds of connectivity which confer status on a group: vertical (with those of higher social status), horizontal (with other similar groups in the same or other cities), and internal (among the members). On the latter, he shows that familial language (e.g. brother, sister) was used in associations and was not exclusive to Christ assemblies.

Three helpful chapters then study features of the life of associations (and of Christ assemblies): meals (ch. 7), Paul’s collection (ch. 8), and funerals (ch. 9). Professor Kloppenborg then studies the relation of the associations to the city (ch. 10), noting ambivalence towards the *polis* in 1 Peter and Hermas. The believers’ use of “fictive citizenship” language is striking here, for it portrays them as members of an alternative *polis* (e.g., Phil 3:20). A final chapter considers how and why people joined and left associations and Christ assemblies (ch. 11). A brief conclusion and a helpful glossary of key terms are followed by 86 pages of endnotes (how I long for footnotes!) and a 41-page bibliography, plus the usual indexes.

This is a very substantial contribution to study of the early churches in their social contexts, full of valuable primary research into the ancient associations. Professor Kloppenborg is clear that he is not arguing that the associations were like the Christ assemblies in every respect—in places he notes contrast rather than kinship. He demonstrates that we have much to learn by considering the Christ assemblies in conversation with our (in many ways, fuller) knowledge of ancient associations: I have only been able to scratch the surface of the riches in this volume. It is also good to see a hardback so reasonably priced! It is indispensable (I choose the term with care) to future researchers considering the nature of the early Christian communities realistically within their ancient setting.

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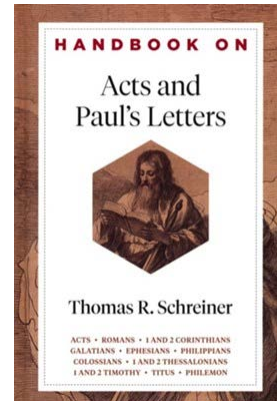
Thomas R. Schreiner. *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*. Handbooks on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. xvii + 461 pp. £28.99/\$44.99.

Thomas Schreiner's *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* occupies the space, if space there be, between a typical New Testament introduction and an exegetical commentary. It represents the first installment in a three-volume series covering the entire NT canon. The series editor, Benjamin Gladd, intends each volume to provide "a snapshot of each New Testament passage without getting bogged down in detailed exegesis," with "special attention to Old Testament allusions and quotations.... Each volume is theologically and pastorally informed" (pp. ix-x).

In fourteen chapters, varying in length from nine to over sixty pages, Schreiner provides us with a book-by-book exegetical overview of Acts and the Paulines. Matters of authorship, origin, destination, recipients, and date are briefly sketched, mainly to orientate the reader to Schreiner's perspective, with the occasional nod towards alternative viewpoints. Luke wrote Acts in the 60s and the thirteen-letter Pauline canon is unequivocally Paul's. With few exceptions, Schreiner does not dwell on the structure of the epistles, satisfied to offer concise outlines. Where he does expend his energy is exactly in the places Gladd told us to expect: each chapter is dominated by a running summary of the exegetical conclusions for significant sub-sections of each book. These summaries get at the heart of the message of each pericope and frequently highlight Luke's and Paul's use of the OT. There are occasional brief forays into matters of exegesis. From time to time, Schreiner warns the reader that the position he takes on a particular text is not without its detractors, but he generally rests content to direct his readers towards the more detailed commentaries for more information. Each chapter is followed by a fairly extensive list of commentaries, mainly from the 1990s through to the present, and a separate list of select monographs, essays and papers. Some classic works from the Reformation as well as the nineteenth century also appear amongst the commentaries. As one would expect, the book is rounded off with fine indexes of Scripture and ancient writings, as well as the subjects covered.

Given Schreiner's extensive track-record of works on how to exegete Paul, a number of volumes of first-rate exegetical commentary, a monograph on the law, as well as a Pauline theology, it will be no surprise that he excels in handling the epistles. His approach follows the text closely without getting lost in the exegetical forest. Many will appreciate being able to get a digest of Schreiner's positions on every passage in Paul, even in letters where he has not yet written a more extensive commentary. It will not come as a surprise that he reads Paul, and for that matter Luke also, in a broadly reformed manner. He stresses both Luke's and Paul's consciousness of salvation-history and their typological handling of the OT, without losing an appropriate degree of anthropological focus. I found his handling of the OT texts and allusions in the first half of Acts especially helpful.

However, there is some unevenness to the work. The chapters on Romans and Galatians are generally both more demanding and more incisive than those on, say, Colossians and Titus. This is not entirely surprising given Schreiner's previous publication history. While matters pertaining to the use of the OT are handled well, the format of the work does not really provide scope to discuss alternative approaches to apostolic hermeneutics by scholars such as Richard Hays, Francis Watson, and Matthew Bates. One of my principal concerns is with the notion of the "passage," or "section," or even "paragraph."



Given the centrality of these intermediate units to the design of the series I would have thought that a bit more reflection, and maybe a bit more “showing the working,” might have been in order. Are these sections taken over from the editorial decisions of the critical texts? Or do they reflect ancient practice (cf. *The Tyndale House Greek New Testament*)? Or are they the result of the author’s top-down analysis of Acts and the epistles? Or a bottom-up synthesis from the cola of the texts and their cohesion? We don’t really get to see, and that I think is a weakness. Moreover, the discussion of the inter-relation of these mid-level units is also somewhat thin.

Nonetheless, Schreiner’s *Handbook* is a fine distillation of a premier exegete’s handling of the whole Pauline corpus. It provides a ready key to Paul’s letters that many students will find very helpful.

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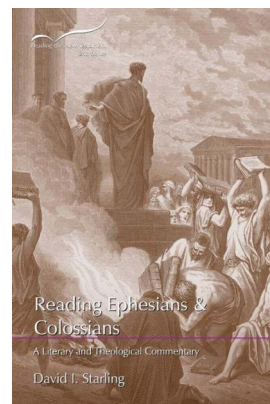
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David I. Starling. *Reading Ephesians and Colossians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Reading the New Testament: Second Series. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2020. xii + 296 pp. £25.36/\$34.00.

Volumes in the Reading the New Testament: Second Series are written for a wide audience and “attend not only to lexical, historical, and critical concerns but are also attuned to and interested in...literary matters and theological meaning” (p. xi). David Starling is the Chief Academic Officer at Morling College (Australia), where he teaches New Testament, hermeneutics, Greek, and theology. Starling has published widely within Pauline studies, and the breadth of his scholarly output makes him well suited to produce a commentary on these two epistles.

Starling’s approach to critical issues on these two texts follows conventional evangelical positions. While acknowledging the various challenges to the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians, Starling successfully defends the traditional view on the authorship of both texts. Concerning the dating and provenance of Ephesians and Colossians, Starling argues for a Roman provenance and suggests they were written between AD 60 and 62. Starling describes Ephesians as a circular letter (possibly to be equated with the letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Col 4:16) intended “to deepen and confirm the readers’ sense of identity as Gentile Christians and ... to fortify their resolve in the face of an intimidating array of hostile powers” (p. 12). Colossians, according to Starling, was similarly composed by Paul “to strengthen and encourage the readers, reinforcing their sense of identity and their confidence in the supremacy of Christ,” but also with the added aim of encouraging the Colossian believers to resist the “Colossian heresy” (p. 178).

Starling’s commentary on these two Pauline texts exhibits several strengths. First, his treatment of Paul’s use of the Hebrew Bible (particularly in Ephesians) is quite helpful. This should not be surprising for anyone familiar with his published PhD thesis, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics*, BZNW 184 (Berlin; De Gruyter, 2011). Second, Starling effectively traces how Paul frames the believer’s new identity in Christ in these texts. In doing so, he shows how Paul constructs his argument in these texts to ensure he accomplishes his overarching purposes. Third, Starling navigates sensitive cultural issues within the “household code” sections with wisdom and careful attention to



the text. For example, concerning Ephesians 5:22, Starling suggests that “husbands are charged with a particular authority or responsibility that wives are to recognize” (p. 141), yet then argues concerning the Greek noun κεφαλή (“head, ESV) that “the dichotomy between ‘authority’ and ‘source [of strength and fullness]’ as rival senses of the metaphor in [Eph] 5:23 is ... best rejected as a false one” (p. 142). While Starling somewhat overstates his case, his discussion of the noun κεφαλή does attentively account for Paul’s depiction of Christ and husbands in texts like Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23–30. Fourth, Starling’s discussion of the wisdom theme throughout Colossians (especially pp. 209, 226, 228, 252) demonstrates the central importance of Paul’s negative assessment of the “Colossian heresy” in Colossians 1:23.

Starling’s commentary, however, is not without some significant weaknesses. First, Starling largely fails to demonstrate the programmatic significance of Ephesians 1:10, which sets forth God’s plan to unite all things in Christ. Second, while Starling appropriately accounts for the complex interplay between the spiritual and earthly identity of the “powers” (e.g., p. 213) within some portions of Colossians, he argues τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (“the elemental spirits of the world,” ESV) in Colossians 2:8, 20 are to be understood as “basic principles of human piety and religion” (p. 236). In reading 2:8 in this way, Starling does not account for the impact of demonic influence within Paul’s discussion of the “Colossian heresy” (cf. 2 Cor 11:14–15; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 3:6–7; 4:1–4) and is then forced to conclude the same terminology in Colossians 2:20 refers to “‘the basic principles’ of the world order under which Christ was crucified” (p. 249). In general, interpreting the phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in 2:20 as evil, spiritual beings makes better sense of the preposition ἀπό (likely conveying separation), Paul’s negative use of the noun κόσμος, and the nature of the overall rhetorical question in verse 20. Third, while Starling rightly correlates the “Colossian heresy” with Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., p. 179), he at least minimizes the dualistic (and likely platonic) elements within the “Colossian heresy.” Among other things, this then affects his treatment of the noun σκιά in Colossians 2:17 and asceticism in texts like 2:18, 21, 23. Fourth, and most importantly, the brevity of this commentary limits the viability of designating this a “theological” commentary. Starling, of course, addresses theological issues in this commentary and is not to blame for this shortcoming. Nonetheless, someone with a limited budget in search of extensive treatment of Paul’s theological message in Ephesians and/or Colossians should probably look elsewhere.

Despite these limitations, this commentary remains an immensely valuable resource, particularly for the non-specialist. Anyone serious about understanding a canonical text must consult an abundance of secondary sources. Laypeople and pastors needing guidance in apprehending Paul’s message in Ephesians and/or Colossians would do well to include this commentary in their “toolbox.” Scholars working closely in these two texts would also certainly benefit from the exegetical insight Starling extends in this commentary.

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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

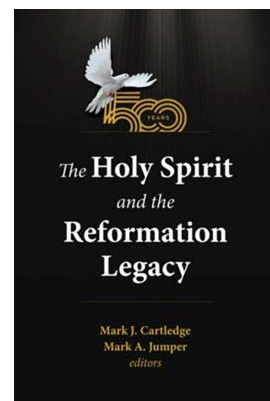
Mark J. Cartledge and Mark A. Jumper, eds. *The Holy Spirit and the Reformation Legacy*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020. 294 pp. £27.00/\$35.00.

A collection of essays arising from a 2017 conference by the same name at Regent University, Cartledge and Jumper's edited volume *The Holy Spirit and Reformation Legacy* brings together a diverse team of scholars and pastors to highlight the relevance of Reformation theology for the contemporary Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Encompassing such wide-ranging topics as Martin Luther's presence in early Pentecostal literature, the impact John Calvin's pneumatology exerted on Karl Barth, and Protestantism's impact on the role of women within the church and society, it offers something for virtually anyone with interest in Reformation studies.

The editors introduce the volume with an overview of European Christendom immediately before the Reformation, particularly which factors helped give rise to it, asking "as Christians who affirm the providence and sovereignty of God, do we dare to discern the role of the Holy Spirit amid such momentous events?" (p. xix). They answer positively; though acknowledging new technologies like the printing press and the renewal of learning precipitated by the Renaissance as catalysts for the Reformation's success, ultimately Cartledge and Jumper "dare to suggest that church, theology, and faith with its experience were the prime drivers of the era's events" (p. xix).

The volume's contributors heartily concur. In part 1, Samuel Muindi's essay on Luther's hermeneutics not only details the reformer's commitment to *sola scriptura* but explains how "apart from the illumining work of the Holy Spirit, human rationality cannot decipher the divine message of Scripture" (p. 30). Luther's potential to inform the Pentecostal movement's exegesis is also discussed, given that neither party is inherently beholden to the assumptions of historical-critical scholarship. In chapter 3, Donald Kammer demonstrates how Luther has always been viewed favorably within Pentecostalism, with early literature sometimes appealing "to the authority of Luther and the Reformation as a means of establishing credibility and continuity with the past" (p. 48). The movement saw itself as a continuation of what God began in the 16th century, viewing "the Reformation as one stage in the continuing reformation of the church" (p. 48). Kammer's essay indicates Luther may even help Pentecostals rediscover impulses of the primitive movement that have often been neglected. Though generally Arminian in soteriology, the early Pentecostals' high doctrine of providence was evident in their preference "to embrace a view of their own genesis that portrays God's direct intervention" in their lives (p. 55). Moreover, Mara Crabtree's (chapter 4) subsequent piece on Luther's view of suffering and Lance Bacon's (chapter 5) on the reformer's theology of the cross are, as the latter explains, "critical for an era in which problematic theologies seek power and possession above all else" (p. 89). This description has unfortunately come to embody certain fringe elements of the Pentecostal-Charismatic world.

Part 2, which focuses on Calvin's legacy, commences with Andrew Snyder's analysis of his pneumatology, specifically his doctrine of union with Christ. Like Augustine, Calvin taught that as "the Spirit binds together the Father and the Son, so too is the Spirit said to bind the elect to Christ" (p. 133). His pneumatological understanding of the sacraments, which Snyder later discusses, is also ripe for



further conversation with Pentecostals (p. 140). Even readers familiar with Calvin's pneumatology on such points may be intrigued by Fitzroy John Willis's contribution on the reformer's understanding of spiritual gifts. While Calvin viewed preaching and prophecy as synonymous, unlike most Pentecostals today, Willis's claim that he "was not a cessationist" might be an overstatement and could benefit from further explanation. That Calvin views Old and New Testament prophecy differently may serve as a good starting point. Indeed, in the subsequent chapter Daniel Gilbert further discusses this gift, drawing on passages from his *Institutes* and commentaries to assert that "in Calvin's description of the New Testament prophet, he left room for the continuation of the gift of prophecy as he defines it" (p. 199).

Part 3 concludes with several essays on major Reformation themes. Christopher Wilson again addresses cessationism in chapter 11, charging that while the reformers held miracles could occur in unreached areas, "their successors adopted a full-blown cessationism" (p. 205). Given his observation that Luther and Calvin frequently expressed their convictions in light of Roman Catholic claims of miracles, one wonders how they would have responded if they occurred in Reformed circles. Those keen to defend the traditional doctrine of imputed righteousness will appreciate James Henderson's section (chapter 12), wherein he contends "only (forensic) justification by faith grants us a firm basis for seeking greater maturity"—contrary to some Pentecostal scholars who suggest the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis might prove a fruitful alternative (p. 245).

The volume could have perhaps been enriched by moving beyond Calvin and Luther, indispensable as they are. Readers who treasure Zwingli's legacy, for example, may be disappointed by the lack of essays specifically devoted to him, likewise for those influenced by the Anabaptists. These omissions are surprising given that the former's position on the Lord's Supper has been the majority report within Pentecostalism, as has the latter's understanding of believer's baptism and the separation between church and state. However, given that the pneumatologies of Luther and Calvin are often overshadowed by their doctrines of justification, ecclesiology, or other matters, this work will prove invaluable for Pentecostals looking for an introduction to their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, for Pentecostals and Charismatics who already recognize the richness found in their theologies and long for their wider tradition to do the same, this volume will undoubtedly be well-received.

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Steven J. Duby. *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology*. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 334 pp. £29.99/\$40.00.

The volumes in the Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture series, edited by Daniel J. Treier and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, seek to foster the production of constructive material in systematic theology through a thoughtful engagement with Scripture as a foundational principle for Christian doctrine. Steven J. Duby, research fellow at Phoenix Seminary, is the author of *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology*, the fourth book in the series.

