

# themelios

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## DESCRIPTION

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

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EDITORIAL

# What Makes a “Good” Church? Reflections on *A Church Called Tov*

— Brian J. Tabb —

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What makes a “good” church? What are our standards and priorities when considering or recommending a local church, and how do we assess whether our church is “good”? Are we drawn to a church by sound expositional preaching, dynamic worship in song, welcoming people, a robust doctrinal statement, programs for the kids, an attractive website, good coffee and pastries in the lobby, or perhaps a convenient livestream option? Relatedly, what makes someone a “good” pastor? Do we measure a minister’s effectiveness by his book sales, Twitter following, or the weekly attendance at his church? Or do we consider other metrics that are more difficult to observe from afar, such as biblical faithfulness, prayerfulness, and hospitality? These are pressing, perennial questions for pastors, seminarians, and church members, particularly in the wake of accusations, controversies, and scandals concerning high-profile evangelical churches and pastors in recent years.

## *The “Tov” Proposal*

Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer offer a clear proposal for what makes a “good” church in their recent book *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*.<sup>1</sup> McKnight is a well-known biblical scholar and author who teaches New Testament at Northern Seminary, and Barringer (McKnight’s daughter) is an elementary school teacher and co-author of *Sharing God’s Love*, a children’s book based on McKnight’s *The Jesus Creed*. McKnight and Barringer recount examples of “toxic and dysfunctional churches” (p. 4), focusing particularly on two Chicago megachurches: Willow Creek and Harvest Bible Chapel.<sup>2</sup>

McKnight and Barringer appeal to Christ’s example of compassion towards the harassed and helpless crowds (Matt 9:36) to support their premise: “Because there are so many wounded, Jesus says,

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020). Hereafter I use in-text citations when referencing this book.

<sup>2</sup> By my count, they refer by name to Willow Creek (or Willow) 128 times and its former senior pastor Bill Hybels eighty-six times, and they mention Harvest Bible Chapel (or Harvest) fifty times in the book and its longtime pastor James MacDonald sixteen times.

we need a host of wounded healers” (p. 7). Then they summarize, “Our book is about wounded healers and wounded resisters: women and men who did the right thing, who told the truth, who suffered rejection, intimidation, and revictimization, but who persevered in telling the truth so the truth would be known” (p. 7). McKnight and Barringer write as wounded healers themselves, regularly drawing on their own story of hurt, betrayal, and loss as former longtime attenders of Willow Creek, and they “honor the courageous women of Willow” in the book’s Acknowledgements (p. 223). They dedicate *A Church Called Tov* to “the wounded resisters,” who were troubled by abusive leadership practices and a sick culture in their church, spoke out at personal cost, and sought to promote healing and change.<sup>3</sup>

So what do McKnight and Barringer propose? Part 1 of their book explores how a church’s culture can become “toxic.” They explain that every church has a culture that reinforces beliefs and behaviors; the leaders guide a church “*toward* a particular culture” through their narratives, teachings, actions, and policies (p. 14). Chapter 1 contrasts a *compassionate* church cultures that exhibit a safe, secure, and open environment with a *toxic* and dysfunctional church culture. Chapter 2 examines two warning signs that a church’s culture may be toxic: “*narcissism* and *power through fear*” (p. 25, emphasis original). Chapter 3 explores how “toxic” churches and their leaders respond poorly to criticism with defensiveness and denials, while chapter 4 discusses eight “false narratives” that such churches present to protect their own interests while discrediting and doing further harm to the “victims” and “wounded resisters” who resist abuses of power and seek to bring truth to light (p. 56).

Part 2 proposes key characteristics of “*tov* churches,” using the common Hebrew word regularly translated “good” in the OT. McKnight and Barringer call goodness the “executive virtue,” the shorthand summary for how a good God wants people to live (p. 87). They explain the gospel as “the message of *tov*”; it is “about God’s *tov* coming to us in Jesus, who is *tov*, and thus making *us* into agents of *tov*” (p. 94, emphasis original). *Tov* churches with a “goodness culture” nurture these seven elements (p. 96):

1. empathy and compassion
2. grace and graciousness
3. putting people first
4. truth telling
5. justice
6. service
7. Christlikeness.

Such churches will “resist abuses of power, promote healing, and eradicate the toxic fallout that infects so many Christian organizations” (p. 8).

This article seeks to engage appreciatively and critically with McKnight and Barringer’s proposal for *tov* church. The authors rightly lament unbiblical, worldly leadership practices in the church and commendably call for Christian communities to cultivate qualities like Christlikeness, compassion, and truthfulness. The question is this: how do we promote “good” churches that reflect Jesus’s truth and love to one another and to the watching world? I argue that the *tov* proposal ultimately lacks the proper theological, ecclesiological, and missiological foundations for building healthy churches. Let’s examine the authors’ treatment of church membership and discipline, their vision for pastors, their

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Scot McKnight, “For Wounded Resisters,” *Jesus Creed*, 27 October 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/october/for-wounded-resisters.html>.

model for confession, and their summary of the church’s mission, then return to the question: what makes a “good” church?

### *Tov Church Membership*

The closest thing to a definition of “church” comes in the book’s final chapter: “A church is not a business.... A church is a local community of believers who are striving to be like Christ, both as a congregation and as individuals” (p. 215). Churches should be marked by interdependence, not hierarchy, as people work together “under the exclusive headship of Jesus Christ” (p. 216). They call the church “a society of reciprocity” (p. 119) and stress that “church is about soul work and confession of sin. Church is about relationships and community ... about knowing and being known, loving and being loved, serving and being served” (pp. 214–15). But questions linger, such as: *How* does Christ exercise his exclusive authority in the church?

McKnight and Barringer take particular issue with how church leaders mishandle or misapply three NT passages—Matthew 18:15–17, 1 Timothy 5:19, and 1 Corinthians 6:1–8—in a way that seeks to silence critics, cover up wrongdoing, and control the narrative in response to accusations (see pp. 47–53).<sup>4</sup> They stress that it would be “psychologically and morally inexcusable” to apply these texts to cases of sexual abuse (p. 50), and they counsel wounded resisters to go public with their grievances (p. 144). McKnight and Barringer also take particular issue with membership covenants, which appeal to principles from Matthew 18 and other biblical texts to direct the conduct of church members, including how they will resolve disputes and conflicts with other members. The authors argue that these covenants, along with some organizations’ use of nondisclosure agreements for departing employees, “are a way for church leaders to prevent negative information from becoming known” and protect the institution from lawsuits (p. 70).

Unfortunately, McKnight and Barringer do not propose which biblical texts and principles *should* guide churches when handling credible accusations of scandalous sin (e.g., 1 Cor 5). They highlight ways that some people have grievously twisted the Scriptures for their own purposes and rightly call for wisdom and care in handling claims of sexual abuse. However, they do not clarify how Christians should properly and wisely apply Matthew 18, 1 Timothy 5, and 1 Corinthians 6 (as well as other biblical teachings) to handle known sin, accusations of wrongdoing, and conflicts in the church. By focusing on examples of pastoral malpractice without presenting the normative biblical practice for dealing with disputes and serious sin within the community, the authors foster suspicion and distrust of church membership covenants, pastoral admonitions, and appeals to Scripture as self-serving “spin.”

In a healthy church, clearly defined standards for membership offer a *basis* for proper accountability, discipleship, and, when needed, removal of those whose conduct dishonors Christ and harms those within the community.<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Kimble explains, “The NT recognizes that false teachers and unbelievers will enter the life of the church as members, and the mechanism for dealing with such situations is

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<sup>4</sup> For similar claims, see Wade Mullen, *Something’s Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself from Its Power* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020), 72.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the extended argument of Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

church discipline.”<sup>6</sup> McKnight and Barringer do not mention church discipline in their proposal, nor do they present a process for evaluating accusations of abuse or other serious sin within a congregation. Rather, they emphasize that women in *tov* churches “will be believed and comforted and supported” when they bring accusations of abuse (p. 106). They assert, “Sometimes the most biblical thing we can do is to expose evil to the light of truth by going public” (p. 144). They acknowledge in passing that it’s wise as a general practice to go to an offender one-on-one first before involving others, but they repeatedly stress that it is “profoundly biblical” to take “prophetic public action” (p. 145—more on this later). By “going public,” they do not mean “tell it to the *church*” (Matt 18:17) or mandatory reporting of abuse claims to law enforcement;<sup>7</sup> rather, they mean “tell it to the *world*,” presumably via news outlets or social media.<sup>8</sup> This makes the court of public opinion the arbiter of “the truth” and dispenser of proper “discipline” for those within the church, which runs contrary to Paul’s explicit teaching: “If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people? ... Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church?” (1 Cor 6:1–4 NIV). A healthy, well-functioning church practices meaningful membership in which believers test and publicly affirm one another’s profession of faith, take “steps of brotherly correction”<sup>9</sup> when members sin, and act to “purge the evil person from among you” (1 Cor 5:13; cf. Deut 13:5) in matters of public, serious, and unrepentant sin,<sup>10</sup> thereby preserving the church’s health and maintaining her public witness to Christ in the world.

### *Tov Pastors*

*A Church Called Tov* sharply criticizes the “celebrity pastor” phenomenon and calls churches to resist “a celebrity culture” while cultivating a culture of service (pp. 183–200). McKnight and Barringer offer several examples of servant-leadership: the senior pastor holding babies in the nursery or regularly visiting his mother with Alzheimer’s (pp. 196–97). They make few positive references to preaching, though they note that pastors ought not think too highly of their own homiletical prowess and should regularly share the pulpit and preach inclusive sermons that incorporate stories of women, marginalized, and wounded people (p. 110). They celebrate several examples of *tov* leadership and community outside of the church, such as an accomplished NCAA basketball coach declining a raise (pp. 90–91) and the city of El Paso responding with empathy and compassionate support for a grieving widower (pp. 100–102). They also write, “Perhaps no one in recent memory exemplifies a people-first perspective and the virtues of dignity, respect, and integrity more than Fred Rogers,” the longtime host of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* (p. 122).

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy M. Kimble, *40 Questions about Church Membership and Church Discipline*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 130–31.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the book’s opening sentence refers to “a breaking news story in the *Chicago Tribune*” related to accusations against Bill Hybels (p. 1).

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, trans. William Pringle, reprint ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 2:352.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 54–55.

Unfaithful, worldly leadership is a real problem facing the contemporary American (and global) church. Pastors called to shepherd God’s people and herald God’s word have misused their influence to promote their own “brand”<sup>11</sup> and to satisfy their own cravings for fame, power, money, and sex. To be emphatically clear: this is a perversion of the pastoral office that dishonors Christ and does serious harm to Christ’s church, and McKnight and Barringer and others rightly lament it.

Yet this is not a *new* problem facing the church but an ancient one addressed repeatedly in the NT and throughout church history. “Self-promotion and celebrity-adulation are nothing new,” writes David Starling.<sup>12</sup> For example, Paul confronts the church’s divisions over loyalty to human leaders (1 Cor 1:10–13), its confusion of human eloquence for “wisdom” (1:17; 2:1–6), and church leaders who “peddle the word of God for profit” like the traveling rhetoricians of the ancient world (2 Cor 2:17 NIV).<sup>13</sup> He warns the Ephesian elders that “fierce wolves will come in among you ... and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30). 3 John 9 refers to Diotrephes, an early church leader, “who likes to put himself first” and refused to recognize the apostles’ authority. The Didache charges that any traveling prophet or apostle who asks for money “is a false prophet,” and those who do not wish to work for a living are “trading on Christ” (Did 11:6; 12:5).<sup>14</sup>

NT authors are very clear about such challenges and threats within the church—how do they respond? They do not jettison authority in the church but provide principles and boundaries for its proper exercise. Biblical writers stress the high doctrinal and character standards for those who aspire to serve as overseers (1 Tim 3:1–7; Tit 1:5–9), they warn against hastily appointing people to leadership positions in the church (1 Tim 5:22), they hold forth the high standards for teachers of God’s word (Jas 3:1), and they establish standards for adjudicating charges against elders and rebuking leaders who sin without showing favoritism (1 Tim 5:19–21; cf. Deut 19:15). At the same time, Hebrews instructs believers to “remember,” “obey,” and “submit to” leaders who speak the word of God, keep watch over people’s souls, and set an example of faith (Heb 13:7, 17). Pastoral ministry is both “a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1) and “a dangerous calling,”<sup>15</sup> if ministers eschew accountability and fail to keep watch on their teaching and lives (4:16).

Early church fathers and later voices from church history express similar sentiments. Clement responds to divisions in the church by calling the Corinthian church to obey, honor, and submit to the elders (1 Clem 1:3; 57:1; 63:1), while the Didache instructs Christians to “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved” (Did 15:1). Writing in the mid-17th century, Richard Baxter recognized the particular temptations facing

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Mike Cospser, “The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill Episode 6: The Brand,” *Christianity Today*, 2 August 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/8pe9az7p>.

<sup>12</sup> David I. Starling, *UnCorinthian Leadership: Thematic Reflections on 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 18.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Socrates reasons that the traveling “sophists” in his day were not really masters of wisdom but of clever speech; they “take their doctrines the round of our cities, hawking them about to any odd purchaser who desires them.” Plato, *Protagoras* 312c–313d, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, LCL 165 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

<sup>14</sup> Translation from Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 265, 267.

<sup>15</sup> See Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

preachers as well as the weightiness of the calling of gospel ministers: “See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls,” and “preach to yourselves the sermons which you study.”<sup>16</sup>

McKnight and Barringer rightly critique celebrity pastors who seek self-glory and power at the expense of faithful, humble care for God’s people. One thinks of Ezekiel’s blistering prophecy against Israel’s unfaithful shepherds who feed themselves but fail to feed and help the sheep (Ezek 34:2–4). But the authors do not move from criticizing such abuses of authority to offering a positive vision for biblically qualified pastors who teach the whole counsel of God, seek out healthy accountability with others, and model for the congregation “the beauty of submission and humility ... between the plurality and the senior leader.”<sup>17</sup> We need to lament the painful effects of pastoral failures, and we need to recover a biblical vision of humble, godly servant leadership that reflects God’s love *and* authority and that’s measured by “faithfulness ... according to God’s design.”<sup>18</sup>

### *Tov Confession*

Having considered McKnight and Barringer’s approach to church membership and their vision for pastoral ministry, let’s now turn to a specific example of how a *tov* church operates in the area of public confession. Chapter 9 present Israel’s Day of Atonement practice as a model for churches committed to nurturing confession, repentance, and truth-telling. The authors insist, “Yom Kippur is all about telling the truth” (p. 150), and they urge churches to develop a litany of confession to come clean about “their complicity, their sinfulness, and their failing of all who have been abused or exploited in the church” (p. 154). This Yom Kippur vision of confession is presented in sharp contrast to those churches (such as Willow Creek) that are unwilling to humbly “surrender” to the truth but instead circle the wagons to protect the reputation of the church and its leaders.

The authors offer a ten-part example liturgy related to the Bill Hybels scandal, which begins this way:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.  
 There is evidence that Bill Hybels’s accusers told the truth about him, that he abused them with his behavior and his words.  
 We believe Bill was wrong.  
 We believe we were wrong for supporting a culture that allowed abusive behavior to occur and continue.  
 We lament the way his accusers were treated.  
 We apologize, seek their forgiveness, and publicly affirm them.  
 Lord, in your mercy, forgive our sins. (p. 154)

Such public prayers of confession have at least five “essential elements,” according to McKnight and Barringer:

<sup>16</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 53, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Dave Harvey, *The Plurality Principle: How to Build and Maintain a Thriving Church Leadership Team* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 49.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *The Rule of Love: How the Local Church Should Reflect God’s Love and Authority*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 148.

1. Affirm the truth teller(s).
2. Name the perpetrator and all specific wrongdoing.
3. Confess all complicity (whether intentional or by neglect) of other leaders and the congregation.
4. Publicly acknowledge the harm done to the victim(s), express sorrow, lament, confession, and repentance, and ask for forgiveness.
5. Publicly acknowledge the desire/intention to change. (p. 158)

These essentials (and the lengthy exemplar prayers) stress the need to apologize thoroughly, penitently, and publicly with particular concern for victims and the wider community. Yet the authors’ model confessions that they commend bear little resemblance to the examples from Scripture or the traditional liturgy of the church. Strikingly absent from their “essential elements” are an emphasis on the holiness of God, the judgment that our sins deserve, and the hope of reconciliation through Christ’s atoning work. Perhaps the authors take these as assumed theological truths but choose to focus their attention elsewhere to correct common gaps in contemporary confession. They do reference the work of Christ as an analogy for the costliness of truth-telling,<sup>19</sup> but Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sinners is peripheral to their entire discussion of “Modeling Yom Kippur.” Contrast this with the following OT confessions, which reflect an altogether different theological center of gravity:

Against *you, you only*, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in *your* sight,  
so that *you* may be justified in *your* words  
and blameless in *your* judgment.  
Hide *your* face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:4, 9–10)

O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love *him* and keep *his* commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from *your* commandments and rules. (Daniel 9:4–5)

O LORD, the God of Israel, *you* are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before *you* in our guilt, for none can stand before *you* because of this. (Ezra 9:15; cf. vv. 4–14)

A traditional liturgy of the church reflects this God-centeredness of confession:

Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against *you*  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.

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<sup>19</sup> “Just as grace is not cheap but was purchased for us by the shed blood of Christ, telling the truth comes at a cost, as well” (p. 149).

We have not loved *you* with our whole heart;  
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
 For the sake of *your* Son Jesus Christ,  
 have mercy on us and forgive us;  
 that we may delight in *your* will,  
 and walk in *your* ways,  
 to the glory of *your* Name. Amen.<sup>20</sup>

Or consider this 17th century Puritan prayer for repentance:

I have grievously sinned against heaven and before *you*, O Lord. I have transgressed all *your* commandments, not only through negligence, but often through willful presumption—contrary to the motions of *your* Holy Spirit reclaiming me from them....

I pray that all my sins and uncleanness may be so bathed in [Christ's] blood, buried in his death, and hid in his wounds, that they may never more be seen, to shame me in this life, or to condemn me before *your* judgment seat in the world to come.<sup>21</sup>

The *tov* church may be affirming, authentic, and sincere, but by failing to emphasize that sin is fundamentally against the holy and righteous God and not merely against other people, the authors offer a shaky foundation for promoting true repentance, forgiveness, and change. These are theological essentials that must not be simply assumed but regularly rehearsed in the church's prayers and teaching.

### *Tov Mission*

McKnight and Barringer regularly refer to the “mission” of *tov* churches. For example, they write, “A Christlike church culture always has its eyes on people because the mission of the church is all about God’s redemptive love for people” (p. 23). What does this mean, exactly? In context, the authors draw a sharp contrast between “toxic, flesh-driven” church cultures and “Spirit-formed, Christlike” cultures. The latter foster truthfulness, service, justice, “redemptive grace and love,” and healing for hurting people (p. 23). This statement about the “redemptive” mission of the church hearkens back to the Introduction: “This is a book about defending *the redemptive value of the church*” (p. 7, emphasis added). They expand on this in chapter 1: “If the reinforcing culture is *redemptive* and *healing* and *good (tov)*, it becomes systemically good. A *tov* church culture will instinctively heal, redeem, and restore” (p. 17, emphasis original). Thus, the focus is on the sort of *culture* that heals or redeems wounded people, especially those who have been hurt by abusive church leaders and “suffered rejection, intimidation, and revictimization” along the way (p. 7).

How does their description of a redemptive church *culture* relate to the NT emphasis on *Christ* redeeming us from “the curse of the law” (Gal 3:13) and “from all lawlessness ... to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Tit 2:14; cf. Gal 4:5; Heb 9:15)? McKnight

<sup>20</sup> “A Penitential Order: Rite Two,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, reprint ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 352, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Bayly, “Prayer of Repentance for the Evening,” in *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*, ed. Robert Elmer (Bellingham, WA Lexham, 2019), 276–77, emphasis added.

and Barringer offer their clearest answer in the book’s final chapter: “Those who align themselves under the headship of Jesus as Lord identify with the redemptive work of salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross (and brought to fulfillment by his resurrection and ascension), and they are brought into restored relationship with ‘the God who saves’” (p. 216). The authors consistently emphasize that a “good” church offers healing and restoration to wounded people who have been hurt by churches and their leaders. They acknowledge Christ’s saving work on the cross, but they focus attention on salvation from corrupt pastors and toxic churches and do not clearly connect this to the fundamental need of all people to repent and seek forgiveness for sins against a holy God. Further, while the authors stress the church’s “redemptive and restorative” agency in people’s lives (p. 216), they do not relate this to the normative activities of preaching, evangelism, or making disciples.<sup>22</sup> Without this context, the “mission” of *tov* churches highlights the goodness and healing power of Christian community but has little to do with the Great Commission.

### *Reconsidering the “Good” Church*

*A Church Called Tov* commendably calls out carnal, celebrity-seeking leadership in the church and calls for churches to cultivate Christlikeness, compassion, truthfulness, and other admirable qualities. We want local communities of believers who strive to follow Christ, confess sin and bear fruit of repentance, use their gifts to serve the body, and have meaningful relationships marked by mutual love. The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, deep divisions among Christians over politics and various social issues, and a string of scandals in evangelical churches and institutions have taken a toll on believers and their churches.<sup>23</sup> Many people have stopped gathering with a church at all for one reason or another. There is a need now—and in every generation—for church revitalization and a renewed commitment to the biblical vision for the local church. As McKnight and Barringer rightly assert, the church is not a business, an organization, or a building; it’s a redeemed *people* gathered in Jesus’s name. The church of Jesus Christ *should* be marked by goodness, truth, and love, not squabbles, controversies, and power struggles.

Unfortunately, McKnight and Barringer fail to supply the sure foundations for building “good” churches. In my reading, the authors effectively downplay biblical preaching and teaching, cast suspicion on church membership and discipline, focus confession on affirming hurting people more than dealing with God, and present a vague and truncated vision for the church’s mission.

It is instructive to compare the qualities of “*tov* churches” with other summaries of the church’s essential characteristics. For example, Calvin famously writes, “We have laid down as distinguishing marks of the church the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacraments. These can

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<sup>22</sup> McKnight offers an extended treatment of the church’s mission in *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014). However, his usage of the term mission and his explanation of the concept of mission are unclear, according to Stina Busman Jost, “Review of Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to Radical Mission of the Local Church*,” *Missiology* 44 (2016): 353. It is noteworthy that McKnight in *Kingdom Conspiracy* makes only one passing reference to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) and does not discuss key missiological passages such as Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14–15; and 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.

<sup>23</sup> See Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL Crossway, 2021), 11–18.

never exist without bringing forth fruit and prospering by God's blessing."<sup>24</sup> John Gill explains, "Sound doctrine, salutary truths, the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus, are what pastors are to teach and feed souls with."<sup>25</sup> Herman Bavinck calls preaching "the greatest and highest part" of Protestant religion, for "through preaching, the congregation is protected in its purity, encouraged in its battle, healed in its sufferings, established in its confession."<sup>26</sup> In fact, as Gregg Allison explains, pastors shepherd and protect their flock "by the faithful preaching and teaching of the word of God and through the exercise of church discipline."<sup>27</sup>

McKnight and Barringer insist that "the purpose of church is not the preacher" (p. 213). In their proposal for a "good" church culture that promotes healing and redemption, preaching is assumed but marginalized, and church leaders (especially men) are suspect. *Tov* pastors should be more like Fred Rogers and nothing at all like Bill Hybels. The *tov* church evidently eschews membership covenants and so does not have a clear mechanism for rightly disciplining those in the community who commit serious, public, unrepentant sin in the community in order to preserve the church's purity and health.

This book presents a vision for the church that is hopeful, inclusive, non-hierarchical, encouraging, and safe—a church in which wounded people "come ... just as you are" (p. 214), "go public" with their grievances, and leave the church as a "prophetic" act when they deem necessary (pp. 146, 149). But it is dubious to claim that the OT prophets' actions such as burying a loincloth (Jer 13) or breaking an earthenware jug (Jer 19) offer a precedent or analogy for a Willow Creek pastor to resign or for Christians today to publicize grievances or leave their local church (pp. 144–46, 149).

Jeremiah explains that he acts as he does because he received a specific command from the Lord (Jer 13:1, 5, 8; 19:1, 3, 10). Throughout the Scriptures, "prophecy is always the communication of something the Holy Spirit has 'revealed' or disclosed to a person."<sup>28</sup> "Prophetic" is not synonymous with courageous or principled activity; it is a claim to speak God's words. If ever there was a leader who *wanted* to resign from ministry and leave for greener pastures, it would be Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, who "invested in the ruins of Judah."<sup>29</sup> To be sure, there may be good and legitimate reasons to leave one church to seek a new church home, and there may also be good reasons to remain in a church through transitions or difficulties. But we need not call such a decision "prophetic."

*A Church Called Tov* seeks to address the present cultural moment in the American church, and it regularly employs contemporary therapeutic categories to do so. For example, the term "toxic" appears more than seventy times in the book. There are numerous books and articles (Christian and secular) published the past few years related to "toxic" emotions, relationships, leaders, spouses, workplaces,

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.10, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960). *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 25.4 expresses a similar point: "Particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them."

<sup>25</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (London, 1769), book 2, ch. 3, §4a2c, <https://tinyurl.com/5hd2dbsk>.

<sup>26</sup> James P. Eglinton, trans. and ed., *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 85, emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 179.

<sup>29</sup> Paul R. House, "Investing in the Ruins: Jeremiah and Theological Vocation," *JETS* 56 (2013): 6.

and of course churches;<sup>30</sup> but very few studies were addressing “toxic” people and organizations even two or three decades ago. Similarly, how many pastors and theologians of previous generations emphasized that the church should “promote healing” (outside of Pentecostal and charismatic circles, of course)? They do not elaborate on the key term “wounded healers,” which I first encountered in the writings of Henri Nouwen.<sup>31</sup> This concept has ancient roots in Greek mythology and philosophy,<sup>32</sup> and it was popularized in the twentieth century by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung.<sup>33</sup> One could argue that this book and others like it are responding to problems that are particularly acute in our time (such as the internet-fueled church celebrity culture) or that were present yet latent in the churches of our grandparents and great-grandparents (such as domestic abuse). At the same time, by focusing on the crises of this particular cultural moment without retrieving the insights from Christians of previous eras who faced plenteous problems in the church themselves, McKnight and Barringer provide a rather shallow vision for the church’s goodness and health.

So we return to the question: what makes a “good” church? The NT describes the church in various ways: it is a local *assembly* of baptized believers in Jesus who meet regularly for instruction in the word, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42); a *family* or “*household*” that displays and protects the truth (1 Tim 3:14–15); and a *holy temple* founded on Christ and indwelt by God’s Spirit (Eph 2:20–21). God has designed the church of Jesus Christ to display his manifold wisdom and resound to the praise of his glory (Eph 1:12; 3:10). A “good” church “is fundamentally God centered,” committed to faithfully preaching the gospel and displaying that gospel through baptism and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>34</sup> “Good” pastors of “good” churches should serve their people *by* faithfully teaching God’s word, caring for the weak, correcting the wayward, equipping the saints for ministry, and seeking their maturity in the faith. To sum up: a “good” church reflects its true identity and purpose in the world by rightly worshipping God, growing in holiness and Christ-like love, and gathering other worshippers through the gospel. A “good” church may not have a famous pastor, an impressive building, or a professional-quality worship band; but it will be marked by gospel faithfulness, spiritual fruitfulness, and furthering the Great Commission.

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<sup>30</sup> See the influential, earlier work by Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians— and How We Can Survive Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1979). For example, Nouwen presents “hospitality as a central attitude of the minister who wants to make his own wounded condition available to others as a source of healing” (p. 97).

<sup>32</sup> “Physicians ... would prove most skilled if, from childhood up, in addition to learning the principles of the art they had familiarized themselves with the greatest possible number of the most sickly bodies, and if they themselves had suffered all diseases and were not of very healthy constitution,” writes Plato, *The Republic* 3 (408D–E), trans. Paul Shorey, LCL 237 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930).

<sup>33</sup> “It is his own hurt that gives the measure of his power to heal,” according to C. G. Jung, *Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects*, ed. Gerhard Adler, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 2nd ed., Collected Works of C. G. Jung 16 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 116. Jung draws on the Greek myth of Chiron, who was wounded by Heracles’s arrow and later became known as a great healer. Cf. Serge Daneault, “The Wounded Healer: Can This Idea Be of Use to Family Physicians?,” *Canadian Family Physician* 54 (2008): 1219; Claire Dunne, *Carl Jung: Wounded Healer of the Soul*, reprint ed. (New York: Watkins, 2015), 119.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *How to Build a Healthy Church: A Practical Guide for Deliberate Leadership*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 32.

STRANGE TIMES

# On Being Soteriologically De-motivated

— Daniel Strange —

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Sometimes, in fact oftentimes, an option presented as an ‘either-or’ is in actuality a ‘both-and.’ For the last twenty years I’ve been trying valiantly (I hope not vainly), to argue that one’s passion for cultural engagement and the socio-political-imaginary implications of the gospel does not mean a diminution or denigration of the summons to personal repentance and faith in Christ, but is rather its pre-requisite. Public theology is public apologetics is public evangelism. The reality of the Parousia, of final judgement, and of the eternal destinies of heaven<sup>1</sup> and hell means there is always an ‘ultimacy’<sup>2</sup> and ‘radicalness’<sup>3</sup> to evangelism. Of course working out the precise dynamics between these two foci, together with the consequent practical implications for ministry, has been a long-standing and thorny talking point. One of my favourite rehearsals of this discussion and shown annually to seminary students in my public theology class is an early 2008 TGC round-table between Don Carson, Tim Keller and John Piper on the theme of ‘Ministries of Mercy.’<sup>4</sup> In that round-table discussion, Piper references a Bethlehem Baptist Church adage and one that has formed the basis of an essay question regarding its suitability for a church’s theological vision: ‘At Bethlehem we care about all suffering, *especially* eternal suffering.’<sup>5</sup> In our various cultural contexts, just how does one practically cultivate and institutionalise an ‘especially’?<sup>6</sup>

Two recent pieces in matters ‘last things’ have caught my attention and require a response: Terry Muck’s short piece ‘Who is saved? A friendlier answer to a modern question?’<sup>7</sup> and James Beilby’s large monograph, *Postmortem Opportunity: A Biblical and Theological Assessment of Salvation after Death*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or rather, the new heaven and the new earth.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 319.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 114.

<sup>4</sup> ‘A Conversation: Tim Keller, John Piper, D. A. Carson (1 of 6)—Ministries of Mercy’, *The Gospel Coalition*, 12 October 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzbSlQovq-0>. Much to our amusement, the aforementioned gentlemen are seated surrounded by what look like garbage liners. As I said, it was early TGC days.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, ‘Abortion and the Narrow Way That Leads to Life’, *Desiring God*, 23 January 2011, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/abortion-and-the-narrow-way-that-leads-to-life>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Galatians 6:10 for a similar question.

<sup>7</sup> Terry C. Muck, ‘Who Is Saved? A Friendlier Answer to a Modern Question?’, *Missiology* 47 (2019): 29–36.

<sup>8</sup> James Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity: A Biblical and Theological Assessment of Salvation after Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021).

In their own ways, and however well-intentioned, in my opinion both are fundamentally flawed and cut the nerve of missionary evangelistic urgency, the former by wanting to reframe the soteriological *question*, the latter by offering a heterodox *answer*. Moreover, both are illuminating in that they raise methodological concerns in their doctrine of Scripture on which their respective theses rest. As a result, and as I'll conclude, I'm de-motivated to follow either.

### *1. A De-motivating Question*

Terry Muck's article questions the traditional question which we have all asked: 'Who is Saved?' He admits to having himself wrestled both with the question and the labelling of his own position. Believing 'that soteriological judgements are God's alone'<sup>9</sup> he moved from the label 'soteriological agnosticism' to the term 'soteriological limitism'.<sup>10</sup> However, more recently he has concluded that his answer to the question was unsatisfactory, indeed *all* answers were unsatisfactory: 'it dawned on me that I didn't need a friendlier answer, I needed a friendlier question.'<sup>11</sup> He now regards 'Who is Saved?' itself to be too modern and 'conflict-producing instead of shalom-enhancing'.<sup>12</sup> It is the wrong question. 'One of the problems the question *Who is Saved?* is designed to answer is this: "We don't know who is saved and we would like to know" Is that really a problem we want to solve? Is that a problem we should be trying to solve? Is that the problem that God wants us to be working on? Perhaps not.'<sup>13</sup> Muck argues that not only do we have more frequent contact with the religious Other than ever before, but that these contacts are or should be *friendly* relationships stating that friendship is friendship be it with a Christian or non-Christian. Given this fact he states, 'I believe the new question, the one that should replace the '*Who is saved?*' question, should be: *How do interreligious friendships contribute to God's kingdom?* To such a question, every interreligious friendship is a contributing answer, a piece of the puzzle depicting the mosaic of Christian life and living.'<sup>14</sup> His conclusion is that while '*Who is Saved?*' creates an atmosphere of distance and suspicion which makes God-honouring relationships impossible, in the new question 'we go at least half way in accepting what this child of God has to say about his or her relationship to whatever transcendent person or principle they have learned to embrace.'<sup>15</sup>

Muck has been one of the most influential evangelical scholars of religion in the past forty years, and his co-edited *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings and Practices*<sup>16</sup> is my current first choice of textbooks in terms of the study of other religious traditions. In the introduction to that volume, Muck's calling out as spurious 'neutral' religious studies in favour of a 'partisan objectivity' is most welcome.<sup>17</sup> However, in this most recent essay I think he goes awry.