Duby's central argument in *God in Himself* is that natural theology, metaphysics, and the incarnation should be brought together appropriately to inform construals of Christian *theologia*, that is, the discourse about the life of God in Himself without taking the divine economy as its prime reference. Concurrently, *God in Himself* seeks to outline the rationale and practice of Christian *theologia* to rehabilitate the combined use of natural theology, metaphysics, and the incarnation in theology proper.

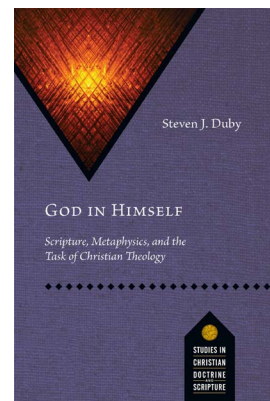
The book's five chapters follow a sequential line of reasoning that establishes a cumulative case for its chief thesis and gradually weaves its intended objective. Chapter 1 explores aspects of theological knowledge, such as its purpose, object, nature, limitations, and developments, according to the scriptural narrative of redemptive history. The chapter ends with some theological considerations concerning the boundaries of human discourse about God in himself and the potential problems arising from Martin Luther's notion of *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God).

In chapter 2, Duby discusses the role of natural theology (natural knowledge of God) as a foundational principle for the practice of Christian *theologia*. Duby exegetes several passages in Scripture to deploy a biblical concept of natural theology and offer some theological conclusions about its origin, content, and purpose. Chapter 2 also includes a historical overview of natural theology according to representative theologians from the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation eras, followed by a response to modern objections to natural theology.

Chapter 3 investigates the role of Christology—primarily expressed in the doctrine of the incarnation as understood within the context of supernatural revelation—in informing theology proper. Here, Duby weighs on the relation between Christology and theology proper by critically assessing and responding to the thought of notable contemporary theologians, including, among others, Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Robert Jenson. Lastly, Duby expounds on the positive contributions of Christology in communicating knowledge of the Triune God in his transcendence of the economy.

Chapter 4 revises the relation between theology and metaphysics. This chapter includes a survey of common criticisms about the so-called “metaphysical” depictions of God. Then, it traces back in history the development of metaphysics in its philosophical and theological usages from Aristotle to the Early Modern era. This chapter argues for legitimate incursions of metaphysics in theology proper, namely, metaphysical reasoning without obfuscating the ontological distinction between Creator-creature.

Finally, chapter 5 retrieves a doctrine of analogical predication suitable for contemporary accounts of God. First, Duby explores the biblical teaching on the transcendence of God and his communicative activity and how these themes have been understood historically vis-à-vis analogical and univocal



predication. In the last section, Duby analyses and retorts contemporary concerns regarding the construct of analogy (and its sufficiency) in light of divine otherness and sovereignty.

While *God in Himself* touches upon subjects such as the doctrines of the divine attributes, the Trinity, and the divine decree, these treatments are neither explanatory nor comprehensive. Instead, they support the central thesis and purpose of the book. Thus, it would be better to classify Duby's book as a prolegomenon for the doctrine of God rather than as a study exclusively circumscribed to the construal and explanation of the classical themes included in systematic treatments of theology proper.

One of the most notable strengths in Duby's book is the conscious appeal to Scripture (deployed as theological exegesis) for the formulation of Christian doctrine. This quality is observed throughout *God in Himself* insofar as Scripture functions as the epistemic principle from which the author draws to elaborate on his theological propositions. Another forte of the book is that it recognizes the importance of catholicity for Christian scholarship. Duby recurrently engages in theological retrieval from the patristic, medieval, and post-Reformation eras to inform his construals, which later are put to the test when he enters in critical dialogue with modern objectors to his theses. The insights about biblically compatible metaphysical principles for the construal of theology proper (chapter 4) and that of the reappraisal of analogical predication to speak of God (chapter 5) should be, by themselves, enough to prompt the interest of academics to Duby's thesis.

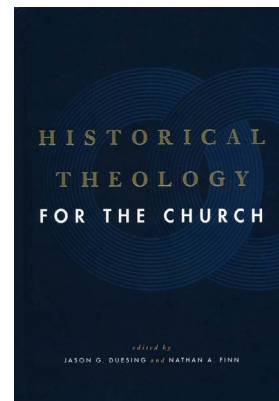
Though lucid in its argumentation and pastoral in its tone, Duby's book is not for popular consumption. Instead, *God in Himself* is a technical and sophisticated study primarily for the attention of theologians and biblical scholars.

Overall, Duby's book is an outstanding achievement in the field of systematic theology. Emulating the works of the Reformed scholastics, *God in Himself* makes a compelling case for the legitimate use of natural theology, metaphysics, and Christology to talk about the inner life of God apart from the divine economy.

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Jason G. Duesing and Nathan A. Finn, eds. *Historical Theology for the Church*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021. 416 pp. £31.99/\$39.99.

The value of historical inquiry has not been lost on men and women through the ages. Learning from the past helps us to understand our present better and move more helpfully into the future. It was C. S. Lewis who reminded us that one "who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age" (*The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, reprint ed. [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001], 58–59). To help Christians live in many places and times, so that they might live faithfully in the present and future, Jason G. Duesing (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Nathan A. Finn (North Greenville University), both respected Baptist historians,



have assembled a group of historians capable of introducing a generation of Christians to the discipline of historical theology.

To accomplish the task, Duesing writes an introduction that sets the stage. Paying attention to past definitions of historical theology provided by Jaroslav Pelikan, Alister McGrath, and Gregg Allison, Duesing defines historical theology as “the study of the development of Christian doctrine and tradition from the Bible by the church and for the church” (p. 6). The definition is relatively good, making it clear that historical theology focuses on the development of doctrine. Yet, Duesing could strengthen the definition by clarifying what he means by “from the Bible.” Regardless, after defining the discipline, Duesing shows how historical theology differs from other theological disciplines. Even though historical theology is different from other disciplines, it is also intimately related. He helpfully notes that rather than competing with other disciplines, historical theology comes alongside and functions “as a friend” to exegesis, biblical theology, systematic theology, and church history (p. 14). Concerning church history, Duesing describes the distinction between the two this way: “Church history reviews the history of the theologians; historical theology investigates the theologian’s ideas” (p. 3). In short, church history focuses on events, institutions, and dates, while historical theology is primarily ideological. Of course, the two disciplines overlap and are not easily separated.

After defining historical theology and providing historical orientation to the discipline, Duesing offers a list of characteristics that should mark historical theology. If the discipline will serve the church in the future, it will (1) uphold the primacy of the Bible, (2) uphold the two Greatest Commandments, (3) aim at helping accomplish the Great Commission, (4) offer friendly support to other theological disciplines, and (5) aim to serve the church. Thus, as historical theologians lean into these five characteristics when they trace the development of doctrine, they will “bring out the treasures from the doctrines of history and serve [churches] as the Lord’s remembrancers” (p. 20).

After introducing historical theology and offering a blueprint for pursuing the discipline for the sake of churches, the book traces certain doctrinal developments throughout the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and modern eras. Duesing and Finn follow commonly used periodization and then choose several doctrinal *loci* to focus on throughout the book. As the reader marches through the various sections, essential doctrines are discussed, such as the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus, the doctrine of salvation, ecclesiology, Scripture and tradition, and other topics. Helpfully, doctrines that find significant debate in multiple ages are picked up chapter by chapter, allowing the reader to follow the theological development across the centuries. For example, the debates over the relationship of Scripture and tradition have never been confined to the patristic era. Therefore, this topic is discussed in the patristic, medieval, and Reformational sections. In contrast, when a doctrine is not significantly debated in every era, it is relegated to the age where it rose to the top of the theological fray (e.g., the Trinity is left to the patristic era and only picked up again by Matthew Hall in the modern era).

Finn concludes the book by offering thoughts on how historical theology can offer “ministerial value” (p. 387). He suggests that historical theology can (1) “inform the devotional lives of believers and the liturgical lives of churches” (p. 387); (2) “inform the preaching of the Word” (p. 388); (3) “inform systematic theology” by helping Christians know “what the church has said about a doctrine” (p. 390); and (4) “inform ongoing debates about faith and practice” (p. 390). When historical theology is employed as suggested by Duesing at the beginning and undertaken in a way demonstrated by the various authors in this book, we should come to see that “historical theology is no mere academic discipline but is a gift to the body of Christ” (p. 391). Indeed, it is a gift that, to quote Lewis again, might just help us

prove “in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.”

In conclusion, Duesing and Finn have put together a clear and concise introduction to historical theology. The chapters not only provide helpful overviews of various debates but provide case studies that show the way debates unfolded in real situations. Yet, the book does not leave the academic descriptions in the abstract. Instead, each chapter labors to show how the subject matter matters for the church today. While reading the book, I was reminded of John Calvin’s caution to pastoral candidates at the Genevan academy not to study the Bible or theology for the sake of mere entertainment, but to serve the church. I hear echoes of that Reformation sentiment throughout this volume. As we study historical theology, our aim is not merely personal curiosity and enjoyment (though it is enjoyable, indeed!), but to grow in our knowledge of the past to serve the bride of Christ in the present and the future.

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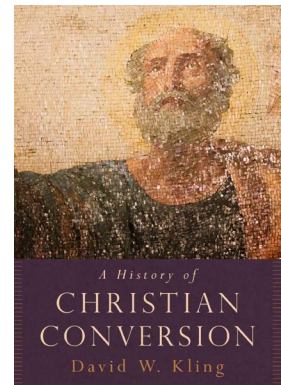
David W. Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xvi + 836 pp. £97.00/\$150.00.

David W. Kling, department chair of religious studies at the University of Miami, has written an intriguing survey of the history of Christian conversion—a complex phenomenon that is integral to Christianity.

In the preface, he argues that even though “conversion studies have [greatly] proliferated,” a survey of “Christian conversion” that is “contextually sensitive, historical, and thematic” is lacking. It is this kind of survey, then, which Kling seeks to provide. Kling notes that the book’s size does not mean it is comprehensive. He discusses four limitations. First, there are geographic omissions. Second, while autobiographical accounts are present, not all “well-known ... conversions” are included. Third, the “interactions between Christianity and other major religions” do not receive “sustained attention throughout.” Finally, while Kling does engage with “theology and mission studies,” his aim is not to write “a book on the theology of conversion nor a history of missions” (p. xii).

Before diving into the main body of the work, Kling offers an “anatomy” of conversion in the introductory chapter. Drawing from “Lewis Rambo’s seven stage model of conversion,” he analyzes the account of his “late father, Gordon Kling (1917–2011)” as a lens for understanding the phenomenon of conversion (p. 2). This analysis, with its attention to various approaches to Christian conversion, gives a window into how Kling will address conversion—a phenomenon that, for him, “remains ... inscrutable,” defying “full explanation” (p. 23).

After the introductory chapter, the book is divided into seven parts, each consisting of multiple chapters. Parts 1–4 deal with the Roman world, Europe, and the Americas, and so, in the main, the Western context is in the forefront, an area familiar to students of church history. Somewhat off the beaten path is part 4, which surveys black and white expressions of evangelicalism (ch. 15) and



Protestants and Pentecostals in Latin America (ch. 16). Parts 5, 6, and 7 deal with China, Indian, and Africa, respectively, and thus are more likely to be found in a history of missions.

In each chapter, Kling often sets up the context, surveys the topic (e.g., forced conversions) chronologically, with geographic subsections (e.g., England), followed by concluding remarks. If the material allows for it, he also gives attention to individual accounts of conversion. These allow Kling to provide the reader with a fuller sense of how conversion was viewed in a particular time (and, if relevant, place).

Given the breadth of this book, some salient features will be mentioned to give the reader a sense of Kling's offering. After summarizing various reasons why New Testament conversion accounts "do not fit neatly into contemporary explanatory models [e.g., economic, psychological]," he writes, "perhaps the most critical reason is the fundamental New Testament assertion ... that conversion is ultimately a result of God's initiative" (p. 28). Moreover, he argues that the closest ancient parallel to NT conversion is found in philosophy (e.g., Stoic, Epicurean) and pushes against the idea that Paul's conversion was a relief from "his guilty conscience" (p. 46).

Commenting on conversion in the early church from Paul to Constantine, Kling argues that "the gospel did not spread through [e.g.] evangelistic rallies," but "along the lines of social networks or face-to-face encounters" (p. 56). Regarding the vexing question of the legitimacy of Constantine's conversion, Kling offers several reasons why "the Eusebian version of Constantine's conversion" is problematic, such as Constantine's view of Christ as a "divine patron" rather than a "suffering Savior" (p. 74), his retention of "the unconquerable sun god Sol Invictus" on his coins, and the fact that Eusebius's description was "shaped by his own purposes, centered on ... the expansion of Christianity" (p. 75).

In his survey of English Protestantism (1520–1700), Kling suggests, following Peter Marshall, that the ability to systematize one's conversion experience was, arguably, the main factor that gave shape to a developing Protestantism. Remarking on the Puritan "stress on the individual temper," Kling contends that it "gradually subjectivized the Protestant movement and gave rise to revivalism and a form of evangelicalism that made conversion the benchmark of the Christian life"; therefore, the "headwaters" of evangelicalism "are found in the Puritan movement" (p. 273).

Kling's survey of the history of Christian conversion is a significant undertaking as he is deeply conversant with the relevant secondary literature and nuanced in his survey of the various approaches to conversion throughout church history. Though Kling primarily relies on secondary sources (and so one may quibble with his lack of engagement with primary historical documents), it is clear, as evidenced by the bibliographical notes, that he has distilled a lifetime of reading into one book and as such he brings to the budding historian's attention many avenues for further study.

A few criticisms need to be noted. First, the methodological rigor in his analysis was uneven, with some chapters having more overall depth than others. Second, he often resorts to choosing very well-known conversion stories such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. Why not a lesser-known figure such as Martin Bucer? Third (and connected to the second criticism), we wonder about the overall usefulness of this large book in a classroom setting. Kling's book, while emphasizing conversion, has significant overlap with multiple kinds of historical surveys. Is it best used as a church history text, a history of missions, or something in-between? The audience may not be evident to all. Fourth, there is a noticeable lack of engagement with more recent autobiographical conversion stories such as *The Heavenly Man* or *The Death of a Guru* or movements such as Messianic Judaism. Attention to some of these stories/movements would have strengthened his project. To conclude, this is required reading

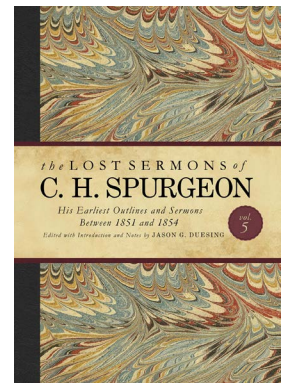
for anyone interested in Christian conversion and will be useful for any student of church history. Recommended.

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C. H. Spurgeon. *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon: His Earliest Outlines and Sermons Between 1851 and 1854*. Edited by Geoffrey Chang. Collector's edition. Volume 5. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021. 498 pp. £47.99/\$79.99.

Before turning a page of *The Lost Sermons*, one is struck by the sheer beauty of the book that harkens back to Victorian England and Spurgeon's own early sermon notebooks. B&H Academic has produced a series of volumes that is stunning in design and compelling in content.

General editor Jason Duesing and volume editor Geoffrey Chang demonstrate a solid grasp of Spurgeon's life and times along with his writing and ministry. Mark Dever, a longtime admirer of Spurgeon, pens the foreword to volume 5, and Chang provides an editor's preface offering a background to Spurgeon's earliest sermons. Spurgeon had planned to publish these sermons early in his ministry but was prohibited due to his burgeoning responsibilities on numerous fronts. Duesing and Spurgeon Library research assistant Philip Ort write a sweeping overview of Spurgeon's life in their introduction. Though the basic facts of Spurgeon's life are familiar to Spurgeon readers, they are retold in *The Lost Sermons* in fresh ways that stir readers to see Christ through the eyes of Spurgeon.



The introduction concludes with a description of the research team's approach to volumes 4–9 (similar to volumes 1–3, but with some tweaks for clarity and readability). The editorial purpose is consistent with the earlier volumes in this series to provide “a critical work that can be accessed by academics and laity alike” (p. 14).

The strengths of volume 5, as with the previous volumes, are found both in design *and* content. Beyond the loveliness of the book's high-quality pages, photo section, and cover design is the unique and compelling material contained therein.