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<sup>9</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 33.

<sup>10</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 33.

<sup>11</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 33.

<sup>12</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 32.

<sup>13</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 34.

<sup>14</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 34, original emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 35.

<sup>16</sup> Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland and Gerald R. McDermott, *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 4.

While he may be correct that the question ‘*Who is saved?*’ can belie a simplistic cookie-cutter theology of religions, and an unloving boorish confrontational missiological approach, the theological tenets underlying both his ‘new’ question and his old ‘soteriological limitism’ need to be questioned. First, while Muck affirms hospitality, friendship and love for the religious Other, which one could undergird with attendant biblical doctrines such as the imago Dei and common grace, there is no reflection of other equally prominent biblical doctrines and themes: the doctrine of the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent described by God in terms of enmity (Gen 3:15); the call from Genesis to Revelation of the need to turn from idols; the fact that we are by nature ‘children of wrath’ and only can be called ‘children of God’ when adopted and united to Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone; and the elenctic missionary zeal, out of love and in love, to reveal to unbelievers humanity’s sinful plight and the only way of rescue.<sup>18</sup> Muck’s opening contention that ‘we should shape the way we relate to persons of other religious traditions acknowledging the possibility that we may be sitting next to him or her in heaven for all eternity’<sup>19</sup> seems to cut against the grain of evangelical orthodoxy and a biblical worldview which was birthed within a world of religious plurality.

Second, Muck’s ‘new’ question appears to have been motivated, in part at least, by his contention that the Bible is not clear enough on the question ‘*Who is Saved?*’ He writes,

It may be we find that ourselves today in between *Who is Saved?* as a modern question and whatever form the question might take in a postmodern era. We are sufficiently suspicious of it as a question to acknowledge that the biblical texts seem to supply data in support of a range of answers? That is, one can make a biblical case for answers ranging from the naturalist ‘no’ to the universalists’ shouted ‘yes’ using biblical texts alone.<sup>20</sup>

Such ambiguity prompts his change of question, but is the Bible so confused or opaque to the question ‘Who is saved?’ Yes, we cannot ‘play God’ in terms of knowing with certainty the eternal destiny of particular individuals. However, the biblical revelation is coherent enough and clear enough in giving us a canonically limited polyphonous (and not discordant) picture in which the criteria for the eternal destiny of men and women is a central plotline.

Third, and related, is a methodological concern regarding Muck’s doctrine of Scripture which sets up his call for the change of question. For him ‘*Who is saved?*’ is asked by theologians, ‘looking back at what the biblical writers wrote about the subject and systematizing those comments into what they hope is a consistent and coherent position.’<sup>21</sup> However, for Muck this theological point of view is incomplete and needs supplementation by a different method that he calls ‘the biblical writers’ point of view’<sup>22</sup> which ‘consists of experiences we have of God’s world and the people in that world. When the biblical writers wrote they were rarely interpreting and systematizing text already written.’<sup>23</sup> Consequently therefore,

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<sup>18</sup> See Daniel Strange, ‘Coming to Our Senses: The Case for a Civil *Elenctics* and an *Elenctic Civility*’, *Themelios* 46 (2021): 5–17.

<sup>19</sup> Muck, ‘Who Is Saved?’, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Muck, ‘Who Is Saved?’, 32–33.

<sup>21</sup> Muck, ‘Who Is Saved?’, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Muck, ‘Who Is Saved?’, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Muck, ‘Who Is Saved?’, 31.

The theologians then, are interpreters of the primary material—their writings are secondary. My suggestion is that when it comes to our relationships with people of other religious traditions, our point of view should primarily be primary. We should not be trying to fit the results of those friendships into a theological structure (at least not immediately); we should consider them fresh data out of which the ongoing narrative of the Kingdom of God continues to be told....

What if instead of predetermining the inadequacy of relational experiences, at least as truth claims, we accepted each and every one of them as a piece of data, incomplete and partial by itself but as an indispensable incident in the life of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, while I appreciate Muck's emphasis on the importance of human relationships which experientially and phenomenologically are often nuanced and complex, there seems to be a stress on the human authorship of Scripture to the detriment of divine authorship which prompts me to ask what *sola Scriptura* might mean for Muck? He claims, 'I am not for a minute suggesting we replace our theologies with a collection of *ad hoc* experiences',<sup>25</sup> but what is the authority of the 'fresh data' of inter-religious relationships in relation to the closed canon of biblical revelation?<sup>26</sup> Surely even what we experience as 'friendships' are cannot to be interpreted as brute facts but must be discerned and interpreted by the theological anthropology revealed in Scripture. Such an anthropology is admittedly richly complex, yet is nevertheless clear and coherent, providing the foundation for missions and evangelism which must confront idolatry as well as connect with the *imago Dei*. In reality though, one wonders whether Muck is really calling for a more a-theological method, or whether he has a more inclusivist theological framework through which he seeks to interpret the religious Other. Either way, as a result of these misgivings, I am de-motivated in wanting to follow Muck and change the question. For myself, 'Who is saved?' remains a relevant and contemporary (not modern) question for Christian believers in the twenty-first century.

## 2. A De-motivating Answer

Another theologian who is firmly attached to the traditional theological question 'Who is Saved?' is James Beilby, professor of systematic and philosophical theology at Bethel University in St Paul, Minnesota. Beilby notes that apologetically and pastorally, the question of the destiny of the unevangelised is a perennial defeater belief for those outside and inside the Christian community. In his study, *Postmortem Opportunity: A Biblical and Theological Assessment of Salvation After Death*, Beilby offers a defence of a version of theory of Postmortem opportunity which he defines thus:

The defender of Postmortem Opportunity assumes that explicit, conscious, and intentional faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, but they also make a claim that many have discounted as impossible, theologically liberal, or otherwise problematic:

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<sup>24</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 31.

<sup>25</sup> Muck, 'Who Is Saved?', 31.

<sup>26</sup> Muck likens this to a Bayesian statistical method, 'whereby conclusions are calculated constantly, changing with every new piece of evidence' ('Who Is Saved?', 31).

that death is not the end of salvific opportunity and that some might receive their first and only opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to God's salvific offer after death.<sup>27</sup>

On coming to the end of nearly three hundred and fifty pages of argument, there are a number of reasons to commend Beilby for his ambition, thoroughness and irenic spirit in his defence of a postmortem opportunity. First, and as he himself recognises, even in these late modern times, attempting anything inter-disciplinary and by 'inter' I only mean within 'theological and biblical studies', can still raise an eyebrow or worse a smirk from a culture of compartmentalized 'specialists'. Beilby's study which integrates exegesis, doctrine and history, is a good model that should be imitated. Second, I appreciated Beilby's intra-systematic sense and sensibilities which, as will become apparent, are crucial in this area of study together with some interesting questions pertaining to evangelical prolegomena and method which could be applied more broadly than the doctrine of the unevangelised. Beilby's study is an interesting microcosm. Third, in an area of doctrine where there can be confusion caused by conflation, Beilby is able to describe and delineate what he is and isn't arguing for and what he believes to be legitimate and illegitimate bases for his defence. In particular Beilby affirms the ontological necessity of Jesus Christ for salvation, that explicit faith in Christ is necessary for salvation (*fides ex auditu*), and the reality of heaven and hell. Conversely, and crucially, he *not* arguing for a soteriological 'second chance', nor is he advocating universalism, recognising there is ultimately a soteriological finality and irrevocability in terms of the eternal destinies of hell and heaven. Unusually, but (in my opinion) advisedly, Beilby's argument is actually strengthened in not putting all his exegetical eggs in the 1 Peter 3:19–20; 4:6 basket. As I have written elsewhere in my own dialogue with the Roman Catholic scholar Gavin D'Costa, who advocates his own version of postmortem evangelism, I do not think these infamously opaque passages in 1 Peter (Millard Erickson somehow, and for some reason, calculates 180 different exegetical options!) can be made to do the 'heavy lifting' in support of this thesis. Just by way of interest I myself am most persuaded by Karen Jobes's expert navigation of the passage in terms of drawing on the Enoch-Noah tradition to encourage derided and maligned Christians of 'the sweeping scope of the efficacy of Christ's victory in his resurrection and ascension.'<sup>28</sup>

However, having commended Beilby in all these areas, in terms of the substance of his argument, I remain thoroughly *unpersuaded* believing a postmortem opportunity to be unnecessarily convoluted and speculative 'going beyond what is written', while recognising the *necessary* nature of this unnecessary given his commitment to an Arminian synergistic soteriological framework including his presuppositions of a universal salvific will and, crucial to my mind, universal accessibility. This will come as no surprise to Beilby given he himself rightly notes on a number of occasions that 'the motivational core of Postmortem Opportunity is eviscerated by monergism.'<sup>29</sup> As a committed and thoroughgoing Calvinistic monergist, rather than using the extreme language of disembowelment which might imply a refusal to engage with him at all (!), I will be a little more 'British' by unpacking why I am 'de-motivated' to follow Beilby exegetically, theologically and historically, recognising for evangelicals the inextricable relationships between these categories.

First, Beilby attempts to 'de-fang' a number of scriptural passages that would seem to be objections to a postmortem opportunity, before looking at the scriptural evidence for it. He concedes that the

<sup>27</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005), 258.

<sup>29</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 204.

Scriptural evidence for a Postmortem opportunity is not decisive but argues that a postmortem opportunity can be *based* on Scripture even it does not directly and explicitly teach it.<sup>30</sup> For him ‘based on Scripture’ means there must be a lack of biblical contradiction plus reasonable inference. However, I wonder whether this falls foul of self-reference incoherence and in terms of evangelicalism is an exercise in methodological alchemy in that he is constructing an argument from biblical silence which cannot be measured against his own criteria of what makes a biblical case. With no direct scriptural evidence, how does one know that his argument lacks contradiction? Beilby will say that there is enough to create reasonable inference, but I would like to challenge both this inference and his claim there are no scriptural objections.

Rather than straightforward re-rehearsal of specific individual ‘proof texts’, I would invite us to think about the texture, tone and timbre of Scripture in terms of an ecosystem: ‘an environment in which many factors interact in a subtle web of effects rather than a series of single, linear consequences.’<sup>31</sup> Positing a postmortem encounter disrupts this ecosystem. I would like to focus on a number of areas.

First, when it comes to the unevangelised, Beilby is not satisfied with agnosticism, quoting Clark Pinnock’s chiding of Lesslie Newbigin: ‘What kind of theologian refuses to speak about the possibility of salvation of the majority of the human race?’ (166 n. 86). However, even after Beilby’s breakdown of what something ‘based on’ Scripture means, I am still left with a version of Pinnock’s question. Given the innumerable references of direct, explicit and in places detailed biblical teaching concerning eschatology and in particular the final judgement, it seems odd that a revealing God and a perspicuous Scripture would be silent on a means to salvation for the majority of the human race (if we agree with Beilby’s unevangelised and pseudo-unevangelised categories).

Second, put simply, there is a straightforward and stubborn ‘separationism’ in Scripture that casts a long shadow over the entire plotline and that cannot just be scratched out with ordinary evangelical interpretative tools. Although I have written about this elsewhere in my critique of evangelical universalism,<sup>32</sup> I think some of it applies here re-iterating that Beilby is not a universalist. This separationism has at least two overlapping aspects. The first is a fundamental separation of humanity into two types, antithetically related and described in a series of stark contrasts from Genesis 3 onwards: seed of the women/seed of Satan; good/evil; belief/unbelief; light/darkness; sighted/blind; sheep/goats; in Christ/in Adam. Of course, it needs to be noted that the ultimate cause of the separation will be different according to prior theological commitments.<sup>33</sup> However, whatever the ultimate cause, the relationship between these two groups is one described in the strongest of terms, e.g., *enmity*, *hatred*, and *hostility*. In such an inimical context, I think Beilby is out of tune when he advocates a ‘soteriological vagueness’ for unevangelised and pseudo-unevangelised: ‘some people never have the opportunity to hear the gospel but does that mean they are necessarily in opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not

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<sup>30</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 160–66.

<sup>31</sup> David Smith, *On Christian Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 32.

<sup>32</sup> See Daniel Strange, ‘Does the Love of God Require Universalism?’, in *The Love of God*, ed. Chris Morgan, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 143–60. See also my earlier essay: ‘A Calvinist Response to Thomas Talbot’s Universalism’, in *Universal Salvation: The Current Debate*, ed. Robin Parry and Chris Partridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 145–68.

<sup>33</sup> In a more Reformed framework, election and reprobation are based on God’s foreordination; in a more Arminian framework, they are based on divine foreknowledge of free libertarian decisions.

necessarily. I suggest that we cannot speak to the spiritual disposition of those who have not heard the gospel.<sup>34</sup>

Rather, I would like to argue that what is direct and explicit biblical evidence is that of the universality depth of human sin by which all humanity ‘know God’, are ‘without excuse’, and all are justly accountable and condemned by law and gospel. To quote Herman Bavinck:

The standard in the final judgement will in the first place be the gospel (John 12:48); but that gospel is not opposed to, and cannot even be conceived apart from, the law. The requirement to believe, after all, is itself grounded in the law, and the gospel is the restoration and fulfilment of the law.... In the final judgment, therefore, the norm will be the entire Word of God in both its part: law and gospel.

But in connection with this, Scripture nevertheless clearly states that consideration will be given the measure of revelation that any given person has received. Those who knew the will of the Lord and did not do it will be given ‘a more severe beating’ (Lk. 12:47). It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgement than for Jerusalem and Capernaum. Those who did not hear the gospel are not judged by it but by the law. The Gentiles who did not know the Mosaic law but sinned against the law known to them by nature perish apart from the Mosaic law, whereas Jews are judged above all by this law (Rom. 2:12). Although Scripture views the judgment as extending to all humans without exception..., it nevertheless makes a distinction between the nations that knew the gospel and finally produced anti-Christianity, and the other nations that never heard of Christ and therefore first learn of him at his Parousia.<sup>35</sup>

The second separation is between the states of pre-mortem and postmortem, and the barrier between the two that we call death. From a human perspective in time, these two separate arenas operate under defined and different terms and conditions—the first, which we call human history, revealing a certain fluidity, and the latter, a finality and irrevocability. While my cultural transformationalist soul has sympathy for some of Beilby’s responses to what he calls ‘irrelevance of this life’ objections to a postmortem opportunity,<sup>36</sup> I still believe these objections to have biblical force. First, is the overwhelming and intense *urgency* of the need for repentance and faith now in this life to avoid facing exclusion from what is variously called the “age to come,” the “kingdom” and “eternal life.” Jesus’ teaching and parables all have this urgent flavor, which cumulatively suggest the need for decision now *while it is still possible*, because there will come a time when it will not be, and the nature of this exclusion will be unimaginably terrible. The parables in Matthew 13 and 25 of the wheat and tares, good fish and bad fish, wise and foolish virgins, and sheep and goats are spoken in the starkest of terms. There is no hint that destinations can be reversed “at the end of the age” (13:40), thus the warning to act now, even if it means

<sup>34</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 117. Twice (pp. 99 and 117) Beilby cites the following Lewis quotation: “The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christian and 100 per cent non-Christian. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but still call themselves by that name: some are clergymen. There are other people that are slowly becoming Christians though they do not call themselves so.” C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, reprint ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 176.

<sup>35</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:701.

<sup>36</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 217.

radical surgery (18:8). Second, is what can be simply called *history*. While it is correctly pointed out that Scripture never uses the term “final” with regard to judgment, to suggest that there will opportunities for repentance and faith post-parousia and judgment seems at odds with the contours of history, where the above-named urgency is matched with a divine patience, long-suffering, and tolerance that, while totally gracious, will cease at judgment day. There is universal “nowness” about history, again linked to “urgency.” For Beilby, what is naturally portrayed as historical climax and end is now in actuality a penultimate and “false” end and therefore something of an anticlimax. However, the taste of death is not only that it is universal but also that it is an end of a particular state of affairs. Again, positing a postmortem encounter takes away something of the terror and potency from the ‘sting of death’ which Christ so wonderfully triumphed over and which we see in the dramatic nature of the raising of Lazarus. For myself a postmortem opportunity means that ‘death’ just doesn’t taste right. This takes us to my final point here, which is the issue of *agency*. The overwhelming stress in Scripture is on the need to hear the gospel from a human messenger in this life.<sup>37</sup> To summarise here, for Scripture to be silent on a postmortem opportunity is, to my ears, quite deafening, particularly when we consider the loud themes we do hear concerning universal sinfulness, urgency and history. As Herman Bavinck puts it, in his own refutation of postmortem evangelism: “If it is not in scripture, theology is not free to advocate it.”<sup>38</sup>

For an evangelical committed to biblical authority, Beilby’s espousal of a postmortem opportunity despite the lack of biblical support might seem strange, but then, as they say, pressure does strange things to people. The pressure to which I’m referring are the theological commitments and presuppositions which stand behind his belief in a postmortem encounter. Beilby’s synergistic Arminianism means his affirmation of conditional election, libertarian freedom, God’s universal will, unlimited atonement and the resistibility of divine grace in a prevenient form. As with Clark Pinnock’s inclusivism, I think Beilby is *right* that with these commitments there is an intra-systemic consistency which *necessarily* leads to a commitment to a universal accessibility of salvation. However, as Pinnock argued many years ago, universal accessibility is ‘far from self-evident at least biblically speaking.’<sup>39</sup> Under this theological pressure, or perhaps better in this theological pressure-cooker, the steam has to be released somewhere to prevent combustion. For Pinnock this was his pneumatological inclusivism (noting that ‘the scriptural evidence for postmortem encounter is not abundant.... Its scantiness is relativized by the strength of the theological argument for it’).<sup>40</sup> For Beilby who wants to add into the mix the *fides ex auditu* (which, it should be noted, still allows him to posit to a form of implicit faith inclusivism based on what he calls the ‘solidification of faith’),<sup>41</sup> I think his affirmation of a postmortem encounter it inevitable yet erroneous. In this regard, for a monergistic Calvinist restrictivist the ‘pressure is off’ meaning there is not the need to let off steam.

So far I have dealt with motivational and de-motivational concerns focusing rightly on evangelicalism’s magisterial authority—Scripture. Before I conclude, though, I would like to briefly note the ministerial authority of history and tradition to which Beilby devotes a chapter. Beilby marshals evidence in support for the postmortem hope (in all sorts of shapes and sizes) within the early church

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed defence of this, see Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelized* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:631.

<sup>39</sup> Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 157.

<sup>40</sup> Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 169.

<sup>41</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 269.

fathers, and he gives a number of reasons why this hope was lost (Augustine's 'pernicious influence'<sup>42</sup> directly and indirectly looms large), before noting a number of contemporary advocates. That said, Beilby admits the controversial nature of his thesis and one that is 'contrary to traditional belief.'<sup>43</sup> Given the ministerial authority of tradition, to be persuaded of a postmortem opportunity is yet another hurdle for me to jump over and once again I'm de-motivated to do so given that in two thousand years of orthodox Christian teaching, not many have chosen to jump. The burden of proof lies with Beilby. What I do find interesting here is how a postmortem opportunity is an interesting test-case that asks questions concerning doctrinal progress (or regress), questions concerning under what circumstances would something like postmortem evangelism become accepted as part of the tradition and 'within bounds', and questions as to whether and on what criteria is postmortem evangelism more (or even less) acceptable than an evangelical inclusivism or universalism whose advocates wish to normalise as a legitimate evangelical option.

### 3. Conclusion

No doctrine is an island. As Beilby himself recognises, in positing a postmortem opportunity for the unevangelised and pseudo-evangelised, we are not dealing with an atomistic or isolated doctrinal point which has no bearing on other doctrinal *loci*, but a question which is one part of theologically inter-connected, organic and systemic 'wholes', hierarchically ordered on various hermeneutical and theological presuppositions. These are 'basic' beliefs that are cherished deeply. Given that these hermeneutical presuppositions interpret evidence before us, even the biblical evidence which we believe to be so blindingly 'obvious', the danger of incommensurability between differing positions is always near, and the possibility of persuasion frustratingly distant. In such a scenario one needs a strategy to break such a stalemate and of breaking through the seemingly impregnable defences of the rival position. Those familiar with the apologetic method known as presuppositionalism will know that in this scenario of competing, hermetically sealed positions, which can be likened to 'worldviews', the 'truth' of a position can be demonstrated not by 'direct' arguments which point to one's own worldview, but rather 'indirect' arguments which demonstrate the truth of one's position by pointing to fundamental flaws in the competing worldview. This is sometimes called an argument with a 'transcendental' thrust, or alternatively, an argument for the 'impossibility of the contrary'. Or put it another way. As is well-known, in the Ptolemaic view of the world, as it became increasingly difficult to believe that the sun revolved the earth, more and more complex and confusing 'epicycles' had to be added to make the model work. Then Copernicus came along with the resulting revolutionary paradigm shift. I would argue that a postmortem opportunity for the unevangelised and pseudo-evangelised creates a number of epicycles which takes us further from the biblical data and an evangelical hermeneutic. Given the 'impossibility' of a postmortem opportunity, I would call for Beilby to question the Arminian presuppositions on which his arguments rest and to consider a Calvinist Copernican revolution.

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<sup>42</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 202.

<sup>43</sup> Beilby, *Postmortem Opportunity*, 96.

# Navigating Empathy

— Jonathan Worthington —

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**Abstract:** What exactly is empathy? There is confusion. Most empathy scholars laud it as putting yourself in someone’s mental and emotional shoes for a time, usually to help them. Most laypeople also commend empathy, but some misunderstand it and are actually commending such unhealthy (and non-empathic) practices as enmeshment and extreme relativism—but under the banner of “empathy.” Other people condemn “empathy” as an enticing sin, polarizing, etc. But they tend to condemn non-empathic practices that have been called “empathy” by their perpetrators without realizing the term is being used wrongly. They thereby seem to critique (and many times think they are critiquing) empathy itself, or a certain version of empathy. Can multiple definitions of “empathy” conflict and yet each be legitimate? If conflicting definitions of one term are used widely, how can any be thought illegitimate? This article helps readers navigate discussions about what empathy is and is not within academic research, diverse (and conflicting) lay uses of the term, and various clashes that arise.

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Jesus saw people hurting and was moved deep in his gut, his *σπλάγχνα*; he had pity, even compassion (Matt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). He experienced what medical and psychological scholars commonly call “sympathy,” an emotional discomfort or even pain “caused by the realisation that something bad has happened to another person.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus also took what psychological and medical (and other) scholars today call an *empathic* stance. Jesus (still) *understands* our human nature, weakness, suffering, temptation, etc. *from our vantage point* (in his incarnation), even *feeling* something of the emotions we feel in all types of situations (Heb 2:14–17a; 4:15). And it is Christ’s empathic approach to us that motivates us to approach the throne of grace with confidence for merciful help (2:17b–18; 4:16).

This article, “Navigating Empathy,” aims to help several groups of readers. Some do not know what empathy is. Some are familiar enough to already have queries about my word choices above. (More on

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<sup>1</sup> David Jeffrey, “Empathy, Sympathy and Compassion in Healthcare: Is There a Problem? Is There a Difference? Does It Matter?,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 109 (2016): <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0141076816680120>. Cf. Anna Gladkova, “Sympathy, Compassion and Empathy in English and Russian: A Linguistic and Cultural Analysis,” *Culture Psychology* 16 (2010): 267–85.

that below.) Still others are invested in current debates about “empathy,” not least as promoted by Brené Brown and criticized by Joe Rigney (and Doug Wilson).

Empathy and sympathy are both healthy for social interaction.<sup>2</sup> Neither is a sin. By this article’s conclusion, I hope you want to nurture each within your hearts and communities—rightly understood, of course. At the very least, I hope it helps you feel more confident to navigate claims, criticisms, and commendations of “empathy” in scholarly and popular arenas.

## 1. Navigating Debates about Empathy

Empathy is usually considered good. Some seem to speak against it. Section 1 lays groundwork for further exploring what empathy is and is not in sections 2–4.

### 1.1. Against Empathy?

Paul Bloom appears to be against empathy. After all, he entitled a book *Against Empathy*.<sup>3</sup> In “Empathy and Its Discontents,” Bloom writes,

There are alternatives to empathy. In particular, compassion—in the sense of valuing other people and caring about their welfare but without necessarily feeling their pain—may have all the advantages of empathy and few of its weaknesses.<sup>4</sup>

Doug Wilson has added a moral dimension, entitling his *Man Rampant* interview with Joe Rigney “The Sin of Empathy.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Rigney provocatively called his own article, “The Enticing Sin of Empathy.”<sup>6</sup> After some push-back, Wilson wrote in “The Empathy Wars”:

The sin of empathy, as we [Wilson and Rigney] defined it, was the sin of [a] entering into someone else’s experience totally, [b] without keeping a firm grasp on objective truth at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

This shows that Wilson and Rigney are against (a) *enmeshment* plus (b) *extreme relativism*. Those are sins, and especially enticing ones in America. But “empathy”?

Wilson further simplifies and polarizes:

*Sympathy* remembers to love God while loving the neighbor; *empathy* abandons God for the sake of the neighbor. [“Turns the neighbor into God,” Rigney adds.] ... That

<sup>2</sup> Jean Decety and Kalina Michalska, “Neurodevelopmental Changes in the Circuits Underlying Empathy and Sympathy from Childhood to Adulthood,” *Developmental Science* 13 (2009): 886–99, emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Ecco, 2016). Cf. Paul Bloom, “Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion,” *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, 19 December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhCGmDJQRpc>.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Bloom, “Empathy and Its Discontents,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 21.1 (2017): 24.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Wilson and Joe Rigney, “The Sin of Empathy,” *Man Rampant* Season 1, Episode 1, *Canon Press*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i9a3Rfd7yI>.

<sup>6</sup> Joe Rigney, “The Enticing Sin of Empathy: How Satan Corrupts through Compassion,” *Desiring God*, 31 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-enticing-sin-of-empathy>.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Wilson, “The Empathy Wars,” *Blog & Mablog*, 17 March 2021, <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/the-empathy-wars.html> (emphasis original, bracketed letters added).

sympathy-empathy distinction is very important, and a lot of people miss it. But at the end of the day, it's pretty straight-forward. Right? Love God *and* your neighbor, not just your neighbor.<sup>8</sup>

While “men have to be tender, compassionate, loving, sympathetic,” Wilson continues, “they should think of *empathy*... like someone said ‘lung cancer.’”<sup>9</sup> Rigney responds,

That's right. So, I would say empathy is the parasitic version of sympathy.... It's what sympathy looks like when it goes bad.... Don't be steered by the demand for empathy. Instead, *actually* show compassion. Actually lean in with help. Don't get stuck twisting in the wind as you try to *conform to the latest grievances*.<sup>10</sup>

James White apparently thinks it is pretty straight-forward too. In a similarly polarizing tweet, White writes,

When you start with a man as image-bearing creature of God, you can understand why sympathy is good, but *empathy* is sinful. Do not *surrender your mind to the sinful emotional responses of others*.<sup>11</sup>

Also against empathy but taking a more political line in “Empathy Is Tearing Us Apart,” Robert Wright writes, “Americans are as polarized as they've ever been. Could the problem be that we're caring for each other too much?”<sup>12</sup> Wright builds upon Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland's article “How Empathetic Concern Fuels Political Polarization,”<sup>13</sup> in which they explore how people “high on an empathy scale” tend to be *more* negative toward an opposing party. Wright concludes that high-empathy people are “prone to Schadenfreude” (finding joy in another's misfortune),<sup>14</sup> while Rigney reacts to this research, “Whoa, highly empathetic people also tend to be highly polarized and tribal!”<sup>15</sup>

With such an understanding, it's no wonder they can criticize “empathy.” What if I saw a ship sailing toward me with *those* descriptors as its banner: loss of identity and truth, against love of God, a surrendered mind, Schadenfreude, and tribalism. I'd prepare for battle too! But is any of that *really* empathy?

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson and Rigney, “The Sin of Empathy,” minute 26:00–40.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson and Rigney, “The Sin of Empathy,” minute 1:03:18–33.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson and Rigney, “The Sin of Empathy,” minute 1:03:34–1:04:26 (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> See James White, “Empathy, Sympathy, and Cage Stages,” *Cross Encounters*, 15 March 2021, <https://crossencountersmin.com/featured-article/white-empathy-cage-stages/> (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Wright, “Empathy Is Tearing Us Apart,” *Wired*, 9 November 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/empathy-is-tearing-us-apart/>.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Simas, Scott Clifford, and Justin Kirkland, “How Empathetic Concern Fuels Political Polarization,” *American Political Science Review* 114.1 (2019): 258–69.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, “Empathy Is Tearing Us Apart.”

<sup>15</sup> Joe Rigney in Alastair Roberts, “The ‘Sin’ of Empathy? (with Hannah Anderson and Joe Rigney),” *Adversaria Videos and Podcasts*, 18 March 2021, <https://adversariapodcast.com/2021/03/18/the-sin-of-empathy-with-hannah-anderson-and-joe-rigney/>, minute 107:45–55.

## 1.2. “Ramming Speed!” When Definitions Collide

Onlookers know a ship’s character, crew, and mission by its standard. Ally or enemy country? Military or trade vessel? Regarding empathy, it seems one ship is flying the banner “Empathy” while crewed by *understanding* others from their vantage and *feeling* something of their emotions, but another ship is flying the banner “Empathy” while crewed by *enmeshment* (losing identity), *extreme relativism* (losing truth), etc. Those are *very* different ships!

As we prepare to navigate the basics of empathy, remember how in the introduction I used “sympathy” for passages not using the συμπαθής word group and “empathy” to gloss a passage that actually uses συμπαθέω. This was to flag a fundamental but multifaceted issue underlying how to navigate the clashing definitions.

- What did συμπαθής and ἐμπάθεια mean in the New Testament (NT) era?
- Is it okay for meanings of words and symbols to morph over 2,000 years?
- What does the English term “empathy” (and “sympathy”) mean now?
- Are all definitions created equal?
- Can multiple definitions of “empathy” (or “sympathy”) conflict yet each be legitimate?
- If two conflicting definitions are used widely, how can one be thought illegitimate?

Below I demonstrate that the banner “Empathy” does have a certain meaning, and its ship and crew are on a certain mission. Others have begun stealing onboard and promoting a thoroughly different and damaging agenda under the beautiful banner. And to criticize the banner by looking at the mutineers is to move the discussion in an unhelpful direction.

A similar dynamic is taking place with “sympathy.” This is not the focus of this article. But a brief glimpse is illustrative.

In an animated video—with over 16.5 million views!—Brené Brown criticizes “sympathy” to commend empathy.<sup>16</sup> “So, what is empathy,” she asks, “and how is it *very* different than sympathy?” For Brown (and some others in popular opinion),<sup>17</sup> sympathy is calloused, lighthearted, with no real care toward the person in pain. Most scholars, however, treat sympathy either as an *aspect* of empathy<sup>18</sup>—as an “empathic emotion”<sup>19</sup>—or at least as closely related to empathy.<sup>20</sup> “*Very* different”? Not by any stretch.

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<sup>16</sup> Brené Brown, “Brené Brown on Empathy,” *RSA*, 10 December 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>.

<sup>17</sup> Shane Sinclair, Kate Beamer, Thomas Hack, Susan McClement, Shelley Raffin Bouchal, Harvey Chochinov, and Neil Hagen, “Sympathy, empathy, and compassion: A grounded theory study of palliative care patients’ understandings, experiences, and preferences,” *Palliative Medicine* 31.5 (2016): 437–47.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Hall and Rachel Schwartz, “Empathy Present and Future,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 159.3 (2019): 225–43.

<sup>19</sup> David Lishner, Daniel Batson, and Elizabeth Huss, “Tenderness and Sympathy: Distinct Empathic Emotions Elicited by Different Forms of Need,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37.5 (2011): 614–25.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jodi Halpern, *From Detached Concern to Empathy: Humanizing Medical Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Stewart Mercer and William Reynolds, “Empathy and Quality of Care,” *British Journal of General Practice* 52 (2002): S9–S12; Mohammadreza Hojat, Salvatore Mangione, Thomas Nasca, Mitchell Cohen, Joseph Gonnella, James Erdmann, “The Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy: Development and Preliminary Psychometric Data,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 61 (2001): 349–65.

One of Brown's missteps is not differentiating between *some popular assumptions* about sympathy, on one hand, and *researched, parsed, analyzed, tested, peer-reviewed, careful definitions* of sympathy. She merely assumes the former and criticizes "sympathy" *per se*. Some do the same thing with empathy. Thus, we will navigate *academic research* on empathy and *popular uses* of it, for divergent definitions of empathy are reaching ramming speed.