I am unaware of any other book series similar to *The Lost Sermons*. With academic precision, Chang and the editorial team place citation notes at the end of each sermon that provides careful analysis of the sermon outline in view. This includes sources that Spurgeon closely followed in producing his sermon notes, usages of various passages, and consideration as to Spurgeon's theological leanings. I found the notes most helpful in understanding each sermon and giving me a fresh window into Spurgeon himself. Remarkably, the editors were able to discover, with specificity, writers—primarily Puritans—whom Spurgeon leaned on in his early sermons. Knowing whom and what Spurgeon read is critical to understanding him.

Many may pass up this book (and series) out of fear that it is too academic; that would be a shame because Spurgeon truly was the “People's Preacher.” Though its primary appeal is to Spurgeon scholars, anyone interested in church history, Victorian England studies, and Spurgeon will find a virtual feast

to enjoy in *The Lost Sermons*. Spurgeon scholars *and* fans alike will appreciate the academic analysis and detail contained therein. That said, even if the popular reader does not find the more academic treatment of the sermons compelling, there is much to still love about the book, especially the front and back matter: foreword, preface, introduction, photographs of the sermons that provide a picture of Spurgeon's handwriting, exegetical musings, and interests from 1851–1854, the general Spurgeon-related photographs, and indexes.

What I especially love about this series and most all books by or about Spurgeon is the centrality of the gospel that is unmistakable in his preaching and writing. To read or study Spurgeon and his sermons means that one will be confronted over and over with the gospel and its implications.

The Lost Sermons matters today because Spurgeon still matters. And Spurgeon matters because he was so gospel-drenched, Bible-saturated, and Christ-intoxicated. Like his hero John Bunyan before him, Spurgeon had the Bible pulsating throughout his bloodstream. Though Spurgeon matured over his ministry, he was essentially the same man in his gospel outlook at the end of his ministry as at the beginning. He never wavered from the truths that he first professed as a Christian at age 16.

Much of the published scholarly work on Spurgeon focuses on his London ministry, and there is very little academic (or otherwise) published concerning his prior ministry. *The Lost Sermons* fills a gaping void in Spurgeon literature, and it helps readers better understand how the “Boy Preacher from the Fens” became the “Prince of Preachers.”

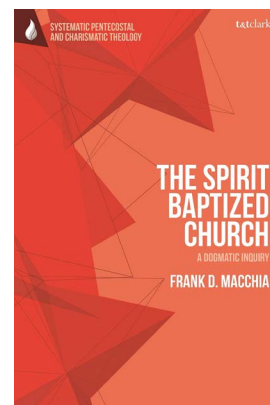
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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Frank D. Macchia. *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry*. T&T Clark Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology. London: T&T Clark, 2020. xi + 223 pp. £28.99/\$39.95.

This volume is published in the Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology series, in which scholars explore core theological themes in critical and constructive fashion within and beyond the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The author is Frank D. Macchia, who is Professor of Christian Theology at Vanguard University of Southern California, USA, and Associate Director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Bangor University, UK.

Macchia is engaged in a long-term project to write a Pentecostal dogmatics. Three volumes have already appeared: *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in the Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). Having looked at justification and Christology in previous volumes, the author now turns his attention to ecclesiology.



In developing this new Pentecostal dogmatics, Macchia takes what he holds to be the distinctive element in all Pentecostal theology, namely, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and works everything out from that core doctrine. Significantly, however, he offers a new twist on this doctrine. Most Pentecostals view the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second (or third) experience, following regeneration. The majority see it as an experience of receiving the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for mission, ministry, and service. Those in the holiness/Nazarene tradition see it as a second blessing bringing holiness (or even complete sanctification). Macchia, however, wants to locate baptism in the Holy Spirit not only as an experiential event in the life of the believer but as a final event when the believer meets Christ on the last day. All earlier events of inauguration (new birth, union with Christ, water baptism, etc.) are to be understood only in the light of the final baptism in the Holy Spirit which is yet to come. This being the case, Macchia sees Pentecost as the key to any understanding of ecclesiology. He also has a strong emphasis on a relational ecclesiology and borrows significantly from Jürgen Moltmann, and Miroslav Volf, as well as Clark Pinnock and Thomas Weinandy.

In the first chapter he lays “the dogmatic foundation for the Spirit-baptized church in the self-giving of the Triune God” (p. 9). While placing all the emphasis on the actions of God, there is a significant discussion on the individual and the corporate nature of salvation. Each individual must come to Christ in faith for salvation, but the church is the social context in which God’s calling of an elect people takes place, by the Son, through the Spirit. The core message of the chapter is that the baptism in the Spirit is the means God uses to incorporate men and women into his own divine life and, thereby, into the fellowship of the church.

In the second chapter he deals with the “elect” church. He rejects the Reformed understanding of election as being an eternal decree, whereby some individuals are chosen for salvation “before the foundation of the world.” At the same time, he rejects the Arminian view, held by most Pentecostals, that God chose certain individuals “before the foundation of the world,” on the basis of having foreseen that they would freely choose Christ. Instead, he follows the doctrine of election in Karl Barth, whereby Christ is the “elect One” and human beings who are “in Christ” share in that election. Macchia is insistent that there is no such thing as an eternal decree. For example, he resists the “eternal decree” interpretation of Acts 13:48 (“all who were appointed for eternal life believed”) and of Ephesians 1:4 (“He chose us in him before the creation of the world”), choosing instead to follow Barth.

In the third chapter, he turns his attention to “the Pilgrim Church.” Here he opens up his theory that the Spirit-baptized church journeys from its beginnings through to the eschaton when that Spirit-baptism will be fully realized. Thus, there is a strong insistence that Spirit-baptism must be viewed eschatologically in helping to define the nature of the Spirit-filled church. Water baptism is described as “the ordination service of every Christian” (p. 116) and the church becomes the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (p. 117). Macchia also explores here what the “priesthood of all believers” means, avoiding the individualist interpretation and viewing it as an expression of the living life of the church in service to God and one another.

The second half of the chapter is devoted to a close examination of the “marks” of the church. His interpretation of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity is rooted in the early church but also pressed into service for his Pentecostal dogmatics. The section on the unity of the church also demonstrates that Macchia is an ecumenical theologian, well aware of the various ecumenical debates and dialogues. He quotes from many of the documents and agreements which have emerged from the movement and demonstrates how his own dogmatic work supports and builds upon these.

The final chapter, the “Witnessing Church,” draws the argument to a close. He concludes, “The church is the sign and instrument of Christ and of his kingdom in the world. The church is constituted by the means used by Christ to baptize others in the Spirit, to address others with the gospel and to incorporate them into communion and vocation. The institutions of canon, proclamation, sacraments, spiritually gifted ministries, and mission are established by Christ and birthed in the Spirit to be used as the means by which the Triune God self-imparts to the world and draws the world into the divine embrace” (p. 210). Along the way, he quite rightly rejects the idea that the church is somehow an extension of the Incarnation (p. 166), and he affirms, with John Webster, that the Holy Spirit was at work not only in the initial giving of Scripture but in canon-formation and acceptance by the church. On the sacraments he highlights the significance of baptism as incorporation but rejects any notion of infant covenant baptism. He sees mission as core to the very being of a church.

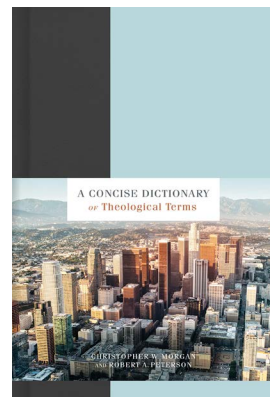
This is a challenging and original book and well worth reading. If it has a weakness, it is that somewhat controversial doctrines (such as his understanding of the eschatological nature of the baptism in the Spirit and his embrace of the Barthian version of election), are not well supported exegetically. It may be, of course, that he has already provided more exegetical work in his earlier volumes which this reviewer has not seen. Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike will need to wrestle with his ideas, and this perhaps will lead to new ecumenical ground being broken.

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Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson. *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020. xi + 179 pp. £14.24/\$19.99.

Evangelical theologians Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson have done a tremendous service to the church, especially to those in the early stages of their theological journey. Alongside their clear and fresh systematic theology textbook (Christopher W. Morgan with Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020]), the authors have provided the companion volume reviewed here: *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*.

As helpful as they are for academic theological research, many theological dictionaries are intimidatingly large, and the entries, at times, can be overly complex for non-professional theologians. Morgan and Peterson’s compact accessibility fills a much-needed gap in the theological landscape. With clarity and brevity, this dictionary enables readers of the textbook to dig deeper into the meanings of unfamiliar terms. But the dictionary is not designed merely for those working through the textbook; it is an invaluable resource for anyone doing introductory reading in theology. Instead of reaching for a thousand-page volume containing entries much longer and more complex than needed for a budding theologian, he or she can grab Morgan and Peterson’s dictionary and become acquainted with terms in just a minute or two.



The greatest strength of Morgan and Peterson's dictionary is its focus on the most relevant and core elements. Some examples highlight the usefulness of this tool:

- *Application of Salvation* (p. 8): This entry contrasts God's planning and accomplishing of salvation with the application of salvation, followed by simple descriptions of all of application's components (regeneration, calling, conversion, etc.), highlighting that all such components revolve around union with Christ.
- *Death* (p. 46): This entry sharply distinguishes between the aspects of death—i.e., death is both spiritual and physical—while providing a biblically grounded explanation for the already/not yet nuance to Christ's victory over death.
- *Type, Typology* (pp. 167–68): This entry offers a clear and helpful definition of a complex topic. Key biblical examples make plain what typology, types, and antitypes are.

In a book of this size, the authors had to make decisions about what to include and exclude. One observed weakness revolves around some of those decisions, particularly regarding which historical figures they included, and those they did not. While I understand and appreciate the inclusion of figures like James Cone (p. 39), Joni Eareckson Tada (p. 51), Ajith Fernando (p. 63), Gustavo Gutiérrez (p. 72), and Susanna Wesley (p. 173), to its detriment this introductory dictionary excludes historically influential figures like the Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as Francis of Assisi and George Whitefield.

Another weakness concerns the style of some entries given the nature of dictionaries, in general. When addressing disputable matters in a textbook—issues like the nature of hell or God's foreknowledge—one expects that the author will make a personal, scholarly judgment based on his or her evaluation of the evidence. But in a dictionary this short, one can reasonably expect a brief presentation of various sides of a controversy and, if space allows, strengths and weaknesses of each view. This allows for the reader to return from his or her dictionary search to whatever he or she might be reading with a working understanding of the debated issue, ready to engage with the expressed propositions of the author. In a number of cases, Morgan and Peterson step out of dictionary writing mode and declare certain teachings—e.g., Annihilationism (p. 4), Open Theism (p. 126), and Universalism (p. 170)—as “serious” or “major” errors, when many proponents of such teachings identify themselves on the evangelical theological spectrum. Certainly, we should all have our convictions about such issues, but a dictionary aimed at being a “a reference book ... to look up words you don't fully understand” (p. x) should leave readers free to come to their own such convictions, rather than making such judgments for them.

The aforementioned weaknesses are minor in comparison to the book's many strengths. In contrast to the few instances of making judgments rather than giving descriptions, the authors most often present multiple sides of controversial issues with fairness, such as entries on the Lord's Supper (p. 109) or the Millennium (pp. 115–17). In regard to the latter, after a balanced presentation of amillennialism, postmillennialism, historic premillennialism, and dispensational premillennialism, the entry closes with an explication of the core tenets that all four views hold in common, which builds unity rather than sowing seeds of eschatological division. And when addressing certain church historical events that fall outside the circle of evangelicalism, the authors' evenhandedness remains consistent. While they likely disagree with certain deliverances of Vatican I and II (p. 171), Morgan and Peterson present these landmark decisions in the Roman Catholic Church with straightforward equity and informedness.

For the reasons stated above, and many others beside, I will highly recommend *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* to my introductory theology students. For anyone else just stepping out on their theological journey, Morgan and Peterson will prove excellent guides.

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Patrick Schreiner. *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. xvi + 117 pp. £11.55/\$15.99.

Christ's ascension rarely receives significant theological attention, at least among many evangelicals. Patrick Schreiner, associate professor of New Testament and biblical theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, seeks to remedy this problem with his *Ascension of Christ*. Schreiner aims for his work to "help people think through this piece of the Jesus event and impress its importance" (p. xv).

The ascension refers to "Jesus going up from earth into heaven" (p. xv), as described in such biblical texts as Luke 24:50–53 and Acts 1:9–11. Schreiner links the ascension event with the session, Christ's sitting in glory at the right hand of the Father. Though these two concepts are not synonymous, Schreiner presents them as "a singular script" because, for the resurrected Christ, "the ascent is the journey, while the sitting is the goal" (p. xv).

Schreiner considers the ascension through Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king. Schreiner employs this threefold delineation of the Messianic office—the so-called *munus triplex*—to great effect. The framing allows him to explain how Christ's work connects with key Old Testament vocations, and how Christ continues his tri-fold work through his exaltation and triumph.

The book's structure follows the *munus triplex* pattern, with individual chapters devoted to exploring Christ as prophet, priest, and king. In each chapter, Schreiner surveys significant Old Testament antecedents. Leaders such as Moses represent the prophetic office. Monarchs such as David represent the kingly office. Old Testament prescriptions related to the priesthood represent the priestly office. Schreiner then argues that in the Old Testament, these three offices remain incomplete. The occasional failings of the occupants who held these offices and the ineffectual nature that these offices had under the Old Covenant are to blame. Christ, however, perfectly realizes the expectations and obligations related to these offices—and he does so not just in his earthly work but also in his ascension and session.

As the ascended prophet, Christ sends his Spirit to his church, teaching his people and convicting them of wrongdoing. As the priest seated in the heavens, Christ intercedes for his people and presents his sacrificial work on their behalf. As the authoritative ruler at the Father's right hand, Christ occupies a place of prominence and authority, dispensing his church to represent his name on the earth.

This material proves rich, demonstrating the value that Schreiner's attention to the *munus triplex* brings. Many presentations of Christ's work tend to "flatten or compress" his ministry to the timespan of his earthly life (p. 68). Focusing on the threefold work of Christ, specifically how that work finds its completion only in the ascension, discloses the more expansive theological import of the doctrine.



Attention to the threefold work of Christ also differentiates Schreiner's work from similar projects. Peter Orr's recent *Exalted Above the Heavens* (London: Apollos, 2018) is an excellent volume that surveys biblical and theological themes related to the ascension; however, Schreiner's text at points more profoundly conveys the ascension's theological significance because of its robust focus on the *munus triplex*. Readers interested in the ascension may wish to read the two volumes together, relying on Orr's work to discover some biblical data not fully addressed by Schreiner—and then turning to Schreiner's book to explore the pertinent theological material.

Despite its strengths, a few minor issues with Schreiner's work merit comment. At times, his language suffers from ambiguity. Stating that Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles "took place" in the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption) suggests the sort of covenant theology prominent among such figures as John Gill or Joseph Hussey (p. 47). A more typical construction would portray these roles as originating in the *pactum salutis* but as not obtaining full actualization—that is, as not "taking place"—until Christ actually performs his ministerial works. Also, Schreiner's comments about Jesus's ascended body no longer existing in our current space and time are not incorrect but do merit some additional explanatory remarks. Finally, Schreiner's exposition of Christ's continuing priestly ministry would benefit from interaction with the writings of David Moffitt.

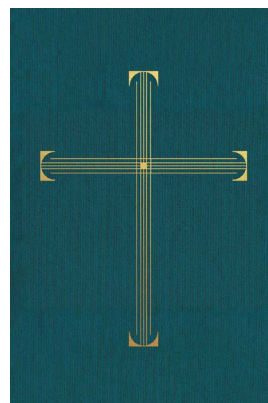
Despite some minor weaknesses in *The Ascension of Christ*, pastors and church leaders will benefit from this clearly written, accessible and biblically faithful exposition of Christ as prophet, priest, and king—and, crucially, from Schreiner's rich explanation of Christ's ascension in relation to these roles.

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Samuel L. Bray and Drew N. Keane, eds. *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer: International Edition*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. lviii + 767 pp. £19.78/\$28.00.

As the editors of this volume observe in their note to the Reader (p. 648), most of us living outside the United Kingdom or Commonwealth countries, who desire to use the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, face three problems. First, it is not immediately obvious how we are to pray for those in authority when the book only provides prayers for the royal family. Second, while the language is no less comprehensible than *O God Our Help in Ages Past*, developments in English have rendered some phrases awkward or obsolete: few of us pray to "our Father *which art* in heaven." Third, later generations have bequeathed countless prayers, of which but one example is Edward Reynolds's General Thanksgiving, which has become so beloved that it is often mistaken for the work of Archbishop Cranmer himself. Could we really stand to turn back the clock?



For those of us beset with such difficulties, Bray and Keane's *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer: International Edition* (hereafter *IE*) offers a delightful gift. The editors take state prayers from the 1928

American and 1960 Ghanaian Prayer Books, while prayers for the royal family are retained in “Prayers and Thanksgivings” (pp. 39–48). Other beloved prayers are included in an appended section of beloved prayers from later prayer books. Language has been modestly revised. Offering a much-needed poetic hand on the liturgical tiller, the editors profess “to update the language of rubrics most; prayers less; and Psalms, canticles, and biblical texts least of all” (p. 649). As a result, the Prayer Book’s biblical euphony strikes afresh, furnishing living words of worship from a time when spoken and written English were not so estranged as they have become in the Age of Twitter. Even when one’s corporate worship situation is less formal, the possibilities for individual and group use are very great.

The *IE* is marked most, however, by what it does not attempt. Where it introduces post-1662 prayers or rubrics, it disclaims any authority to impose them; the appendix, “Additional Rubrics,” states that permission to follow appended rubrics in public worship rests with the “appropriate ecclesiastical authority” (p. 719).

Far more importantly, the *IE* displays the God-honoring, Christ-exalting, life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, and manages to do so with minimal adjustment to the original text. What changes do appear evince editorial restraint. Early modern spelling and punctuation are revised only so far as to render the text intelligible for modern users. Obscure expressions are defined in a glossary. Substitutions are present but uncommon. Bible readings and prayers stand in their original integrity. The *IE*, in effect, faithfully presents that Anglican formulary which the 2008 *Jerusalem Declaration* calls “a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer.”

The *IE* can thus be regarded as a conservative project, in two senses. It is *structurally* conservative, in that it allows its Reformation-era contents to stand as their own textual edifices, resisting the urge to prize apart their interrelated theological and rhetorical architectures. Attention to the theological teaching and implications of the Prayer Book’s contents is signaled by the appending of *A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind by Only Christ Our Saviour from Sin and Death Everlasting*—i.e., Cranmer’s 1547 “Homily on Justification,” which alone among the two Books of Homilies is specifically cited in the eleventh of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Even so, the editors emphasize that it is not their “place to indulge in theological or ethical adjustments to the prayer book, nor to explicate it with commentary” (p. 653). For that, we must await further work in the vein of Prayer Book commentary (one example of which this reviewer, with one of the editors, is currently working on).

The *IE* is also *textually* conservative. Cranmer’s prose, sober and grave—that on account of which C. S. Lewis described the Prayer Book as “the one glory of the Drab Age” (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954], 204)—remains intact. Prayer Book English is, of course, a lesser glory. Not all Anglican evangelicals even regard it as such, associating it rather with a snide penchant for archaic ritual. But in doing so, some have unwittingly sold the family farm. Consider a comparison to evangelical attitudes to liturgy and church fabric in seventeenth-century England. As Julia Merritt has shown (“Puritans, Laudians, and the Phenomenon of Church Building in Jacobean London,” *The Historical Journal* 41.4 [1998], pp. 935–60), and as Alice Soulieux-Evans has more recently underlined (“Cathedrals and the Church of England, c.1660–1714” [PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2019]), it is Laudian rhetoric that we have to thank for a longstanding impression that Puritans and evangelical conformists in early seventeenth-century England cared nothing for church fabric, whether parish churches or cathedrals in particular. Later evangelical resistance to certain features of English church life was, in part, a sign that their opponents had won the rhetorical field. In

other words, English evangelicals did once, it turns out, care about *particular* things – not only ethereal concepts like “shapes” and “styles,” but also concrete terms, materials, and practices.

Drawing the analogy home, the *IE* offers what J. I. Packer called “the Bible arranged for worship” as one such concrete particular. May it equip evangelicals anew, as it did that great Bible expositor and Prayer Book apologist, Charles Simeon, to ground the faithful exposition of God’s Word in the glory of a gospel-centered liturgy.

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Quassim Cassam. *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 224 pp. £14.99/\$20.00.

The era of Trump, Brexit, and ever more heated public debate over which news is most fake, has spawned a cottage industry in the relatively new field of vice epistemology. Branching from virtue epistemology, which emerged as an Aristotelian retrieval in the 1990s, the vice variant examines the personal qualities that make us prone to epistemic error. British philosopher Quassim Cassam has provided a study of epistemic vice that begins with its careful definition and extends out to its taxonomy, mechanisms, real-world importance, case studies, and possibilities for mitigation.

Taking a so-called obstructivist viewpoint, Cassam defines an intellectual vice as “a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge” (p. 23). Whereas its rival, motivationalism, blames intellectual vice on bad motives (p. 17), obstructivism is broader and more consequentialist, asking what personal qualities have the effect of inhibiting knowledge. “Blameworthy” and “reprehensible” are important technical terms in Cassam’s scheme. Some vices are blameworthy in themselves, but others are merely reprehensible, meaning that they reflect poorly on the person and, for that reason, merit criticism. For instance, someone who grew up indoctrinated by the Taliban may not be blamable for developing dogmatic and closed-minded habits, but they still reflect badly on him (pp. 19–21).

The way that vices can obstruct knowledge is twofold. First, they shut down effective inquiry—for instance, the intellectually arrogant person has no interest in listening to learn from another (pp. 7–8). Second, vices like prejudice can twist the operation of the senses themselves—for instance, by causing a biased witness to “see” a crime wrongly (p. 8).

After defining intellectual vice, Cassam defends the very concepts of virtue and vice as meaningful explanations of intellectual behavior, over against competing claims that structural factors and cognitive biases provide better accounts. Without dismissing these other lenses for understanding human thinking, Cassam maintains that vice, with its personal level of explanation, nevertheless has its place alongside them (pp. 23–27). He goes on to supply further detail on the three categories in his definition. A *character vice*, such as closed-mindedness, is a dispositional trait (pp. 30–34). Less characteristic of the agent, a *thinking vice*, such as gullibility, is “a particular piece of thinking” or a “thinking style” (p.



56). Finally, an *attitude vice*, such as prejudice, is a stance or position, an affective evaluation of an object (pp. 81–83). In the latter chapters, Cassam explores the pernicious function of intellectual vices: they nullify justification of knowledge (pp. 108–09), stealthily mask their own detection (pp. 144–46), and resistantly hamper the epistemic virtues needed to undo them (p. 183).

Cassam's writing is substantive and efficient, but conversational enough to avoid swamping the reader in the kind of minutiae that often plagues analytic philosophy. The book's brief length allows him space to interact with interlocutors but not engage in lengthy polemics. He structures both the book and its chapters with welcome lucidity, usually hooking the reader with a concrete scenario before laying out the key questions that guide each chapter.

These real-world illustrations make intellectual vice come alive with its poisonous ramifications. At the same time, the follies of real people stumbling into poor thinking lends human pathos to the work. The honest reader can see him or herself in the case studies with little difficulty. What is more, the examples illustrate how frequently epistemic vices occur in life and help the reader understand them more precisely. In particular, the discussion of epistemic insouciance and its distinction from lying (pp. 78–81) is as fascinating as it is useful for discerning exactly how that politician, author, or conversation partner is compromising the truth.

Cassam aptly leads his readers through a tour of broader conversations on virtue epistemology and related fields, balancing thoroughness with accessibility to the newcomer. His interaction with other authors and his thorough presentation make this an impressive work that cannot be ignored by anyone seeking a careful understanding of virtue and vice epistemology.

While welcoming Cassam's emphasis on personal qualities, rather than merely the structural or the neurological, Christian readers will note that some of his arguments rely on non-hamartiological assumptions. These make good sense from his secular standpoint, but the Christian with a biblical perspective on sin and responsibility will dispute some of his conclusions. The most prominent example is his argument that blame for a vice depends on the agent's control over contracting or maintaining it (pp. 123–30). While a Christian can appreciate the common-sense logic here, the biblical-theological categories of original, actual, intentional, and unintentional sin point to a different analysis of responsibility. To be specific, the distinction between blame and mere reprehensibility may not withstand theological scrutiny (e.g., Rom 9:10–13). Still, this difference qualifies less as a weakness in Cassam's book than as a launching point for constructive dialog from a Christian viewpoint.

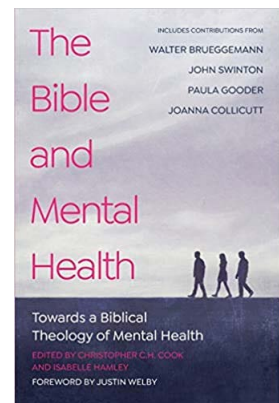
Similarly, the Christian, who believes that nothing short of spiritual regeneration can begin to undo a person's natural vicious habits (Jer 13:23; Eph 2:1–5; 4:17–24), may find Cassam's discussion on self-improvement naïve. Notably, Cassam himself appears to weave back and forth between admitting as much, and holding out hope that vice mitigation and reversal are indeed possible (pp. 176–87). Nevertheless, the self-help and superficial nature of his suggestions (for instance, conducting paraphrasing exercises to improve one's listening and combat intellectual arrogance) rings hollow over against the radical and sweeping heart change wrought by the Holy Spirit's re-creation of believers in Christ (Ezek 36:25–27; Tit 3:5). Again, Cassam does his best from a secular viewpoint, but biblical Christianity offers a deeper well of resources for heart and mind renewal.

With its ability to advance the scholarly conversation, orient the beginner, intrigue the otherwise curious reader, and supply a user's guide to the epistemic mischief that blights today's media environment and our own hearts, *Vices of the Mind* provides a valuable contribution to the topic of intellectual vice.

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Christopher C. H. Cook and Isabelle Hamley, eds. *The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health*. London: SCM, 2020. xxi + 244 pp. £25.00/\$40.00.

This book, a product of a conference in 2019 hosted at Lambeth Palace, joins the ranks of a growing body of Christian literature that seeks to understand better mental ill-health and how to minister to Christians who struggle with it. The intended readership is: (1) those involved in leadership and pastoral care; (2) lay members; and (3) medical professionals (p. xvii). Although not primarily an academic text, some of the essays assume that the reader will be conversant with developments in contemporary biblical criticism. The book's purpose is to challenge the bifurcation of faith and modern medicine by hosting an 'interdisciplinary conversation' between the fields of biblical studies, psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy (p. xvi). In the words of the editors, 'This book is an attempt to bring together these different discourses and different worlds, through the specific lens of the Christian Scriptures' (p. xvi).



Providing a comprehensive analysis of a collection like this in the short compass of a book review is difficult. Therefore, I shall restrict myself to briefly summarising each chapter before reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of this volume as a whole.

Topped and tailed with an introduction and conclusion written by the editors, the book's fifteen contributions are divided into three parts: (1) Biblical Theology, (2) Biblical Case Studies, and (3) Practical Focus.

In the first part, Jocelyn Bryan argues for the importance of narrative in finding meaning in our lives and constructing our identity. Gordon McConville examines what the Old Testament has to say about human nature and what it means for humans to be whole. Joanna Collicutt offers a provocative exploration of the concept of madness through how Jesus was perceived and treated in his earthly ministry. Stephen Barton and Paula Gooder both focus on aspects of Pauline theology. Barton argues that a 'disruptive apocalyptic hermeneutic' (p. 71) best explains Paul's anthropology and his understanding of the self; Gooder analyses the semantic range of the word 'mind' and its cognates before relating it to Paul's teaching on the mind of Christ.

The second part is a selection of snapshots from specific biblical texts. Isabelle Hamley, focusing on the prologue and epilogue of Job, argues that the ambiguous use of language by the narrator and main characters can help faith communities to explore together the challenges invoked by mental ill-health. David Firth examines the language of anxiety in the Old Testament and then analyses how Psalms 38, 94, and 139 use that language. Walter Brueggemann provides a brief overview of the lament psalms as examples of truth-telling and challenges the Church to recover these psalms in its liturgy.

Jill Firth explores the character of Jeremiah as a case study of resilience in the face of national trauma. Christopher Cook, in two essays, first looks at the importance of prayer for mental health in the Sermon on the Mount and then explores the language of demon possession as a metaphor for mental illness through the example of the Gerasene demoniac.

The third part approaches mental health via practical theology to offer some suggestions for pastoral application. John Swinton explores what a mental health hermeneutic might look like through the experience—both positive and negative—of Bible study in the lives of three Christians. Nick Ladd examines the Church's role in reading the Bible, specifically in the practice of dwelling in the Word, and how this can help form genuine community. Megan Turner's insight that many biblical writers wrote against a backdrop of national trauma provides an introduction to trauma theory as an interpretative lens. Nathan White looks at the role of Scripture in promoting resilience or, referencing Hebrews 11, how Christians are to live 'in-between promise and fulfilment' (p. 206).

All the contributors are mindful of the difficulties of using the Bible to address an issue that it rarely mentions explicitly. Repeatedly, the reader is cautioned against anachronistic proof-texting and, thankfully, this is consistently borne out in the essays. There are few attempts to psychoanalyse biblical figures, choosing instead to carefully examine key themes and what they might contribute to a theology of mental health.

Most of the chapters are very strong—indeed, some are excellent—offering much for the reader to ponder. Particularly worthy of note are Cook's two contributions, Barton and Gooder's explorations of Paul's thought, Swinton's proposal for a mental health hermeneutic, and White's examination of resilience. Jill Firth and Turner complement each other's work nicely on trauma. Some essays, such as David Firth's, feel more like vignettes, suggestive appetisers for future research and study. The chapters by Collicutt and Hamley, however, although containing some intriguing insights, utilise a hermeneutic of suspicion, sometimes reading against the text as much as with it. The reader will need to sift these chapters carefully to extract what is of value.

For this reviewer, one contribution, the first chapter by Bryan, was a disappointment. As an exploration of the importance of narrative or stories, this was the ideal place to provide an overview of the redemptive storyline of the Bible, demonstrating how Baumeister's four needs for meaning might relate at each point. Frustratingly, Bryan's only examples are from Genesis 1–3 and the Gospels (with one minor reference to Paul). I feel that this chapter was a missed opportunity to set out a framework to situate the other contributions—which, ironically, encompass most of the Bible's storyline—and give the book a better sense of structure and direction.

Inevitably, considering the almost impossibly large area that mental health covers, there are many aspects of mental health that this book doesn't address—something the editors acknowledge (p. 225). That said, perhaps a tighter focus on specific aspects of mental health or either the New or Old Testament would have given this collection a better thematic unity and allowed the contributors to delve deeper into their respective topics.

A more significant criticism is that this volume omits the very voices it purports to represent. Except for three of the practical focus chapters, none of the other contributions refers to the experience or insights of people with mental ill-health, church leaders or pastoral carers, and therapists. The reader, especially the busy church leader, will find plenty of suggestions for pastoral care but little of actual substance about how these might be concretely applied. What might it look like to incorporate lament into a church's public worship? How do Christians with poor mental health read particular parts of the

Bible, and what do they find most helpful and unhelpful? How might a faith community offer support to someone with mental ill-health or suffering significant trauma? How might a therapist incorporate Scripture and other spiritual resources into their sessions? The addition of these perspectives would vastly improve this volume's usefulness.

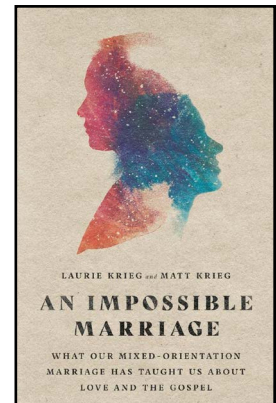
These criticisms aside, I would recommend this book for its numerous and valuable insights, as long as the reader approaches it with discernment. These essays are not the end but just the start of a long but hopefully fruitful conversation on mental health.

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Laurie Krieg and Matt Krieg. *An Impossible Marriage: What Our Mixed-Orientation Marriage Has Taught Us about Love and the Gospel*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. 226 pp. £11.99/\$20.00.