### 2. Navigating the Basics of Empathy

What *is* empathy? Theresa Wiseman writes, "there is general agreement as to the definition of empathy."<sup>21</sup> But Bruce Maxwell writes, "When it comes to 'empathy' the waters of terminological confusion run deep indeed."<sup>22</sup> Oh great; scholars can't even agree on *whether* there is agreement! Well, that is not exactly true.

A pattern in scholarly descriptions of empathy does emerge. But there are also many aspects of empathy to explore: e.g., its composition, its mode of operation, its communication.<sup>23</sup> After navigating some rocky etymological waters (section 2.1), we will chart a basic course through two common foci in empathy studies, cognitive and affective dynamics (2.2–3) before taking a quick dip into a few other angles of study (2.4).

#### 2.1. Navigating Etymology

In popular debates about empathy, many people start with a basic etymology of "empathy" and "sympathy." What are the parts of the words? Sympathy is "feeling with" and empathy is "feeling into," or something like that. When navigating these etymologies more carefully, however, one cannot sail in such a straight line—especially not with "empathy."

Πάθος referred to passions and pulls in general, contextually referring to "sinful passion," the emotional experience of "suffering," etc. With the prefix συν- (or συμ-, "with") it portrayed feeling some sort of passion *alongside someone*, usually someone suffering. It did not necessarily mean feeling the *same* emotions as them; rather, someone is suffering (perhaps with the intense shock and grief of betrayal) and so you are suffering alongside him or her (perhaps with general sadness at their pain). Add the prefix ἐν- (or ἐμ-, "in") and the word portrays having passions *within yourself* (not in any way "feeling into" someone else).

The words συμπαθής and συμπαθέω are used only in 1 Peter 3:8, Hebrews 4:15, and 10:34. The word ἐμπάθεια is not used in either testament. Some Christians thus automatically trust the English word "sympathy" and question the value of "empathy"—because only the former is "in the Bible" (and thus the other is not biblical?). To counter this façade-level distrust of "empathy," it is *not* helpful to mention that words such as "trinity" (circa 200 CE) are not in the Bible either. Because ἐμπάθεια did exist at the time. So, why was it *not* used?

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<sup>21</sup> Theresa Wiseman, "Toward a Holistic Conceptualization of Empathy for Nursing Practice," *Advances in Nursing Science* 30.3 (2007): E61–72, citing E62; cf. Jeannette Gagan, "Methodological Notes on Empathy," *Advances in Nursing Science* 5.2 (1983): 65–73.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Maxwell, *Professional Ethics Education Studies in Compassionate Empathy* (New York: Springer, 2008), see front matter.

<sup>23</sup> Jolanda van Dijke, Inge van Nistelrooij, Pien Bos, and Joachim Duyndam, "Towards a Relational Conceptualization of Empathy," *Nursing Philosophy* 21.3 (2020): <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/nup.12297>.

When ἐμπάθεια was used in ancient texts, it conveyed “passions” swarming “within” or filling you up<sup>24</sup>—contextually these could run the gamut: sexual passions, hot anger, etc. (In modern Greek, ἐμπάθεια has actually retained such a basic meaning—passions burning within you—though it has narrowed to only one main burning emotion: hatred or malice.<sup>25</sup>) So, suppose for a moment that NT authors wanted to obligate Christians to *understand* others from their vantage and *feel* something of their emotions—the basic scholarly definition of “empathy” (see sections 2–3)—they would *not* have used ἐμπάθεια to convey such a Christian obligation.

The English (Greek-like) word “empathy” was born more directly from the German Einfühlung.<sup>26</sup> Fühlung concerns “contact,” being in “touch” with something, “sensing,” or “feeling.” The prefix ein- is directional,<sup>27</sup> like the English “into” or the Greek εἰς. Einfühlung referred to “feeling into” something or someone else, like projecting oneself “into” a piece of art.<sup>28</sup> When Edward Titchener converted Einfühlung from art appreciation to British psychology, he should have coined a Greek-ish term “eispathy” instead of borrowing ἐμπάθεια. But he didn’t.

Our current English term “empathy,” then, is not exactly connected to the Greek term ἐμπάθεια. Rather, the English “empathy” involves moving yourself into someone else’s mental and emotional shoes to walk around from their perspective for a time, especially to help them.

## 2.2. Cognitive Empathy

Empathy involves significant *cognitive* activity, not least *understanding someone else’s perspective*—“perspective-taking.” Some scholars further parse this angle into “the ability to imagine the other’s experiences” (cognitive) and “the ability to directly perceive the other’s experiences” (perceptive).<sup>29</sup> In general, then, cognitive empathy is *discerning the other person’s experience and interpretation from their vantage point*.

Anecdotally, cognitive empathy corresponds with something my friend learned from Francis Schaeffer as they strolled on an Alpine path. Schaeffer counseled,

When do you know you are ready to critique his theological perspective? When you can articulate his own perspective to him in such a manner that he responds, “Yes, *that* is

<sup>24</sup> See LSJ, s.v. ἐμπαθής.

<sup>25</sup> Nick Nicholas, “Why Does the Word ‘Empathy’ Derived from the Greek Word ἐμπάθεια Have the Complete Opposite Meaning in Greek?” *Quora*, 4 August 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/wd3njumw>.

<sup>26</sup> See Michal Piasecki, “To Reclaim Einfühlung: The Search for a Formula of Radical Empathy in Harun Farocki’s Early Work,” trans. Lukasz Mojsak, *View: Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* 26 (2020), <https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/empathetic-images/reclaim-the-einfuhlung>.

<sup>27</sup> “Ein,” *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/german-english/ein>.

<sup>28</sup> “Empathy,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=empathy> (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> van Dijke, van Nistelrooij, Bos, and Duyndam, “Towards a Relational Conceptualization of Empathy.” Cf. M. C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); R. W. F. Meneses and M. Larkin, “Edith Stein and the Contemporary Psychological Study of Empathy,” *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 43.2 (2012): 151–84.

what I believe”—with no modifications, further clarifications, or caveats. *Then* you are ready to critique his argument.<sup>30</sup>

Practicing such cognitive empathy involves a humble (and difficult) listening skill: temporarily withholding judgment on the other person’s feelings, words, interpretation, and perspective until you understand accurately and robustly.

Note the words “temporarily” and “until.” Christians who (rightly) resist the *extreme relativism* of our culture can easily misunderstand the notion of “non-judgmentalism” in cognitive empathy. In pop culture being “non-judgmental” often involves *agreeing* with or *validating* whatever a person feels and says—all for the sake of “love” or “tolerance.” Someone says, “If you don’t validate my self-understanding, you clearly don’t love me.” (Though that’s not what “love” means, even though it’s popular.)

Joe Rigney offers a helpful diagnosis and stiff-arm against this unholy American *Zeitgeist*. Extreme relativism counsels hurting people “to resent all resistance to their feelings,” as if such resistance were “a direct assault on their dignity and an affront to the depth of their suffering.”<sup>31</sup>

Researchers maintain that having “cognitive empathy” for a patient or client (or congregant or friend) does *not* validate their perspective. But we must be careful here. This non-validating aspect of cognitive empathy does *not* demand or even suggest automatic distrust of someone in pain. Automatic distrust is often born from epistemic arrogance. Arrogance repels others; empathic understanding typically opens doors. Cognitive empathy seeks to *deeply understand someone from his or her vantage point*, which also means that *later* “critical observations” (if necessary) will be more appropriate, nuanced, trusted, and thus easier to accept.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3. Affective Empathy

Empathy is not only about cognition but *affection* as well. It is about *feeling in some measure the emotions* of someone else<sup>33</sup>—“affective matching,”<sup>34</sup> or affective attunement.<sup>35</sup> Step into another’s emotional shoes to walk a mile—or ten, depending on the pain and confusion.

Affective empathy is also easy to misunderstand. For even though it focuses on affections, it still “involves cognitive evaluation.”<sup>36</sup> Even though it centers in the limbic system, it remains “regulated

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<sup>30</sup> Recorded in 2004 from a private conversation with the recipient of Schaeffer’s counsel.

<sup>31</sup> Rigney, “The Enticing Sin of Empathy.” See also Alastair Roberts, “An Ethic of Nerve and Compassion,” *Alastair’s Adversaria*, 27 May 2013, <https://alastairadversaria.com/2013/05/27/an-ethic-of-nerve-and-compassion/> (emphasis added). Cf. James White, “On the Sin of Empathy,” *Alpha and Omega Ministries*, 13 March 2021, <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/theologymatters/on-the-sin-of-empathy/>.

<sup>32</sup> Wynn Schwartz, “The Parameters of Empathy: Core Considerations for Psychotherapy and Supervision,” *Advances in Descriptive Psychology* 10 (2013): 203–18.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffery, “Empathy”; cf. Janice Morse, Gwen Anderson, Joan Bottorff, Olive Yonge, Beverley O’Brien, Shirley Solberg, and Kathleen McIlveen, “Exploring Empathy: A Conceptual Fit for Nursing Practice?,” *Image* 24 (1992): 273–80.

<sup>34</sup> This term is found widely in the literature.

<sup>35</sup> Attunement does not require that we feel the exact feelings of the other (i.e., matching), but that we attend to and, in a sense, vibrate similarly to the other. See Linda M. Frey, “Intersubjective Relatedness and Internal Working Models,” *ScholarWorks at University of Montana* (2004): 30, <https://tinyurl.com/y22kywrj>.

<sup>36</sup> See Jeffery, “Empathy.”

by executive functions.”<sup>37</sup> It does *not* cut off critical thinking and analysis, nor does it neglect broader realities.

Some lay uses of “empathy” (likely only meaning *affective* empathy without realizing it) miss this or assume something different. As Alastair Roberts writes,

The *empathetic* individual, bound up with the feelings of the other person, can be deeply reluctant to cause them further or exacerbated pain, even though that pain may be in their good. By contrast, *compassion* has sufficient nerve to wound the other person for the sake of their good, like the surgeon prepared to cut into the patient in order to save their life.<sup>38</sup>

Following Roberts, Rigney writes that “empathy is often fundamentally or primarily oriented *to the feelings* of sufferers” while “compassion (or sympathy) is fundamentally or primarily oriented *to their good*.”<sup>39</sup>

This contrast between *feelings* and *the bigger good* undoubtedly holds true in many people. But this is not the way empathy is discussed in the research. Van Dijke and her coauthors write, “Many prominent researchers in the fields of psychology and philosophy argue that empathy is grounded in concern for, and thus oriented toward, *the other’s wellbeing or good*.”<sup>40</sup> And the American Psychological Association fills out “wellbeing or good” by showing that empathy is concerned with *the good* of the human’s *person, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, cognitions, affections, motivations, and behaviors*.<sup>41</sup>

Another misstep is to think affective empathy necessarily involves becoming “enmeshed” in the other person’s emotions. Enmeshment is “a condition in which two or more people ... are involved in each other’s activities and personal relationships to an excessive degree, thus limiting or precluding healthy interaction and compromising individual autonomy and identity.”<sup>42</sup> Enmeshment is unhealthy even though popular these days. Scholars argue that affective empathy is *not* enmeshment, *nor* does the former necessarily lead to the latter. Empathy does *not* involve losing one’s own identity or perspective or blurring boundaries between people and perspectives.<sup>43</sup> In fact, academic proponents of empathy have been warning people against *enmeshment* for years. In 1957 Carl Rogers, one of the founders of humanistic psychology and psychotherapy (which means some Christians automatically distrust his insights), wrote this:

<sup>37</sup> Jean Decety and Andrew Meltzoff, “Empathy, Imitation, and the Social Brain,” in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 58.

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, “An Ethic of Nerve and Compassion” (emphasis added).

<sup>39</sup> Rigney, “Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues,” *Desiring God*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain> (emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> Jolanda van Dijke, Inge Van Nistelrooij, Pien Bos, and Joachim Duyndam, “Care Ethics: An Ethics of Empathy?,” *Nursing Ethics* 26.5 (2019): 1282–91 (emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> “Empathy,” *Dictionary of Psychology*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/empathy> (emphasis added). Cf. Barbara Carper, “Fundamental Ways of Knowing in Nursing,” *Advanced Nursing Science* 1.1 (1978): 13–23, esp. 17.

<sup>42</sup> *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/enmeshment>.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Liz Bondi, “Empathy and Identification: Conceptual Resources for Feminist Fieldwork,” *ACME* 2 (2003): 64–76; Halpern, *From Detached Concern to Empathy*; Jeffrey, “Empathy.” Benjamin Cuff, Sarah Brown, Laura Taylor, and Douglas Howat, “Empathy: A Review of the Concept,” *Emotion Review* 8.2 (2016): 144–53; Jean Decety and Aikaterini Fotopoulou, “Why Empathy Has a Beneficial Impact on Others in Medicine: Unifying Theories,” *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 457.

To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, *but without ever losing the "as if" quality*—this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, *yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it*, is the condition we are endeavoring to describe.<sup>44</sup>

"Over-identifying with the patient," Rogers warns, may "distort understanding" and thus would "threaten" the entire "therapeutic process."<sup>45</sup> Avoiding enmeshment has always been crucial for practicing affective (and cognitive) empathy in counseling.

But is it possible to be clothed in full affective empathy without necessarily changing out of it and into enmeshment? Yes. Jeffery observes, "The empathiser *is able* to resonate with the patient's emotions *yet remain* aware of what is distinct in that patient's experience."<sup>46</sup> Even Brené Brown, whose view of empathy (see below) and certainly sympathy (see above) may have some problematic elements, warns about empathy without boundaries: "We have to know where we end and others begin if we really want to show up with empathy."<sup>47</sup>

Affective empathy itself, then, does *not* involve enmeshment. But plenty of people make the mistake. Steve Cuss discusses precisely this error in leadership: "the *enmeshed* leader struggles with *codependency* but calls it *empathy*."<sup>48</sup> Such a leader does *not* have empathy but an unhealthy blending of identity (enmeshment) that has led to codependency.<sup>49</sup> But he or she tries to pass it off as something healthy—i.e., empathy.<sup>50</sup> This confuses discussions.

### 2.4. Many More Ways to Explore Empathy

Scholars are clear that cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy are both healthy, go together, and do not involve extreme relativism or enmeshment.<sup>51</sup> But there are so many more ways to explore empathy than just these. Here are a few examples.

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<sup>44</sup> Carl Rogers, "The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 21.2 (1957): 95–103 (emphasis added); reprinted in *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 44.3 (2007): 240–48, quoted on 243.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffery, "Empathy"; see Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (London: Constable, 1961).

<sup>46</sup> Jeffery, "Empathy."

<sup>47</sup> Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2018), 142 (emphasis added).

<sup>48</sup> Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 119 (emphasis added). Edwin Friedman, on whom Joe Rigney relies in part for his critique of what he views as "empathy" (or a certain type of empathy), writes that empathy in leadership is often a "disguise for anxiety" (*A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* [New York: Seabury, 2007], 133).

<sup>49</sup> Codependency is "a dysfunctional relationship pattern in which an individual is psychologically dependent on (or controlled by) a person who has a pathological addiction" (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/codependency>).

<sup>50</sup> See also Sheri Jacobson, "Sympathy and Empathy—Do You Really Know the Difference?," *Harley Therapy Counselling Blog*, 19 May 2015, <https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/sympathy-and-empathy.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> Maxwell, *Professional Ethics*, ch. 2. Cf. Amy Coplan, "Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–18; Jeffery, "Empathy."

Some scholars add communicating empathy as a third major aspect of empathy alongside its cognitive and affective dimensions.<sup>52</sup> The communication of empathy is a nuanced sub-field in itself.<sup>53</sup> Most psychologists, however, would differentiate *experiencing* empathy itself from competently *communicating* accurate empathy.

Some scholars look at the *mode* of empathy rather than its make-up. Some explore empathy as an *incident*, analyzing a particular moment where it is seen. Others examine it as a *process*—like a developing pattern of praxis.<sup>54</sup> Others analyze empathy as a *way of knowing* wherein it “provides a more accurate assessment of the patient’s needs.”<sup>55</sup> Others investigate empathy as a *way of being*, as in “That’s just the way he is.” Still others see a “continuum of empathy development,” expanding from *incident* to *way of knowing* to *process* to *way of being* (or some other configuration).<sup>56</sup>

Some scholars explore empathy’s automatic (“low-level”) versus thought-through (“high-level”) aspects.<sup>57</sup> Still others explore empathy’s aesthetic dimension, or moral dimension, or behavioral dimension, or bodily (“somatic”) dimension, or neuroscientific elements.<sup>58</sup> Empathy is not just something to chat about in tweets, blogs, videos, etc. There is a world of responsible research going on!

What *is* empathy? Empathy is a rich and dynamic ship on a mission of accurate other-orientation. Yes, scholars select different aspects and nuances to analyze, parse, test, define, and analyze some more. But there *is* something called “empathy.” There *is* a definite ship crewed by particular sailors that legitimately sail under the banner of “Empathy.” And it looks remarkably like Christ’s incarnate help for us in our weakness as described in Hebrews 2 and 4. Jesus *understands and experiences our perspective and emotions from our vantage point*, without losing truth or becoming enmeshed, so as to help us in the most effective way for our good.

### 3. Navigating Empathic Tools and Nuances across Disciplines

We have explored the basics of empathy. But various disciplines—including nursing, counseling, and ethics—provide tools, insights, and nuances about empathy we must navigate.

<sup>52</sup> Irving Dickson, “Empathy: Towards a Conceptual Framework for Health Professionals,” *International Journal of Healthy Care Quality Assurance* 17 (2004): 212–20.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Sun Yeob Choi, “Concept Analysis of Empathy,” *Journal of Korean Academy of Fundamentals of Nursing* 26.3 (2019): 145–54; Mercer and Reynolds, “Empathy and Quality of Care,” S9–S12.

<sup>54</sup> See Wiseman, “Toward,” E67–8.

<sup>55</sup> Wiseman, “Toward,” E66.

<sup>56</sup> See Wiseman, “Toward,” E61–72.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Coplan, “Understanding Empathy”; Sarah Songhorian, “Review of *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*,” *Method Journal* 2 (2014): 217–30. Songhorian takes slight issue with the way Coplan construes high-level empathy.

<sup>58</sup> See numerous chapters in Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie Coplan, ed., *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Janice Morse, Joan Bottorff, Gwen Anderson, Beverley O’Brien, and Shirley Solberg, “Beyond Empathy: Expanding Expressions of Caring,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17.7 (July 1992): 809–21; Adrian Raine and Frances Chen, “The Cognitive, Affective, and Somatic Empathy Scales (CASES) for Children,” *Journal of Clinical Child Adolescent Psychology* 47.1 (2018): 24–37; Lishner, Batson, and Huss, “Tenderness,” 614–25.

### 3.1. Navigating Empathy and Diagnostic Truth in Medicine

Nurses' interactions with patients and their families are crucial to successful medicine, and these should be characterized by empathy and sympathy.<sup>59</sup> In nursing literature and training, sympathy and compassion are understood as being pained *that* the patient is suffering and thus moved to help.<sup>60</sup> And empathy is consistently understood as in section 2 above with its cognitive and affective dimensions. As Jean Decety and Aikaterini Fotopoulou conclude,

Overall, there is solid and accumulative evidence that *all facets of empathy play an important role in medical practice* and have an impact on both the patient and his/her physician. A physician's empathy can improve the patient's psychological and physiological adjustment to disease, contribute to healing, and can influence the overall well-being of the recipient.<sup>61</sup>

For example, physiologically, the presence of people who are empathically *for* a patient's improvement "helps individuals to conserve metabolically costly somatic and neural resources through the social regulation of emotion."<sup>62</sup> Such presence even helps the patient's brain "respond to environmental changes adaptively."<sup>63</sup>

What is more, empathy training in the medical field involves practicing cognitive and affective empathy *while not ruling out* the physician's or nurse's ability, right, and need to sometimes *disagree* about the patient's interpretation of their own situation. Part of medical care is to treat what is *actually* wrong—in *truth*, as Rigney and Wilson would say—regardless of the patient's perspective. Only *non-empathy* abandons truth. Fortunately, nurses listen to the nursing scholars and not the crowds for their understanding and practice of empathy.

### 3.2. Navigating Empathic Tools and Truth in Counseling

Toward the end of their *Man Rampant* conversation, Rigney and Wilson push for *forgiveness*.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, as empirically demonstrated over the past decades of forgiveness research, *empathy* is one of the most important and effective aspects in forgiveness (alongside humility).<sup>65</sup> And it is understood in

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<sup>59</sup> Gordon Kraft-Todd, Diego Reiner, John Kelley, Andrewa Heberlein, Lee Baer, and Helen Ross, "Empathetic Nonverbal Behavior Increases Ratings of Warmth and Competence in a Medical Context," *PLoS One* 12.5 (2017): e0177758, <https://tinyurl.com/cfd72wpx>.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Barry Silverman, "Physician Behavior and Bedside Manners: The Influence of William Osler and The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine," *Proceedings: Baylor University Medical Center* 25.1 (2012): 58–61; Decety and Fotopoulou, "Why Empathy," 457.

<sup>61</sup> Decety and Fotopoulou, "Why Empathy," 457 (emphasis added).

<sup>62</sup> Decety and Fotopoulou, "Why Empathy," 457.

<sup>63</sup> Decety and Fotopoulou, "Why Empathy," 457. Cf. Theresa Wiseman, "A Concept Analysis of Empathy," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 23 (1996): 1162–67, esp. 1162; Patricia Chaney, "The Importance of Bedside Manner to Trust and Patient Engagement," *UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine*, 18 July 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/nhm2ydrj>; Cf. Anna Morrow, "Why Is Bedside Manner Important?," *in-Training*, 22 October 2018, <https://in-training.org/why-is-bedside-manner-important-16124>.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson and Rigney, "The Sin of Empathy," minute 57:24–58:00.

<sup>65</sup> Steven Sandage and Everett Worthington, Jr., "Comparison of Two Group Interventions to Promote Forgiveness: Empathy as a Mediator of Change," *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 32.1 (2010): 33–57, esp. 37; Ann

its cognitive and affective fullness (as described in the literature above): “A person might [1] cognitively take the offender’s perspective and even [2] identify emotionally with him or her.”<sup>66</sup>

What’s more, it is the *other*-oriented nature of empathy that helps motivate the altruistic gift of forgiveness. While pop-icon Oprah takes a self-focused approach to forgiveness, pushing the masses to forgive others because *you* will be healthier (which is true, by the way), psychology researchers Steve Sandage and Everett Worthington empirically demonstrate that cognitive and affective focus on and care for *the other* (empathy) is “more effective in promoting forgiveness” than is a “self-enhancement motivation.”<sup>67</sup>

In forgiveness-based (and other) counseling settings, cognitive and affective empathy is bi-directional. First, the *psychotherapist* seeks to empathize with the client. He or she is thereby better equipped to coach the hurting person toward healing, perhaps even helping them rethink their perspective and feelings toward the offender and situation. Sounding like Francis Schaeffer, Wynn Schwartz trains counselors to continuously ask themselves during their empathic reflections whether the client can “tolerate the way I express what I understand about them.”<sup>68</sup> He further teaches that “therapeutic tact” and “careful listening” (both fueled by cognitive and affective empathy) “come *first* and may take considerable time *before* problematic motivations and constraints are interpreted”; *then* the “critical observation” can be given effectively.<sup>69</sup>

Second, the *hurting person* is also counseled to cognitively and affectively empathize with the offender or perceived offender: “[1] I see my offender’s motivations and understand his or her point of view. [2] I feel what he or she might have been feeling.”<sup>70</sup> Understanding and even feeling *why* a person might have offended or hurt a person does not make the offense less offensive, hurtful, or even evil; but it does help him or her forgive the offender.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of helpful tools for stimulating empathy, here are two. Since “empathy is putting yourself in the other person’s chair,” Everett Worthington writes,

Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to him. Pour your heart out. Then, when you’ve had your say, sit in his chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy, and even if you can’t empathize, you might feel more sympathy, compassion, or love, which helps you heal from hurt.<sup>72</sup>

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Macaskill, John Maltby, Liza Day, “Forgiveness of Self and Others and Emotional Empathy,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 142.5 (2002): 663–65.

<sup>66</sup> Everett Worthington, Jr., “An Empathy-Humility-Commitment Model of Forgiveness Applied Within Family Dyads,” *Journal of Family Therapy* 20 (1998): 59–76, citing 63 (numbers added).

<sup>67</sup> Sandage and Worthington, “Comparison,” 37.

<sup>68</sup> Schwartz, “Parameters,” 209.

<sup>69</sup> Schwartz, “Parameters,” 203, 207.

<sup>70</sup> Worthington, “An Empathy-Humility-Commitment Model,” 63 (numbers added).

<sup>71</sup> Sandage and Worthington, “Comparison,” 52.

<sup>72</sup> Everett Worthington, Jr., “REACH Forgiveness of Others,” <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others>.

Empathy is so potent for forgiveness not least because “gaining empathy for an offender may *humanize*, though *not* necessarily exonerate, that person.”<sup>73</sup>

Secondly, the therapist (counselor, pastor, friend) says, “So, *from your point of view...*” Some Christians will misunderstand this as unhealthy relativism. It actually helps foster something Rigney and Wilson promote: the assumption that the hurt person’s perspective on their own pain is *not necessarily* the “single right way of looking at the problem.”<sup>74</sup> (This tool is *not* meant to be used to convey skepticism that the hurting person was really wronged.)

### 3.3. Navigating Empathy and Limits in Ethics

Recall Paul Bloom’s book *Against Empathy* (section 1.1). Bloom says, “Sometimes people get the idea I’m *against empathy*. Nothing could be further from the truth. I’m a big fan of empathy.”<sup>75</sup> Chuckling confusedly, I then realize his nuance: empathy is “essential” for a full life but terrible “as a moral guide”<sup>76</sup>—for “guiding our decisions.”<sup>77</sup> Bloom explains,

What I’m really interested in is [1] putting yourself in another person’s shoes and [2] feeling what they feel. And a lot of people—a lot of smart, concerned, good people—think that this is central to morality.... In a very simple situation—just you and one other person—empathy’s fine.... I’m not against empathy in general. I’m against empathy *as a moral guide*. I think empathy is a *valuable* part of intimate relationships. It’s a great source of pleasure.... A world without empathy would be immensely impoverished.<sup>78</sup>

Notice that Bloom *defines* empathy according to scholarship (section 2 above). Notice that Bloom *values* empathy highly. Understood rightly, it is certainly not a sin. But notice, too, that Bloom thinks it is too *limited* to be good for making moral decisions on a broad social scale.<sup>79</sup> His reasoning? Supposedly, affective empathy is fit to give one person not millions (number) and easier to have toward your own ethnic, socioeconomic, or ideological group (selectivity).

However, Cameron, Inzlicht, and Cunningham summarize the findings of a growing number of empirical studies regarding empathy and *number*:

Whereas people usually feel less empathy for multiple victims (versus a single victim), this tendency reverses when you convince people that empathy won’t require costly donations of money or time. Similarly, people show less empathy for mass suffering

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<sup>73</sup> Sandage and Worthington, “Comparison,” 52 (emphasis added).

<sup>74</sup> Worthington, “An Empathy-Humility-Commitment Model,” 67–68.

<sup>75</sup> Bloom, “Against Empathy,” 19 December 2016, minute 26:28–34 (emphasis added). See also Jesse Prinz, “Against Empathy,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49.1 (Sept 2011): 214–33; Adam Waytz, “The Limits of Empathy,” *Harvard Business Review* (Jan–Feb 2016): <https://hbr.org/2016/01/the-limits-of-empathy>.

<sup>76</sup> Bloom, “Against Empathy,” minute 26:35–27:28.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Bloom, “The Perils of Empathy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 December 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-perils-of-empathy-1480689513>.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Bloom, “Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion,” *The Brainwaves Video Anthology*, 27 January 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/4xfw9szy>, minute 1:22–4:18 (numbers and emphasis added).

<sup>79</sup> Meghaan Lurtz, “When More Advisor Empathy Isn’t Better and the Compassion-Based Alternative,” *The Kitces Report*, 13 January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2vckbjhe>. Anderson in Roberts, “The ‘Sin’ of Empathy?,” minute 44:34–45:00.

when they think their helping won't make any difference or impact, but this pattern goes away when they think they can make a difference.<sup>80</sup>

Regarding in-group *selectivity*, Robert Wright and Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland appear to confirm Bloom's critique. Remember, people "high on an empathy scale" tend to be more negative toward an opposing party. But they conclude that *empathy* is polarizing<sup>81</sup> and tearing us apart,<sup>82</sup> which is incorrect. Their research actually shows that the people "high on an empathy scale" have lots of empathy for *their own party* but *no* empathy and even *antipathy* for their out-groups. And it is more precisely the "*deficits in empathy for out-group members*" that polarize, tear us apart, and create more general "negative societal impact."<sup>83</sup>

But perhaps it is inevitable that people who are highly empathic (toward their in-group) will be tribal and polarizing. Not according to the research. First, yes, it is *difficult* to have *affective empathy* toward people who are ethnically, religiously, or physically different from oneself. (Then again, Jesus never told us it would be *easy* to love or forgive or do good to our enemies and not only our friends [e.g., Luke 6:32–36], just necessary if we are to be like him.) Second, the nuances in section 2 above are important here: *cognitive empathy* must play a more significant role in such situations where affective empathy for the out-group is difficult.<sup>84</sup> And third, even affective empathy "can be learned" by those with empathy deficit toward out-groups—a certain intervention even helps "learning experiences change empathy-related brain responses!"<sup>85</sup>

I am not arguing affective empathy is crucial for society-wide moral decision-making. I am merely navigating certain claims about empathy, such as this one by a public leader in ethics. Bloom understands empathy correctly. Bloom highly values empathy. And Bloom's two main reasons for limiting empathy for large scale moral decisions are not actually clearly limits at all.

#### 4. Navigating Empathy and Truth in Popular Level Material

We finish exploring empathy research and popular uses by navigating comments by two people garnering attention regarding empathy: Brené Brown and Joe Rigney. Both say some unhelpful things but are also easily misunderstood. We would do well to listen empathically.

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<sup>80</sup> Daryl Cameron, Michael Inzlicht, and William Cunningham, "Does Empathy Have Limits?," *The Conversation*, 1 March 2017, <https://theconversation.com/does-empathy-have-limits-72637>. Cf. Daryl Cameron and Keith Payne, "Escaping Affect: How Motivated Emotion Regulation Creates Insensitivity to Mass Suffering," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100.1 (2011): 1–15; Eesha Sharma and Vicki G. Morwitz, "Saving the Masses: The Impact of Perceived Efficacy on Charitable Giving to Single vs. Multiple Beneficiaries," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 135 (July 2016): 45–54.

<sup>81</sup> Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland, "How Empathic Concern Fuels Political Polarization."

<sup>82</sup> Wright, "Empathy Is Tearing Us Apart."

<sup>83</sup> Grit Hein, Jan Engelmann, Marius Vollberg, and Philippe Tobler, "How Learning Shapes the Empathic Brain," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113.1 (2016): 80–85 (emphasis added).

<sup>84</sup> Helen Riess, "The Science of Empathy," *Journal of Patient Experience* 4.2 (2017): 74–77.

<sup>85</sup> Hein, Engelmann, Vollberg, and Tobler, "How Learning Shapes the Empathic Brain."

#### 4.1. Navigating Cognitive and Affective Empathy in Joe Rigney

Since his initial interview and articles, Rigney has honed his understanding of *popular uses* of “empathy.” He recently tweeted this:

- 1) Empathy (A), properly understood, is less than sympathy & the servant of sympathy.
- 2) Empathy (B), commonly understood & frequently practiced, is regarded as superior to sympathy & involves a dangerous untethering from truth and judgment. We might call these tethered empathy & untethered, or governed & ungoverned. And crucially, Empathy (B) is thus a distortion or corruption of Empathy (A).<sup>86</sup>

By now we should notice that neither public opinion (A) nor public opinion (B) align with empathy research.

We should also add Empathy (C) to Rigney’s taxonomy of popular understandings of “empathy.” In a 2019 study by Hall, Schwartz, and Duong—“How Do Laypeople Define Empathy?”—191 participants from an Introduction to Psychology class were asked to define and give examples of empathy.<sup>87</sup> The researchers documented ten narrative empathy codes. “Non-judgmentalism” *was* among them, though only in 8% of the laypersons’ definitions. Compare 59% describing “perspective taking” as essential to empathy, 46% describing “emotional sharing,” and 29% including “accurately judging another person.”<sup>88</sup> Lay use “Empathy (C),” then, actually aligns most closely with the research. Thus:

Popular Uses of Empathy	Scholarly Research on Empathy
Empathy A: less than and servant to sympathy	
Empathy B: extreme relativism + enmeshment	
Empathy C: perspective taking + emotional sharing	Empathy: perspective taking (without extreme relativism) + affective attunement (without enmeshment)

To most fully navigate Rigney’s perspective on “empathy,” many points of which have been scattered through this article, I must highlight a final point. Rigney can attend well to empathy research. In “Do You Feel My Pain?” he summarizes eight possible definitions or elements of empathy charted in a 2019 meta-analysis of psychological literature on the subject:

- (a) knowing another’s thoughts and feelings; (b) imagining another’s thoughts and feelings; (c) adopting the posture of another; (d) actually feeling as another does; (e) imagining how one would feel or think in another’s place; (f) feeling distress at another’s

<sup>86</sup> See Joe Rigney (@joe\_rigney), Twitter, 16 March 2021, [https://twitter.com/joe\\_rigney/status/1371881492507324416](https://twitter.com/joe_rigney/status/1371881492507324416).