If you're looking for a book about the "nuts and bolts" of marriage between two people with different sexual orientations, this is not it. You will not find a how-to-guide or a romantic meta-narrative with an awaiting sunset. The Krieges' seemingly impossible marriage is more than the inconceivable union between a straight husband and a woman who experiences attraction to other women. Though the context is a mix-orientation marriage, *An Impossible Marriage* is in fact a parable, because Laurie and Matt's life is a parable for a world desiring intimacy and oneness. David Hansen has described a parable as "a story meant to create a comparison between a known thing and an unknown thing, the purpose being to illuminate the unknown thing so as to bring something new, unforeseen and surprising to the hearer" (*The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012], 26). The story of the Krieges' journey of seeking oneness and union in their marriage illuminates something old and mysterious that in our over-romanticized and over-sexualized landscape has been kept "unforeseen and surprising" for Christians and unbelievers alike.

What the Krieges have written in parable form is in fact a well-crafted piece of practical theology. In the discipline of practical theology, a particular practice in a particular context is first analyzed and the undergirding theology explored; then this theology is assessed, affirmed, critiqued or transformed in light of Scripture and other relevant disciplines; finally, the theology is returned to a context to "enable faithful practices" (John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* [London: SCM, 2006], 10). Marriage is the practice under scrutiny and the Krieges' union is the context for this inquiry. Each chapter navigates the theological and cultural assumptions that underpin marriage, and through the intertwining of three voices (Matt's, Laurie's, and God's) these assumptions are assessed, critiqued and transformed. This approach is much needed because it examines our theology and practice of marriage through a "non-normative" lens. For example, the book relates how sex between Matt and Laurie became difficult and traumatic because of a mixture of retriggered abuse, sexual orientation issues, and porn addiction. When sex is temporarily taken off the table for the Krieges, deeply engrained cultural assumptions about marriage begins to be revealed.



Each chapter critiques a particular unbiblical assumption about marriage, and then applies Scripture and evangelical theology to it. Chapter 1 critiques the idea that sex is a need. “Sex is not a need,” writes Matt, “even in marriage. Sex is a fruit. It is a gift for covenanted couples. It is a gospel metaphor within the gospel metaphor of marriage. It is something to be used to worship God, not to be demanded” (p. 28).

True vulnerability and intimacy are explored in chapter 2—not only between husband and wife, but also with God. To be vulnerable to Jesus is to allow him to be Lord over every aspect of life. As Laurie writes, “Having a sexual orientation that did not naturally draw me to Matt did not let me off the hook. Just because I had been assaulted did not mean I had the right to wander” (p. 30). Chapter 3 pries open how past patterns of idolatry, trauma, and sin impact current relationships. For Laurie, even though many of her idols (like perfectionism and people pleasing) “were church acceptable ... they were still idols” (p. 51).

Chapter 4 explores the teleology of marriage and how unbiblical goals make the parable of marriage murky. The assumption that sex or service is a commodity to be exchanged for core needs—e.g., husbands exchanging service in the house for sex in the bedroom (p. 66) or wives exchanging emotional bonding for sex (p. 80)—reveals idolatrous thinking. Likewise, “slapping a prayer on sexual intimacy doesn’t magically transform it into the gospel metaphor” (p. 89).

True “oneness” and unity in marriage is explored in chapter 5. The Kriegs stress that “oneness is not a euphemism for sex. Oneness is Holy Spirit-fueled unity in all of the areas of relating” (p. 92). Consequently, sex is not the only path to oneness. “Walking can lead to oneness. So can co-teaching on the stage, podcasting together, serving others, and raising kids side by side” (p. 92)

As each aspect of Matt and Laurie’s life is readdressed with Scripture and theology, healing begins to occur and the point of the parable becomes increasingly clear: “Married and single gardeners have the same goal: Remove the weeds and cultivate the fruit-bearing seeds so that the Holy Spirit’s rain can flow through healthy gardens, insert good nutrients, and produce fruit that tumbles down your mountain to serve and feed the body of Christ” (pp. 87–88).

Chapters 6–9 give insights into the process of walking through trauma—both in therapy and in prayer, and of redeeming toxic sexual shame. The ways that community and friendships can be used by God to (re)build marriages is explored in chapter 8. The final two chapters reconstruct and reconnect sex, sacrifice, and their potential to be a parable for the gospel and the marriage between Christ and the Church. “Having sex with Matt was not God’s primary goal for my life. God’s primary goal for me and for the church is to be one with us—and that that oneness tells the world of his love” (p. 163)

Ultimately, then, the Kriegs’ seemingly impossible marriage is a parable of “Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32). The particularities that the authors unearth are characteristics that make all marriages seemingly *impossible* (p. 9). They suggest that “our marriage problems are not really marriage problems. They are heart problems. They are God problems. Our lack of intimacy with God creates a void that we try to fill with frail substitutes, like wealth, pleasure, fame, respect, people—or marriage” (p. 71). Therefore, in reality, *An Impossible Marriage* is a book for all people regardless of their marital status. It is a glimpse of the seeming impossibility of divine and human union – the *impossible marriage* between God and his broken, sinful, idolatrous and beloved people.

Because the book is narrated through the two distinct voices of Matt and Laurie, at times I yearned for a co-written voice that summarized the lessons they had learnt together. Yet, on reflection, the form itself challenged the (preconceived) notion that marriage is a totalizing of oneness. Two distinct voices

with different pasts, baggage, processing methods and faith striving for oneness, allowing dialogue, interweaving their lives while respecting individual distinctions communicated a richer and even greater oneness. That is, the form itself helpfully represents the nature of Christian unity in diversity.

When you open this book, prepare to take off your shoes, because you are being given access into intimate, sacred space. To use Matt and Laurie's metaphor, we are being invited to step onto soft soil of the Kriegs' private holy garden where the work of God in planting, growing and harvesting is still continuing. By reading their account of this work, we are drawn into practical theological reflection and helped to engage in practical theological reflection upon our own lives.

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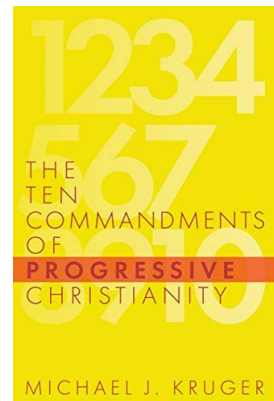
Michael J. Kruger. *The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity*. Minneapolis: Cruciform, 2019. 55 pp. £6.17/\$7.99.

Michael J. Kruger is the president and the Samuel C. Patterson professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. In addition to his work at the seminary, he serves part-time as pastor of teaching at Uptown PCA in downtown Charlotte. This volume demonstrates Kruger's experience both as a scholar and a pastor, tackling academic problems that easily infiltrate the church.

The book seeks to critique ten principles of progressive (theologically liberal) Christianity. Philip Gulley (*If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus* [San Francisco: Harper One, 2010]) is the principal interlocutor; the chapters of his book serve as the chapter titles in this volume as well. Kruger believes that Gulley has written nothing new, but simply redressed liberal Christianity in new clothes. The thesis of the present volume is that liberal Christianity is not Christianity at all. Kruger sets out to show why this is true.

Kruger's tone is winsome. He never belittles his opponent(s) or succumbs to *ad hominem* arguments. Instead, he models good (and *Christian*) critique. Each chapter is four or five pages in length and dedicated to one principle of progressive Christianity. The pattern for each is similar. He begins with a brief introduction of each principle, and an anticipation of the critique he will render. He then identifies what is agreeable about the principle, or what is *partially true*, before moving on to deliver a biblical and theological response. Additionally, in many of the chapters, Kruger exposes the logical inconsistencies of the progressive position. He concludes with a definite account of why the progressive position is wanting, being unbiblical and less than Christian.

The echoes of J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1922) are unmistakable. Though Machen's project was quite different, the goal was much the same. In fact, Kruger begins his volume with an appreciation of the work and a recognition of the fact that the problems Machen addressed are still much the same. However, what Kruger adds to the conversation is a more contemporary, though traditioned, response to the problems. He also engages issues now more post-modern than Machen's modern context. Whereas, Machen's world was concerned with



scientific proofs, and with that a dismissal of ancient (and “unproveable”) authority, Kruger’s world is driven by moral relativism. Otherwise put, the problem for Machen’s era was how ancient words could have real relevance for a contemporary audience, when so much of the foundation of authority could be questioned. Machen said rejection of doctrine in his time involved “out-and-out skepticism” (*Christianity and Liberalism*, 19). But in today’s world, Kruger’s audience is driven by moral relativism, which is the product of the previous era. With no foundation for absolute moral truth, Kruger explains that “morality is ever-changing and culturally conditioned. There is no true morality; don’t push *your* morality on me” (p. 10, emphasis original).

What endures for liberal Christianity is its dismissal of doctrine and what Kruger calls the “vertical” (e.g., relationship with God) for the moral and “horizontal” (pp. 37, 42, 52). Kruger systematically and surgically shows how at each turn this project fails. A horizontal-only moralism is dysfunctional. It is baseless and unable to deliver what it promises. In fact, the very thing it shuns (i.e., doctrine) holds the answer to the problems it addresses. Examples of this can be found in each chapter, but I offer the following as a noteworthy instance of Kruger’s tactful insight: “The fundamental problem with the progressive approach to judging is that it undercuts the very goal it is trying to achieve, namely human reconciliation. Such reconciliation can only happen when wrongs are acknowledged, owned, and repented of. And in order for that to happen, judgments must be made about people’s behavior. And that behavior must *really* be wrong—not just wrong in someone’s *opinion*. Otherwise, reconciliation is a mirage” (p. 20, emphases original).

This volume is a commendable engagement with problems that persistently tempt Christians to depart from “the faith that was delivered once for all to the saints” (Jude 3, ESV). Moralism, and especially moral relativism, appear to care for the problems of the day in an especially contemporary way. But with the departure from truth, there is no way of genuinely establishing that these problems are in fact problems. And with the move away from the theological, the solution must come from within, which dismisses the fundamental problem of sin. So, liberal Christianity misses the gospel, defining human problems in human ways and prescribing human solutions. Thus, liberal Christianity is not Christian at all.

This book should serve a wide audience. With its short length and accessible style, it would be good to put in the hands of many lay people. But this would also serve theological students as a model of clear and charitable engagement with divergent theology. Any reader should be encouraged by the application and defense of gospel truth.

Apart from a couple of minor blemishes (e.g., the omission of a word on page 11 and the claim that there is no single statement that “better captures the ethos of progressive Christianity than ...” applied to two different statements), the book is well-written, and an edifying treatment of why biblical Christian doctrine is worth clinging to even in days like these.

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Leland Ryken and Glenda Faye Mathes. *Recovering the Lost Art of Reading: A Quest for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 304 pp. £17.50/\$21.99.

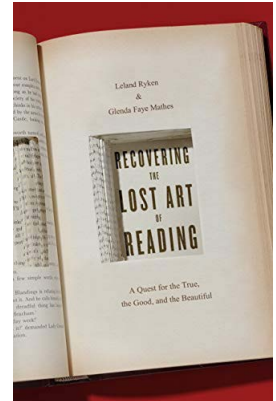
In a day when many seek edification via social media and the smartphone rather than the sonnet, the short story or even the Scriptures, this insightful and inspiring work by Leland Ryken and Glenda Mathes offers a masterful presentation of God's gift of literature and a clarion call to its revival and renaissance. Ryken is professor emeritus of English at Wheaton College and author of over fifty books; he has frequently written about classic literature from the Christian perspective and the Scriptures as literature. Mathes is a professional writer, adept in numerous genres (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) and media platforms (magazines, newsletters, blogs), who, as an author of over one-thousand articles, seeks to convey timeless truths through literary excellence.

While illiteracy is a growing and grievous issue, the authors believe a more significant concern is "aliteracy," the ever-increasing number of people who know how to read but never do (p. 17). Their hope is to inform, inspire, and align the way we read, for as they see it, artful reading (reading receptively and thoughtfully) or "deep reading" is in "deep trouble" (p. 23). While people may spend "more time scanning screens ... they are spending less time reading literature" (p. 160). As a consequence, we're "losing depth and wisdom, perhaps even a part of ourselves that jeopardizes our very souls" (p. 160).

The book unfolds in three sections. Part 1, "Reading Is a Lost Art," gets to the root of the problem. People read persistently online but that does necessitate reading material of worth or reading well (p. 16). Digital reading averages 5.9 hours per day while traditional reading about 1 hour. The cumulative effect is "cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning" (p. 21). The believer's devotional life suffers, for we "lose the ability to read the Bible consistently and attentively" (p. 24), as well as our walk with God. Part 2, "Reading Literature," provides a rationale for reading literature and offers instruction on how to enjoy several distinct types: stories, poems, novels, fantasy, children's books, and creative nonfiction. These various areas of literature "can be briefly defined as a concrete, interpretive presentation of human experience in an artistic form" (p. 61). Reading widely "offers us meaningful leisure at contemplative, intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual levels." (p. 78). Part 3, "Recovering the Art of Reading," offers a reasoned strategy for this pursuit. Prior to recovery, there must be an acknowledgment of the problem. This will lead to an assessment of one's reading habits and the reading of good literature—works which reflect (or remind us of) scriptural values, thereby enhancing our spiritual walk (p. 167). Other recovery suggestions include the practice of rest, never leaving home without a book, forming good habits, and avoiding time thieves—"the most insidious and common ones have a screen" (p. 217).

Of the book's twenty-two weighty chapters, three bear a further look. Chapter 1 answers the question, "What Have We Lost?" Francis Bacon asserted that reading makes a full person. But when humans refuse the gift of literature, what do they forfeit? The answer is sevenfold: (1) meaningful leisure; (2) self-transcendence; (3) beauty; (4) contact with the past; (5) contact with essential human experience; (6) edification; and (7) enlarged vision.

Chapter 5 asks the question, "Why Does Literature Matter?" To be sure, "Scripture does more than *sanction* literature; it shows us that literature is *indispensable* in knowing and communicating our most



important truth” (p. 64, emphasis original). Literature matters because: (1) it conveys knowledge and confers delight; (2) seeing human experience and the world accurately matters; (3) it can help shape us into thinking people, armed with God’s answers to life’s questions; and (4) we need artistic beauty to live happily and fully.

A major surprise was chapter 11, “Reading Children’s Books.” Gone are the days when children’s books conveyed biblical values and pictures of God. Parents must be on the alert and guide their children’s reading, for “children’s literature [has an] *incredible capacity to shape impressionable young minds*” (p. 122, emphasis original). The authors offer tips on choosing good books, a comprehensive nurturing style based on Deuteronomy 6:6–9, and a stern warning that technology is not just a thief of our children’s time, but also of their childhood (p. 133).

This work highlights a pair of biblical/theological emphases and their relation to literature. The first is the *Imago Dei*. God said, “Let there be ... and it was so ... and it was good,” and as God’s image-bearer, man possesses the prospect of creating and delighting in the beautiful (p. 31). While every reader can delight in literature’s beauty, only Christians can “experience beauty on spiritual levels that point to God. In the words we read, we often see dim reflections of the One who created by his word and the Living Word, Jesus Christ” (p. 200). Second, as the subtitle suggests, the authors define the *quest for the true, the good, and the beautiful*—the three inextricably linked transcendentals that echo the very character of God (p. 164). To determine *the true*, one must test the literary work’s truth claims against what the Scriptures and Christian doctrine say about like subject matter (p. 175). To determine *the good*, “we also need to exercise this comparative process to assess the moral claims in a work of literature. The more our literary excursions send us to the Bible, the better we expand our grasp of Christian ethics” (pp. 186–87). To determine *the beautiful*, we first need to recognize that beauty matters to God, for God is the ideal and radiance of true beauty, and graciously imparts this gift for the sensory pleasure and spiritual delight of humanity (p. 198).

It may surprise those who employ a literal/natural hermeneutic that the authors deem that the “hundred-pound hailstones of the Apocalypse [that] picture the coming cataclysmic destruction of the earth” (Rev 16:21) belong to the genre of “fantasy” (p. 115). The authors define fantasy as “not simply fictional or made-up as opposed to being historically or empirically factual” (p. 112). Does Revelation’s use of apocalyptic imagery mean that the only interpretive option one is left with is that of “imaginary hundred-pound hailstones” (p. 115)? I would answer in the negative.

This uncertainty notwithstanding, this magnificent volume will prove beneficial for all lovers of Scripture, for “who should care more about reading timeless truths than children of the Book?” (p. 24). Those with a particular interest in literature, especially Christian literature, will welcome this addition to the growing body of evangelical treatments of the arts. For further study one may read Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman’s *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1993) or Frank Gaebelien’s classic, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1985). We need to recover the lost art of reading, for the quest for the true, the good, and the beautiful is ultimately the quest for God.

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Darby A. Strickland. *Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. 360 pp. £15.99/\$19.99.

I have never been a victim of domestic abuse and until relatively recently I didn't really have a full picture of the horror that so many have experienced. As domestic abuse has gained greater attention in the media, as I've participated in my own denomination's development of policy around dealing with domestic abuse, and as I've heard directly from a range of victims, my eyes have been opened to the prevalence of this dreadful evil, even among God's people. As I've come to understand the complexities and difficulties for victims, I have also become increasingly aware of the need for godly guidance and good training.

Darby Strickland's *Is it Abuse?* goes a long way toward meeting that need. As she writes in her opening sentence, "I have written this book for anyone who desires to come alongside a victim, or victims, of domestic abuse" (p. 15). Her own journey into supporting and caring for victims of domestic abuse was somewhat unplanned. But using her counseling skills and experience she has developed not just a book to help us understand domestic abuse, but also provided resources to enable good policy and practice in our churches.

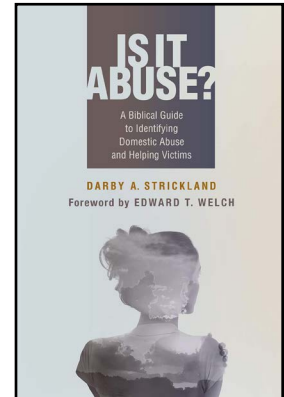
The book is unashamedly about the care and protection of women. While Strickland acknowledges that men also experience domestic abuse, and that her "book's material can be applied to male victims," it was because of conversations she kept having with women who were in "oppressive marriages" and the statistical fact that men are "more likely to be the perpetrators of domestic abuse" (p. 17), that she focuses on supporting these vulnerable members of God's family.

This is both a *what is it* and *how to* book. But it is not a *find a quick fix* book. Strickland spends a significant amount of time outlining and educating the reader about the nuts and bolts of abuse, the different types of abuse, along with some practical helps for those supporting abuse victims. One noteworthy feature of this book is Strickland's departure from the usual language of *perpetrator* (for those who commit abuse), replacing it with *oppressor*. She explains her reasoning as follows:

I like to use the term oppression since it provides a framework for this behavior that is addressed in Scripture and captures the domination that it involves. No matter what form oppression takes, its intended outcome is the same: to punish and wound a victim so that an oppressor gets their world the way they want it. (p. 24).

For Strickland, oppression language better expresses the patterned behaviour of the abuser; whereas a perpetrator is one who carries out an act of violence. She writes, "*Oppression is so much more than an anger problem or a marriage problem. Oppression is about coercive control*. Oppressive behavior is not provoked. It is behavior that accomplishes something for the abuser. It is an expression of pernicious entitlement" (pp. 62–63, emphasis original).

Here Strickland helpfully draws out the distinction between a bad marriage and an abusive marriage. She describes the limitations of marriage counseling where the fundamental issue within the marriage is abuse. This is a key insight for those involved in supporting victims of abuse. Strickland then fleshes out what is at the heart or root of all oppression. She highlights patterns of entitlement, punishment, self-justification, unrelenting demands for love and service, lack of empathy, and hypocrisy—these are common for all abusers. Other books have also identified these behaviours with abuse but Strickland



offers a further insight into the foundation of oppression that many secular and even Christian writers fail to address.

Oppressors do not only lack empathy and punish others. Underneath the six key beliefs that are at the root of entitlement and the damaging behaviours that it causes is the most significant and detrimental distortion of all: a worship problem. Oppressors see themselves as the center of their world; their hearts say, “I was created to be worshipped, not to worship.” But *God* is the center of all things. He created us to worship him. So when “Me, me, me!” rules all, God is dethroned, worship is impeded, and Christian growth is stunted. (p. 71, emphasis original)

Strickland doesn't just stop at the pathology of the oppressor. She also helps the reader to understand the situation and pathology of the victim in order to develop better frameworks for care and support. She writes, “I am not suggesting that you seek to intellectually understand an oppressed person or simply gather facts about her; I am challenging you to know her and know her story in a way that moves you” (p. 94). Strickland helps orient our thinking toward and about the victim. She challenges misplaced perceptions of who victims are and how they ought to respond to their trauma. She equips the reader with strategies to help investigate.

One of the unique things about this book is that it has features of a workbook. In the second of its three sections, each chapter focuses on different types of abuse and has accompanying check lists and reflection questions. Importantly, these resources are specifically written for victims. This is to help victims recognize the abuse they are experiencing. And yet, given the title of the book, it is difficult to imagine when and where a victim might read it—certainly not in their home! Some creativity is needed to get this book into the hands of those being abused.

Lastly, Strickland helpfully emphasizes the importance of connecting victims to God's words (p. 56). She acknowledges the reality that for victims God often feels distant, and that they often feel unheard and unloved by him. If abuse comes into a marriage, like cancer (or any kind of suffering), questions of God's goodness and kindness are easily raised. But, unlike cancer, when violence is inflicted by someone who purports to love you, then this is doubly confusing and feels like a double betrayal—from the spouse and from God.

Having God's word front and center is an essential aspect of creating a support framework from victims. It enables us to bring life-giving truth into a situation that is dominated by lies. Strickland writes, “The more a victim can receive God's good words, the more she will be able to do battle with the false and disorienting words of her oppressor” (p. 57). Abuse is itself a lie about a person's worth and value—that we are precious in God's sight. It's also a denial of all that God says about us—that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. And it is a lie about how we are to treat one another—with love and respect. We must bring truth back into the world of the victim.

A final word of caution. While Strickland's work is enormously helpful in providing diagnostic tools for those seeking to care for victims, there is a danger that it might embolden the reader, whether they be a minister or church attendee, with an over confidence in their own abilities. Although she warns the

reader about this, it is imperative that those in support roles understand the importance of involving professional counselors and others in the process.

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Paul David Tripp. *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 231 pp. £21.99/\$26.99.

Perhaps it is due to the ubiquitous nature of media in our current culture, but the number of ministers who are disqualified from ministry for one reason or another seems to have proliferated in recent days. As leaders in the church it seems this is a needful time to step back, reflect, and assess with our leadership teams the effectiveness of our “ministry success rubric.” Whether we are hiring new pastoral staff for our local church or simply striving for the health of our current church ministry team, there must be a unified, biblical path laid out for long-term spiritual maturity and ministry effectiveness.

Paul Tripp is a well-known author, pastor, and counselor who has written on myriad topics. His latest book *Lead*—which serves in many ways as a sequel to his earlier book *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012)—could serve as a tremendous tool for pastors and churches alike, if we are willing to sit and listen, and apply what is being said. And this needs to happen because we need to see health and growth in our church leadership communities, not disfunction and disrepair.

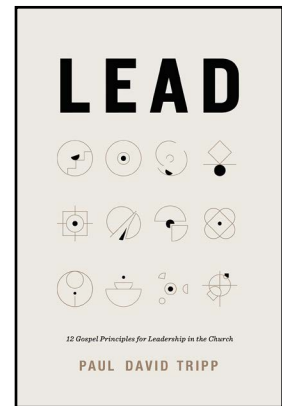
Early in the book Tripp says, “I want to turn your thinking toward the foundational character and lifestyle of a healthy church leadership community” (p. 18). Additionally, he states, “The focus of this book is the specific call of the gospel on the way we think about leadership” (p. 29). Tripp shares some of his own stories of failure, as well as the many ways he has seen God’s providence in ministry settings. He also writes about situations where he has been called upon for counsel. Many will find these stories chilling to read, either because the scenarios he describes strike too close to home, or because the dangerous patterns he lays out could even now be seen in your church leadership community.

While not always needful in a review of this nature, it seems worthwhile to list out Tripp’s chapter headings, which consist of a key term regarding church leadership and then a succinct principle. This takes the leader to the heart of the book.

Chapter 1: Achievement—A ministry community whose time is controlled by doing the business of the church tends to be unhealthy.

Chapter 2: Gospel—If your leaders are going to be tools of God’s grace, they need to be committed to nurturing that grace in one another’s lives.

Chapter 3: Limits—Recognizing God-ordained limits of gift, time, energy, and maturity is essential to leading a ministry community well.



Chapter 4: Balance—Teaching your leaders to recognize and balance the various callings in their life is a vital contribution to their success.

Chapter 5: Character—A spiritually healthy leadership community acknowledges that character is more important than structure or strategies.

Chapter 6: War—It is essential to understand that leadership in any gospel ministry is spiritual warfare.

Chapter 7: Servants—A call to leadership in the church is a call to a life of willing sacrifice and service.

Chapter 8: Candor—A spiritually healthy leadership community is characterized by the humility of approachability and the courage of loving honesty.

Chapter 9: Identity—Where your leaders look for identity always determines how they lead.

Chapter 10: Restoration—If a leadership community is formed by the gospel, it will always be committed to a lifestyle of fresh starts and new beginnings.

Chapter 11: Longevity—For church leaders, ministry longevity is always the result of gospel community.

Chapter 12: Presence—You will only handle the inevitable weakness, failure, and sin of your leaders when you view them through the lens of the presence, power, promises, and grace of Jesus.

Tripp rightly points to such things as theological acumen, biblical knowledge, ministry achievement, or social popularity and rightly asserts that these are not necessarily indications of spiritual maturity. We need to hear this, as many leadership communities in local churches prize these and other such items but never really get to the heart of one another's spiritual health.

Another great strength of the book is the relentless onslaught of diagnostic questions contained throughout. Assertions are frequently made, but the author puts his counseling prowess to work and asks heart-level penetrating questions meant to cause the reader to pause and reflect. This is also a great reason why this book should be read and discussed in community.

In these kinds of ways Tripp puts the gospel to work in the life of a leader in ways that may be new or seldom used. For example, in addressing the issue of longevity, Tripp speaks of four key principles: consideration, confession, commitment, and change (pp. 204–5). In other words, the gospel will always work to remind us of who we are in Christ and transform us into the likeness of our Savior, all in community. Our functional theology at times does not match up with our confessional theology, and we need to remind ourselves of the grace of God and how it impacts our identity and output. Knowing who we are and whose we are steers us away from typical ministry idols toward the arms of a loving God who works through us in the lives of others while he continues to work in us.

These gospel principles for leadership in the church provide clear areas of focus for the ministry leader. One area that I would love to see more detail about—and we apparently will, as Tripp says he is writing a book in this area (p. 190)—is that of restoration. Tripp walked a careful line of encouraging

leadership communities to not simply discard fallen pastoral leaders, while not simply brushing aside their sinful patterns. However, this leaves a great degree of margin in the middle that could receive further specification. Can ministers be restored to full-time positions every time? Some of the time? How does one decide? When does a church know they need to part ways with a ministry leader? The intensity of such questions will only grow as cases of a disqualifying nature will always be with us. As such, I look forward to seeing what Tripp offers readers in his forthcoming work on this topic.

There is a great degree of wisdom packed into the 231 pages of *Lead*. Readers will be helped in numerous ways to reconsider the kind of business that is covered within leadership meetings. There is no doubt that church leaders must speak to matters of care, counseling, strategy, vision, and decisions of various kinds, but all of this must be couched in a community that is actually, demonstrably and effectively seeking one another's spiritual good.

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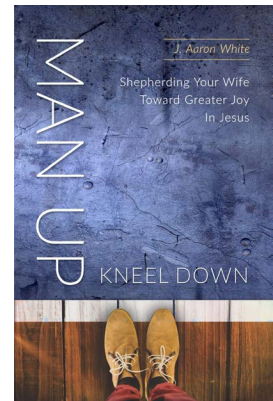
J. Aaron White. *Man Up, Kneel Down: Shepherding Your Wife Toward Greater Joy in Jesus*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2020. 157 pp. £13.45/\$14.99.

My wife and I run the marriage ministry in our church, and so it was with some eagerness that I sat down to read Aaron White's new book, *Man Up, Kneel Down: Shepherding your Wife Toward Greater Joy in Jesus*. Comprised of thirteen short chapters, it's a passionate and practical exhortation from a husband to husbands to live out the gospel in their marriages. There are simple, easy-to-remember topics—like “Protect Her,” “Lead Her,” “Love Her,” and “Strengthen Her”—and each chapter concludes with a small (read “manageable”!) number of application questions, and, perhaps best of all, a model responsive prayer for husbands to pray.

There is much to appreciate about this book: it is generally well-balanced, combining both incisive rebuke and optimistic encouragement; it is easily digestible while also being profoundly insightful at times; and some of the chapters are notable for addressing rarely-treated topics—“Cherish Her” and “Prepare Her” (for eternity with Christ) are particularly moving. White's concluding prayer at the end of chapter 13 is superb:

I long for my dear wife to face death with courage and the eager expectation that she will, by your grace alone, enter into the joy of her Master. Lord, please grant me the grace to run my own race toward heaven while urging her to follow me home to glory. If you should sovereignly choose to take her before me, give me the strength to shepherd her and point her to Christ until her last breath. In Christ's name, Amen. (p. 147)

Overall, *Man Up, Kneel Down* is a thought-provoking attempt to show how the theology of God's grace shapes the authentically Christian marriage. It will appeal to husbands at any stage of marriage with its winsomeness, relevant illustrations, and non-guilt-inducing plea for us to grow in godliness. For example, White writes this:



We need better men. No, we don't need perfect men, but we do need better men. Even though Christ is the only perfect man and the sole head of the church, the body of Christ needs men of integrity and grit. Although this book is written with love and goodwill, it is a direct call to war. It is a call for Christian men to make war against the things that belittle the glory of God, wound their wives and children, and disqualify them from fruitful ministry. (p. 15)

At the same time, the book has some significant shortcomings. Although brevity is a benefit when it comes to the notoriously short male attention span, the book is decidedly poorer for what it does not cover or covers poorly. For example, the opening chapter ("Protect Her") is built entirely around 1 Timothy 3—which the author acknowledges is a passage about elders in particular and not husbands in general—and yet still insists that "the character qualities that Paul lists for elders in 1 Timothy 3 should be pursued by every man who follows Christ" (p. 22). Conversely, the author barely engages with Ephesians 5:25–33 (not even in the concluding chapter which focuses on heaven), despite it being the New Testament passage par excellence which directly applies the gospel to Christian husbands.

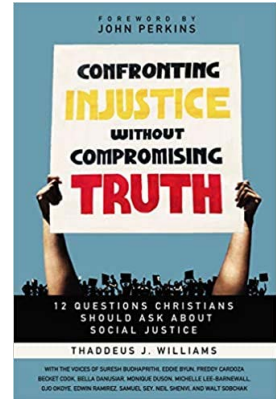
Moreover, I could not discern any apparent logic to the thirteen chapters, some of which felt oddly repetitive. There was significant overlap, for instance, between "Hear Her" (ch. 4) and "Understand Her" (ch. 8), which ultimately left me wondering on what basis the author chose these thirteen particular topics? And although White has a commendably broad use of Scripture, the cumulative effect is strangely disorientating: in chapter 12 ("Delight Her"), he urges men to thrill their wives with the majesty of God's sovereignty, devoting considerable attention to both God's superintendence over Assyria (Isa 10) and the challenge and comfort of the doctrine of election (Rom 9:18)—which seemed mildly incongruent in a book about Christian marriage! By the end of the book, I was left with niggling doubts about why some passages and topics were given extended treatment while others did not feature at all: why, in a contemporary book about marriage, is there almost no mention of the challenges of sexualization—apart from a somewhat awkward and all too brief paragraph in chapter 7 under the sub-heading, "Serve Her in the Bedroom" (p. 91)?

In sum, *Man Up, Kneel Down* is a solid attempt to focus on Christian husbands and their role in marriage. In that sense it is a useful resource which goes some way toward addressing a real lack in contemporary Christian literature. That said, I think there are better books that examine either the purpose of Christian marriage—e.g., Timothy and Kathy Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013) and Paul David Tripp's *What Did You Expect: Redeeming the Realities of Marriage?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010)—or the practicalities of living as husband and wife—e.g., Scott Kidersha's outstanding treatment *Ready or Knot: 12 Conversations Every Couple Needs to Have before Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019). Admittedly, those offerings are not directed specifically at husbands; whereas *Man Up, Kneel Down* is. And yet, for me, the book not only needs to do more but, at points, raises as many questions as it answers. Even the intentionally catchy title is never really explained—in fact, my wife and I still can't agree: Is *kneeling* a metaphor for a husband *praying for* or *serving* his wife?!

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Thaddeus J. Williams. *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. xix + 261 pp. £16.99/\$22.99.