<sup>87</sup> Judith Hall, Rachel Schwartz, and Fred Duong, “How Do Laypeople Define Empathy?” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 161 (2021): 5–24. The sample consisted of 60/40% female/male representation; a mean age of 19 in a range of 18–25; 6.3% African American, 33.5% Asian/Asian American, 39.3% White/Caucasian, 7.3% Hispanic/Latin American, 6.3% Middle Eastern, 7.3% other; and representing all majors in the university.

<sup>88</sup> Hall, Schwartz, and Duong, “How Do Laypeople Define Empathy?,” table 1.

suffering; (g) feeling for another's suffering, sometimes called *pity* or *compassion*; (h) projecting oneself into another's situation.<sup>89</sup>

From our navigations above, we will recognize three basic elements represented in these eight:

1. *understanding* the other person's cognitive or emotional perspective (a, b, e, h);
2. *experiencing* in some manner and measure emotions similar to the other person's emotions (c, d);
3. being emotionally *moved* that the other person is suffering, which many scholars place into its own (related) category of "sympathy" and "compassion" (f, g).

Does Rigney see this pattern? With a good synthesizing eye, Rigney makes this commendation:

It's clear that we can find *much to praise* in the concept of empathy. It's *good* [1] to try to understand others, to see things from their point of view, to recognize their felt reality. It's *good* [2] to feel the same emotions as other people—to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). It's *good* [3] to feel warm and compassionate emotions for those in distress (and hopefully be moved to help them in concrete ways).<sup>90</sup>

For Rigney, then, cognitive empathy is good, affective empathy is good (and biblical), and sympathy and compassion are good.

Likewise, though in a different forum and format, Rigney says this to Hannah Anderson:

It is interesting to me that you used over and over again in that description [of empathy] the word "understand." Because I think that is precisely the word that I would *want* to lean on. I think it's the biblical word for it.... "Live with your wife in an *understanding* way" [1 Pet 3:7]. You're talking about *that*. Which doesn't imply that you think your wife is right about everything, but that there is an attempt to sort of approximate ... attempting to [1] *understand from her vantage* what just happened and why the way the world is. And that's an obligation on Christians.... And it's *not simply a cognitive thing*; it involves the *imagination*; it involves at some level [2] the *emotions* and sort of a *phenomenological* [question]: "What is it like to *be* that person?"<sup>91</sup>

Rigney's language captures what empathy is as understood by the people who study it in depth, with rigor, and in a peer-review system. He even calls it "an obligation on Christians"!

When does Rigney's tune change? He responds to Anderson,

But what's interesting is that you insisted there on "it doesn't carry with it affirmation."  
But that's precisely, I think, the way that *in the wider cultural moment* it does carry with it the wider affirmation—that affirmation is essential.<sup>92</sup>

Perspectival shifts are soundlessly occurring. Anderson continues functioning from a technical understanding of empathy, which explicitly does *not* involve affirmation or validation (see above). A few

<sup>89</sup> Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain?" This is Rigney's summary of Hall and Schwartz, "Empathy Present and Future," 225–43 (I converted bullets to letters for subsequent reference).

<sup>90</sup> Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain?" (emphasis and numbers added).

<sup>91</sup> Rigney, in Roberts, "The 'Sin' of Empathy?," minute 1:06:21–1:07:18.

<sup>92</sup> Rigney, in Roberts, "The 'Sin' of Empathy?," minute 1:07:30–1:07:42 (emphasis added).

minutes prior, when Rigney was also thinking within Anderson's realm (scholarship), he acknowledged that it does *not* involve affirmation or validation: "it doesn't imply that you think your wife is right about everything." But at this point, Rigney has shifted his perspective to what some in this "wider cultural moment" consider "empathy" to be.

(Remember Brené Brown's similar hermeneutical move regarding "sympathy" in her kids' video. She *tried* to define empathy from scholarship [see below], but for "sympathy" she merely voiced the everyday jerk and ended up defining it in opposition to scholarship.)

Some people do sneak a relativistic form of "non-judgmentalism" onboard empathy's ship. Rigney critiques such extreme relativism. Good. But we should *also* critique their misunderstanding of empathy. I wonder how many of the former are following Brené Brown's short video.

### 4.2. Navigating Empathy and Truth in Brené Brown

In her viral video,<sup>93</sup> Brown explicitly relies on Theresa Wiseman's 1996 nursing publication for her understanding of empathy.<sup>94</sup> She observes that Wiseman "came up with four qualities of empathy" and words them as such:

1. "Perspective taking: the ability to take the perspective of another person, or recognize their perspective is their truth."
2. "Staying out of judgment (not easy when you enjoy it as much as most of us do)."
3. "Recognizing emotion in other people."
4. "And then communicating that."<sup>95</sup>

Numbers 1, 3, and 4 are *roughly* equivalent to what scholars say: cognitive empathy, affective empathy (or perhaps perceptive cognitive empathy), and empathic reflection, respectively.

But the way Brown words 1 and 2 give them a feel of *extreme relativism*: "their perspective is their truth," "staying out of judgment." Some think Brown here is advocating *losing grip on truth*.

Interestingly, while Wiseman did use "non-judgmentalism" as one of empathy's four defining attributes (though the self-admittedly most debatable one), Wiseman did *not* mean extreme relativism. Remember, in nursing there is always room for critiquing the patient's interpretation against the more objective diagnosis. Wiseman also did *not* include non-judgmentalism in her "holistic conceptualization of empathy" in 2007.<sup>96</sup> And non-judgmentalism is *not* included as an aspect of empathy in the "standard empathy conceptualizations and measuring instruments."<sup>97</sup>

This means that *if* Brown wants "staying out of judgment" to mean validating whatever the hurt person says (extreme relativism), Brown has *misunderstood* her own primary source (Wiseman) and her own trade tools. This would mean that Brown does not merely have a *different* definition of empathy

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<sup>93</sup> Brown, "Brené Brown on Empathy."

<sup>94</sup> Wiseman, "A Concept," 1165.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, "Brené Brown on Empathy."

<sup>96</sup> Wiseman, "Toward," E61–72.

<sup>97</sup> According to Hall, Schwartz, and Duong, "How Do Laypeople Define Empathy?," 5–24, these "standard empathy conceptualizations and measuring instruments" include the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), the Affective and Cognitive Measure of Empathy (ACME), the Empathy Quotient (EQ), the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy, the Batson's empathy adjectives, and the Basic Empathy Scale.

from scholarship, but a *wrong* definition. And those people (perhaps millions) who follow her video definition are thereby using and perpetuating a *misunderstanding* of what empathy truly is, *not* merely a different understanding.

I suggest, though, that Brown's *listeners* have the wrong definition. But Brown's language exacerbates their misunderstanding.

According to Brown's wider teaching, in order to cope with perceived threats, fear, or pain, we tell ourselves stories about what we think is happening and why. "So, if we give the brain a story," Brown teaches, "we get a chemical reward, a calm reward.... The problem is that the brain rewards us for a story regardless of the *accuracy* of the story."<sup>98</sup>

Brown believes our stories can be accurate or inaccurate. Knowing this reality, Brown asks her boss to hold *her* interpretive narratives (her stories) in check, even having him say things to her like: "Keep checking out the stories with me, because that's a crazy-ass story." (How is *that* for suspending judgment?!) Brown observes, "The stories we make up and *our ability to reality-check them* completely predict our levels of bounce and resilience."<sup>99</sup>

Brown maintains a "reality" beyond a hurting person's perspective, and it is important to be accurate to it. So, when she asks, "If you were to share your story with me, how do I stay open and sit in that with you as opposed to moving into blame and judgment?"<sup>100</sup> we would be wrong to take such empathic listening as losing grip on truth. She pauses judgment and critique *for a time, until* she accurately and deeply understands the person from their cognitive and affective vantage point. She waits until she is in a good relational position to help them do the necessary "reality-check."

But surely Brown's language of "their perspective is *their truth*" is full-on extreme relativism, right? While this is common and popular wording, and sloppy, it is not *necessarily* synonymous with thinking their perspective is *the* truth or of equal value with *the* truth. It could merely be a (shoddy) way to admit that the client *truly believes* what he or she thinks, that such beliefs *truly affect* their feelings and actions, and that they are not intentionally lying. Remember, Brown believes "their truth" eventually needs to be checked against "reality" (*the* truth).

I think Brown's language will push many culturally primed listeners in places she does not actually intend them to go, and where empathy research says they should *not* go if they are practicing true empathy. Empathy scholars tend to use sharper, more helpful language such as "objectivity" (the ability to hear disturbing confessions or perspectives without being personally shocked, reacting negatively, or immediately condemning) or even "unconditional positive regard for the client" (not for all their views, many of which need to "change").<sup>101</sup>

An understanding of empathy that involves extreme relativism is a *misunderstanding*. It is not merely a *different* definition of empathy, but a *wrong* definition as it is a misappropriation of the very sources on which it attempts to base itself. And when the language of those who do understand properly—or at least better—gets sloppy or in some manner blurry, the misunderstandings and poor definitions of empathy will wreak havoc on communities.

<sup>98</sup> See Brené Brown, "Audience Q&A," *Overheard*, 11 July 2019 (last viewed 21 July 2021), <https://tinyurl.com/bs6kex6a>, minute 40:10–43.

<sup>99</sup> Brown, "Audience Q&A," minute 41:40–44:25 (verbal emphasis).

<sup>100</sup> Brené Brown, "Shame & Empathy by Dr. Brené Brown," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQiFFA7KfF0>.

<sup>101</sup> Rogers, "Necessary and Sufficient," 95–103.

## 5. Conclusion

There are debates in scholarship over nuances, angles, and implications of empathy. But it is far from a free-for-all. As we have seen in this article, here are a few aspects that are more fixed than people realize:

- it is healthy to be bothered at the fact that someone is hurting—*sympathy*;
- it is healthy to seek to understand others from their perspective—*cognitive empathy*;
- it is *un*-healthy to lose a sense of truth, to lose the possibility of a bigger perspective that goes beyond or even contradicts a hurt person's perspective on their own pain—*extreme relativism*;
- empathy (properly understood) does *not* involve extreme relativism;
- it is healthy to seek to share something of the emotions of others—*affective empathy*;
- it is *un*-healthy to lose your own identity and perspective in someone else's experience of suffering—*enmeshment*;
- empathy (properly understood) does *not* involve enmeshment.

Does Christ deeply *understand* our human weaknesses and pain from our perspective while maintaining a firm hold on objective truth? Undeniably. Does Christ *feel* something of our emotions, especially suffering, while maintaining a clear distinction between himself and us? Absolutely. Christ does not give in to either extreme relativism or enmeshment. No, Christ *empathizes* with us profoundly. Real sins can be smuggled onboard a virtuous ship flying an honorable banner. And extreme relativism and enmeshment are surely being smuggled onboard the Christ-like ship of empathy.

Let us not validate the mutineers, as if what they are saying and doing is legitimate. Neither let us criticize the banner itself. Rather, let's clarify the true nature and mission of the ship and remove the sinful, damaging elements from it. The ship is good and its mission is right—when rightly understood. Let us say, "Your enmeshment, extreme relativism, antipathy toward outgroups, etc. is *not* empathy. And your use of *non*-empathy is the problem. You can't steal this ship and banner." If we do not take such a careful and clarifying stand together, I fear we will never be able to successfully navigate the Christ-like ship through murky and rocky waters of public opinion to properly serve hurting people and communities in Christ's name.

# Leviticus in Light of Christ

— Roland Elliott —

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**Abstract:** Christians have long wrestled with how to read the Law in light of the work of Christ. Focusing on Leviticus, this article defends a proposal for its structure and leverages this as a starting point for reading its laws in light of Christ. The resulting approach considers laws in terms of (1) the purpose of the overarching section to which they belong and (2) how they are expressed in terms of old covenant realities. This provides the tools for nuanced consideration of the degree and manner of how these laws continue to be relevant to daily life in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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## *1. Introduction*

From the earliest times Christians have sought to understand how the work of Christ impacts the relevance of the Law to our lives. One of the most well-known attempts at making sense of this is the threefold division of the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial precepts (which itself is a development of the earlier twofold division into moral and symbolical precepts). However, when it comes to the task of actually interpreting the Old Testament Law in light of Christ's work, these divisions are insufficient. Wright has articulated at least two reasons why this is the case:

The main attack upon it is first that it serves no exegetical purpose, in that it is impossible to make clear divisions into such categories when actually studying Old Testament legal texts, and second that it is foreign to the thought of either Old or New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to note a potential response that the proponent of the threefold division might give: the division is meant not as an exegetical tool for reading the law, but as a hermeneutical guide for how it might apply to believers. While this may be true, it leaves us no better off in our search for a Christian approach to the Old Testament Law.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Dr Nathan Lovell from George Whitefield College in South Africa for his guidance and feedback on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also to the anonymous referee(s) who helped improve the overall clarity of this paper.

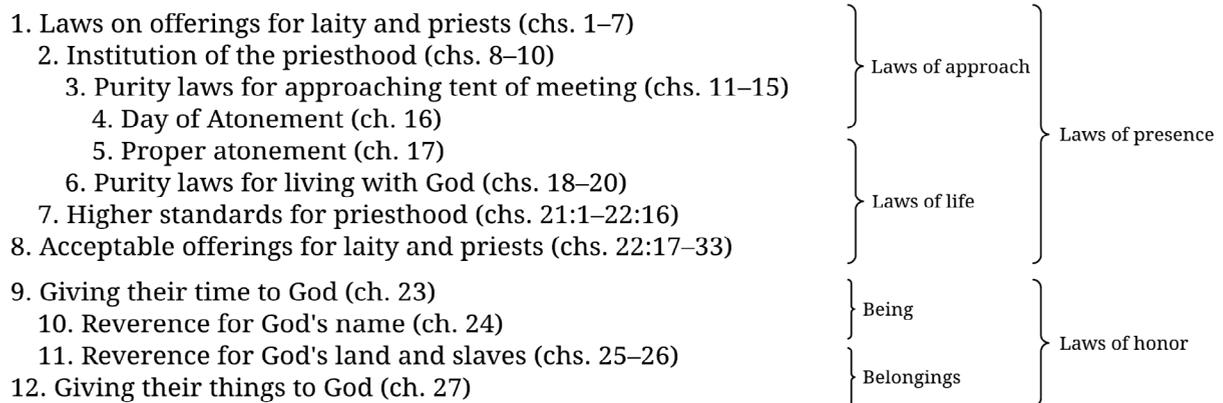
<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches, Part I," *TynB* 43 (1992): 205.

This is most keenly felt when studying the laws in Leviticus, for out of the entire Pentateuch these laws are the least anchored to a surrounding narrative that might serve as an interpretative guide. The next best thing to this would be an understanding of the structure of the book, which could help us to better appreciate the purposes and organization of the laws contained therein. Unfortunately, while there is widespread agreement among commentators that Leviticus is well-structured, the details of that structure enjoy nowhere near the same level of agreement. Indeed, with little exaggeration we could say that there are almost as many proposed structures as there are commentators.

In order to pursue this line of investigation, we will first defend a proposal for the structure of Leviticus, and then we will show how it can guide us in interpreting the precepts of the book in light of the work of Christ.

## *2. The Double-Chiastic Structure of Leviticus*

Our approach to the structure of Leviticus will have a significant impact on the results of our investigation. Rather than approach the question with an a priori commitment to a primary theme, conceptual framework, or presumption about its form, we shall proceed inductively in three stages. First, we identify the natural sections within the text, paying attention to any explicit markers that it provides. Second, we consider how those sections might be connected with one another. And third, we attempt to explain the organization as a whole. The resulting structure can be summarized as follows:



### **2.1. Stage 1: Identifying Sections**

There are various indicators within Leviticus for how to divide successive sections from one another.<sup>3</sup> The clearest of these are explicit introductions and conclusions: the holy festivals are introduced by the divine address (23:1–2) and concluded by the statement of fulfillment (23:44); the Day of Atonement is introduced with a divine address to Moses to instruct Aaron (16:1–3) and concluded with the calendrical

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the structural indicators within Leviticus, see John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, rev. ed., WBC 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), xxx–xxxv. Hartley groups chapters 17–26 together because this section “lacks the structural signals that mark off the other divisions” (xxxiv). On the contrary, we shall see that the same kinds of indicators for divisions of sections in chapters 1–16 also serve for divisions of sections in chapters 17–26.

comment and statement of fulfillment (16:34); the Sabbath and Jubilee year regulations together with the blessings and curses (chs. 25–26) are all part of a single divine speech which is introduced and concluded with reference to Mount Sinai (25:1 and 26:46);<sup>4</sup> and the regulations on the redemption of vowed things (ch. 27) are introduced with a divine address (27:1–2) and concluded with a summary statement (27:34).<sup>5</sup>

The laws on offerings (chs. 1–7) are introduced with a reference to God speaking to Moses from the tent of meeting (1:1) and concluded with a summary of the offerings that have been covered (7:37–38). Sklar argues that this conclusion is only for the priestly regulations (6:8–7:36), since (1) the word used for “law” only appears in these regulations and (2) the order of the offerings (except for the ordination offering) corresponds to the order given in the priestly regulations rather than the regulations for the laity (1:1–6:7).<sup>6</sup> But the lack of any identifiable conclusion prior to this<sup>7</sup> and the reference to the people of Israel in 7:38 rather than only the priests<sup>8</sup> suggest that we should take the conclusion to cover all of the regulations in chapters 1–7.

The divine addresses are themselves important organizational elements in Leviticus, even when explicit conclusions are not present. They may be grouped in terms of who is addressed and then by common subject matter. Only in chapters 11–15 are Moses and Aaron addressed together (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1),<sup>9</sup> and the laws in this section all deal with ritual purity. Chapters 17–22 can be divided using the same criteria. Chapter 17 is an address for Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel (17:1–2) regarding the place of sacrifice and prohibition of eating blood. Chapters 18–20 then switch to contiguous addresses for the people of Israel (18:1–2; 19:1–2; 20:1–2) regarding how they are to live with God and avoid the sinful practices of the nations. This grouping is further confirmed by how chapters 18 and 20 bracket chapter 19 with their common subject matter. Following this, 21:1–22:16 is made up of consecutive addresses to Aaron and his sons (21:1, 16–17; 22:1–2) regarding the standards they must uphold as Israel’s priests. Finally, 22:17–33 are contiguous addresses for Aaron and his sons

<sup>4</sup> Coherence of subject matter further confirms that chapters 25 and 26 should be grouped together: fellow Israelites were to be released in the year of Jubilee because they were God’s servants whom he brought out from slavery in Egypt (25:42; 26:13), and the curses culminate in them returning to living under foreign rule (26:33); the land, which also belongs to God (25:23), was to rest in the Sabbath and Jubilee years (25:5, 11), and would receive this rest as a consequence of Israel being excised from it by the curses (26:34–35, 43).

<sup>5</sup> It is unclear whether the conclusion in Leviticus 27:34 (“These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai”) is meant to refer to the entire preceding book or to these final regulations; in either case these regulations would be their own section.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 139.

<sup>7</sup> Hartley effectively makes this point when he acknowledges that the conclusion belongs primarily to the priestly regulations, but that “in the setting of the book [it] concludes the entire sacrificial corpus” (*Leviticus*, 95).

<sup>8</sup> As Milgrom notes, “Lev 7:37–38 distinguish between the *torah* instructions imparted to Moses on Mount Sinai (chaps. 6–7) and the commands given to the *Israelites* (not the priests, 6:2 [Eng. 9]) concerning *their* sacrificial duties—an unmistakable reference to chapters 1–5, the sacrificial laws directed to the Israelites (1:2; 4:2).” Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 75, emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup> It should be recognized that 12:1 and 14:1 address Moses only, but (1) are interspersed with addresses to Moses and Aaron together and (2) deal with the common subject of ritual purity laws, suggesting that we should not treat them as separate.

and the people of Israel (22:17–18) regarding the animals they bring for offerings, that they do not profane God’s name in bringing the wrong ones (22:31).<sup>10</sup>

The remaining two sections do not need to be divided up further: chapters 8–10 make up a single narrative of the ordination of the priesthood and their first offerings, and chapter 24 will be examined in more detail below. Thus, overall there are twelve sections:

1. Laws on offerings for laity and priests (chs. 1–7)
2. Institution of the priesthood (chs. 8–10)
3. Ritual purity laws (chs. 11–15)
4. The Day of Atonement (ch. 16)
5. Laws about the proper place for sacrifice and the proper use of blood (ch. 17)
6. Laws about living with God and not like the other nations (chs. 18–20)
7. Laws about priestly standards (21:1–22:16)
8. Laws about standards of offerings for both priests and laity (22:17–33)
9. Holy festivals to God (ch. 23)
10. Covenant offerings and the case of the blasphemer (ch. 24)
11. Sabbath and Jubilee year regulations, with corresponding blessings and curses (ch. 25–26)
12. Laws on the redemption of things vowed to God (ch. 27)

## 2.2. Stage 2: Connecting Sections

Having delineated the sections of Leviticus, the second stage of our approach is to explain how they relate to one another. Recognizing the centrality of the Day of Atonement, Morales and others have suggested that the entire book is structured as a chiasm, with chapter 16 (or chs. 16–17) acting as the fulcrum between the two halves of the book.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this leads to grouping sections too coarsely in order to make them fit the structure. For example, Morales groups chapters 23–27 and pairs them with chapters 1–7, but we have already seen that markers in the text suggest that chapters 23–27 should be understood as four distinct sections rather than one. Nevertheless, the importance of atonement and the possibility of chiasmic patterns should not be dismissed.

If we consider the sections we have already identified, what we find is that the book is structured as a pair of chiasms rather than one, the first spanning sections 1–8 (chs. 1–22) and the second spanning sections 9–12 (chs. 23–27). Starting with the first chiasm, we can see that both sections 1 and 8 deal with offerings and are addressed to both priests and laity, while both sections 2 and 7 deal with the priesthood itself. Continuing this pattern, both sections 3 and 6 deal with the purity of Israel. Although section 6 contains the famous command to be *holy* in light of God’s holiness (19:1–4; 20:26), we classify this section as *purity* laws because the primary way Israel remains holy through these laws is by maintaining

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<sup>10</sup> The lack of mention of whom the address is for in 22:26 implies that it is a continuation of the previous address. At first glance, 22:31–33 looks as though it is a concluding statement (like we saw for chs. 16, 23, and 25–26), but it is still part of the divine speech, and acts like more of an exhortation than a summary. Its primary function seems to be to emphasize that the commands in 22:17–30 are given so that the people of Israel would not profane God’s name, a claim that has not yet appeared in this divine speech.

<sup>11</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 27–30. In addition to giving his own proposal for the structure of Leviticus, Morales discusses various other proposals that also recognize the centrality of the Day of Atonement.

their *cleanness*: God separates Israel from the nations to live in his holy presence, to which the proper response is not defiling or profaning anything with the uncleanness of the nations.

The final pair in this first chiasm are sections 4 and 5, which both deal with atonement and sacrifice. As the central pair of this chiasm, it is also noteworthy that these sections exhibit a parallel structure, focusing first on the place of sacrifice, and second on the proper use of blood for atonement. We may explain their relation as follows: section 4 explains the proper way of approaching God (16:1–5) and using blood for atonement (16:6–34) and section 5 explains that these are the *only* appropriate ways to do so (17:1–9 and 17:10–16 respectively).

While not as clear, sections 9–12 also form a chiasm. That sections 9 and 12 are connected to one another in some way is suggested by the high frequency of the phrase “to the LORD” in these sections (19 times in section 9, 16 times in section 12) compared to the much lower frequency in the other two sections (3 times in total). Upon reflection, it is unsurprising that this phrase would feature so prominently in these outer sections, since they both focus on giving to God what in some sense first belongs to the people—their time, their property, their servants, or even themselves in service at the tabernacle.

Sections 10 and 11 are similarly related to one another, although this is made more difficult to see by the lack of clarity about the meaning of section 10 (ch. 24). Nevertheless, their relation to each other can be seen once we recognize their thematic and structural unity with one another, and their thematic contrast with the outer two sections of this chiasm.

Starting with the thematic point first, we have said that both sections 9 and 12 deal with things which first belong to people that they can give to God. By contrast, both sections 10 and 11 deal with things that God has given to his people and that they are to revere—his presence, his name, his land, and their freedom as his servants.

Structurally, we see something similar to what we saw in the first chiasm, where each section is made up of subsections that parallel each other. Just as the lamps are arranged each day and the bread is prepared every seven iterations of this (24:1–9), so too is the Sabbath year to be observed every seven years and the Jubilee every seven iterations of this (ch. 25). And just as the divine name, which is a source of blessing if revered (Ex 20:24) but a cause for punishment if misused (Lev 24:10–23), so too is the land a source of blessing if revered but a cause for national punishment if misused (ch. 26).<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3. Stage 3: Overall Organization

We turn now to the final stage of our approach to the structure of Leviticus, and note the high-level relationships that exist between the sections and parts of the book. A number of commentators have noted that there is a thematic shift around chapter 16. Hartley<sup>13</sup> and Wenham<sup>14</sup> characterize it as a shift

<sup>12</sup> The covenant offerings (24:1–9) and the concern for God’s name (24:10–23) are naturally grouped together, despite this not being as explicit in the text as chapters 25–26. As Morales argues, the covenant offerings celebrate God’s presence among Israel, which is likewise indicated by his giving them his name to bear, as in Exodus 20:7 (*Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 187–94).

<sup>13</sup> Hartley, *Leviticus*, xxxv.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5.

from cultic or priestly operation to national holiness, while Hill<sup>15</sup> and Morales<sup>16</sup> characterize it as a shift from *approaching* God to *living in* his presence. The latter characterization is superior in that it provides some reason for the progression: once Israel is able to approach God properly they can begin to safely live in his presence. Each of these commentators see this shift covering the whole (or a large part of) Leviticus, but in our case it is restricted to the first chiasm. Thus, we can say that this first chiasm is concerned with “laws of presence,” made up of “laws of approach” focused on how to properly approach God in sections 1–4 (chs. 1–16) and “laws of life” focused on how to live in his presence in sections 5–9 (chs. 17–22).

Building upon this, the second chiasm instructs Israel in how to specially honor God, which is a unique privilege and responsibility they have in virtue of this life with him that he has made possible. This is not merely about living appropriately in his presence—something already covered in the laws of life—but about how they are to use their privileged position to honor God with what is theirs (sections 9 and 12) and what he has given them (sections 10 and 11). Accordingly, we shall classify this second chiasm as the “laws of honor.” As with the laws of presence, we can also detect a shift in focus between the first and second half of these laws. Sections 9 and 10 focus on Israel honoring God with their *being*, by humbling themselves before their savior and provider, regularly giving up time to dedicate special days and feasts to him, and revering his name above all else. Sections 11 and 12, on the other hand, focus on Israel honoring God with their *belongings*, by recognizing that these ultimately belong to God and that they are blessings from him.<sup>17</sup>

In order to better understand the relationship between these two chiasms we can liken the nation as a whole to an individual priest. A priest is made holy by being set apart for service in the tabernacle, and he maintains his holiness by upholding his cleanness according to the priestly laws of life in section 7 (Lev 21:1–22:16). But it is not enough for a priest to merely *maintain* his holy status—he also needs to *live it out* by doing what such a status enables him to do, namely perform his priestly duties.<sup>18</sup> On the other side of this “priestly analogy,” the nation of Israel is *made* holy by God choosing them as his people and redeeming them from Egypt (Exod 19:1–6), establishing his presence among them (Exod 40:34–38), and enabling him to access him through the first half of the laws of approach. The laws of life show Israel how to *maintain* this holy status, and the laws of honor show them how to *live it out*.

This proposal has a number of features that commend it for serious consideration independent of our aims here: it proceeds from clear organizational indicators within the text itself, and makes no upfront assumption about how many parts it should have; it does justice to the well-recognized high-level progression from laws about approaching God to laws about living with him; it accounts for

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 130–31. Hill sees the shift occurring between chapters 10 and 11, but we place it between chapters 16 and 17 because the concern for approaching the tabernacle continues after chapter 11, in the purity laws of chapters 11–15 (12:4, 13:46, 15:31) and the introduction of the Day of Atonement (16:1–3).

<sup>16</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 27–30.

<sup>17</sup> By “belonging” I mean something or someone over which one has control, such that giving a belonging to God involves forgoing this control for the sake of God. By contrast, giving one’s “being” involves ordering oneself towards God as someone worthy of worship.

<sup>18</sup> We may equally speak of “fulfilling” his holy status. For clarity, however, we use the language of “living out” in order to preserve the biblical theological sense of fulfillment, which we will discuss in the next section.

every section in the book, without relegating chapter 27 (section 12) to an appendix; and it provides an explanation for the role of chapter 24 (section 10) within Leviticus.

### 3. Christ's Fulfillment of Leviticus

Having defended the double-chiastic structure of Leviticus, we now turn to the task of interpreting its laws in light of the work of Christ. Of course, we must say that Christ *fulfills* the law (Matt 5:17), but the question before us is how this fulfillment works for the laws we find in Leviticus. Why is it that the command to love our neighbor as ourselves still holds importance (Gal 5:13–14; cf. Lev 19:18), but other purity laws like those involving clean and unclean animals have only symbolic significance to believers (Acts 10:13–15, 28; cf. Lev 11)? Why is it that Paul can repeat the reasoning used in the Jubilee year regulations when talking about slaves and masters (Eph 6:9; cf. Lev 25:42–43), but say that we are no longer bound to revere certain days as special (Col 2:16; cf. Lev 23)? To be clear, our question is not how we can know *which* laws still hold some relevance—this can largely be determined by study of the New Testament—but rather to understand *why* the laws of Leviticus were influenced as they were by the work of Christ. In other words, we wish to glimpse what the New Testament authors saw when they looked at Leviticus in light of Christ.

As Kloosterman notes, our thinking about fulfillment has been unhelpfully shaped by the aims of the traditional threefold division of the law: this division encourages us to think about fulfillment in terms of continuity and discontinuity, when instead we should think about it in terms of organic growth and maturity brought about by Christ.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Sklar notes, “If what we see in the Old Testament is an acorn, what we see in Jesus is a magnificent oak.”<sup>20</sup> Essentially, Christ fulfills the law by “fully filling it out,” that is, by encapsulating in himself the true substance of which the law is a mere shadow. This does not mean that all laws are equally applicable today as they were when given to Israel at Sinai, but rather that our question needs to change from “does this law continue to apply today?” into “how is the true substance of this law filled out in Christ, and how should we therefore think about it in light of his work?” With this question in hand, we will look at how we can proceed from the structure of Leviticus as a starting point in coming to an answer.

#### 3.1. The Laws of Presence

The laws of presence (Lev 1–22) cover four areas of the Levitical system that make living in God’s presence possible: offerings, priests, purity, and atonement. As we saw above, each of these areas corresponds to a pair of sections within the first chiasm of Leviticus, one within the laws of approach and one within the laws of life.

Starting with the purity laws, their aim is to regulate the daily lives of the people of Israel, teaching them to separate the clean from the unclean in order to avoid profaning God’s holiness. We have mentioned that there is a shift in focus between the two halves of the first chiasm—from a focus on *approaching God* to a focus on *living in his presence*—and this shift is clearly visible in the purity laws. The purity laws of approach (Lev 11–15) are concerned with the state of the people as they approach

<sup>19</sup> Nelson D. Kloosterman, “The Old Testament, Ethics, and Preaching: Letting Confessional Light Dispel a Hermeneutical Shadow,” in *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam*, ed. Jason Van Vliet (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 189–90.

<sup>20</sup> Sklar, *Leviticus*, 73.

God at the tabernacle. As Morales notes, this focus is clear from the concern for separating uncleanness from the tent of meeting (12:4, 15:31) and the bookending of the section with references to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, who died for improperly approaching the tent of meeting (10:1–3; 16:1–2).<sup>21</sup> By contrast, the purity laws of life (Lev 18–20) are concerned with the state of the people as they live with God and his people. This difference is evident in how uncleanness is treated: in the first set of laws people need only cleanse themselves before approaching the tabernacle, whereas in the second if someone becomes unclean they are to be cut off from the people.<sup>22</sup>

This distinction between the purity laws of approach and the purity laws of life provides a natural account of why Christ brought an end to the former (Acts 10:13–15, 28; Rom 14:14) but the latter are repurposed as guides for believers (Gal 5:13–14; Rom 13:9–10). Because of Christ, the temple is no longer a building *external* to God’s people, but is rather *constituted by* God’s people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Since the laws of approach presuppose the need to *approach* a temple (or tabernacle) outside of ourselves, and since there is no longer any such temple, it follows that these laws can no longer serve as a guide for our daily lives like they did for Israel. By contrast, Christ did not stop us from living with God—quite the opposite! Because of Christ, God now indwells believers by his Holy Spirit, and since this is the same God who gave the laws of life, we can still look to them for wisdom in this life we have with him.