“God does not suggest, He commands that we do justice” (p. 2, emphasis original). Thaddeus Williams, associate professor of theology at Biola University, reminds us of this truth in his new book *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth*. But what is justice? And how can we distinguish true justice from its counterfeits? Unpacking those questions takes several hundred pages, but the result is convincing, accessible, and sorely needed. Civil Rights leader John Perkins, who wrote the book’s forward, warns us that in the midst of “much confusion, much anger, and much injustice ... many Christian brothers and sisters are trying to fight this fight with man-made solutions [that] promise justice but deliver division and idolatry [and] become false gospels” (p. xvi). Williams’s book is a must-read for those trying to understand these false gospels, especially high school and college students who feel torn between conservative Christian theology and a passion for activism.



In his introduction, Williams contrasts two different visions for “social justice,” dubbing them “Social Justice A” and “Social Justice B.” Social Justice A refers to the application of biblical principles to society’s laws, as exemplified in the lives of William Wilberforce, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sophie Scholl. It describes Christian efforts to “abolish human trafficking, work with the inner-city poor, invest in orphanages, upend racism, and protect the unborn” (p. 4). Despite the understandable discomfort many evangelicals feel with the term “social justice,” it has historically been used by Christians to refer to activities that are mandated by Scripture.

In contrast, Social Justice B refers to the “oppressor vs. oppressed” narrative of Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School, the deconstructionism of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the gender and queer theory of Judith Butler” (pp. 4–5). It thus describes a movement that is often diametrically opposed to a biblical worldview, both in theory and in practice.

In the subsequent chapters, Williams asks twelve penetrating questions that expose the stark differences between Social Justice A and Social Justice B, probing everything from their assumptions about identity and morality to their attitudes towards truth, tribalism, and unity.

The divergence between Social Justice A and Social Justice B begins at the most fundamental level. While secular theories of justice must necessarily start with horizontal relationships between humans, a biblical conception of justice starts with our vertical relationship to our Creator. “If justice means giving others their due,” then justice demands that God be given his due, for he “is due *everything*” (p. 18, emphasis original). Williams points out that all of history’s worst injustices were the product of fallen human hearts in rebellion against God: “Look deep enough underneath any horizontal human-against-human injustice and you will always find a vertical human-against-God injustice, a refusal to give the Creator the worship only the Creator is due. All injustice is a violation of the first commandment” (p. 18).

Establishing a proper theological foundation is crucial because “[t]here is simply no worldview-neutral way to think about or act out justice” (p. 7). This is why people on both sides of a range of controversies “believe they are fighting for justice” (p. 6). For example, pro-choice “reproductive justice” is a major component of Social Justice B while pro-life opposition to abortion is a major component of

Social Justice A. Why? Not because one side believes they are fighting for injustice, but because each side has a different understanding of what justice entails. What is a human being? What is the basis of human value? What are our moral duties? Far too often, Christians want to dive into activism, skipping past these “theoretical” issues. But they’re inescapable. If we ignore them, we might find ourselves doing great evil in the name of “justice.”

From a Social Justice A perspective, our fundamental problem as human beings is sin and the fundamental solution is redemption through Christ. Of course, Williams reminds us that individual human sinners can and do create unjust systems: “From steep interest rates to ritual child sacrifice, the Bible has much to say about confronting the kind of injustice that is bigger than this or that individual sin” (p. 79). But the problem begins with the individual human heart, even if it doesn’t end there.

In contrast, Social Justice B locates our social problems primarily in groups. It thus “attempts to explain the world’s evil and suffering by making group identities the primary categories through which we interpret all pain in the universe” (p. 61). Yet does such “collectivist group blaming” lead to justice or to internecine group conflict? In answering this question, Williams references a 2018 *Washington Post* article by Suzanna Danuta Walters entitled “Why Can’t We Hate Men?” which included lines such as “Is it really so illogical to hate men?... when they have gone low for all of human history, maybe it’s time for us to go all Thelma and Louise and Foxy Brown on their collective butts” and “please know that your crocodile tears won’t be wiped away by us anymore. You have done us wrong” (cited on p. 57). The point of the article, like that of several others that Williams references, is clear: Instead of seeing all human beings as guilty sinners before a holy God, Social Justice B encourages us to cast certain groups as villains and others as victims. This is hardly a pathway towards unity.

The narrative of Social Justice B will also prescribe a certain perspective towards group disparities. As best-selling author Ibram X. Kendi wrote in the *New York Times*, “racial disparities must be the result of racial discrimination.... When I see racial disparities, I see racism” (cited on p. 81). Yet in chapter 7, Williams provides examples of how the real world is far more complex than this simple formula implies. For example, “twenty-two of the twenty-nine astronauts in the original Apollo space program were firstborns.... Asians are underrepresented in the NBA.... Women are overrepresented in health-care.... Jewish people ... received ... 32 percent of Nobel Prizes in medicine and 32 percent in physics” (pp. 82–83). In few if any of these cases do we think discrimination is the sole or even the predominant explanation for these disparities.

To be clear, Williams is not denying that discrimination *can* play a role in disparities, possibly even a large role. He is simply pointing out that it is possible to become so enamored of the heroic, liberatory narrative of Social Justice B that we bypass available evidence, or even dismiss appeals to evidence as a veiled attempt to justify oppression. Williams cautions us to resist this temptation: “We can’t separate the Bible’s commands to do justice from its commands to be discerning” (p. 3).

To this end he offers a helpful suggestion: “Before assuming you are ‘woke’ on issues of systemic injustice, I suggest reading at least one or two books about racism that challenge the dogmas of Social Justice B.... The best way to avoid being taken in by dangerous, one-sided ideologies is to expose ourselves to different perspectives” (p. 100). Especially important is Williams’s insistence that he is not attempting to rein in Christians’ desire for justice, but rather to point it in the right direction. If we misdiagnose the problem, then our solutions will be ineffective at best and harmful at worst.

A final, crucial element of Social Justice B is the exalted role played by “lived experience.” According to Social Justice B, people from dominant, oppressor groups (men, whites, heterosexuals, the rich) are

supposed to defer to the experiential authority of people from subordinate, oppressed groups (women, people of color, LGBTQ people, the poor): “Those on the oppressed side of the equation are often granted automatic authority” (p. 156). Yet this framework has several problems.

First, while Christians can and should listen to and learn from people with different experiences than our own, someone’s race, class, or gender does not determine whether their claims are true or false. Instead, we must test everyone’s claims against reason and evidence.

Second, in an attempt to defend the experiential authority of oppressed people, proponents of Social Justice B will sometimes make extraordinarily insulting claims, like Judith Katz’s assertion that “‘objective, rational, linear thinking,’ ‘controlled emotions,’ ‘the scientific method,’ and ‘quantitative research’ are all defining marks of racist ‘white culture’” (cited on p. 146). In reality, rational thought and reliance on evidence are human universals, not the property of white, Western males. To say otherwise is to demean myriads of brilliant black and brown innovators, scientists, and scholars throughout history.

Finally, surveys show that there is no single, monolithic *voice of color*. For example, “less than one-in-three black people without college degrees believe their race has made it harder for them to succeed (29 percent), while 60 percent believe ‘race has not been a factor in their success or failures’” (p. 98). Noting that phrases like “white privilege” and “white fragility” were coined by whites, Williams drily comments: “it is possible that what is often considered ‘the black voice’ is actually the white liberal voice” (p. 98). What is true for the average “man on the street” is true for intellectuals too: “When Social Justice B advocates call for more ‘voices of color’ to be centered in our schools, our diversity seminars, and our political platforms, it is clear that they don’t want voices of color like Sowell’s or the many brilliant black thinkers like him [e.g., Walter Williams, Shelby Steele, Glenn Loury, John McWhorter, and Coleman Hughes] who question the worldview of wokeness” (p. 100).

This point is driven home in a series of brief personal essays scattered throughout the book. In these contributions, people of color (myself included) offer perspectives that don’t easily fit into the Social Justice B narrative. Edwin Ramirez muses, “Though I considered myself woke, my bitterness towards white people had closed my eyes to God’s marvelous saving power in the gospel” (p. 52). Monique Duson explains how Critical Race Theory pulled her towards partiality: “with my black Christian friends, speaking of whites in derogatory ways was perfectly acceptable. I spoke words over whites that Christ would never speak over me. CRT made it nearly impossible to see white people as beloved image-bearers whom Christ died to redeem” (p. 108). Freddy Cardoza laments, “I have become a pariah in many circles [because] I reject today’s trending justice ideologies. The intensity of attacks on people who reject identity-based tribalism has become a spiritual pathology in many Christian institutions” (p. 159).

If we really are committed to “listening to voices of color,” we need to listen to *all* such voices, not just those which fit into our preferred liberal (or conservative) framework.

In the preface, Williams explains his motivation for writing: “I care about God, I care about the church, I care about the gospel, and I care about true justice.... Not all, but much of what is branded ‘social justice’ these days is a threat to all four of those things I hold dear” (p. xviii). I concur. Evangelical Christians have struggled to articulate exactly what is wrong with the secular social justice movement in a way that is irenic, passionate, and non-partisan. This book is a big step in that direction.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Glenn Daman. *The Forgotten Church: Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018. 255 pp. £11.50/\$14.99.

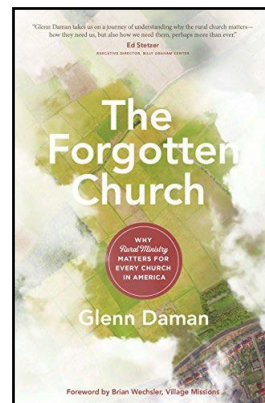
Rural ministry matters, says Glenn Daman, who urges readers not to forget about the often marginalized and often overlooked rural areas in America. Glenn Daman is a well-educated, tenured pastor with a heart and vision for growing rural ministry. He summarizes his thesis in this way: “The goal and purpose of this book is that the church at large might understand the importance of and need for rural ministry, as well as identify ways that rural and urban churches can partner together to mutually encourage and strengthen the larger body” (p. 18). This book provides a practical guide for a better understanding of a rural worldview.

I read this book as one who lived and ministered in an East Asian city of eight million people for eight years before God called me to pastor a local church in rural South Carolina. My journey from urban Louisiana to urban East Asia was a massive leap of worldview. However, the jump from East Asia to rural America was effortless. Let me explain. Many of those I served in the mega-city were migrant students and workers from surrounding rural areas. Consequently, I became familiar with rural Asian culture while living in an urban metropolis. Learning to prioritize people over process was what prepared me for pastoring in a rural American setting.

While many works related to rural church ministry often revolve around some type of revitalization or revisioning process, this book draws attention to the significance of community and relationship within a rural ministry often devalued and under-utilized. While the great commission is global in scope, Daman asks an honest question: Why are rural areas being “overlooked and cast aside by the larger church community” and deemed “unworthy of our attention?” (p. 16).

In chapters 1 and 2, Daman observes that rural churches are both forgotten and often misunderstood. He believes that if we fail to understand a culture and its people, “we will eventually devalue and probably ridicule them” (p. 30). Therefore, to begin the process of healing and helping the rural church, there must be “recognition of the gulf existing between rural and urban worldviews” (p. 36). While some rural ministry caricatures are overstated, Daman does well to differentiate between urban and rural ministry methodologies.

Chapters 3–5 briefly explore historical perspectives of American rural life, church, and culture. These chapters are a practitioner’s goldmine for rural ministry. Daman astutely observes why rural ministries often struggle. He states, “Urban principles and practices are often implemented within the rural church context” (p. 37). As a solution for transitioning rural churches, Daman suggests “helping the ‘old-timers’ see that some of their values are cultural rather than biblical, while at the same time helping the ‘newcomers’ learn to respect and value the rich traditions that undergird a rural church and dispel the myths and misconceptions that popular culture has of rural people” (p. 39). Although Daman is right to bridge the gap between traditionalists and those desiring a more authentic practice of ministry, I would contend that helping a traditionalist to value scripture over their sacred traditions is not an easy job. This problem is a leading factor of rural ministry decline.



Chapter 6 synthesizes Daman's pastoral plea to the broader church community for effective rural ministry. In his observation, the evangelical world has overemphasized urban ministry while the rural landscape had become the new ghetto. In Daman's assessment, "Evangelicals have viewed rural America through idealist's eyes as over-churched, over-evangelized, and overly-prosperous" (p. 94). Consequently, conditions in rural America are now facing a crisis, and chapter 7 provides a brief discussion on social injustices and racial tensions plaguing humanity. Daman correctly observes that race is often interwoven into local culture. Therefore, churches must acknowledge that racial tension does exist and must help its community move beyond skin color or ethnic background (p. 120).

Daman next considers the church's role in the rural community before attempting to develop a theology of rural ministry in Chapter 9. Here is where Daman displays his frustration directly toward Christian leaders who argue that the redemptive plan of God is urban focused (p. 146). Citing multiple New Testament texts, Daman recognizes the vital role of the rural church in sending missionaries and growing pastors for the Great Commission (p. 153). In this chapter, Daman's strength becomes his weakness as most of his solutions for these challenges are apparently pragmatic.

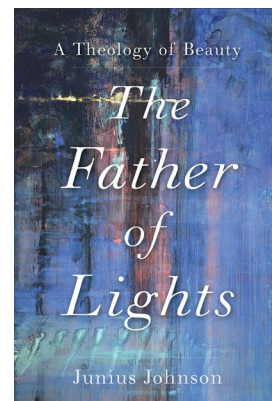
In the book's final sections (chs. 10–13), Daman challenges the reader to consider how ministers can create strategic partnerships and view the rural community as an intentional mission field. He asserts, "We struggle to understand rural communities as a mission field because we assume they are already Christian. And we assume they are Christian because of the moral conservatism. As a result, the rural church is viewed as a maintenance church rather than a missional church" (p. 209). Providing a strategy for the future rural ministry, Daman proposes, "Rural churches must maintain a missional priority over simply 'maintaining' the ministry" (p. 209). These latter four chapters provide powerful insights and wisdom for the future development of rural ministry. Once again, Daman's strength is his weakness. Numerous practical solutions are provided for what is often a theological problem in the church that is only solved by God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit changing the hearts of men.

Daman has written a well-researched book that covers a broad array of practical issues. This work is exceptional in that it is a first of its kind with its rigorous sociological and historical perspective on the great need for a rural ministry focus. In particular, his clarion call is a challenge for all the evangelical community to hear. Daman provides a distinct contribution to the topic of rural ministry. He provides clarity on the clear distinctions between an urban and rural worldview. Daman's breadth of knowledge and experience in small church rural ministry is the book's greatest strength. The book is of great value and would well serve anyone considering rural or urban ministry.

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Junius Johnson. *The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty*. Theology for the Life of the World. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xiv + 210 pp. £25.00/\$32.00.

When I first started reading theology in a serious way, I remember being disappointed at the apparent dearth of meaningful contributions from the reformed and evangelical world insofar as it concerned theological reflection on beauty. Sure, a handful of Protestant theologians worked in theological aesthetics (e.g., Wolterstorff or Begbie), but beyond that small number, it seemed the case that beauty suffered from being subsumed under the exigencies of truth and apologetic. Beauty, it seemed, was useful for the sake of truth. If I wanted, as a young Christian working through Derrida, Zizek, and the oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp in my university's rhetoric program, a Trinitarian articulation of what beauty was, I had to read Roman Catholic thinkers. Disagree with them as I may about justification or Mariolatry, here at least I was home among those for whom beauty—and not merely its instances—demanded serious theological consideration.



The work that Junius Johnson does in his *The Father of Lights* is thus brilliant for two reasons. First, it sets the theological consideration of beauty in terms that, while heady at times, are not uniquely Roman Catholic. Second, it focuses on the theology of beauty proper, instead of approaching “the topic somewhat obliquely, turning to concrete instances of beauty (art) to get some purchase of the topic” *à la* theological aesthetics, however helpful those may be (p. 1).

In part 1, Johnson establishes a clear and detailed understanding of beauty and avoids getting bemired in dichotomies of objective/subjective with his emphasis on God being the properly beautiful and that all our encounters with the beautiful (e.g., creatures and experiences) ultimately remind us of God, who is Beauty himself. This is because “God is beautiful and the source of beauty; God is its source because God is the cause of God’s own beauty and because God is the cause of all beauty that is not divine” (p. 2).

What follows from that understanding is a cogent consideration of “the means of apprehension by which this experience is encountered” (p. 44). “In this life,” Johnson argues, “what we need are eyes that are primed for the eschatological conversion into the vision of glorified creatures” (p. 47). Fallen humanity finds flickers of beauty, even as we find flickers of the true and the just (cf. Acts 17:27–29; Rom 1:19–23), but it is in having “eyes of faith,” as Johnson names it, that our experience is fulfilled in the knowledge of God, who is the truly beautiful, “when the eternity in our hearts becomes the eternity in our eyes” (p. 47).

The phrase for this that Johnson develops here is “contuition” or, literally, “co-seeing” (p. 56). What Jesus assures Philip of in John 14:9 (“whoever has seen me has seen the Father”) presents a picture of the biblical logic at work in the beautiful. Johnson is not arguing for a kind of “double-vision” or a compound seeing. No, the two things being encountered “are not merely adjacent or juxtaposed; rather one is seen *through* the other” (p. 56, emphasis original).

Part 2 of the book approaches the meaning of beauty using the concept of contuition developed earlier. Johnson moves through five theological themes: the nature of language, the nature of metaphor, things as signs, the nature of sacraments, and icons and ecstasy. These discussions are lengthy, yet Johnson’s leisurely and careful approach avoids tedium. Notable among these reflections is his discussion

of things and signs (pp. 131–42). Much of our cultural confusion regarding things as variegated as gender, race, worship music, clothing, and cinema (to name a few), results from the folly of modern and postmodern semiotics. What Johnson does in these pages arrives at a depth of understanding of the nature of signs and things, and the way in which meaning comes to be, anchored in the beauty of the Trinity and a biblical understanding of signification.

For all this positive good, however, I offer two critiques, both coming from the book's latter portion. First, his invocation of Ockham's theory of signs (pp. 101, 116) is both unnecessary and problematic. This hazardous gesture, while affording a helpful Latin phrase, was ultimately unnecessary in moving the theological project forward, especially once Johnson applied all the necessary attenuations to Ockham to keep his nominalism at bay. Secondly, chapter 8 fails to adequately address the concerns of those readers who would disagree with him about icons. His scant use of Scripture in the chapter and his lack of rigor when he does, leaves readers wanting.

For many pastors and scholars in the reformed and evangelical world, concepts such as "icon" can put one ill-at-ease. They "smell Romish." The book moreover might seem of little importance in the reading-list hierarchy of the pastor or young scholar, dwarfed perhaps by more purportedly practical texts (on church-growth, evangelism, or counselling). Against these concerns, I commend it.

First, despite places where those of a more reformed or evangelical sensibility might find disagreement with Johnson's work regarding sacraments and icons (and perhaps in other places), Johnson's work remains valuable for the method by which he approaches the beautiful. In an age that suffers from a dysphoria towards and objectification of the beautiful on almost every level, it behooves the church to have pastors and scholars who can proclaim the gospel by clearly articulating an understanding of beauty that makes biblical sense.

Moreover, while Johnson is analytic in his philosophical processes, this book displays his ability to speak to and from the heart, at times being almost pastoral in tone as when he deals with the concept of ugliness (pp. 33–41). "It is dangerously naïve," he reminds us, "if we forget that there is still to come a mighty working of the divine power with regard to the ugly," in both its physical and moral forms (p. 40). For those who may be tempted to write-off philosophical explorations of beauty in favor of more "practical" texts, take note: beauty preaches.

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Andreas J. Köstenberger with T. Desmond Alexander. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. 2nd ed. New Studies in Biblical Theology 53. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. xxii + 377 pp. £16.99/\$35.00.

This second edition of *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* is not merely the simple update of the first edition (2001) but is rather a major revision. Peter O'Brien is no longer coauthor, and T. Desmond Alexander has contributed an entirely new chapter on the Old Testament. The remainder is now the sole work of Andreas Köstenberger of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The New Testament material is significantly reworked and restructured, for example integrating James and Hebrews with the discussion of Matthew's Gospel, Peter and Jude with Mark, and the Pauline corpus with Acts. A new subsection has also been added to each chapter titled "Contemporary Relevance."

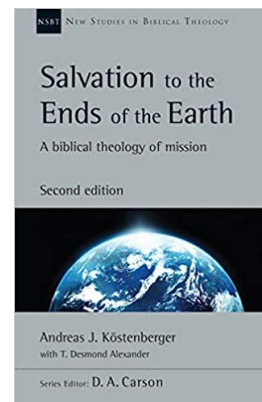
Several features characterize this work. First, the author approaches the biblical text from the standpoint of historic evangelical convictions. Second, it is a biblical theology in the strictest sense, not a systematic theology or missiology. Accordingly, he discusses biblical texts in terms of their canonical and historical contexts, and sources are drawn almost exclusively from academic biblical studies. There's virtually no interaction with contemporary thematic discussions in theology of mission. Third, this is primarily a *New Testament* biblical theology of mission. Alexander is tasked with covering the entire OT in but one chapter of twenty-nine pages. 224 pages are then devoted to the New Testament, followed by a twenty-page appendix on the Second Temple period.

Finally, mission is narrowly defined, primarily in terms of proclamation. As explained in the introduction, "On a general level, the criterion for inclusion of a given portion of Scripture for discussion in the present volume may simply be that it relates in a significant way to the proclamation of God's name and of his saving purposes in Christ to the unbelieving world" (p. 4). Considerable attention is also given to the inclusion of gentiles in the New Testament people of God. However, other prominent biblical themes relating to mission—such as the universality and particularity, or missional ecclesiology—remain largely unexplored.

The text reads much like a running commentary on selected Bible passages, walking book by book through the New Testament. Apart from a concluding chapter, there is little attempt to trace an overarching theme. Thus, the value of this text is found in its discussion of specific New Testament texts in terms of their historical and canonical background. Extensive footnotes point the reader to helpful related literature in biblical studies. Readers desiring a more comprehensive, thematic approach or an examination of these texts in light of current missiological discussions will need to look elsewhere.

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Duane Alexander Miller. *Two Stories of Everything: The Competing Metanarratives of Islam and Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Credo, 2018. xiii + 143 pp. £11.97/\$15.99.

Religion, theology, doctrine, and ideology do not arise in a vacuum. Rather, each of these elements emerges from a certain way of viewing the world that is both implicit and explicit. One way that values and worldviews are implicitly carried along is by the stories that individual communities tell about the world. According to Duane Miller, comparing such overarching stories—or metanarratives—provides a more fruitful opportunity to see the distinctions between faiths than is achieved when merely comparing doctrines.

In his book, *Two Stories of Everything*, Miller contends that when comparing Christianity and Islam, the “approach of ‘comparative metanarratives’ is more fruitful than that of ‘comparative religions’” (p. ix). Throughout the book, Miller rehearses the overarching stories told by the two faiths in an effort to demonstrate that, beyond mere doctrinal disagreement, there are worldview-driven causes for why Islam and Christianity differ on Jesus.

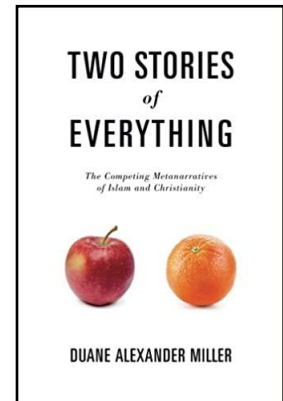
Contrary visions of divine nature lie at the heart of the worldview differences that Miller identifies between Christianity and Islam. Not only does Miller recognize the distinction between Islamic monotheism (monadic) and Christian monotheism (Trinitarian), but he rightly identifies the implications for this distinction on each faith’s theological anthropology (p. 65).

For Miller, this works itself out narratively within Islam as follows. If God is a monad, love cannot be an essential part of his nature prior to creation. Thus, the Islamic worldview is not compatible with the biblical teaching that God is love. Since the Islamic God is not love, his creation is an act of power, not an expression of his love or an instantiation of a loving relationship. Therefore, when a Muslim conceives of the ultimate *telos* of humanity, it is not “to love God and enjoy him forever; in Islam it is to know God’s power and be his vice-regent on earth” (p. 66).

While Islamic theology would perhaps include a more eternal vision of human purpose—such as passing the test of life and being admitted to paradise to enjoy gardens of pleasure—Miller is correct in identifying the locus of divergence in the conception of God and his relationship to his creatures. From these points of divergence, Miller traces the different stories told by Islam and Christianity as it relates to the essential human problem and each faith’s proposed solution.

Miller argues that since the story that Islam tells of the world involves humans created to know God’s power rather than knowing God relationally and dwelling in his presence, there is no sense of conflict between human imperfection and divine judgment. Ultimately, since Muslims do not anticipate God’s loving extension of himself in relationship, their sins can be merely forgiven and overlooked. They need not be removed. Therefore, human failure can be conceived of as a failure to submit one’s will to God and a forgetfulness regarding the instructions of God. The answer to a problem of a wayward will and forgetful mind is clear, objective instruction. Thus, Miller views the Islamic solution to the human problem as the final dispensation of divine instruction given through Muhammad in the Qur’an.

For the Christian, Miller argues, the essential human problem is death (p. 21). Though some might argue that a more accurate description of the fundamental human problem is separation from God, Miller’s point is that human life is characterized by death while God is a God of life. This plays itself out throughout Miller’s retelling of the Christian story as one that anticipates an eschatological condition



of living in God's triune and unmediated presence in the new creation spoken of in Revelation 21. For Christians, then, the human problem is not one that can simply be overlooked, but rather something that needs to be radically transformed.

While valuable for comparing the basic stories told by Islam and Christianity, Miller's book is not to be mistaken for a precise theological articulation of each faith's tenets. For example, in discussing Genesis 3:20, Miller states without explanation—and without connection to or contrast with Islamic teaching—that Adam naming Eve is a symptom of their mutual alienation from God instead of a statement of faith that she will be a mother to all the living (p. 3). Another instance of theological imprecision occurs a few pages later when Miller refers to sin as “a symptom of death [that is] not the fundamental problem” (p. 6). To the contrary, according to Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23, death is a symptom of sin.

Despite this occasional lack of theological precision, Miller helpfully demonstrates the value of considering the metanarrative undercurrent that is influential in creating doctrinal divergence between Christianity and Islam. Such an approach is invaluable to Christians who seek to understand why they share some similarity with their Muslim friends and neighbors while also exhibiting radical disagreement over central doctrines.

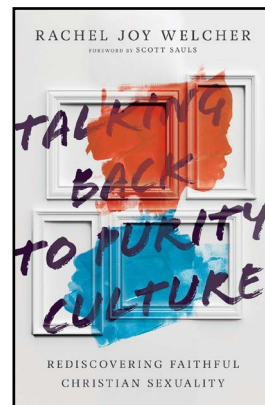
This book does not offer a deep dive into Islamic or Christian theology, but rather an incisive analysis of the central points at which the biblical metanarrative and the Islamic metanarrative part ways. As points of difference between Christian doctrine and Islamic teaching arise, then, the reader will be ready to explain such differences as features of different stories rather than merely viewing them as competing doctrines. For that, this book is to be commended.

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Rachel Welcher. *Talking Back to Purity Culture: Rediscovering Faithful Christian Sexuality*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. 216 pp. £11.99/\$17.00.

The *Imago Dei* concerns both our bodies and our relationships with others, regardless of gender, so says Rachel Joy Welcher. In *Talking Back to Purity Culture*, she does a masterful job investigating all manner of purity culture. Welcher grew up in the trenches of purity culture and in her early twenties found herself divorced and questioning the purity rhetoric she had internalized. She draws from various books and interviews. By “purity culture,” Welcher refers to an American movement in the late twentieth-century “that utilized pledges, books, and events to promote sexual abstinence outside of marriage” (p. 12). Much of the first chapter describes specific features of this movement. Her examples of purity culture rhetoric help readers understand how pervasive, explicit, and implicit the messages are. The book seeks to shine a light on many half-truths about sex that were emphasized by purity culture. The author's goal is the offer encouragement and freedom for those wounded by the excesses of purity culture.

While she has stern words for the purity rhetoric coming out of the 1990s, she keeps a generous, evangelical lens in place. Welcher says, “My desire to reevaluate purity culture teachers is out of love



for the church, not a vendetta against her.... Evangelical purity culture was not a wicked movement but rather an earnest response to the age-old problem of immorality and the modern crisis of STDs and teenage pregnancy” (p. 9). The book consists of ten chapters that either examine the claims of purity culture or present a more biblical robust vision of sex. For instance, she highlights the ways that girls were expected to bear an uneven burden of responsibility compared to men when it came to sexual purity. Likewise, Welcher considers the subtle, yet unrealistic promises that purity culture made to teens who remain abstinent. Her assertions are balanced, thorough, and well-documented. She opens up personally, sharing from her own life to allow us to understand how her divorce, absorption in purity culture, and interactions with community-led her to a place of generosity toward herself and others.

When abstinence education got in bed with government funding, appeals to Scripture were thrown on the floor. “Strategies for attracting teenagers to chastity had to focus more on individual benefits and consequences than the glory of God” (p. 23). Extra-biblical promises of a good marriage, amazing sex, and a bundle of children would make abstinence worth it. This promise-making is where the purity culture went off-roading. Teens committed to the delayed gratification of an incredible married life. Many who had signed the commitment cards and faithfully wore purity rings were left disappointed when sex was uncomfortable, and marriage got hard. Welcher argues, “Purity culture’s main problem is not that it is too conservative but that it is too worldly. Sex is not about self, and abstinence is anything but sexy. Dressing it up as such is not only confusing, it’s discouraging” (p. 179). She further suggests that purity culture rhetoric pushes same-sex attracted, trans, abuse victims, singles, and others further towards the margins of the church. Welcher proposes, “Maybe one reason people leave the church is because we tell them purity is about sex, when really it should be about God” (p. 94).

Throughout purity culture books and teachings, the battle imagery is well-worn. Welcher examines such themes, including warriors, fighting, and waging war, especially as they relate to men and purity. This vocabulary quickly sets up a posture of being the brave warrior who not only wins the lust war but wins the princess as well. “In purity rhetoric for men, women are often depicted as damsels in distress but also damsels causing distress” (p. 60). She acknowledges that lust is a struggle for many men (and women), but she also pulls forward the emphasis on personal responsibility that has been missing in the purity discussion. Men seem to have received a free pass on doing the deep heart work of giving into lustful temptation. We give boys and their parents an excuse by saying, “Well, boys will be boys.” It’s as if we’ve collectively agreed that certain behaviors are expected and even endorsed as defining maleness.

If men’s purity is directly related to women’s behavior, this means that women must think about her shirt being too low, her skirt being too high, her gaze being too long, and her laugh being too loud. In these conversations about purity, the moral responsibility falls on the woman to act appropriately. If she fails in any of these areas and becomes a victim of sexual assault, the fault was mostly on her. “What this communicates is that, if it happens, *he* was ‘being a guy’ and *she* ‘should have known better’” (p. 116).

There’s an assumption in the church that people get married and start having babies around 25–35 years of age. Welcher mentions, “Sure, we want them (singles) to experience our joy, but if we’re honest with ourselves, we also want the convenience of sameness” (p. 69). Many churches don’t understand how to fully integrate singleness into the deep waters of the church body. Typically relegated to singles mixers and Bible studies, the church is missing a huge opportunity for communal synergy. We have grown so accustomed to sectioning off our community time by age and seasons of life that we are no longer learning from people different than us. Welcher even challenges the church’s assumptions by asking, “We need to ask ourselves why the church views singleness as a problem to solve” (p. 70).

Purity culture impacts how many of us interpret Scripture. Some sermons tell us Bathsheba was a temptress. Welcher asks all of us to take a step back and think through the entire situation. Would Bathsheba have been able to say “no”? David was king and obedience was assumed. We will never know. Key details are left out of Scripture, but we do know Bathsheba was summoned by David. And in that summoning, they slept together. It seems reasonable to think this could’ve been sexual assault. This example should at least give us pause and evaluate just how pervasive purity culture impacts the way we read Scripture and interpret the actions of people around us.

As the book concludes, there’s a brief discussion on how we can approach our children with healthier version of sexuality. One way outlined is to use anatomically correct words. While we might want to infantilize the vocabulary, it short-circuits children’s ability to communicate aches, pains, sensations, and abuse. The conversation should happen in our nuclear families and our church families. The discussion about sex shouldn’t be taboo in either home.

Following each chapter are several questions to work through and an activity to engage with. The idea is that these are not done by individuals in isolation. Churches and families need to make these discussions well-rounded and communal. This book is a great place to start.

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