Something similar can be said for the other laws of approach and laws of life, since they share the same purpose with the respective purity laws. However, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that the laws of life simply continue in Christ whereas the laws of approach simply do not.

Regarding the laws of life, although their purpose remains, they were originally expressed in terms of old covenant realities, and therefore need to be interpreted in light of how those realities have changed. Among the laws of life, the purity laws are unique in how independent they are of these old covenant realities: they focus primarily on the daily lives of God’s people rather than the particular Levitical expressions of atonement, the priesthood, or offerings. Accordingly, when we apply Leviticus to life in Christ, we find that the purity laws of life are primarily influenced by the differences in daily life while the other laws are often radically altered by Christ’s fulfillment of the Levitical system. This is why Paul can quote the command to love our neighbor as ourselves without any modification (Gal 5:13–14; Rom 13:8–10), but must recontextualize the notion of sacrifice to a covenant where animal sacrifices are no longer required (Rom 12:1). The latter captures the purpose of the sacrificial laws of life, but within a radically different expression.

Regarding the laws of approach, although their purpose is completed in Christ, it does not follow that they have no relevance today whatsoever. Rather, they continue to have *typological* relevance, in that they help us to understand and appreciate the work of Christ. For example, these laws express the incompatibility of uncleanness with God’s holiness—which is still true—and the need for atonement in order to approach him—which is now provided by Christ.

When considering each of the areas covered by the laws of presence (offerings, priests, purity, atonement), we must avoid the temptation to abstract them from their place within Leviticus. Each area appears on both sides of the chiasm for the laws of presence, indicating that they each serve multiple

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<sup>21</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 153–54.

<sup>22</sup> What exactly it means to be cut off from the people is unclear, but Exodus 31:14 suggests it involves the death penalty. Wenham proposes that it involves direct divine judgement (*The Book of Leviticus*, 125), and Milgrom proposes that it might also involve being denied life in the hereafter (*Leviticus*, 73).

purposes; and it is in reference to these purposes that we approach the question of relevance. So, it is not the offerings *as such* that are only typologically relevant, but the offerings *as a means of approaching God*. The offerings *as a part of life with God*, on the other hand, find a place in the new covenant as something relevant to our daily lives, albeit with an expression that has been radically altered: we now offer sacrifices of praise (Heb 13:15), spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5), and our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). We have seen something similar for the purity laws, and something similar can also be said for atonement and the priesthood.

### 3.2. The Laws of Honor

Having identified the laws of honor (chs. 23–27) as a unit within the structure of Leviticus, we have been able to recognize their role in the theology of the book. The laws of approach play a role in Israel becoming holy through God’s presence among them, the laws of life outline their responsibility in maintaining this holy status, and the laws of honor show them how to live out this holy status, calling them to honor God with what is theirs and what God has given them.

Now, the way a holy status is lived out is always connected to the way it is established, as we see with the priest who lives out his holiness by performing the very duties he was set apart to do. In Israel’s case, they live out their holiness by living out their new identity as God’s redeemed people, called to live with him in the promised land. This purpose ties the laws of honor together, and gives us a path forward in reading them in light of Christ.

Similar to Israel, believers today are redeemed to belong to God and are called therefore to honor him above all else. As Paul urges the Corinthians, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19–20).<sup>23</sup> Later, in the same letter, he exhorts them, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (10:31). Unlike Israel, however, Christ did not merely redeem us from a foreign nation but from *sin itself*, and he did not merely secure a life with God in a temple external to ourselves but a life with God who *indwells us by his Holy Spirit*. So, the redemption and life we find in Christ are fully filled out versions of the redemption and life originally granted to Israel.

The consequence of this is that when it comes to their fulfillment in Christ, the laws of honor are similar to the laws of life: their purpose remains applicable after Christ, but their expression in terms of old covenant realities needs to be reckoned with when working out that application. Specifically, the laws of honor more closely resemble the non-purity laws of life, since Christ has filled out the redemption and life of God’s people, and thereby radically altered the way we are to live out that redeemed life in honor of God. This continued purpose with altered expression explains why the New Testament authors saw fit to repurpose the laws of honor without simply repeating them.

Consider, for instance, the Levitical calendar (Lev 23). The weekly Sabbath was a way for Israel to remember and celebrate God’s sanctification of them by his life with them in the temple in the promised land.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the annual festivals were ways for Israel to remember and celebrate God’s redemption

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<sup>23</sup> All Scripture citations in this article follow the ESV.

<sup>24</sup> In Exodus, the Sabbath commandment is explained both in terms of God sanctifying Israel (31:12–14) and in terms of them imitating God’s actions in the creation week (31:15–17; cf. 20:8–11). One way to explain how both can be true is that the former provides the purpose for the Sabbath, while the latter explains why the work-then-rest pattern is a fitting way to fulfill this purpose. Since God sanctifies Israel by his presence among them, Deuteronomy 5:15 should be understood as a reiteration of the purpose of the Sabbath.

of them and provision for them in the land he was to give them. The purpose of such laws is clearly still applicable today: it is right and fitting to celebrate God's sanctification and redemption of us, and remember our dependence upon him. But the particular expression of these laws in Leviticus celebrates a specific history that is no longer shared by all of God's people: we are not sanctified by his presence in a temple, we are not redeemed from a foreign nation, and he does not provide for us in a particular land he promised our forefathers. It is in virtue of this continued purpose with altered expression that Paul can assure us that we are not bound to celebrate certain days as special (Col 2:16–17) and yet call us to uphold the Lord's supper until he returns (1 Cor 11:26).

Consider also the laws of redemption for the Jubilee year (Lev 25:8–55). These laws begin and end with the rationale that Israel and the land ultimately belong to God their redeemer and therefore it is wrong for Israelites to withhold redemption from one another (25:23, 55). Again, the purpose of such laws remains relevant today: we are to live in light of the fact that all of creation belongs to God, and that as his redeemed people we are all his servants. Unlike with Israel, however, our redemption in Christ does not bring with it special privileges to any promised land in the present.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Paul does not call Christians to uphold the Sabbath or Jubilee years, but he does call masters to treat their slaves well since both serve the same Lord (Eph 6:9). And just as God's redemption of the Israelites was supposed to motivate them to show mercy to their poor kinsmen (Lev 25:35–38),<sup>26</sup> so too the mercy and forgiveness shown by God to us in Christ is supposed to motivate us to show mercy and forgiveness to others (Luke 6:32–36; Col 3:12–13).

### 3.3. The Laws Outside of Leviticus

Before we conclude, let us comment on how what we have said relates to the broader task of reading the laws of the Pentateuch in light of Christ. In Leviticus two things coincide that need not coincide in general, namely (1) the theological purpose of a passage containing laws and (2) the purpose of those laws within the old covenant. These happen to coincide in Leviticus because the theology of the book is centered around the Levitical system and expressed through laws that define that system. But these need not coincide in general, and we must show care when applying lessons learned from Leviticus to other books of the Pentateuch. We may be able to categorize laws found in passages outside of Leviticus in terms of the purposes we have identified from the structure of Leviticus, but this will not necessarily help us understand the theological purpose of those passages in their contexts. And the analysis of laws in terms of purpose and expression may be of use when applied to passages containing laws, but unless the purpose of such passages requires that all their laws serve the same purpose within the old covenant, this will likely not help us to determine the relevance those laws have today.

For example, we have said that the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind Israel of God's sanctification of them, achieved by his living among them. The coming together of God and humanity is central to the

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<sup>25</sup> As Martin notes, "The New Testament presents the land promised to Abraham and his offspring as finally fulfilled in the (physical) new creation, as a result of the person and work of Christ.... In the present, believers live as exiles (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11) between the inauguration and consummation of the kingdom and anticipate the final fulfilment and enjoyment of these covenant blessings in his presence in the new heaven and new earth won by the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 21–22)." Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, NSBT 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 119.

<sup>26</sup> As Hartley notes, "This reference to the Exodus also communicates the principle that Yahweh requires and expects expressions of mercy from those to whom he has shown mercy" (*Leviticus*, 440).

covenant with Israel as well as a major theme in the book of Exodus. Given this, it is natural to read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17 as a reflection of this theme, with the Sabbath commandment (20:8–11) bridging the commandments about God (20:1–7) with the commandments about our neighbor (20:12–17). If the purpose of the Ten Commandments in Exodus is to reflect this coming together that God has achieved through Israel, then it would be natural to read this as a type of the unity between God and humanity achieved by Christ. On the other hand, with respect to each law's purpose within the old covenant, we have already seen that the Sabbath commandment should be understood as a law of honor whereas the other nine commandments should likely be understood as laws of life. Thus, studying the Ten Commandments as a passage in the context of Exodus yields a different (though not contradictory) result to studying merely the purposes of the laws mentioned therein. The former does not help us to determine whether the Sabbath commandment is still a guide for daily life in Christ, and the latter does not help to discern the theology of the passage within the context of the book.

#### *4. Conclusion*

We have arrived, then, at a method for reading the laws of Leviticus in light of Christ. When approaching a law (or set of laws), we start by analyzing it in terms of two components: (1) the purpose of the overarching section to which it belongs, given by the structure of Leviticus, and (2) the particular way it is expressed in relation to old covenant realities. Insofar as a law serves a purpose which has been completed by Christ, we should seek to understand it typologically when reading it in light of Christ, rather than try to find some guidance in it for our daily life. In this regard, we have said that because of Christ we no longer need to approach God in a temple external to ourselves, and that therefore the purpose behind the laws of approach remains relevant only in a typological sense. We no longer need to purify ourselves before approaching God, provide atonement for ourselves or our community before enjoying fellowship with him, or rely on human priests to mediate our communion with him, because each of these roles is fulfilled by Jesus.

On the other hand, we continue to live in God's presence and he continues to deserve honor, and so the purposes behind the laws of life and the laws of honor remain relevant to the way in which we live our daily lives in Christ. In such cases, the expression of the law (or set of laws) plays an important role in how we read it in light of Christ. This is because even if the purpose of such laws remains relevant, the particular expression they have within Leviticus may depend on things that have changed since they were originally given. Broadly speaking, there are three options here: (1) a law may be expressed in terms of old covenant realities that have been radically altered by the ushering in of the new covenant, (2) it may be expressed in terms of ancient practices or features of life that have changed with the passage of time, or (3) it may be expressed so generally as to not depend upon anything that has changed between the giving of the law and the coming of Christ. To the extent that the old covenant realities have analogues in the new covenant we may repurpose the law, with the remainder being left to a typological reading; to the extent that the ancient practices resemble modern practices we may repurpose the law; and if the law has a general expression then little, if anything, needs to be done in order to repurpose it—as in the case of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18).

It is noteworthy that these options resemble the traditional threefold division of the law into ceremonial, civil, and moral. This aligns with the suggestion we mentioned at the outset, that the threefold division can be seen as an account of the categories of application rather than as an exegetical

tool. It tells us the possible outcomes of our hermeneutical method, but not how we should arrive at these outcomes. Our proposal recognizes these categories (or something resembling them), connects them to a broader hermeneutical method, and provides an exegetical framework for applying this method to Leviticus.

# Old Testament Hope: Psalm 2, the Psalter, and the Anointed One

— S. D. Ellison —

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**Abstract:** Scholarly discussions concerning the nature of OT hope are arguably most passionate and divisive when the figure of the anointed one (often designated the messiah) is in view. This article suggests that the Psalter may offer a profitable avenue in which to reconsider the debate, and employs Psalm 2 as an example. By considering its placement in the Psalter, content, and use in the NT, it is concluded that Psalm 2 is a signpost to the future hope of a coming Davidic king. In this way, we learn, the Christian Scriptures document, unfold, and realise OT hope.

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## 1. Introduction

Despite the testimony of the NT there remains a divergence of opinion concerning OT hope. Is OT hope expected to enjoy immediate fulfilment? Is OT hope expected to experience more distant or progressive fulfilment? Is OT hope ultimately eschatological? The debate is perhaps most pronounced in the discussion surrounding the figure of the anointed one, often designated the messiah.<sup>1</sup> This article will seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion by examining the figure of the

<sup>1</sup> The root from which the Hebrew word is derived is מָשַׁח. Across the languages of the ANE the root experienced differing levels of development. In West Semitic languages it occurs most often with the meaning of 'measuring'; the highly developed Aramaic branch has the meaning 'anointing/anoint', and in Arabic it possesses a range of meanings (including 'rub', 'measure', and 'anoint'). In Hebrew the root has given rise, principally, to two words. First the verb, מָשַׁח, meaning 'to anoint'. The majority of uses of this verb are in reference to the anointing of kings; thus, it has become a technical term with a specialised sense. However, it is acknowledged that its use is elliptical. Second the noun, מָשִׁיחַ, meaning 'anointed or anointed one'. Some scholars prefer the term 'verbal noun', as it is only ever used in conjunction with animate objects. Indeed, it has even been labelled an adjective because of its particular use. As a result of the rich vein of meaning associated with the noun it has now become a fixed *theologoumenon*. See especially, Victor P. Hamilton, 'מָשַׁח', *TWOT* 530–33; John N. Oswalt, 'מָשַׁח', *NIDOTTE* 2:1123–27; Klaus Seybold, 'מָשַׁח', *TDOT* 9:43–54. It is equally important to note that the messianic impetus of the OT is elucidated by more than a mere word study. For helpful contributions on this front see Michael A. Rydelnik, 'The Messiah and His Titles', in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of*

anointed one in Psalm 2 with specific reference to the psalm's placement in the Psalter and its use in the NT.

The Psalms offer a profitable avenue into this debate given they are (on the whole) originally independent compositions, compiled as the Psalter by an editor(s), and frequently quoted in the NT. Craigie captures how these stages demonstrate the development of OT hope when commenting on Psalm 2:

The words of the psalm do not change, but its function and significance have changed over the passage of time. Consequently, there is a change, at least a development, in the theological significance of the psalm; whereas in its original form, its theology pertained to the role of God in relation to the Davidic kings, that theology eventually blossomed into a fully messianic theology.... The latter stage is not a new theology, but a growth and development from the initial nucleus.<sup>2</sup>

This article will demonstrate that while Psalm 2 originated from an historical event and references an actual king, its placement in the Psalter establishes it as a signpost pointing its reader to the future hope of a coming Davidic king.

## 2. Psalm 2

### 2.1. The Significance of Placement

One way in which this future hope of a coming Davidic king is highlighted is in Psalm 2's placement in the Psalter. Before his untimely death Wilson had produced a significant volume of work that evidenced a purposeful shaping of the Psalter.<sup>3</sup> He observed that the Royal Psalms 'are widely distributed throughout the Psalter'.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this observation is realised by comparing the Psalter to other ANE literature. Throughout the ANE royal hymns tended to be kept together in collections. It would therefore appear that the Psalter is drawing attention to their placement by separating them.<sup>5</sup> The

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*the Messiah in the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 29–39; Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 1–4.

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 40–41.

<sup>3</sup> Most notably, Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985). However, also see Gerald H. Wilson, 'The Shape of the Book of Psalms', *Int* 46 (1992): 129–42; Gerald H. Wilson, 'Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms', in *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann Jr., JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 72–82; Gerald H. Wilson, 'Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of the Psalms in the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promises', in *Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. C. McCann Jr., JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 42–51; Gerald H. Wilson, 'The Structure of the Psalter', in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip S. Johnson and David G. Firth (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 229–46; Gerald H. Wilson, 'King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter', in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 391–406.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, 'Evidence of Editorial Division in the Hebrew Psalter', *VT* 34 (1984): 344.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 162.

question this poses for us is: What significance is there in the placement of Psalm 2 near the beginning of the Psalter?

In short, contemporary scholarship affirms that Psalm 2's placement near the beginning of the Psalter is noteworthy.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the reason we find it here is that it forms part two of a two-part introduction to the Psalter. That together Psalms 1 and 2 form a two-part introduction to the Psalter is supported by a number of features. First, neither possesses a superscription. This is significant in Book 1 as David is ascribed authorship of all but four psalms (Pss 1; 2; 10; 33).<sup>7</sup> With both Psalms 10 and 33 being intimately connected to the preceding psalms (and thus tainted with a Davidic hue), this sets Psalms 1 and 2 apart from the rest. Second, the term 'blessed' (אַשְׁרֵי) forms an inclusio, occurring in 1:1 and 2:12. The Psalter's reader is reminded that blessed is the one who walks righteously and takes refuge in YHWH.<sup>8</sup> Third, both psalms begin with the imagery of a group of people meditating/plotting (הִגְהָה).<sup>9</sup> Fourth, both psalms end with a consideration of the 'way' (דֶּרֶךְ).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the enemies of YHWH will perish (1:6; 2:12) if they choose the wrong way.<sup>11</sup> These correlations encourage McCann to conclude that 'Psalm 2 portrays in corporate terms what Psalm 1 depicts in individual terms'.<sup>12</sup> However, it seems that these correlations could be pressed further. On the basis that Psalm 1 also shares similarities to Joshua 1:8, I want to suggest that Psalm 1 depicts an idyllic royal figure who is the role model for the actual

<sup>6</sup> Charles A. Briggs, *Psalms*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 1:11; William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 8; James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 101; David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 73–74, 245; Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBCOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 44; Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 205; Robert L. Cole, 'An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2', *JSOT* 26 (2002): 76; Jamie A. Grant, 'The Psalms and the King', in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip S. Johnson and David G. Firth (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 108; David M. Howard Jr., 'The Psalms and Current Study', in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip S. Johnson and David G. Firth (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 26; W. Dennis Tucker Jr., 'Book of Psalms 1', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 589; K. Barker, 'Psalms of the Powerless: A Theological Interpretation of Imprecation', in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*, ed. A. G. Shead (Nottingham: Apollos, 2013), 214; Robert L. Cole, 'Psalms 1 and 2: The Psalter's Introduction', in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutz and David M. Howard Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 2013); Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, HBM 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 64; Mark J. Whiting, 'Psalms 1 and 2 as a Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Psalter', *EvQ* 85 (2013): 246–62; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth L. Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 65.

<sup>7</sup> On reading the titles as authorship ascriptions see, Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 68–71.

<sup>8</sup> deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr., 'The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections', in *NIB* 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 689.

<sup>10</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 95.

<sup>11</sup> My gratitude to Ben Davis for identifying this link between the psalms.

<sup>12</sup> McCann Jr., 'Psalms', 689.

royal figure of Psalm 2, Israel's king.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as Wenham asserts, 'the juxtaposition of Psalms 1 and 2 suggests that the righteous of Psalm 1 could be identified with the king of Psalm 2, while the wicked of Psalm 1 could be the king's enemies.'<sup>14</sup>

This reading, however, is not universally accepted.<sup>15</sup> Note two objections in particular: first, Anderson argues that Psalms 1 and 2 could not constitute a literary unit as their content is too diverse.<sup>16</sup> More significantly, Gillingham observes that Psalm 1 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, while the final word begins with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet. She therefore suggests that Psalm 1 is a self-contained unit.<sup>17</sup> In response to both objections it should be clarified that the claim is not that Psalms 1 and 2 constitute a literary unit. Rather, they serve together as a two-part introduction—each informing the other. Thus, Whybray's conclusion is somewhat misguided: 'In view of these differences of opinion it is probably unwise to use the hypothesis of the unity of Psalms 1 and 2 as a basis for an understanding of the composition of the Psalter.'<sup>18</sup>

As a result, it should be asserted that 'Psalms 1 and 2 offer a reading strategy for the Psalter by providing a number of its generic illocutions.'<sup>19</sup> The placement of Psalm 2 is significant. Regarding this significance Leupold states: 'Standing almost at the beginning of the Psalter, this psalm gives due prominence to the Messianic truth, which looms large in the Psalms.'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, coupled with the picture of the idyllic royal figure of Psalm 1, Leupold's comment finds further evidence. From the outset the Psalter's reader is introduced to the concept of an ideal Davidic king embodying YHWH's reign for the sake of the righteous. These claims are further demonstrated in the psalm's content.

## 2.2. Gods and Kings: Style and Substance

Somewhat poetically, and yet accurately, Weiser summarises the scene in Psalm 2: 'A race of pigmies is face to face with a giant!'<sup>21</sup> It is evident that there is a face-off in this psalm; kings (and presumably their gods) square up to one another. Yet the predominant figure in this psalm is YHWH, closely followed by his anointed one. Our concern is in identifying the agent of YHWH. Is he simply a king? Is he merely a Davidic king? Or, is he someone superior? In answering these questions, we must first appreciate the psalm's poetry, assess its supposed historical setting, and comment on some textual issues. Only then will we be in a position to suggest the identity of YHWH's anointed in Psalm 2.

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<sup>13</sup> On this issue see particularly, Cole, *Psalms 1–2*; Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, AcBib 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 64. I want to thank Dr James McKeown for bringing this reference to my attention.

<sup>15</sup> For example, John T. Willis, 'Psalm 1: An Entity', *ZAW* 91 (1979): 381–401.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold A. Anderson, *Psalms*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 1:63. However, he does proceed to then concede that there are links in content between the two.

<sup>17</sup> Susan E. Gillingham, 'An Introduction to Reception History with Particular Reference to Psalm 1', *RevScRel* 85 (2011): 567.

<sup>18</sup> Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup 222 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Barker, 'Psalms of the Powerless', 214.

<sup>20</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 41.

<sup>21</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell, OTL (London: SCM, 1962), 112.

Psalm 2 is an expertly crafted poem. This is apparent in its structure as it naturally divides into four strophes: verses 1–3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12.<sup>22</sup> Alternative divisions have been proposed, but they are not convincing. For example, Dahood advocates a three-fold division (1–3, 4–9, and 10–12), yet proceeds to further divide his second strophe into two sub-sections, and therefore revoke his original breakdown of the psalm.<sup>23</sup> Rather, there are four movements in the psalm: enemy kings rebel (vv. 1–3); YHWH responds (vv. 4–6); Israel's king responds (vv. 7–9); enemy kings are warned (vv. 10–12). In addition to its structure, the skilled craftsmanship of Psalm 2 is also evident in the employment of several facets of Hebrew poetry. Grogan observes that 'synonymous parallelism appears in almost every verse.'<sup>24</sup> There is also onomatopoeia (v. 1), rhyme (v. 3), and chiasmus (v. 5).<sup>25</sup> Anderson even argues that Psalm 2 offers the clearest evidence of metre in Hebrew poetry.<sup>26</sup> Thus, 'As poetry the psalm has a striking and dramatic aesthetic of composition.'<sup>27</sup> This powerful poetry parallels Psalm 2's content.

Essentially summarising the previous paragraph, Craigie writes, 'The psalm is effective and dramatic in its literary style. The poet has used fairly short lines, which highlight the drama of the moment which the psalm reflects.'<sup>28</sup> The exact moment which Psalm 2 reflects has long been understood to be a coronation ceremony.<sup>29</sup> This historical reconstruction was spawned in Mowinckel's work, most notably *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*.<sup>30</sup> Central to his development of this reconstruction was his observation of striking similarities between Israelite practice and that of other ANE cultures.<sup>31</sup> In my judgement Mowinckel's reconstruction is somewhat presumptuous. To begin with, Longman suggests that Mowinckel (and equally, those who follow him) was overzealous in his comparison. More specifically, it is not merely similarities that are important but also differences.<sup>32</sup> Mowinckel failed to adequately consider the distinctiveness of Israelite culture in comparison to other ANE cultures. Additionally, the individual psalms have been purposefully divorced from their original setting and placed in a new literary setting.

<sup>22</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, CBSC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 8; S. R. Driver, *Studies in the Psalms* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), 51; Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 41; Weiser, *Psalms*, 110; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 125; Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 108; Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 56; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 65.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:65.

<sup>27</sup> Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> Weiser, *Psalms*, 109; Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, 7; John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM, 1976), 112; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 64; Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 117; John Day, *Psalms*, OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 12, 92; Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 65.

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund O. P. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship: Two Volumes in One*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Mowinckel, 55. Weiser, *Psalms*, 110–11 Cf. Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:70; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 113; McCann Jr., 'Psalms', 689–90; Gard Granerød, 'A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation? Psalm 2:6 in Light of Egyptian Royal Ideology', *VT* 60 (2010): 323–36.

<sup>32</sup> Tremper Longman III, 'Psalms 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Poetry and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 593, 604.

This is evident in the inherent difficulty of dating individual psalms. At the beginning of the twentieth century Gunkel asserted, ‘current research into the dating of the royal psalms shows an amazing state of complete confusion.’<sup>33</sup> Despite the significant progress that has been made in archaeological and biblical studies in the past century, there remains considerable debate regarding the Psalter’s date and dating individual psalms. Hence VanGemenen concludes, ‘There is no general agreement on the historical context of this psalm.’<sup>34</sup> Therefore, although Psalm 2 can be considered pre-exilic,<sup>35</sup> there is minimal information contained in the psalm to permit an historical reconstruction of the exact moment which it reflects.<sup>36</sup> Does this mean that while Psalm 2 is a powerful poem it is impossible to identify the anointed one?

Before we can answer this question, we must briefly comment on three textual issues in Psalm 2. First, what is YHWH’s relationship to the Israelite king? In various ANE cultures the king was widely understood to be divine.<sup>37</sup> The king’s divinity is ascribed to the fact that he is the result of divine procreation. Therefore, some commentators have misconstrued the begetting of an actual Israelite king in Psalm 2:7. This betrays the aforementioned issue in Mowinckel’s work of observing only the similarities between ANE and Israelite culture. Rather, as Longman warns, ‘The best approach to studying the psalms in light of their cultural analogues is not simply to draw on parallels but also to take note of the differences that exist.’<sup>38</sup> Several differences are apparent: there is difficulty in locating evidence for the deification of the Israelite king in the OT;<sup>39</sup> there is no ‘mother’ present in Psalm 2 to bear the perceived child of YHWH;<sup>40</sup> and the use of the term ‘today’ in Psalm 2:7 insinuates the employment of metaphorical language.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore preferable to understand Psalm 2:7 as a ‘performative declaration of adoption.’<sup>42</sup> Instead of a crude act of sexual intercourse between the Creator and the creature which results in a deified king, Psalm 2:7 communicates the legal adoption of the Israelite king by YHWH (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14).<sup>43</sup> The relationship is intimate, but this intimacy is the result of a divine declaration as opposed to divine procreation.

Second, what is YHWH’s relationship to the foreign kings? This question may be answered by considering the use of Aramaic in Psalm 2:12 for ‘son’ (בֶּרֶךְ). The use of Aramaic is highly unusual for a

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<sup>33</sup> Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, trans. James D. Nogalski, MLBS (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 118.

<sup>34</sup> Willem A. VanGemenen, *Psalms*, revised ed., EBC 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 89.

<sup>35</sup> Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:13; VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Day, *Psalms*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> Longman III, ‘Psalms 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background,’ 593.

<sup>39</sup> Day, *Psalms*, 102.

<sup>40</sup> Granerød, ‘A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation?’, 334.

<sup>41</sup> Driver, *Studies in the Psalms*, 58; Gerald B. Cooke, ‘Israelite King as Son of God,’ *ZAW* 73 (1961): 209; Granerød, ‘A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation?’, 334.

<sup>42</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 100. Cf. Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, 11; Granerød, ‘A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation?’, 334–36; Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 171; George A. Gunn, ‘Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah,’ *BSac* 169 (2012): 431–32.

<sup>43</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 46.

pre-exilic Hebrew text and has led to numerous unsatisfactory attempts to amend the text.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is all the more intriguing given the author of the Psalm has already used the Hebrew for 'son' in verse 7. A number of solutions may account for this strange occurrence. It is possible that the poet is enjoying a play on words with 'iron' in verse 9 (בְּרִזָּה). Alternatively, it avoids dissonance with the following phrase in verse 12.<sup>45</sup> However, Craigie's suggestion is worthy of further consideration:

Aramaic is known to have been used in Syria-Palestine from at least the ninth century B.C.... The words are addressed (in the mouth of the poet) to *foreign* nations and kings (Aramaic speaking?), whereas בֶּן, 'son,' in v7, is used by God in speaking to his king. It is possible that the poet deliberately uses a foreign word (loan-word) to dramatize his poetic intent at this point.<sup>46</sup>

The relationship between YHWH and the foreign kings is not so intimate. What is implied by the use of a 'loan-word' in Psalm 2:12 is stated explicitly in the rest of the verse.

Third, the opening phrase of verse 12 has been labelled the *crux interpretum* of Psalm 2. McCann has stated that Psalm 2:12 is impossible to understand.<sup>47</sup> Others in agreement with McCann have proffered interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory alternatives.<sup>48</sup> The exact pointing and translation are debateable to a greater or lesser degree. Nevertheless, the meaning of the entire verse is clear: the close of Psalm 2 demands sincere submission and homage to be given to YHWH's king. Once more the relationship between YHWH and the foreign kings is lucid; they are enemies. Yet these earthly kings may enjoy blessedness by bowing before YHWH's anointed king.

### 2.3. God's King: A Coming Davidide

Who is this king? It seems to me that the style and substance of the psalm point to a coming Davidide. This is evident in that the language of 'anointed one' is predominantly applied to Israel's kings and yet at the same time this psalm remains in use beyond the supposed extinction of the Davidic line.

As observed above, Psalm 2 possesses four strophes, each building on and developing the previous. In the first strophe (vv. 1–3) astonishment is expressed at the folly of those who have gathered against YHWH and his anointed. This is emphasised by the lingering question: 'Why?' (v. 1).<sup>49</sup> The astonishment is expressed with confidence because, as the second strophe (vv. 4–6) makes clear, the one against whom they rebel is seated in the heavens and has appointed his anointed as king. That is to say, he is omnipotent. In strophe three (vv. 7–9) the close link between YHWH and his anointed king becomes explicit and is evidently based on previous promises made by YHWH to the Davidic king.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the psalm closes in strophe four (vv. 10–12) with the inevitable sole option: refuge in YHWH by way of the rebels' submission to the anointed king.

<sup>44</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 57; Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 177.

<sup>46</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 64, emphasis original.

<sup>47</sup> McCann Jr., 'Psalms', 690.

<sup>48</sup> For example, William L. Holladay, 'New Proposal for the Crux in Psalm 2:12', *VT* 28 (1978): 110–12.

<sup>49</sup> Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, 8; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 63; Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 97; VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 91.

<sup>50</sup> Such as 2 Samuel 7:12–16 and 2 Kings 11:12. Cf. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 50; Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 209; Wilson, *Psalms*, 111; Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 100.

Historically the predominant position has been to understand YHWH's anointed in Psalm 2 in a messianic-eschatological sense; in other words, Christologically.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, arguably it was not until the eleventh century that a non-messianic reading of Psalm 2 was documented, and even then there was allowance made for a messianic reading.<sup>52</sup> Regrettably this tradition has led to some exclusivist and untempered interpretations of the psalm. For example, the seventeenth century Puritan David Dickson argued of Psalm 2 that 'this Psalm doth mainly, if not only, concern Christ.'<sup>53</sup> However, Willis's conclusion is apt: 'As widespread as the exclusive Messianic interpretation of Psalm 2 has been, it will not bear the scrutiny of critical exegetical examination.'<sup>54</sup>

The reason that Willis's conclusion is apt is primarily related to the use of the title 'anointed'. It is abundantly clear that throughout the OT, and in Psalm 2 specifically, the title is principally a royal title.<sup>55</sup> Goldingay highlights that the term is 'not a participle, like the English word, but a noun; it designates an ongoing status rather than drawing attention to an event ... [it refers] more usually to a king.'<sup>56</sup> Thus we must conclude that the term 'anointed' in Psalm 2 refers to a king; more, in Israelite consciousness, a Davidic king. This is undeniable. Equally so, however, is the reality that the language of Psalm 2 is idealistic.<sup>57</sup> It is evident that given its placement alongside Psalm 1, at the outset of the Psalter, and being read in the Second Temple Era, 'The thoughts of the reader are not directed towards the best examples of kingship (David or Josiah), they are directed rather to the ideal of kingship.'<sup>58</sup> Given the depiction of an ideal king in Psalm 2, I suggest that we must hold together both the historical and Messianic-eschatological interpretations side-by-side. Israel's hope was manifestly centred on an enthroned king. As Psalm 2 was written, prayed, read, and sung its content remained the same; as the fortunes of Israel peaked and troughed the function and significance of that content developed. History reveals the failure of the enthroned kings of Israel to realise the hopes of the nation. Even so, the use of this imagery and language remained.

The continued use of the imagery and language found in Psalm 2 suggests that it formed the basis for a new hope. The longing for a new Davidide becomes most potent in the wake of the exile.<sup>59</sup> On the foundation of Psalm 2 Israel's hope develops and matures into anticipation for the ideal Davidic

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<sup>51</sup> Ernest Lussier, 'The New Latin Psalter: An Exegetical Commentary I Psalms 1 and 2', *CBQ* 9 (1947): 234; William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 122, 124, 162, 169–70; Gunn, 'Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah', 428.

<sup>52</sup> Michael A. Signer, 'King/Messiah: Rashi's Exegesis of Psalm 2', *Proof* 3 (1983): 273. He writes: 'As we shall see, Rashi interpreted the psalm in such a way as to preserve the eschatological reading while finding a very different anchor in the biblical narrative—the life of King David.'

<sup>53</sup> David Dickson, *Psalms*, reprint ed., GC (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 4.

<sup>54</sup> John T. Willis, 'A Cry of Defiance--Psalm 2', *JSOT* 15 (1990): 34.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:66; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 66; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 128; Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Zondervan Academic, 2007), 887; Grogan, *Psalms*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 591.

<sup>57</sup> Driver, *Studies in the Psalms*, 71; Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 34; Wilson, *Psalms*, 1:109.

<sup>58</sup> Grant, 'The Psalms and the King', 116.

<sup>59</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1956), 21–24; Briggs, *Psalms*, 1:13; Mays, *The Lord Reigns*, 110, 113–15; Whybray, *Reading the Psalms*, 90.

king. The initial context in which this occurs is the Psalter itself. Royal psalms reiterating the promise inherent in Psalm 2 are found at key junctures throughout the Psalter. Psalm 41:12–13 closes Book 1 with David testifying that his kingship has been established by YHWH. Psalm 72 closes Book 2 with a prayer to YHWH for Davidic descendants which embellishes the hope for Davidic kingship. Book 3 reflects the exile and ends with the apparent abrogation of the Davidic covenant (Ps 89:39–40). Yet, the reiteration of Davidic promises present in 2 Samuel 7 and the open-ended nature of Psalm 89 fosters hope that answers to the psalm's painful questions will become manifest. The answer might be the exalted horn in Psalm 92:11, the righteous king of Psalm 101, David's mysterious lord in Psalm 110, the promised anointed one in Psalm 132:11, 17, the horn YHWH raises in Psalm 148:14. The Psalter—especially Books 4 and 5—repeatedly directs the reader's attention towards a future idyllic Davidic king.<sup>60</sup> Wilson captures this concept helpfully:

Psalm 2—and the rest of the royal psalms—have taken on a continuing significance that exceeded their original context with the human kings of the Davidic dynasty. In the aftermath of the Exile, with the destruction of the national identity and hopes of Judah, many of these psalms took on a new life of messianic hope and expectation. What the human kings of Israel and Judah had been unable to do, God would accomplish through his 'Anointed One,' the Messiah (2:2). This 'Anointed One' would come in the future, empowered by God to usher in the kingdom of God over all the earth.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, this is the testimony of the NT.

### *3. New Testament readings of Psalm 2*

#### **3.1. Introduction**

It is impossible to document here all quotations of and allusions to Psalm 2 in the NT. They are both plentiful and intriguing. For example, Ferda argues that the *titulus crucis* in Matthew is an allusion to Psalm 2:6, thus suggesting that the crucifixion is the pinnacle of the opposition described in Psalm 2.<sup>62</sup> In an attempt to offer some breadth regarding Psalm 2 in the NT, this final section will briefly note the reading of Psalm 2 offered in Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. In each instance it is evident that Jesus of Nazareth is the one correlated with the 'anointed' of Psalm 2.

#### **3.2. Acts 4:25–26; 13:33**

Two quotations of Psalm 2 in Acts are of particular interest. First, Acts 4:25–26 contains the only quotation of Psalm 2:1 in the entire NT. That this is a quotation is clear from the verbatim repetition

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<sup>60</sup> For a popular expansion on this see my article 'Seeing Christ in the Shape of the Psalms,' *The Gospel Coalition*, 6 April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/seeing-christ-shape-psalms/>. For a scholarly expansion on this see my doctoral thesis, 'Hope for a Davidic King in the Psalter's Utopian Vision' (PhD thesis, Queen's University, Belfast, 2021), esp. ch. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson, *Psalms*, 107, emphasis original.

<sup>62</sup> Tucker S. Ferda, 'Matthew's Titulus and Psalm 2's King on Mount Zion,' *JBL* 133 (2014): 561–81. Cf. Gunn, 'Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah,' 436, who notes several possible allusions in Johannine literature.

of the LXX (which in turn accurately reflects the MT).<sup>63</sup> The quotation begins a prayer offered by Peter, John, and their friends immediately after the first occasion of persecution recorded in the book of Acts. It would appear that the emphasis is that all rebellion against God will ultimately fail.<sup>64</sup> This quotation of Psalm 2 in the prayer reminds all within earshot that just as the rebellion of the world's kings against God and his 'anointed' failed in Psalm 2, so the rebellion of contemporary kings (Acts 2:27) against Jesus of Nazareth failed when he was raised from the dead. The implication is that any rebellion against the kingdom of God, made visible in the church, will likewise fail. This quotation makes it clear that the NT understood Jesus of Nazareth as the one appointed by God to withstand the rebellion of the world's kings.

Second, Paul employs Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33. The above claim is further supported by the psalm's appearance in Paul's sermon recorded in Acts 13. Addressing Jews in the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul explains that the 'anointed' in Psalm 2 was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 13:33). The exact manner in which this occurs is complex.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, as Crowe correctly asserts, the psalm's use affirms, "The resurrection of Jesus is *at least* a confirmation of his messianic sonship"<sup>66</sup>—resurrection and sonship are intimately related. Even though there remains debate as to which aspect of Jesus's ministry Paul is referring, the quotation is unmistakably applied to Jesus.<sup>67</sup> Marshall concludes, "The significance of the citation is, accordingly, that a messianic psalm is applied to Jesus, who is given status as the Son of God. The promise made in the psalm is fulfilled in Jesus."<sup>68</sup> This final sentence aptly summarises the argument made above: the hope of a coming Davidide, as expressed in Psalm 2, is realised in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. OT hope is enfleshed in Jesus.

### 3.3. Hebrews 1:5; 5:5

The full import of Psalm 2's use in Hebrews is fecund and hence beyond the remit of this article.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Psalm 2:7 is quoted twice in Hebrews at particularly important junctures. In both Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 the author quotes Psalm 2 as he introduces the two primary Christological movements of the book.<sup>70</sup>

In 1:5 the author employs a catena of Scripture quotations in defence of his premise that Jesus, the divine royal Son, is supreme. In doing so the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7 verbatim from

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<sup>63</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 245; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 202; I. Howard Marshall, 'Acts', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 552; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 200.

<sup>64</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 206; Marshall, 'Acts', 553.

<sup>65</sup> See the helpful discussion in, Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 47–57.

<sup>66</sup> Crowe, *The Hope of Israel*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 392; Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 87, 419.

<sup>68</sup> Marshall, 'Acts', 585.

<sup>69</sup> For a fuller discussion on Psalm 2's significance in Hebrews see, David Wallace, 'The Use of Psalms in the Shaping of a Text: Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1', *ResQ* 45 (2003): 41–50.

<sup>70</sup> George H. Guthrie, 'Hebrews', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 925.

the LXX.<sup>71</sup> Guthrie argues that the ‘primary point in 1:5 is that Jesus has been shown to be the Son of God by his exaltation to the right hand, his enthronement over all creation demonstrating his unique relationship to the Father.’<sup>72</sup> At the outset of the first Christological movement of the book of Hebrews Psalm 2 is clearly applied to Jesus of Nazareth. In 5:5 the use of Psalm 2 appears to function structurally rather than theologically; that is to say, the author appears to quote Psalm 2 in preparation for quoting Psalm 110:4.<sup>73</sup> The sonship of Jesus (1:5–14) is a necessary foundation before proceeding to assert his priesthood. However, it remains abundantly clear that the content of the psalm finds tangible expression in the person of Jesus. Psalm 2:7 is spoken by God and addressed to Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

The book of Hebrews asserts that Psalm 2 has ‘found a fulfilment that far surpasses God’s relationship to the merely human descendants of David.... The words of Psalm 2 addressed to the descendants of David find their ultimate fulfilment in the heavenly enthronement of Christ.’<sup>75</sup> Yet Jesus is a Davidide (Matt 1:1). Thus, Hebrews simply confirms that the promise of an idealised coming Davidide in Psalm 2 finds fulfilment in the appearing and enthronement of the divine royal Son, Jesus.

### 3.4. Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15

Unlike the use of Psalm 2 elsewhere in Acts and Hebrews, its use throughout Revelation is never a direct, verbatim quotation. Rather, the author merely alludes to the psalm. Nevertheless, these allusions are unmistakable.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, that Psalm 2 is being alluded to at certain points in Revelation is clear from the fact that its use closely reflects the original import of the psalm. Osborne writes, ‘John follows the original meaning of Ps. 2.’<sup>77</sup> In each instance (Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15) there is one who will rule rebellious nations with an iron rod (Ps 2:9). Consistently, allusions to Psalm 2 in Revelation occur in passages concerned with asserting that rebellious nations, opposing God’s rule, will face the judgement of God’s ‘anointed’ at his coming.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the theme of ‘messianic victory over the nations’<sup>79</sup> is central to both Revelation and Psalm 2. Throughout Revelation it is clear that the ‘anointed one’ who will execute God’s rule across

<sup>71</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 112; Gert Jacobus Steyn, ‘Psalm 2 in Hebrews’, *Neot* 37 (2003): 272.

<sup>72</sup> Guthrie, ‘Hebrews’, 927. Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 64–65.

<sup>73</sup> Guthrie, ‘Hebrews’, 960.

<sup>74</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 282; Steyn, ‘Psalm 2 in Hebrews’, 277.

<sup>75</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 103–4. Cf. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 32.

<sup>76</sup> David Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52A (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 199; David Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 688; David Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1061. Cf. Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (London: Apollos, 2019), 34, 48, 55–56, 58, 61, 90, 92, 106, 127, 129, 131, 152, 157, 202–3.

<sup>77</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 166. Cf. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 234, 355; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 639–40.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 314.

<sup>79</sup> This is Bauckham’s phrase. See *The Climax of Prophecy*, 324.

the globe is Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>80</sup> Beale concludes, rather succinctly, 'According to the Apocalypse, the prophecy will be fulfilled by Jesus.'<sup>81</sup>

#### *4. Conclusion*

Psalm 2 is a psalm of hope. Despite the accumulation of antagonistic kings in active rebellion, YHWH enthrones his vice-regent in Zion. He proceeds to adopt this king as a son. The result is a declaration that only by submitting to YHWH and his 'anointed' may the rebellious kings of the nations avoid divine judgement. For readers of the Psalter this was a confession of hope.

Initially this hope is placed in each successive Davidic king enthroned in Jerusalem. However, as the decades passed, the circumstances deteriorated, and kings did what was evil in the eyes of YHWH, psalms such as Psalm 2 must have read like vicious sarcasm. Nevertheless, those who compiled the Psalter kept Psalm 2 (and other royal psalms) in the collection. As a result, Psalm 2, being set in tandem with Psalm 1 at the beginning of the Psalter, envisages a righteous Davidic king. The style and substance of the psalm supports this reading. The content depicts a Davidide who is known intimately by YHWH and rules the nations on his behalf and at his bidding. The NT readings of Psalm 2 briefly noted above further substantiate this claim as they understand Psalm 2 to be fulfilled in the son of David, Jesus of Nazareth. Steyn observes, 'At the time of the early Christian Church this hermeneutical bridge was already built.'<sup>82</sup> This article, then, has demonstrated that while Psalm 2 almost certainly originated from an historical event and references an actual king, in its placement in the Psalter it becomes a signpost pointing its reader to the future hope of a coming Davidic king. In this way the Christian Bible documents, unfolds, and realises OT hope.

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 463, 685.

<sup>81</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 962.

<sup>82</sup> Steyn, 'Psalm 2 in Hebrews,' 266. Cf. Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 180–81.

# Raised up from the Dust: An Exploration of Hannah’s Reversal Motif in the Book of Esther as Evidence of Divine Sovereignty

— Justin Jackson —

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**Abstract:** The book of Esther presents a challenge for many modern interpreters, since the book does not mention the name of God or his direct action. This glaring omission has led some throughout history to doubt Esther’s place in the canon of Scripture. Contrary to such doubts, this article seeks to show that textual evidence of God’s sovereign work does indeed exist in Esther. By highlighting the inner-biblical parallels between Hannah’s psalm of great reversal in 1 Samuel 2 and the events that take place in Esther, this article will argue that Esther presents the God of Israel as the same God who humbles the self-exalting and exalts the humble whether it be in the life of King David or the lives of his exilic people in Persia.

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For generations, Bible scholars have questioned Esther’s place and contribution in the canon of Scripture. Behind this questioning is the awkward fact that Esther is the only book in the canonical Scriptures that does not mention the name of God even once.<sup>1</sup> This omission has led some to reject Esther entirely—thus refusing to give her a place in the canonical storyline. For example, fragments of every Old Testament (OT) book have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls except the book of Esther, implying that the Qumranites did not accept Esther as an inspired text.<sup>2</sup> In later days, even the great German reformer, Martin Luther, questioned the canonicity of Esther. Indeed, “questioned” is too

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<sup>1</sup> It is debated whether the Song of Solomon does or does not mention the name of Yahweh (Song of Solomon 8:6). Also, the Apocrypha’s Greek additions to Esther differs significantly from the OT version of the book. Most significant is that in the Greek additions Esther prays to “the Lord God of Israel,” who then changes the Persian king’s heart (*Additions to Esther* 14:3).

<sup>2</sup> This implication will of course need to change if Qumranite fragments of Esther are discovered in the future. Robert Alter posits, “The pious Dead Sea sectarians might well have looked askance at it not merely because it

soft of a word as evidence shows that he vehemently opposed Esther being included in the OT canon. In his *Bondage of the Will*, Luther argued that Esther had more reasons to be treated as noncanonical than did the apocryphal books of Judith, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.<sup>3</sup> According to his evaluation, the book of Esther had “too many heathen unnaturalities.” Of course, not everyone in history doubted Esther’s place in the canon. The vast majority of Jews apparently had no qualms in reading the book during Purim, and Josephus valued Esther enough to comment on it in his *Antiquities*, believing that the book appropriately represented Jewish heritage. Nevertheless, the book still challenges teachers, preachers, and Bible study leaders today. How should the church teach theology from a book that does not even mention the name of God?

In seeking an answer to this question, one has to wonder whether the judgment that Esther is completely void of any textual evidence of God’s sovereignty is all that valid. Is the book of Esther truly empty of any literary testimony to the hand of God? To be sure, the omission of God’s name and the absence of any mention of his direct work may seem troubling to many. However, such concerns may be unnecessarily exaggerated. Could it be possible that readers might have simply missed the author’s intentional literary allusions that not only affirm but assert God’s sovereign actions in the preservation of his people?

This article will argue that the book of Esther employs the great reversal motif described in 1 Samuel 2:8, in order to subtly highlight the sovereign hand of God, who works to bring low arrogant princes and exalt those who are humbly seated in the dust. It is as though the entire story is intended to be a visible illustration or a *historically true parable* demonstrating Hannah’s great reversal motif at work in the preservation of God’s people in Persia.<sup>4</sup> If this is indeed the author’s intention, then the great reversal motif is utilized to reveal God’s sovereign, though hidden, hand. Throughout Scripture, and especially in Esther, the great reversal motif is employed to proclaim the truth that “the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S” (1 Sam 2:8).<sup>5</sup> He exalts the humble to princely places and humbles the self-exalting because he alone is King whether in Israel or Persia. It is always God who is behind all such reversals.<sup>6</sup>

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never mentions the name of God but also because its narrative world is fundamentally secular.” Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: The Writings* (New York: Norton, 2019), 713.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 143.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted early on that this article disagrees with Alter’s assertion that the book of Esther was written “primarily for entertainment” or that Haman’s plot is “a manifest fantasy.” Alter, *The Writings*, 713. Instead, I agree with Eugene Merrill, who writes that though no other extrabiblical historical documents have affirmed Esther and Mordecai’s existence, “an *argumentum e silentio* should never be used in serious historiography. Unless irrefutable evidence to the contrary surfaces, one must on principle assume that Esther is a reliable historical document originating in and faithfully recounting the era it professes to record.” Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 500.

<sup>5</sup> It is as G. Keys writes that the elevation of Esther and Mordecai “reveals the hand of a God who is infinitely more powerful than the whole Persian Empire, a God who is truly the King of kings.” G. Keys, “Esther,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 199.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 72:12–14 offers one scriptural example of God’s sovereignty over reversals. Of course, this is not intended to negate the importance of the human responsibility/initiative theme in Esther. To be certain, the author of Esther describes Esther’s and Mordecai’s faithful action as the means by which the reversal occurs. However, even Mordecai admits that if Esther refused to act, “deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place” (Esther 4:14).

First, this article will provide a brief methodology that will highlight the importance of inner-biblical exegesis in the book of Esther. From there, Hannah's psalm of reversal in 1 Samuel 2 will be considered in preparation for discerning the thematic allusions made in Esther. This paper proposes that the author of Esther intentionally used the narrative of Samuel as the backdrop of the story of Mordecai and Haman. Once this backdrop is established, the thematic and literary parallels between Esther and Hannah's psalm will be made more evident. If these parallels are indeed authorially intended, then it can be concluded that the author utilized Hannah's reversal motif in order to communicate God's sovereignty in the exaltation of his humble people.

### *1. A Brief Word on Methodology*

The practice of "intertextuality" has stirred up mixed feelings in the scholarly realm. Some argue that the practice is baseless and in danger of inviting Bible readers to commit the "parallelomania" that Samuel Sandmel denounced.<sup>7</sup> To be certain, this type of baseless, evidence-free intertextuality is dangerous as it dismisses authorial intent and invites semantic autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Understandably, the broad practice of intertextuality has been met with no small apprehension in recent years. Lau and Goswell note their concerns:

The free association of *all* texts, and, as usually understood and practiced, challenges the idea of canon as a *fixed* group of texts, viewing canon as an illegitimate fence around Scripture that gives a privileged status to certain texts over other texts. For intertextuality there are no boundaries, and the result is that there is no settled context from which to determine the stable meaning of a text, for it may be compared and associated with any text at all. Without the concept of canon, a text is hermeneutically equidistant from all other texts.<sup>9</sup>

Russell Meek likewise expresses his concerns stating that intertextuality tends to be "free from the constraints of the written word" and fails to develop "criteria for determining intertextual relationships between texts."<sup>10</sup> He argues that "inner-biblical exegesis" should be preferred over intertextuality.<sup>11</sup> Though, broadly speaking, the practice of intertextuality has many deficiencies as Meek shows, it is not

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<sup>7</sup> By "parallelomania," Sandmel means that "in dealing with similarities we can sometimes discover exact parallels, some with and some devoid of significance; seeming parallels which are so only imperfectly; and statements which can be called parallels only by taking them out of context." Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1, 7.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase "semantic autonomy" comes from E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Peter H. W. Lau and Gregory Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth*, NSBT 41 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 66.

<sup>10</sup> Russell L. Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Bib* 95 (2014): 282–84.

<sup>11</sup> Meek writes, "Whereas with intertextuality one need not be concerned with issues of textual origins and directionality of influence, inner-biblical exegesis requires that scholars make known and defend their view of a text's provenance." "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion," 288.

fair to say that everyone who practices “intertextuality” does so without concern for exegetical criteria.<sup>12</sup> Whether one refers to the practice as “intertextuality” (which is very broad) or “inner-biblical exegesis” (which is much narrower), scholars must be careful to not undermine parallels that do indeed exist between the various OT texts. Careful exegesis reveals that the biblical authors often utilized previously given motifs and lexical forms for the sake of doctrinal and typological development.<sup>13</sup> That is, a later biblical writer may at times allude to previously written Scripture to make a theological point. Discerning such authorially-intended inner-biblical connections will only serve to enrich one’s understanding of the book’s theological message.<sup>14</sup>

For the literary connection to qualify as an allusion the author must have intended his audience to discern the parallel. In other words, there are no maverick allusions; instead, all allusions are intentionally constructed. Just as no one constructs a bridge that has no intended purpose, so also literary bridges deliberately connect point A to point B. These authorially constructed literary bridges can be discerned through textual markers—shared language, shared motifs, and shared theological or historical concepts. Proposed allusions that meet these criteria are more likely to be authorially-intended than the proposed allusions that meet few or none of these criteria. Proposed connections must be textually proven, otherwise they must be relegated to speculation.

It is beyond the scope of this article to give an extended evaluation of the differences between the broad practice of intertextuality and the narrower practice of inner-biblical exegesis.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, because of the deficiencies found in the broad practice of “intertextuality” (the scholars who practice “intertextuality” with responsible exegetical criteria notwithstanding), this paper will use the narrower practice that has been termed by some as inner-biblical exegesis. While there may certainly be some who practice intertextuality without concern for textual evidence, this paper’s inner-biblical exegesis will rely on the author’s lexical forms and recycled literary motifs in establishing connections. More specifically, this type of inner-biblical exegesis examines a biblical author’s use of previous OT texts to theologically develop a particular point or truth. In short, this article does not merely claim that the author of Esther

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<sup>12</sup> Consider, for example, Richard B. Hays and G. K. Beale, both of whom provide a criterion for substantiating proposed parallels. See G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 40. See also, Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> To this point, Michael Fishbane’s explanation of *traditio* and *tradtum* is useful. Fishbane argues that ancient scribes “adapted, transformed, or reinterpreted” *tradtum*, which he defines as the “content of tradition.” He goes on to argue, “In the light of its post-biblical cogeners, it may be observed that inner-biblical typologies constitute a literary-historical phenomenon which isolates perceived correlations between specific events, persons, or places early in time with their later correspondents. Since the latter occur either in the present or in the immediate or envisaged future, there is an implied emphasis on the linear and historical aspects of the correlations. For in so far as the ‘later correspondents’ occur in history and time, they will never be precisely identical with their prototype, but inevitably stand in a hermeneutical relationship with them.” Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 351.

<sup>14</sup> David Firth writes, “One can read the narrative of Esther perfectly well without seeing the varying levels of intertextuality and still appreciate the meaning communicated by the text, but at the same it is the intertextuality that enriches our reading of the text.” David G. Firth, “When Samuel Met Esther: Narrative Focalisation, Intertextuality, and Theology,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 1.1 (2020): 21.

<sup>15</sup> For an extended review of these practices see chapter two in Jonathan Gibson’s book on Malachi. Jonathan Gibson, *Covenant Continuity and Fidelity: Inner-Biblical Allusion and Exegesis in Malachi*, LHBOTS 625 (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

was alluding to Hannah's reversal psalm in the book of Samuel; instead, it seeks to prove the connection by exploring the shared language and literary themes that are embedded in each work. This article then considers what theological purpose is carried forward in these inner-biblical allusions.

## 2. *Hannah's Psalm of Reversal*

Before considering the narrative of Esther, it is essential to understand Hannah's psalm, which introduces the literary motif of the great reversal. In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah praises the Lord for answering her prayers and giving her a child. After years of intense emotional abuse from the arrogant Peninnah ("the fruitful/fertile one"), God overturned Hannah's barrenness leading to Samuel's birth. Hannah's psalm of exaltation not only praises what God has done for her personally but also what he will do for his humble people on a national and cosmic scale.

Hannah exalts in the Lord, who has exalted her "horn" (a symbol of strength). She proclaims that there is no one like the Lord. Therefore, self-exalters are to be warned: "Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Sam 2:3). The implication is that God will judge the proud—that is, those whose speech is "high" (גבה), suggesting self-exaltation. He knows their arrogance and their prideful actions are weighed (תכנן), literally "measured." As the psalm's series of reversals demonstrate, those who make themselves "high" will be brought low, while those who are low (i.e., humble) will be exalted. Hannah's psalm envisions once mighty people being weakened, while the humble-weak "bind on strength." Those who were arrogantly full hire themselves out for bread, while those who were hungry are now full.

The reversal of the humble poor and the arrogant described in verses 7 and 8 pertain explicitly to our discussion of Esther. "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (cf. Ps 113:7–8).<sup>16</sup> "Poor" (ל) in verse 8 does not refer merely to the financially destitute. The word may also signify a state of weakness or powerlessness. It is, at its root, vulnerability. In the context of Scripture, the word describes those who have not the means nor the status to protect themselves from oppressors. In his Law, God revealed that his heart was for those who lived in such vulnerability, and he would not tolerate their oppression. God will judge those who harass the helpless.<sup>17</sup> Hannah's psalm of reversal contributes to the great reversal motif by showing that God will stand for the poor and helpless who cannot stand for themselves. He will humiliate (שפל) those who exalt themselves against his people and exalt those who humbly trust in him. This truth certainly fits the context of Esther in which the helpless people of God are harassed by the powerful Haman.

For Hannah, this great reversal serves to highlight the Lord's sovereignty over all the earth: "For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's and on them he has set the world" (1 Sam 2:8). God can bring low and raise up, make poor and make rich, and exalt the poor to princely places, specifically because all the earth belongs to him. The very foundations of the earth (symbolized by pillars) are his. With

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that Psalm 113, which alludes to Hannah's psalm of reversal, is situated in Book V of the Psalms—the very book that is generally focused on Israel's exile and restoration. This detail may provide an important link between the exiles of Esther's narrative and Hannah's reversal motif in 1 Samuel.

<sup>17</sup> One thinks of Psalm 107:39–40, in which the Psalmist warns that when the poor are diminished or brought low through oppression, God "pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes."

these metaphorical lyrics, Hannah expresses that any great reversal is an expression of God's direct sovereignty. He alone humbles the self-exalting and exalts the humble because he alone is King.

Throughout the book of Samuel, Hannah's psalm serves as a paradigm that helps explain the various "falls" of arrogant antagonists in contrast to the rise of the humble-hearted David. Eli exalts himself and in humiliation "falls" to his death. The Philistines proudly place the ark in their temple and their god, Dagan, "falls" and is embarrassingly broken to pieces on the threshold. Goliath arrogantly taunts God's people and "falls" by the hand of humble David. Finally, the tall and proud Saul, "falls" on his own sword, leading to David's exaltation to the throne. Through the great reversal motif, God shows that those who are proud and self-exalting "fall," while the humble, faithful, dependent people of God are exalted to high places.

While 1 Samuel is not the first place the reversal motif is used, it is in 1 Samuel that the great reversal theme is made most evident in the OT. Following Hannah's psalm and Samuel's use of the reversal motif, Bible readers should pay careful attention to how other OT books employ this motif and consider how subsequent reversals communicate God's sovereign work. In other words, it seems logical to say that other OT authors may often utilize the same reversal theme to express God's sovereignty in the humiliation of the proud and the exaltation of the humble, which ultimately leads to the enthronement of God's anointed King. The author of Esther certainly seems to employ the reversal motif for this purpose. The reversal motif becomes a medium through which God's sovereign work is communicated, even if the author does not explicitly write about God's direct action. The author of Esther may not mention God even once, however by using the reversal motif he expects his readers to pick up his intentional, albeit implicit, message. In Scripture, if a reversal happens, someone must have caused it. From a Biblical perspective, such reversals are always due to God's humbling and exalting work.

The lexical and thematic markers that connect Esther to Samuel imply that God is at work in the arrogant Haman's humiliation and the humble Mordecai's exaltation to a princely place.<sup>18</sup> In Esther, Mordecai, a descendant of Kish, strives against Haman, a descendant of Agag—a renewed struggle that began in the book of Samuel. In due time, Mordecai is raised from the dust/ash heap and exalted to reign as a prince in Persia. Haman, on the other hand, who exalted himself through arrogant manipulation, "falls" (נָפַל) before Mordecai and the Jewish people. In this way, Haman falls just as Eli, Dagan, Goliath, and Saul "fell" when they arrogantly oppressed God's people. In Esther, the theme of God's sovereign reversal is carried forward showing that he will faithfully preserve his humble people and bring low any who pridefully try to destroy them.

### *3. The Book of Samuel as a Backdrop to Esther*

While the book of Esther is named after the Israelite maiden, Esther (her Jewish name is Hadassah), who is exalted to become a Persian queen, the conflict between Mordecai and Haman takes center stage. In no way undermining Esther's crucial role in the narrative, Mordecai seems to be the primary

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<sup>18</sup> This article is not the first to connect Samuel's reversal motif with that of Esther's. David Firth argues, "Readers attuned to the placement of this motif in Samuel are thus aware that it points beyond itself to offer a further reflection on how the reversal of fortunes might occur." Firth goes on to explore two instances (King Ahasuerus's feast and Haman's fall) and their inner-biblical connections to the book of Samuel. Firth, "When Samuel Met Esther," 23.

actor.<sup>19</sup> Michael Fox writes, “Mordecai is the dominant figure in the book. He is introduced first (2:5) and praised last (10:2–3), and his glorification lies at the book’s turning point and presages the Jews’ victory.”<sup>20</sup> Importantly, Mordecai’s conflict with Haman reaches back to Saul’s failed war with the Amalekites and King Agag. Mordecai is introduced as a “son of Kish, a Benjamite” (בֶּן־קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי), while Haman is introduced as “the Agagite” (הָאֲגָגִי). These epithets serve to connect the Mordecai-Haman narrative with the Saul-Agag narrative in 1 Samuel 15.<sup>21</sup> As a brief review, The Lord commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites for their oppression of Israel when they came out of Egypt. God’s justice on Amalek’s hostility was to result in complete annihilation. According to the Lord’s command, all that belonged to Amalek was to be “devoted to destruction.” The verb חָרַם (“to put under the ban” or “to dedicate to destruction”) reaches back to God’s commands to Israel as they entered the Promised Land. This absolute annihilation was a holy punishment for the Canaanites’ depravity and also prevented the spread of their depravity to God’s people.<sup>22</sup> When Israel failed to heed God’s חָרַם in the book of Judges, God determined that the remaining people groups would become “thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you” (Judg 2:3). Saul repeats Israel’s sin by leaving Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive and failing to carry out the task of חָרַם.<sup>23</sup> Saul’s hesitation to obey the Lord allows Agag’s seed to continue, and as was true of the remnant Canaanites in the Judges’ era, Haman the Agagite becomes a thorn in Israel’s side.

By highlighting the conflict between a son of Kish and an Agagite, the author of Esther makes the book of Samuel the backdrop of his narrative. In this way, the author signals his intention for readers to recognize the parallels that exist between the two narratives. Namely, the reversals embedded in the book of Samuel will be repeated in the book of Esther. Just as the poor rise and the arrogant fall in Samuel, so also the poor will be exalted and the arrogant will fall in Esther, thus revealing the Lord’s all-encompassing sovereignty. The implication of this is that the Lord is not just sovereign in Israel and over Israel’s kings, but he also sovereign in Persia and over the Persian princes. Yahweh is not a god bound by geographic territory. Instead, the whole earth belongs to him, and it is his hand that brings down princes and raises the poor.

<sup>19</sup> In saying that Mordecai is the primary actor in the narrative, this author in no way intends to minimize Esther’s brave and faithful actions. As the book of Esther shows, Hadassah was truly an exemplary woman of Yahweh.

<sup>20</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Books of Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Several studies connect Esther/Mordecai’s rise with that of Joseph’s in Genesis. See Abraham Winitzer, “The Reversal of Fortune Theme in Esther: Israelite Historiography in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *JANER* 11 (2011): 170–218. See also, Gabriel F. Hornung, “The Theological Import of MT Esther’s Relationship to the Joseph Story,” *CBQ* 82 (2020): 567–81.

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Klein notes that the ban was intended to “wipe out all traces of syncretism.” Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 149.

<sup>23</sup> “Agag” (אֲגָגִי) seems to be a title given to Amalekite kings rather than the name of a specific individual, just as “Abimelech” is most likely a dynastic title given to the kings of the Philistia. Consider the fact that the term “Agag” is used in Numbers 24:7 long before the reign of the Agag in 1 Samuel 15.

#### 4. *Great Reversal in Esther*

Robert Alter rightly notes, “Reversal is key to the plot of Esther.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Esther alludes to Hannah’s psalm of a great reversal in several ways. Hannah’s statement in 1 Samuel 2:8 that God raises up the poor from the dust and ash heap so that they may sit with princes and inherit honor is a particularly important parallel with the events that occur in the exaltation of Mordecai. What follows is a brief explanation of the thematic and lexical parallels that connect the narrative of Esther with Hannah’s song of reversal.

##### 4.1. Haman the Agagite

While it is debated whether the term “Agag” does indeed connote “high” or “lofty one,” the designation of Haman as an Agagite nevertheless casts him in a lofty and arrogant light and sets the stage for a great reversal.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the name Haman likely means “celebrated one,” and his self-celebration of his oppressive schemes works to make an ironic twist of events as it is the Jews, not Haman, who celebrate in the end.<sup>26</sup> Haman fits the role of an arrogant, self-exalting oppressor, who sets out to harass the poor and powerless. From the beginning, he is obsessed with his exaltation in the eyes of others. Chapter 3 says that King Ahasuerus “lifted up” (נשא) Haman and entrusted him to govern the kingdom’s officials. All who sit at the king’s gate are now expected to bow and pay homage to him. However, Mordecai refuses to bow. The reasons for this are unclear, but given the emphasis on Mordecai’s and Haman’s ancestries, it is possible that he refuses because of Haman being a descendent of Amalekites.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the case, Haman is “hot with anger/venom” (יחם) when he hears of Mordecai’s refusal. His venomous rage reignites the ancient enmity of Genesis 3:15.<sup>28</sup> In his hostility, Haman is also cast as a new Pharaoh who seeks to kill God’s son, Israel.<sup>29</sup>

Haman, however, is not content to punish Mordecai alone. Instead, he is determined to exterminate all the Jews throughout the entire kingdom. Lots are cast (פּוּר) and the month of Adar is selected

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<sup>24</sup> Alter goes on to say, “In the first verse of chapter 9, this pattern is actually spelled out in two Hebrew words, *wenahafokh hu’*, ‘on the contrary’ or ‘it was the opposite.’” Alter, *The Writings*, 714. Dumbrell likewise argues, “Reversal seems to be the most important structural theme in Esther.” William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 300.

<sup>25</sup> While this point is debatable, it is possible that the term “Agag” may refer to one who is “high” or “lofty.” The promise that Israel’s king will be “higher than Agag” (Num 24:7) certainly seems to suggest that Agag connotes someone who is “high.” If this is true, then Samuel’s cutting the “lofty one” (a euphemism for pride) into pieces (שֶׁשֶׁשׁ) serves as a visual fulfillment of Hannah’s psalm that prophesies that the Lord’s enemies will be broken into pieces, though a different word (חֲתָת) is used in 1 Samuel 2:10.

<sup>26</sup> G. K. Beale, *Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019) 29.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, WBC 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 385.

<sup>28</sup> Dempster connects Esther’s opposition against Haman as parallel to Eve’s opposition against the serpent. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 223.

<sup>29</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 222. See also Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 222.

as the desired execution date. The casting of lots in ancient Persian times was a form of divination.<sup>30</sup> The irony of this historic fact is that it is Israel's God who governs the outcome of the lots and not the Mesopotamian or Persian gods. Through manipulation and deception, Haman convinces the king that there was a group of people within the kingdom who threaten the king's rule. Haman claims that the danger is so urgent that the king should not rest while they live. The king consents by taking his signet ring and giving it to Haman—a symbol of authority and power to do as he wills. King Ahasuerus commissions him saying, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you" (Esther 3:11). After the edict is written and delivered to the provinces, Haman "[sits] down to drink" in celebration. Throughout the rest of the story, Haman, "the celebrated one," tends to prematurely celebrate the success of his evil plans. In chapter five, his proud heart is joyful at the queen's invitation to dinner, and in chapter six, he arrogantly thinks that the King wants to honor him. In both cases, his celebration is presumptuous. The latter leads to his humiliation, while the former leads to his death.

Esther 5 humorously records Haman's vain and arrogant heart. "And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king" (v. 11). Haman is literally "counting" (ספר) the "glory" (כְּבוֹד) of his wealth. The irony of this arrogant inventory-taking is that all these things will be taken from Haman before the end of the narrative—Haman's wealth will be given to Mordecai, his ten sons hanged, and his position given to the one whom he tried to kill. In a silent but sovereign irony, Haman's "glory" (כְּבוֹד) will be given to Mordecai, who, as Hannah sings in 1 Samuel 2:8, will inherit Haman's seat of honor (כְּבוֹד).<sup>31</sup> This man who speaks so proudly and exalts himself is the perfect candidate to receive the humbling of which Hannah spoke.

#### 4.2. Mordecai, Who Sits in the Dust

Haman's greatness is contrasted against Mordecai's poor status. In Esther, where one sits and what he wears is vitally important to the narrative. Haman sits with the king, drinking, and wears the King's personal signet ring. Mordecai, on the other hand, sits in the king's gate, in the dust, and wears sackcloth after hearing about Haman's plot. In many ways, the story of Esther is the story about how Haman and Mordecai switch places and wardrobes. Mordecai moves from the king's gate to the king's right hand and exchanges his sackcloth for royal robes. In contrast, Haman moves from the king's right hand to the gallows and exchanges a noble's crown for a shameful head covering (6:12). Borrowing from Lamentations 4:5, the book of Esther illustrates how one who sits on the ash heap becomes robed in royal purple, while "those nurtured in purple now lie on the ash heaps."

<sup>30</sup> Abraham Winitzer, "The Reversal of Fortune Theme in Esther: Israelite Historiography in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," *JANER* 11 (2011): 196–98. John Walton explains the process: "In the casting of lots, markers with designated meaning were put together in a container. The container was shaken up and down until one of the markers came out (thus drawn by deity rather than by human involvement). Instead of observing a sign that deity was believed to have written of his/her own record (such as celestial signs), this method gave the deity the opportunity to provide a sign (just as extispicy did)." John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 256, 259.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase "seat of honor" (1 Sam 2:8) in other OT passages (e.g., Isa 22:23) can refer to a high administrative office. Mordecai receives a "seat of honor" as he is exalted to a princely status in Persia's royal court. See Klein, *1 Samuel*, 18.

The king's gate was often the place where officials gathered and legal matters were discussed.<sup>32</sup> In Esther, Mordecai's place at the gate probably serves a mediatorial purpose. On the one hand, Mordecai serves as a representative of his people—as demonstrated by his mournful sitting in sackcloth and ashes at the king's gate. On the other hand, it is also the place where Mordecai actively blesses the city in which he lives (e.g., Jer 29:7). For example, it is at the city gate that Mordecai overhears the plot to assassinate the king and works to prevent it. Thus, it is at the city gate that Mordecai advocates for his people and honors the king. In this way, even while being “poor” in Persia, Mordecai serves as a prince among his people.

While many scholars highlight the seemingly apparent assimilation of the Jewish characters in Esther, there is plenty of evidence that Mordecai was a faithful Jew even in exile. To be sure, his name may be Persian, however, his actions prove that he is anything but Persian. The conflict with Haman is initiated because Mordecai, as a Jew, refuses to bow down. While some scholars have argued that Mordecai's motive was jealousy, there is no evidence of this in the text itself.<sup>33</sup> After the king's servants question Mordecai's refusal, they indicate that the primary reason Mordecai had given for not bowing was that he was a Jew (3:4).<sup>34</sup> In Esther, Mordecai takes on a truly heroic role—advising Hadassah, uncovering an assassination plot, refusing to tremble before Haman, leading the Jews in crying out and fasting, petitioning Queen Esther's assistance, and eventually being exalted to a princely place in the king's court. The theory that Esther records God's faithfulness despite the unfaithful and unrepentant Jews in Persia simply does not hold when considering Mordecai's humble work on his people's behalf.

In Esther 4, Mordecai takes on the role of the “poor” seated in the dust (עָפָר) mentioned in 1 Samuel 2:7. “When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes (4:1) (אֲפָרָה). With him, many of the Jews also wore sackcloth and laid in ashes (אֲפָרָה). The mention of ashes or dust (אֲפָרָה) corresponds with the similar, though distinct, noun עָפָר found in 1 Samuel 2:8, which also means dust. Though these two lexical forms are not one-to-one correspondences, it is not difficult to imagine an at least conceptual parallel between the poor who sit in the עָפָר and the Jews who sit in the אֲפָרָה—both of which denote an abject humiliation.<sup>35</sup> In OT symbolism, dressing in sackcloth and ashes signifies mourning and suffering. However, it can also symbolize weakness and emptiness.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the Jews' sitting in the ashes/dust is a self-humiliation that expresses the seriousness of their plight. With the helpless lying in dust and ashes, the stage is now

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<sup>32</sup> “Gate,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 321.

<sup>33</sup> For a list of opinions about Mordecai's disobedience, see Marion Ann Taylor, *Ruth, Esther, The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 131–32. Anthony Tomasino's description of Mordecai as a “trouble-maker” seems unwarranted. See Anthony J. Tomasino, “Interpreting Esther from the Inside Out: Hermeneutical Implications of the Chiasmic Structure of the Book of Esther,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 118. See also the conclusion that Mordecai was acting out of pride in Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 767.

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner writes, “It seems that bowing down to Haman would violate his devotion to Yahweh as the God of Israel. The Lord was Mordecai's king and sovereign, not Haman.” Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Firth notes that while the specific language may differ, “the intertextual allusion is precise in that Mordecai's experience is indeed one where the poor are exalted and made rich while the powerful are brought down.” Firth, “When Samuel Met Esther,” 27.

<sup>36</sup> “Ashes,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 50.

set for a great reversal. According to Hannah's reversal psalm, Haman is destined to be brought low, while those who sit in the dust, like Mordecai, will be raised up from the ash heap.

### 4.3. A Preview of Reversal

Esther 6 provides an amusing preview of the reversal that is to come. In Jon Levenson's proposed structure of the reversal motif in Esther, the royal procession of chapter six stands as the center of the chiasm, demonstrating that this event is the turning point of the narrative.<sup>37</sup> If this is true, then the momentary reversal in Esther 6 creates an air of "cruciality," showing that the entire narrative flows toward and from this ironic reversal.<sup>38</sup>

In the previous chapter, Haman was counting the glory of his wealth and position. And yet, even with all his wealth, Haman is not content. He laments to his wife, "Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (6:13). As an answer to this lament, Haman's wife and friends hatch a plot to acquire the king's permission to hang Mordecai in the morning. Haman presumptively constructs the gallows and afterward sets out to receive the king's assent.

While Haman and his evil cohort are concocting schemes and building gallows, the king is unable to sleep. The king's lack of sleep can be interpreted as an act of God, especially in light of the fact that his insomnia leads to a nocturnal reading of Mordecai's deeds which saved the king. The king asked if any distinction (גְּדֻלָּה) had been given to Mordecai as a reward and found that nothing had been done for the man who saved his life. When morning comes, the king is told that Haman is waiting in court to seek an audience with him. Comically, the man whose execution Haman is seeking is the very man whom the king desires to honor.

Upon his entrance, the king asks Haman, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" (6:6). The phrase "the man whom the king delights to honor" is repeated no less than six times in this short section, which furthers the ironic fact that this mysterious man is not whom Haman expects. His arrogant thoughts are recorded in verse 6: "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" This prideful thinking leads Haman to recommend the most extravagant of parades. The "man" is to be adorned in royal robes that the king himself has worn, given a horse the king himself has ridden and then crowned. If that were not enough, the noblest of the king's officials are to dress the man and lead him in a royal procession throughout the city. The suspenseful buildup climaxes in the king commanding Haman to do so to Mordecai the Jew and ends with the humorous command, "Leave out nothing that you have mentioned" (6:10).

While Mordecai refused the garments offered to him by Esther in 4:4, it is Haman, the enemy, who must now take off Mordecai's sackcloth and dress him in a royal robe. It is Haman who must put the crown on Mordecai's head, and Haman who must humiliatingly serve as Mordecai's herald. The clothing and crown are given to the humble Mordecai, who moments before was lying in ashes. In contrast, Haman, who longs to wear the crown, walks away in humiliation and a "head covering" (וְחֹפִי' רֹאשׁ), as a symbol of shame (cf. Jer 14:3).<sup>39</sup> This self-made covering may be a subtle foreshadowing of

<sup>37</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Esther*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 5–12.

<sup>38</sup> While his central focus on Esther 5 is debatable, Anthony Tomasino is certainly correct in saying, "The 'hinge' of the chiasmus should possess true *cruciality*, being essential to the narrative or thematic development of the text. A chiasm necessarily focuses attention on a central thought or scene, and that scene should therefore be important." Tomasino, "Interpreting Esther from the Inside Out," 106, emphasis original.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Ruth, Esther*, 171.

the death shroud that will be placed on him before execution in Esther 7:8. In this way, Hannah's great reversal principle is powerfully illustrated as the "poor" (i.e., helpless) Mordecai is crowned and exalted to a princely place, while the "lofty" Agagite, who seeks to oppress him, is humiliated and ashamed. This unexpected change of clothing hints at the reversal that will be completed in the final chapters of Esther.

#### 4.4. Haman's Fall and Mordecai's Exaltation

Throughout the book of Samuel, the word "fall" (נפל) typically refers to the humiliating death of the arrogant. Their "fall" visibly indicates that proud oppressors are brought low by the Lord because of their self-exaltation. The word נפל denotes the same idea in Esther.<sup>40</sup> Haman has exalted himself, and as a consequence, he is doomed for a divinely tailored fall. After receiving the humiliating order to lead "Mordecai the Jew" in a royal procession, Haman returns crestfallen and ashamed to his wife and his friends who, just a few verses earlier, counseled him to have Mordecai hanged. This time, however, Haman's wife and friends prophetically warn of his coming ruin: "If Mordecai before whom you have begun to fall (נפל), is one of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall (נפל) before him" (6:13). The doubling of the word נפל in Hebrew communicates the certainty of Haman's impending doom. Haman's entourage sees what he cannot: those who arrogantly oppress God's people, who sit in the dust, will fall before them in shame.<sup>41</sup> It is as David Firth writes:

Zeresh's speech, though at one level ignorant of Hannah's Song, thus points straight back to it. A theological interpretation of Haman's fall, which is complete the following day when he is impaled on the stake he erected for Mordecai (7:10), is thus provided in advance. Zeresh can see this only as something inscrutable about the Jews of the empire, but by situating the story within the traditions of Samuel, the narrative fills that out to point to Yahweh's concern for the weak.<sup>42</sup>

In short, Esther's implicit dependence upon the Samuel narrative demonstrates that self-exaltation against God's people will always end in humiliation and defeat.

The author insinuates divine timing as the king's eunuchs come to escort Haman to the very feast where he will meet an ironic demise while his friends are still speaking. It is at Queen Esther's feast that Haman's true plot is revealed to the king. In Esther 3:15, Haman celebrates his presumptuous victory over the Jews by sitting down to drink with the king. The author masterfully notes the irony by highlight that it is on the second day while "they were drinking wine" (7:2) that the reversal takes place. Esther tells her husband that there is one who seeks her life and the lives of her people. In apparent shock, the king asks, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" Esther answers, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" (7:6). The scheme is now out and Haman's true intent exposed. The man who is

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<sup>40</sup> Winitzer writes, "Concerning *npl* in general, however: it is submitted that the intersection between what this verb intends to recall throughout Esther on the one hand, and the reversal them in all its manifestations on the other, constitutes nothing less than the core message of the book." Winitzer, "The Reversal of Fortune Theme in Esther," 182.

<sup>41</sup> Webb writes, "Zeresh here probably confronts Haman with something he himself already knows but has been fighting against; this is a fight he cannot win." Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*, NSBT 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 123.

<sup>42</sup> Firth, "When Samuel Met Esther," 25.

enraged when Mordecai refused to tremble, now sits in terror before the king and queen. Naturally, the king is outraged, which is made evident by his sudden departure from the wine-drinking.

Haman begs for his life, and when the king returns, he finds Haman falling (נפל) on the queen's couch. Here, נפל carries a double irony. Haman "falls" before Esther in humiliating defeat—the prince becomes a beggar—and yet, the king interprets his actions as attempted molestation (כבש) of the queen. Molesting the queen was considered a usurpation of the king's authority, and though Haman is begging Esther and not actually molesting her, he nevertheless dies a self-exalting usurper's death.<sup>43</sup> The prince who exalted himself against God's people meets his end when the pagan king mistakenly interprets his falling as an attempt to seize the throne.<sup>44</sup> This ironic confusion leads to Haman's immediate shame: "As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face" (7:8). Haman's head covering in Esther 6 now becomes a death shroud. Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, reports that Haman had prepared gallows for Mordecai, the man whose actions saved the king. Then comes the swift order: "Hang him on that" (7:9).

The author concludes Haman's fall, writing, "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated" (7:10). That Haman hangs (תלה) on the gallows or, literally, a tree (עץ) is a subtle allusion to Deuteronomy 21:23 that says that anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed by God himself.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Haman's hanging on a tree signifies both that Haman has been cursed by God and that the Abrahamic promise, "Him who dishonors you I will curse" (Gen 12:3), is upheld. While this thematic connection of Haman's cursed death does not directly connect to the book of Samuel, it does nevertheless prove that Haman's demise is due to divine causality. Haman's attempt to shame Mordecai falls back on his own head (9:25), and he dies by the very means he intended to destroy Mordecai.<sup>46</sup> In this way, Haman's arrogance-induced "fall" certainly alludes to the great reversal motif established in the book of Samuel. The "lofty" Agagite falls before those who sit in the dust; and, as will be seen in the narrative's conclusion, those who sit in the dust are raised to princely places.

#### 4.5. Mordecai's Exaltation

In Esther 8, the signet ring that had once been given to Haman and all of Haman's property become Mordecai's possessions. In this way, the Jew "plunders" his enemy instead of Haman plundering the possessions of the Jews. An edict is then signed into law and sealed with the king's ring declaring that

<sup>43</sup> Taylor notes that molesting the queen would have been taken as "a ploy commonly used by usurpers of thrones." Taylor, *Ruth, Esther*, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor writes, "Given that Xerxes had just a day earlier been reminded of the plot to kill him and seize power (2:19–23; 6:1–3), and given that royal wives and concubines were often used as pawns in royal power plays, and given Haman's obvious obsession with honor, success, attention, and the idea of being king for a day ... it is not surprising that Xerxes may have believed Haman was intent on usurping the throne." Taylor, *Ruth, Esther*, 183.

<sup>45</sup> While the actual practice may very well have been impalement (no less of a humiliation), the Hebrew author decides to depict Haman's death as "hanging on a tree" in order to emphasize that his death was a curse from God.

<sup>46</sup> Josephus comments, "And from hence I cannot forbear to admire God, and to learn hence his wisdom and his justice, not only in punishing the wickedness of Haman, but in so disposing it, that he should undergo the very same punishment which he had contrived for another; as also, because thereby he teaches others this lesson, that what mischiefs anyone prepares against another, he without knowing of it, first contrives it against himself" (see *Jewish Antiquities* 11.6.268). Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 303.

the Jews are free to defend themselves from impending attacks. Mordecai came into the king's palace as an oppressed Jew but leaves as a powerful prince dressed in royal robes and wearing a golden crown (8:15). The Jews' mourning, fasting, weeping, and lamenting (4:3) is replaced with light, gladness, joy, and honor (8:16). On that day, a "reversal" (הפך) occurred as the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.<sup>47</sup> The Jews' sorrow is reversed (הפך) and is turned into gladness. They go from mourning in the dust to rejoicing and feasting (9:22). The passive form of הפך should be viewed as a divine passive, as it was God who reversed the Jews looming defeat into an outstanding victory. Thousands of enemies who "hated them" die, including the sons of Haman—of whom Haman had boasted in 5:11.<sup>48</sup> They are hung and Haman's future line is completely wiped out thereby accomplishing the חרם God had commanded of Saul in 1 Samuel 15. The Pur (casting of lots) that once signified death becomes a holiday in which the Jews celebrate their salvation. Even more significantly, it is during Purim that the Jews give gifts to the "needy" (אֲבִיּוֹן), perhaps as a reminder that God will lift "the needy (אֲבִיּוֹן) from the ash heap" (1 Sam 2:8) as he did with Mordecai. The narrative concludes with a final word about Mordecai, who in his exaltation becomes "great" (גָּדֹל) in the kingdom and among his people. His exaltation secures both good and *shalom* for the exiles. With this final description, the author reminds his readers that those who think of themselves as great will be humbled, while those who humbly know they are weak will become great. Put simply, those who humbly depend on God will be saved, while the arrogant will be ruined.

### 5. Theological Implications of Hannah's Reversal Motif in Esther

Having explored the great reversal theme in Esther, which mirrors the reversal spoken of in 1 Samuel 2:8 as well as the various "falls" of the arrogant throughout the book of Samuel, one is left asking what theological message the author intended his readers to discern. If he was indeed employing Hannah's great reversal motif, then to what end? As mentioned before, Hannah's reversal psalm crescendos in a declaration of the Lord's sovereignty: "For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's and on them he has set the world." In other words, such reversals prove that the Lord alone holds ownership over all things. He alone is King of the earth. In Esther, the reversal of the humble poor and self-exalting princes happens not in the Promised Land but in Persia—where, according to the ancient Near Eastern thought, Israel's deity has no jurisdiction or domain.<sup>49</sup> The book of Esther powerfully asserts that the Lord's sovereignty

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<sup>47</sup> Firth says that הפך is "as close as the narrator comes to mentioning God directly as the author of deliverance." David F. Firth, *The Message of Esther*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 122.

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that both Saul and Haman lose ten sons. In 1 Samuel, three of Saul's sons die on Mount Gilboa; and in 2 Samuel, seven sons are hanged for the breach of the covenant with the Gibeonites. The aftermath of Saul's and Haman's demise has a very similar ending, though Saul's line is not completely wiped out as Haman's is.

<sup>49</sup> With his people exiled from their homeland and the temple destroyed, in ancient Near Eastern eyes, the God of Israel and his people had lost all important links between each other—thus, from an outsider's perspective, Israel's God has been rendered powerless. By carting off the temple articles, the Babylonians had seemingly declared the supremacy of their own gods over Yahweh. Dandamayev writes, "The images of deities of enemies were not smashed but only carried away in order to deprive the enemies of the support of their gods." Muhammad Dandamayev, *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Lanham: University Press of Maryland, 1996), 40. In short, without their temple, without their rituals, without their land, the people of Judah were seemingly without

is not limited to life in the land of Israel. Even the pillars of Persia are his, which is made evident by the fact that his poor people are exalted to princely places and made to inherit a seat of honor, while their self-exalting oppressors “fall” before them. In this, God will preserve his covenant people come-what-may. It is as Peter Lee argues: “The book of Esther testifies again that there is nothing that can halt the Lord from accomplishing his divine plan”—not even exile in a foreign land.<sup>50</sup> Who else in all of OT Scripture is said to raise up the poor from the dust? Mordecai’s rise from the dust/ashes was a clear indication that the God of Israel is still with his people and is working to bring his redemptive plan to fruition. Even though the remnant of Judah languishes in Persia, Israel’s God still knows the arrogant speech of their enemies and measures their actions in judgment. Even in times when God’s hand seems hidden, his hand is ever moving toward the enthronement of his anointed (1 Sam 2:10). His silent sovereignty preserves his people and ensures that the redemptive plan with its *telos* in Christ will one day be fulfilled.<sup>51</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

As this article has labored to demonstrate, it is not entirely accurate to say that the author of Esther gives no literary place to God or God’s sovereign work. To be sure, the author may have had a purpose in not explicitly mentioning God. However, his use of the great reversal motif powerfully brings God into the foreground, as it is God who sovereignly brings about such reversals.<sup>52</sup> Abraham Winitzer agrees: “Israel’s deity is indeed to be found in Esther, even if on the face of it his presence is only alluded to by Mordechai’s [sic] faithful words and loyal conduct.”<sup>53</sup> The story of a lofty, self-exalting prince being brought low, while a humble Jew who sits in the dust is exalted to a princely place mandates the conclusion that it is God who did it, thus proving that “the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s and on them he has set the world.” Evil men may cast *Pur*, but it is the Lord who sovereignly determines the result (Prov 16:32).<sup>54</sup> Esther powerfully shows that it is the sovereign God of Israel who will humble the self-exalting and exalt the humble, no matter how the lots may fall. He alone brings his poor people from ashes to glory, from fasting to feasting, and only he can cause them to rise from the dust to sit with princes. It is through the great reversal theme—evidenced by Mordecai the Jew rising up out of the

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a Divine protector. The book of Esther counters that thought by showing God’s supremacy even in the land of Persia.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Y. Lee, “Esther,” *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. by Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016): 489.

<sup>51</sup> Lee writes, “Thus Haman’s aim to annihilate the Jews witnesses once again the attempts made by the wicked seed to nullify the redemptive seed of life. God, however, preserves that seed, which climaxes in the true seed of the woman in the person of Jesus Christ.” Lee, “Esther,” 492.

<sup>52</sup> Levenson writes, “Mordecai, Haman’s advisers, and Zeresh have articulated the theology of the book of Esther rather completely: A hidden force arranges events in such a way that even against the most daunting odds the Jews are protected and delivered. The hiddenness of the force is an essential part of this theology.” Levenson, *Esther*, 21. Webb artistically adds that the hidden hand of God works to show that “God is present even when he is most absent.” Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Winitzer, “The Reversal of Fortune Theme in Esther,” 187.

<sup>54</sup> As Barry Webb notes, “[God’s] people are never simply at the mercy of blind fate or of malign powers, whether human or supernatural.” Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 125. Baldwin adds, “Even when the die had fallen the Lord was powerful to reverse its good omen into bad, in order to deliver his people.” See Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 23.

dust to inherit honor (glory) and the proud Haman “falling” in disgrace—that Esther proves that, even if hidden, God is still “present as deliverer.”<sup>55</sup>

In the final evaluation, then, the book of Esther contributes to the canon by calling God’s people to a humble and faithful dependence upon Yahweh who, while at times unseen, knows and weighs the actions of all people. In his sovereignty, the Lord will bring about a great reversal, thereby securing redemption for those who trust in him and bringing about the fall of all who arrogantly oppress them. Thus, by using the reversal theme established in the book of Samuel, the author of Esther testifies to all: “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s and on them he has set the world” (1 Sam 2:8).

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<sup>55</sup> Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 124.

# Ben Sira's Canon Conscious Interpretive Strategies: His Narrative History and Realization of the Jewish Scriptures

— Peter Beckman —

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**Abstract:** This paper will outline the canon-conscious worldview of Ben Sira, highlight the major contents of his authoritative corpus of Jewish Writings, and describe his hermeneutical strategies. Ben Sira's interpretive methods include (1) his reading the Jewish Scriptures as a coherent religious message and (2) his realization and application of these texts to and within his believing community. This scripturally authoritative worldview understands that the Jewish Scriptures are not locked away in the past, but rather it believes that they can and ought to be realized in the present believing community who models and participates in its story.

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Our modern Bibles consist of a bound together book format (i.e., codex) of numerous texts into one unified manuscript. This binding format makes it seem natural for the narrative from Genesis to Revelation to be read as a cohesive unit. Before the advent of the codex book format in the first and second centuries AD, the individual books of the Old Testament were not bound together; instead of one book, there were numerous different scrolls preserved by the believing people.<sup>1</sup> How were the Scriptures read by the people of God in the years that preceded the advent of the Christian Messiah which was followed by the bringing together of the various scrolls into a unified book? Were the different stories read individually or were they part of a greater narrative? The hermeneutical and interpretive tendencies of Ben Sira and his grandson help to answer these questions.

Ben Sira's interpretive methods include (1) reading the Jewish Scriptures as a coherent religious message and (2) applying these texts to and within his believing community. This article will describe Ben Sira's canon-conscious worldview that contains an authoritative corpus of scriptural texts and certain hermeneutical strategies. This textually authoritative worldview understands that the Jewish Scriptures are not locked away in the past as documents that only speak to previous persons and communities, but rather it holds that they can and ought to be realized in the present believing community. Early

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<sup>1</sup> Tomas Bokedal, *The Formation and Significance of the Christian Biblical Canon: A Study in Text, Ritual and Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 125–27.

Christians employed this canonically unified interpretive tradition within Second Temple Judaism in their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in light of the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

### *1. The Relevance and Status of Sirach within the Christian Tradition*

Within the Christian tradition, the nature of Sirach's authority has been identified in various ways. In the East, Athanasius (ca. 367), the Synod of Laodicea (ca. 360), Amphilochius of Iconium (ca. 395), Jerome (ca. 390–393) and Gregory Nazianzus (ca. 390) do not include Sirach in the Old Testament canon but include it in a list of other non-canonical books "appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness."<sup>2</sup> In the West, Augustine (ca. 397) and the Third Council of Carthage (397) include Sirach within the canonical books of the Old Testament itself. The Latin Vulgate and subsequent Roman Catholic tradition followed this trajectory.<sup>3</sup> Like some thinkers in the East, the churches of the Reformation never identified Sirach as scriptural in the same sense as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, in the Lutheran and Anglican traditions, it was and is still maintained as part of regular lectionary readings.<sup>4</sup> Early Lutheran and Anglican Bible editions such as the *Lutherbibel* (1531), the Froschauer Zürich Bible (1531), and the King James Version (1611) included Sirach along with other apocryphal books in a separate section after the scriptural books of the Old Testament. Although the Apocrypha was not Scripture, Bibles without the Apocrypha were considered deficient. Likewise, some reading plans, such as the Lutheran *Calendarium* of the Elector's Bible (1736), and the Anglican Lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer (1662) included Sirach in their regular Bible reading plans. Doctrinal statements, theologians, and popular piety made use of this book as a witness to the practical piety and lived out virtue found in the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup> Historically speaking Sirach was and is part of the heritage of the undivided Christian

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<sup>2</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter 39* (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 4:552); cf. Jerome, *Prologus Galeatus*. See also Daniel Harrington, "The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Early Church and Today," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 199; Elias Oikonomos, "The Significance of the Deuterocanonical Writings in the Orthodox Church," in *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. Siegfried Meurer (Reading, UK: United Bible Societies, 1992), 20–22; Edmon Gallagher and John Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 198–203. For a comparison of various early canon lists, see Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*.

<sup>3</sup> *Breviarium Hipponense* 36; Augustine, *Christian Instruction*, 2.8.12.24–13.29. Gallagher and Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*, 223–30; Hans Peter Rüger, "Le siracide: un livre à la frontière du canon," in *Le canon de l'Ancien Testament: sa formation et son histoire*, ed. Jean-Daniel Kaestli and Otto Wermelinger (Genève: Labor et fides, 1984), 56; Harrington, "The Old Testament Apocrypha," 198–99.

<sup>4</sup> Article 6 of the Anglican 39 Articles states that the Apocrypha (including Sirach) should be read "for example of life and instruction of manners"; Article 35's Book of Homilies cites the Apocrypha about eighty times. While the Reformed tradition always was less favorable to the use of the Apocrypha, only in the 19th century was the Apocrypha more commonly removed from Bibles as more economically affordable and "pocket sized" editions were mass produced. Bruce Metzger, *Introduction to the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 181–204; Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157–58.

<sup>5</sup> David Chyträus, *Sententiae Iesv Syracidae: Qvae Svnt Vera Et Sacra Christianorum Ethica: Illustratae explicatione* (Wittenberg: Johannes Crato, 1573); Valerius Herberger, *Erklärung des Haus- und Zucht-Buchs Jesus Sirach* (Frauenstadt: Leidenfrost, 1739); Eve-Marie Becker, "Jesus Sirach und das Luthertum des 16. Jahrhunderts:

Church and provides a valuable example of a pre-Christian interpretive witness of the Old Testament narrative.

## 2. *The History and Textual Status of Sirach*

Jesus (i.e. Joshua), son of Eleazar, son of Sirach of Jerusalem—or simply Ben Sira—wrote the book of Sirach in Hebrew sometime between 195 and 175 BC (Sir 50:27).<sup>6</sup> It was later translated into Greek by his grandson 65–70 years later in Egypt (Sir Prologue).<sup>7</sup> Both texts are prime examples of Second Temple Jews applying Old Testament themes to their religious contexts and communities.<sup>8</sup>

While originally written in Hebrew, there is not one complete Hebrew manuscript of Sirach. There is only about 3/4 of the Hebrew text extant.<sup>9</sup> The Greek translation, which is the oldest complete edition of the text, appears to be essentially a faithful contextualization of the original Hebrew version (i.e., the *Vorlage*) along with a brief introduction and conclusion by the translator.<sup>10</sup> We recognize that there are differences between these versions, but for the sake of the passages examined in this study, the ongoing assumption is that the Greek recension essentially translates the thought existent in the previous Hebrew *Vorlage* unless otherwise noted.<sup>11</sup>

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Über Inhalt und Funktion eines schlesischen Katechismus von 1561,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference Durham Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel, BZAW 321 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 353–55; Klaus Fricke, “Apocrypha in the Lutheran Bible,” in *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective*, ed. Siegfried Meurer (Reading, UK: United Bible Societies, 1991), 58–67; Ernst Koch, “Die Himmlische Philosophie des heiligen Geistes. Zur Bedeutung alttestamentlicher Spruchweisheit im Luthertum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,” *TLZ* 115 (1990): 705–20; William Daubney, *The Use of the Apocrypha in the Christian Church* (C. J. Clay, 1900).

<sup>6</sup> Marko Marttila, *Foreign Nations in the Wisdom of Ben Sira: A Jewish Sage between Opposition and Assimilation*, DCLS 13 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 3–4; Alexander Di Lella and Patrick Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 550; Bradley Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Wright, *No Small Difference: Sirach’s Relationship to Its Hebrew Parent Text*, SBLSCS 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 1. The prologue only states that it was translated in Egypt, while most people assume it was in Alexandria, this is not conclusively known since Jewish communities also were in Memphis and other cities, see James Aitken, “The Literary Attainment of the Translator of Greek Sirach,” in *The Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten, JSJSup 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 98–99.

<sup>8</sup> John Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Núria Calduch-Benages, “Ben Sira y el canon de las escrituras,” *Greg* 78 (1997): 361.

<sup>10</sup> Studies in the grandson’s Greek recension have demonstrated that in his translation he was primarily interested in accurately translating the Sirach *Vorlage* before him into the understandable Greek of his day. Various features of the recension, such as a greater fluidity and natural style in the prologue as well as Hebraisms maintained in the translation, indicate that the translator was interested in not creating a new work but in faithfully making his grandfather’s work accessible to Greek speakers. See Aitken, “The Literary Attainment,” 108; Benjamin Wright, “Translation Greek in Sirach in Light of the Grandson’s Prologue,” in *The Texts and Versions of Ben Sira*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 75–94.

<sup>11</sup> We recognize that there are major differences between both versions, but for the topic of this study we do not think that the results are dramatically different. If there appears to be any unique contribution provided in the Greek recension this will be noted. This is a necessary assumption because for many of the passages we examine in this study there is no known extant Hebrew manuscript. The best available scholarly Hebrew edition of Sirach,

### 3. Ben Sira's Worldview of Authoritative Texts

The word canon does not appear in the actual text of Ben Sira. The reality is that the word canon comes from a later theological period; nevertheless, this does not mean that there was not a similar concept or worldview utilized by Ben Sira. While Ben Sira did not use the term canon, he affirmed the concept of an authoritative corpus of texts that he believed were of divine origin and normative for his community. As we will see, his method of approaching the Jewish scriptures was remarkably like the interpretive methods of early Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

This is where Ben Sira is a valuable resource, because it can be demonstrated that he acknowledges and interprets a corpus of authoritative writings. While an understanding of a biblical canon, such as that of the later Masoretic Text, was not yet present (or at least universally adhered to) in Second Temple Judaism, it is evident to any reader that Sirach was immersed in the Jewish Scriptures and contained a “canon-consciousness.” He believed that there was a body of sacred literature that was a normative guide to the community’s faith and practice.<sup>13</sup> For Ben Sira “the Scriptural canon shapes [his] religious consciousness and informs how key concepts are understood and presented.”<sup>14</sup>

In the current historical study of Sirach, there are maximalist and minimalist claims of the influence of earlier Jewish Writings upon his thought. Scholars have rightly cautioned against assuming that Ben Sira’s use of Jewish scriptural vocabulary signifies that he is alluding to a specific biblical passage. It is not clear that we can distinguish between common wisdom vocabulary used by Ben Sira in a worshiping and academic Jewish environment and a direct reference to a previous passage.<sup>15</sup> While Ben Sira was generally familiar with a proto-Masoretic Text, because we do not know what textual version

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which is used in the study, is Pancratius Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts*, VTSup 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1997). English LXX citations (*LES*) are from Ken M. Penner, Rick Brannan, Israel Loken, Michael Aubrey, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012). Greek citations are from the standard Greek critical edition Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Early Christian groups viewed various books as divine Scripture; these were authoritative books that they believed were given to them under God’s supervision. This belief that there were divine Scriptures was shared with many Second Temple Jewish groups that shared the conviction that there were certain books that were Scripture (Matt 19:3–9). The belief that there was scripture signified that there was an implicit category of non-scripture. The loosely agreed upon list/collection of scriptural books was later easily recognized as a canon by later communities that were forced to answer these questions. These were later called the Old Testament and New Testament across various Christian communities. James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 52–54; Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging The Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 27–46; Bokedal, *The Formation and Significance*, 70–79.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament*, BZAW 151 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 109–10; Jack Sanders, *Wisdom and Torah Traditions in Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, SBLMS 28 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “Ben Sira’s Praise of the Fathers: A Canon-Conscious Reading,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference Durham Ushaw College 2001*, ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel, BZAW 321 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 243.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *No Small Difference*, 123–24. John Snaith, “Biblical Quotations in the Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus,” *JTS* 18 (1967): 11–12.

of a Jewish scriptural book he used, we cannot know with certainty what passage he was referring to.<sup>16</sup> Maximalist readings assume that Ben Sira had the complete Torah (essentially assumed to be equivalent to the Masoretic Text) and commented upon it in his writings.<sup>17</sup> Other authors take a more middle of the road approach and believe that Ben Sira is commenting on canonical themes and did have a form of the Jewish Scriptures in mind when he wrote about certain passages, but are cautious to claim that he is commenting on a specific passage.<sup>18</sup> This study generally assumes the third view. We will now identify Ben Sira's references to various groupings of Scripture.

#### 4. *An Authoritative Corpus in Ben Sira*

When we read through Sirach, we see that the author makes references to various stories, teachings, and documents contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. He assumed that his audience was familiar with these writings and understood them to be of divine origin and authoritative. We will see here that he makes specific reference to many of the books associated with the sections of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

##### 4.1. Ben Sira's Reference to the Torah

Scholars have identified Ben Sira's scriptural corpus as some unified form of at least the Torah and Prophets.<sup>19</sup> Ben Sira frequently mentions the term Law to refer to divine commandments generally (Sir 32:24; 33:2; 41:8).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, throughout his book he at times refers to νόμος to indicate a specific writing that he considered to be divine Scripture:

All these things are the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded as an inheritance for the congregation of Jacob [νόμον ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυση̄ς κληρονομίαν συναγωγᾶς Ἰακωβ̄]. (Sir 24:23)

While Ben Sira elsewhere refers generally to the Mosaic covenant linked to a law of the Most High (Sir 42:2; 44:20), here he makes explicit that this law is linked to an explicit book. This book is some early version of the Hebrew Pentateuch. This reliance on a version of the Mosaic Torah is strengthened by the fact that Sirach 24:23 appears to be an almost verbatim citation of LXX Deuteronomy 33:4.<sup>21</sup> While one

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Wright, "The Use and Interpretation of Biblical Tradition in Ben Sira's Praise of the Ancestors," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May 2006*, ed. Géza Xeravits, JSJSup 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 189. Andrew Schmidt, "Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2017), 245–47.

<sup>17</sup> Marc Jolley, "The Function of Torah in Sirach" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Seminary, 1993), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Burton Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers*, CSJH (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 80–81, 112–13.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Louis Ska, "L'éloge des pères dans le siracide et le canon de l'ancien testament," in *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom*, ed. N. Calduch-Benages and J. Vermeylen, BETL 143 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 181; Timothy Lim, "A Theory of the Majority Canon," *ExpTim* 124 (2013): 369.

<sup>20</sup> In the Greek Recension this is referred to by νόμος (i.e., Sir 2:16) and in available Hebrew Manuscripts as תורה (15:1; 32:24).

<sup>21</sup> Compare with "a law, which Moses commanded you, an inheritance of the congregations of Jacob [νόμον, ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυση̄ς, κληρονομίαν συναγωγᾶς Ἰακωβ̄]" (LXX Deut 33:4). See Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Her-*

cannot know the exact text-form used by Ben Sira, this indicates that there was a written form of the Mosaic Torah/Law that was regarded as scriptural or authoritative for the children of Israel.<sup>22</sup>

The belief in a specific corpus of divine Scriptures discernible as the Law of the Most High appears evident in Ben Sira's later comments. In his admonition to wise men, he exhorts them to examine various bodies of literature. In the process, he outlines various collections which include the Law of the Most High, the wisdom of the ancients, and prophecies.

But the one who gave his soul freely and ponders on the law of the Most High [ἐν νόμῳ ὑψίστου] will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients and be occupied in prophecies [ἐν προφητείαις]. He will preserve the tale of renowned men and will enter along with the turnings of parables. He will seek out the secrets of proverbs, and he will be conversant with obscure parables. (Sir 39:1–3)

In this passage, Ben Sira clearly distinguishes between different groups of writings. The Law of the Most High appears to be a distinct literary entity.<sup>23</sup> It is not clear if the other collections of prophecies, discourses, and parables refer to specific documents. Some commentators believe that in this passage, Ben Sira merely lists Jewish literature in general and does not reference here an authoritative corpus of writings for the believing community.<sup>24</sup> This does not make the best sense of the data because the Law, Prophets, and Writings that Ben Sira mentions, are uniquely derived from God.<sup>25</sup> He does not imbue other sources of knowledge, such as foreign medicine (Sir 38:1–15), or the discourse of notable men (39:2), as coming directly from God. As we will see, in other contexts Ben Sira will continue to outline these writings as authoritative and from God. In conclusion, we see here that Ben Sira identifies the Law as Scripture for his community.

#### 4.2. Ben Sira's Reference to the Prophets

Ben Sira displays his knowledge of prophetic history generally and appears to refer to a specific collection of Twelve Prophets. In his narrative history, he refers to the three major prophets in the same order found in the Hebrew canon, from Isaiah (Sir 48:22), to Jeremiah (49:6), to Ezekiel (49:8), culminating with a reference to the Twelve Prophets (49:10).<sup>26</sup> Ben Sira meticulously only uses the title prophet to refer to characters from the conquest of the land until the exile, indicating that he has a

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*meneutical Construct*, 101.

<sup>22</sup> Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 68–69, 106; Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Borchartd, "Prologue of Sirach (Ben Sira) and The Question of Canon," in *Sacra Scriptura: How "Non-Canonical" Texts Functioned in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Blake Jurgens, and Lee Martin McDonald, JCTC 20 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 64; Armin Lange, "The Law, the Prophets, and the Other Books of the Fathers," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengeller, JSJSup 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 67, 70.

<sup>25</sup> The Law is a book from God (Sir 24:23; 39:1), and the Prophets are exclusively figures who precede the return from the exile who speak for God and see visions (46:13, 16). Prophets are those who pray (see Gen 20:7). Goshen-Gottstein, "Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers," 254.

<sup>26</sup> Ska, "L'éloge des pères," 182.

specific concept in mind.<sup>27</sup> These prophets are not merely sages, but speak for God and see visions (46:13, 16). He also references the Twelve Prophets in a similar form to that found in the later Masoretic Text: “And also the Twelve Prophets [אֲנֹכִי וְעֶשֶׂר הַנְּבִיאִים]” (49:10; author’s trans.).<sup>28</sup> The use of the title “the Twelve Prophets” is likely an assumed recognizable entity. Ben Sira seems to be familiar with the twelve books as a grouping of prophetic writings.<sup>29</sup> In conclusion, we see that he is familiar with a prophetic history like that found in the Jewish Scriptures and regards them as instructive for his community.

### 4.3. Ben Sira’s Reference to the Writings in his Narrative History of Israel

Ben Sira does not explicitly describe a collection of books which would later be called the Writings; however, in his narrative history of Israel, he refers to most of the sequentially portrayed characters of the Writings. He tells the story of the Jewish Scriptures not by referring to books but by referring to religious themes that connect them. Within his narrative history of Israel, Ben Sira outlines his knowledge of a version of an earlier Hebrew version of the Pentateuch by speaking of the fathers from Noah, to Abraham, to Aaron, and Moses (Sir 44:16–45:26).<sup>30</sup> Ben Sira does not identify the Pentateuch as a book, but rather refers to its contents as associated with the covenants. He distinguishes, not between books, but between covenants made with primeval persons, the patriarchs, Moses, and David. His categorization of Scripture is thematic.<sup>31</sup> After the covenantal section, Ben Sira follows the Deuteronomistic History (as opposed to the Chronicler) and outlines the history of kings and prophets from Joshua to Zerubbabel whom he highlights as prophets or engaging in prophecy (Sir 46:1–49:13).<sup>32</sup> While the exact textual form of the Hebrew *Vorlage* he used cannot be verified, in his Praise of the Fathers’ narrative, Ben Sira alludes textually to an essentially thematic and narratively similar textual tradition to the Pentateuch, Prophets, and some of the writings contained in the Hebrew Jewish Scriptures.<sup>33</sup> He does not explicitly

<sup>27</sup> Ska, “L’éloge des pères,” 184.

<sup>28</sup> This differs slightly from the Greek version which states “and the bones of the Twelve Prophets [καὶ τῶν δώδεκα προφητῶν τὰ ὀστά].”

<sup>29</sup> Sid Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, TCAAS 47 (Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1976), 27; Jeremy Corley, “Canonical Assimilation in Ben Sira’s Portrayal of Joshua and Samuel,” in *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol, DCLS 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 69–70. The collection of individual oracles into a recognizable list imbued them with a sense of authority. A list delineated the right way to read them as Scripture. Michael Floyd, “New Form Criticism and Beyond: The Historicity of Prophetic Literature Revisited,” in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark Boda, Colin Toffelmire, and Michael Floyd, ANEM 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 27–31.

<sup>30</sup> Corley, “Canonical Assimilation,” 186.

<sup>31</sup> Corley, “Canonical Assimilation,” 188.

<sup>32</sup> Corley, “Canonical Assimilation,” 189–90. Many of the books, such as Joshua or Samuel, which were later identified as part of the writings, were at the time of Ben Sira identified as prophets. Corley, “Canonical Assimilation,” 69–70. Ben Sira embodies some themes similar to those in Chronicles such as the high liturgical importance of David, see Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> Craig Evans, “The Scriptures of Jesus and His Earliest Followers,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 187; Rieger, “Le siracide: un livre à la frontière du canon,” 60–64. Sirach makes no explicit reference to the wisdom books such as Proverbs or Ecclesiastes but its textual format of bicolon stanzas show that it likely was inspired by these writings.

comment on some of the other books of the Writings such as Ruth, Song of Songs, Ezra, Chronicles, Daniel, or Esther; nonetheless, he shows a remarkable knowledge of the essential Deuteronomistic and Prophetic History.<sup>34</sup> Ben Sira possesses knowledge of the narrative history of Israel in a form remarkably similar to that of the later Jewish Masoretic Text. His comments on the Scripture's many narrative parts indicate that he believed that there was a body of sacred literature normative to the faith and practice of his people.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.4. Canon Consciousness in Ben Sira's Grandson's Interpretive Remarks

In the Greek version of Sirach, Ben Sira's grandson writes a prologue where he communicates his concept of the Jewish Scriptures. While it is arguable that there may not have been a clear tripartite division of the Jewish Scriptures in mind in Hebrew Ben Sira, his grandson clearly understands that the Hebrew Scriptures are divisible into three separate sections.<sup>36</sup>

Many and great things to us through the law and the prophets and the others [διὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων] who followed after them. (Sir Prologue)

Likewise, the prologue clarifies that Sirach was written as a result of Ben Sira's reflection on the Law, Prophets, and other books to help those who read to live according to the Law:

My grandfather, Joshua [i.e. Jesus], having given himself over much *time* to reading the law and the prophets and the other books of *our* ancestors [τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πατρίων βιβλίων], and after obtaining sufficient skill in these, was himself also prompted to write something of the things pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that those eager to learn, having become acquainted with these things also, might make much more progress on account of the divine law of life. (Sir Prologue)

The prologue highlights that by its time (and incidentally early in Christianity) there existed within some movements of Judaism a fluid tripartite understanding of Scripture. While there were three general collections, the exact contents of each of them were still fluid.<sup>37</sup> While most groups agreed on most of the books contained in these collections, there remained a lack of consensus concerning certain books such as Esther or Ecclesiastes. While Ben Sira does not delineate a comprehensive canon list in Hebrew Sirach, by the time of the Greek version the teaching sage does refer to some explicit groupings of scriptural writings.

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<sup>34</sup> Ska, "L'éloge des pères," 189–92; Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 110. Ben Sira's lack of explanation to convince his audience of the authenticity of the writings he refers to, indicates that there was a sizable population of Second Temple Jews who by the earlier part of the 2nd Century BC possessed a corpus of scriptural writings remarkably similar to that later espoused in the Hebrew Canon.

<sup>36</sup> Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 29; Lim, "A Theory of the Majority Canon," 369. The Law and Prophets are given recognizable titles whereas what would later be included in the Writings are merely called the others without a specific title. This indicates that this identification of this division as a commonly held concept was perhaps a more recent development that was gradually spreading. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 165.

## 5. Ben Sira's Canonically Informed Interpretive Strategies

In the previous section, we demonstrated that Ben Sira possessed a corpus of authoritative writings that proceeded from a divine origin. We will show here that Ben Sira and his grandson interpreted these diverse ancient documents as together forming a coherent message that informed and shaped their present religious communities.

### 5.1. Ben Sira's Hermeneutical Interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures as a Coherent Religious Message

Most modern readers are exposed to the books of the Jewish Scriptures or the Old Testament as a unified document. This internal thematic and theological coherence is assumed by the binding together of various texts by different authors into one book. As we will see, this internal unity was not always historically evident and was not assumed by all Second Temple Jews. This is where the importance of Ben Sira as a historical figure emerges because he believed that the Jewish Scriptures could be read as a part of a unified narrative emphasizing themes that ought to be emulated by later members of his believing community.

On a historical level, we must recognize that in different times in history readers might not have seen this coherence between different books. With perhaps the exception of Chronicles and some comments in other later books, it is not immediately clear that many of the Jewish scriptural texts, if read as separate books by individual authors, must be read as parts of a unified plot that share a coherent theology.<sup>38</sup> Various groups within Second Temple Judaism disagreed about the extent of the scriptural corpus. Some groups read the Pentateuch alone as the authoritative writing for their community.<sup>39</sup> This was further complicated by the textual reality of books being read separately because they were not bound

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<sup>38</sup> Some introductory remarks of canonical interpretive trajectory are in the Hebrew Texts themselves. F. F. Bruce, "The Earliest Old Testament Interpretation," in *The Witness of Tradition: Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at Woudschoten, 1970*, ed. Martinus A. Beek, Oudtestamentische Studiën 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 37–52; Robert I. Vasholz, *The Old Testament Canon in the Old Testament Church: The Internal Rationale for Old Testament Canonicity*, ANETS 7 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> For instance, the Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch and rejected the books of the Prophets and Writings as Scripture. J. Coggins, *Samaritan and Jews: The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 148–53. The Sadducees likewise appear to have only accepted the Pentateuch and rejected the other books as well as oral tradition, see Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 211. Different communities also possessed versions of the Jewish Scriptures that had different Hebrew language text forms. There were also multiple Hebrew forms of certain books that co-existed in Second Temple Judaism: these included Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, and likely Esther. For those communities that used Greek, there were major differences between Greek Daniel, Esther, and 3 Kingdoms and their Hebrew counterparts. John Wevers, "The Interpretative Character and Significance of the Septuagint Version," in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300)*, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 87–88; Shemaryahu Talmon, "Aspects of the Textual Transmission of the Bible in the Light of Qumran Manuscripts," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 226–63; Emanuel Tov, "The Nature of the Large-Scale Difference Between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources," in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship Between the Masoretic Text and Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*, ed. Adrian Schenker, SBLSCS 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 121–44; Emanuel Tov, "Reflections on the Many Forms of Hebrew Scripture in Light of the LXX and 4QRevised Pen-

together in a codex. The earliest known forms of the Jewish Scriptures where the various books were bound together into one codex were the Old Greek translations. These first only included the Pentateuch but later by the second century AD included all the books of the Jewish Scriptures translated into Greek and bound together as a unit. The diversity of Second Temple Jewish understandings concerning a community's religious texts is where Sirach stands as an important precedent for early Christianity. Ben Sira possesses a list of scripturally authoritative texts which he interprets as a coherent message relevant to his religious audience. This method of understanding the Jewish Scriptures as unified authoritative texts appears to be practiced by early Christianity.

Ben Sira's understanding of history, unlike modern history that tends to be concerned with dates, events, wars, and politics, is principally dominated by and concerned with God's acts in history and the religious behavior of his worshipers.<sup>40</sup> Particularly in his Praise of the Fathers section (chs. 44–50), Ben Sira retells the epic of Israel as a story that highlights certain laudable philosophical and ethical concepts.<sup>41</sup> Rather than engaging in secular history, readers are confronted by Ben Sira's religious worldview of members of the people of God who faithfully embody God's wisdom and virtue.<sup>42</sup> In this section he tells the story of Israel, highlighting the characteristics of persons who embody faithful covenant worshipers and leaders. He concludes with the Hebrew *Vorlage's* chronological ending of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah's reconstruction of the temple (49:12–13).<sup>43</sup> Breaking his chronological order, he mentions Adam and Enoch as faithful persons (49:14–15) and then turns his attention to the current situation of the High Priest Simon worshiping with the people in Jerusalem (ch. 50).<sup>44</sup> History is understood in terms of praise; all the events from creation to the return from exile culminate in the doxology of God.<sup>45</sup>

Ben Sira read various Jewish books, most of which would be included in the later Old Testament, as part of a unified narrative of the story of Israel. Despite his recognition that there were multiple authors of the various books that made up the Hebrew Scriptures, he believed that they together formed one

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tateuch," in *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, Septuagint: Collected Essays, Volume 3*, VTSup 167 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3–19; Bruce Waltke, "Aims of Old Testament Textual Criticism," *WTJ* 51 (1989): 102–7.

<sup>40</sup> Goshen-Gottstein, "Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers," 237.

<sup>41</sup> Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 114.

<sup>42</sup> The Praise of the Fathers is a series of examples [*Beispielreihe*] who actualized laudable virtues. See similar forms in 1 Maccabees 2:51–60; 3 Maccabees 2:3–8; 4 Maccabees 16:15–23; 18:9–19. Jeremy Corley, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship*, BJS 316 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 22; W. Baumgartner, "Die literarischen Gattungen in der Weisheit des Jesus Sirach," *ZAW* 34 (1914): 164; Samuel Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions*, JSJSup 125 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 159; Mark Sneed, *The Social World of the Sages: An Introduction to Israelite and Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 184; Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 13; Thomas Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50*, SBLDS 75 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 32–33, 242; Renzo Petraglio, *Il libro che contamina le mani: Ben Sirac rilegge il libro e la storia d'Israele*, Theo 4 (Palermo: Augustinus, 1993), 17–18; Robert Siebeneck, "May Their Bones Return to Life!—Sirach's Praise of the Fathers," *CBQ* 21 (1959): 414.

<sup>43</sup> The centrality of covenant in his interpretive system is seen in Sirach 11:20; 39:8; 44:12, 18, 20; see Goshen-Gottstein, "Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers," 245–49.

<sup>44</sup> God's provision of a faithful priest like Simon acts as a visible guarantee of God's faithfulness. Edmond Jacob, "L'histoire d'Israel vue par Ben Sira," in *Mélanges bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de Andre Robert*, TICP 4 (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1957), 294.

<sup>45</sup> Goshen-Gottstein, "Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers," 237.

narrative of the people of God. This story was not merely a historical novelty, but he believed it had present implications for the life of the present people of God who likewise worship God and receive mercy and blessing from him (Sir 50:22–24).

### **5.2. Ben Sira's Hermeneutical Realization of the Jewish Scriptures in His Current Religious Community**

Ben Sira's practice of re-reading and re-appropriating earlier texts for his current faith setting is of particular interest to Early Christianity. What is significant in Sirach is that the author does not claim that his writings are the result of an apocalyptic vision or divine prophecy.<sup>46</sup> He believes that he, as a covenant member of the Jewish people (and possibly a priest or scribe),<sup>47</sup> can read previous texts and apply them to his religious community's situation. Ben Sira adapts the older Scriptures and makes them relevant to Jews living in the Hellenistic age.<sup>48</sup> Previously inked Scriptures are not historically detached or un-applicable to the later believing community. Scripture functions as a hermeneutical lens by which later lives can be understood and formed. Scripture is not understood in isolation to modern reality but finds representation in present believing individuals and circumstances.<sup>49</sup> The spiritual story finds realization in the life, worship, and practices of the present believing Jewish community (Sir 50:19–24).

This practice of understanding the salvation history of the people and events of the Jewish Scriptures as culminating and being made real in the present community of believers is widely appropriated by early Christianity. Hebrews retells the story of members of the people of God from Abel to the prophets who embodied faith to encourage the Christian community who likewise needed to express faith (Heb 11:1–12:1). Similarly, Jesus is pictured as the culmination of the royal lineage of the people of God (Matt 1:1–18; Luke 3:23–38). Clement of Rome narrates the history of Israel by outlining the characters who embodied envy and jealousy and those who embodied humility to exhort his followers to engage in holy conduct (1 Clement chs. 4–5). Like these writers, Ben Sira does not believe that the Jewish Scriptures are locked into the past as documents that only speak to previous persons and communities; rather, he realizes and appropriates them in his current believing community.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study we introduced the book of Sirach and its historic use in the greater Christian tradition where it was placed either in the Deuterocanonical Old Testament or in the section of the Apocrypha in various Bibles. We outlined the basic history of the Hebrew version and its derived Greek translation. The book itself claims to have been written as a summary and application of the Jewish Scriptures for practicing Second Temple Jews. We then examined the Scriptures that Sirach used. Sirach references the sections of the Law, Prophets, and Writings as well as the stories and figures contained in them.

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<sup>46</sup> This is unlike some other Second Temple Works such as 1 Enoch or the Testaments of the Patriarchs.

<sup>47</sup> Many scholars believe that Ben Sira was interested in cultic terminology because he was actually a priest (Sir 7:29–31). Some think on the other hand that he was a temple scribe (38:24). See Saul Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood," *HTR* 80 (1987): 263; Greg Goering, *Wisdom's Root Revealed: Ben Sira and the Election of Israel*, JSJSup 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 126.

<sup>48</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Goshen-Gottstein, "Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers," 261.

While Sirach does not contain an exhaustive list of the books or the forms of the books that he used, the Jewish Scriptures he read and taught from were remarkably like the later Masoretic Text.

Ben Sira's commentary is a witness of a Second Temple Jew who read the Hebrew Scriptures as a cohesive unit, as a theological canon. His treatment of the Jewish Scriptures is a witness of a coherent unified reading of a corpus of Jewish Scriptures remarkably similar to that found in the later Hebrew Masoretic Text. He believes that these diverse texts can be read as a narrative that continues on and is realized in the life of his worshipping community who models and participates in it. Similar methods of interpreting the Jewish Scriptures were later employed by early Christianity.

The way that Ben Sira used the Jewish Scriptures was and is an interpretive model for us Christians. We Christians find a valuable witness in Sirach of a pre-Christian thinker who believed in a corpus of Jewish Scriptures remarkably like the Christian Old Testament. In contrast with some modern skeptical scholarship, Sirach proves that there were some Jews in the second century BC who possessed a canon conscious understanding of Jewish Scripture like that of early Christians. His interpretive method teaches us modern Christians how we can read the Bible. Like Ben Sira who taught, applied, and made relevant ancient Jewish Scriptures to his religious community, modern Christian teachers can apply the Old Testament to their current religious contexts. Ben Sira's unified reading of Scripture is also instructive. Modern historical methods tend to study each historical book of the Old Testament individually in its unique context; as a result, sometimes the coherent unified message of the various books is obscured. Frequently the necessary detailed diachronic historical reading of each book is not followed by a synchronic sequential reading of the books together as part of a greater narrative. Believers can follow Ben Sira's example when we read the various texts of the story of Israel as a unified narrative and message that culminates in our worship and glorification of God.

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# Soteriology in the Gospel of John

— Bruce R. Reichenbach —

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**Abstract:** Salvation plays a central role in the Gospel of John, although the author never develops an abstract theory of salvation. Rather, by various narrative techniques, and ultimately by his overall dramatic narrative, John suggests diverse soteriological concepts. He introduces rebirth bringing about children of God, depicts Jesus drawing people by being lifted up and dying on behalf of others, claims victory over the devil, and demonstrates healing. Underlying and unifying all these themes is the fundamental thesis that salvation brings life, both qualitatively and quantitatively. This study investigates his medley of soteriological concepts, explores their relation to Old Testament themes, and inquires how they connect with the fact of Jesus's death and its necessity.

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The climax of the Gospel of John is Jesus's trial, crucifixion, and resurrection, as evidenced by the texts anticipating and the material devoted to recording these events.<sup>1</sup> Since John purposes to bring about belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and thereby enable eternal life (20:30–31), one might ask how these events enable eternal life. As William Loader notes, it is “a vexed question what role Jesus' death plays in Johannine soteriology.”<sup>2</sup> What is it, as the Samaritans proclaimed, to be “the savior of the world” (4:42)?

Rather than “precise dogmatic formulations,”<sup>3</sup> multiple soteriological themes emerge from John's extended drama about Jesus. Salvation motifs are “taught implicitly through allusion, ... expressed with more subtlety.”<sup>4</sup> By considering John's narrative features,<sup>5</sup> we uncover the significant, multifaceted

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<sup>1</sup> One might add his departure, though this is alluded to rather than described.

<sup>2</sup> William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 194.

<sup>3</sup> Ruben Zimmermann, “Jesus—the Lamb of God (John 1:29 and 1:36),” in *The Opening of John's Narrative (John 1:19–2:22)*, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and Jörg Frey, WUNT 385 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2017), 95.

<sup>4</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, “The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” *Covenant Theological Quarterly* 72 (2008): 245.

<sup>5</sup> “The Fourth Gospel is not so much interested in precise dogmatic formulations, but rather Christology is made by means of literary devices like metaphors and narration,” according to Zimmermann (“Jesus—the Lamb of God,” 95), though, we might add, rooted in traditions.

soteriological clues scattered throughout the Gospel and consider how the fact and necessity of Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection fit into the picture. Some commentators suggest that the author of the Fourth Gospel had significant familiarity with Greek drama and that this familiarity influenced the writing style of his Gospel.<sup>6</sup> Its dialogues, they note, are shaped, consciously or unconsciously, in the fashion of Greek drama. If we take this as a clue, we can understand John's soteriology as arising from not only literary devices and individual dramas or dialogues, but from the entire Gospel as a drama of the cross. We are thereby presented not with an abstract, dogmatic account but with dramas of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

### *1. Re-socialization*

In his treatment of John's soteriology, Jan van der Watt views salvation as indigenous to John, not in the sense of "a comprehensive, a-historical, all-inclusive soteriology, for the sake of describing a soteriology, but a soteriology modelled on questions at stake in the conflict, namely, 'with whom is God and where can he be found (seen/heard)?"<sup>8</sup> He interprets the Gospel as a conflict between two groups, the disciples of Moses and the disciples of Jesus. Both claim to worship the same God and be members of God's family. Van der Watt argues that Jesus aims to re-socialize his audience to become children of God (John 1:12–13). To achieve this, they must take the specific path of believing in Jesus (5:29; 20:31). Rejection of Jesus is their sin (1:10–11; 8:24), which puts them in ignorance of (9:40–41) and separates them from the Father (8:34–36). "If the question were asked, 'From what must a person be saved according to John?', the answer would be, 'From a lack of spiritual knowledge and blindness in order to be able to see and know the Father in the Son.'"<sup>9</sup>

How does re-socialization link with the cross and resurrection? In quasi-Bultmannian fashion, van der Watt emphasizes the revelatory nature of Jesus's death on the cross; "the salvific power of the cross lies in its revelatory power."<sup>10</sup> Part of accrediting Jesus's own witness to his identity comes through his power, manifested in his signs and ultimately in his rising from the dead. His death and resurrection not only show that the Father confirms Jesus's revelatory witness but, since Jesus himself is active in these, also demonstrate his power (10:17–18).

Van der Watt admits that other cross events relate to salvation but claims that John does not focus on them. Glorification occurs when Jesus is identified as the revealer of the Father. The reference to the Lamb in 1:29 does not tell us anything about *how* the lamb removes sin. He notes that although at least one Johannine passage can be interpreted as substitution (11:50–52), this is at best an insinuation and

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<sup>6</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); W. R. Domeris, "The Johannine Drama," *JTSA* 42 (1983): 29–35.

<sup>7</sup> "Johannine theology is, in some radical sense, far more *theo-logical* and more *theo-dramatic*.... Secondly, it is more *theo-dramatic*. The *Theos* is revealed in a divinely-authored drama of love," according to Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003), 83–84.

<sup>8</sup> Jan G. van der Watt, "Salvation in the Gospel according to John," in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt, NovTSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 102.

<sup>9</sup> van der Watt, "Salvation in the Gospel according to John," 107.

<sup>10</sup> van der Watt, "Salvation in the Gospel according to John," 113.

not John's main point.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the three references to being lifted up do not decide the case between the cross being sacrifice or revelation. In short, according to van der Watt, John focuses on salvation as being re-socialized into the family of God. The cross reveals Jesus identity and thereby his authority to be God's revealer.

However, there is more to John's soteriology than revelation and to the cross as establishing Jesus's identity and power and resocialization. Van der Watt has downplayed other, significant contributions of John's soteriology found in his extended narrative. We will consider these themes, noting how the fundamental thesis that salvation brings life (3:16), both qualitatively and quantitatively, underlies and unifies them.

## 2. *Birth from Above*

The Gospel of John is a book about parentage. The narrative reveals Jesus's identity as found in his relationship with the Father. He comes from (is sent by) and goes to the Father, is testified to by the Father (8:18), does his Father's work (10:37), is taught by the Father (15:15), is loved by and obeys the Father (15:9–10), glorifies and is glorified by the Father (17:1), and is one with the Father (10:30). The Gospel's mission is to bring us to proper parentage, to "become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (1:12–13). John thus initiates in the Prologue discussion of salvation through the metaphor of birth.

For the evangelist, who we are depends on our origin. Jesus's heritage preoccupies the Jews (1:46; 6:42; 7:27–29, 41, 52; 8:48), and Jesus responds (6:33, 50; 7:28–29; 8:23, 29, 42). Jesus's contemporaries affirm their earthly identity based on natural descent from Abraham (8:33), and, John adds, human decision (1:13). However, being born of faithful human lineage does not guarantee right believing and action (8:39–40). Through sin we easily can slip into having parentage of the devil (8:44). To be born of God we must rely not on human activity but on the work of God (1:13; 6:44), and to do the work of God is to believe in Jesus (6:29). Through believing and receiving Jesus (1:12–13), we become children of God through the Father's drawing grace facilitated through Jesus (1:16–17; 6:65).

After the Prologue, the evangelist returns to and expands on the birth motif in Jesus's dialogue with Nicodemus.<sup>12</sup> In the first scene of an extended three-act play (3:1–15; 7:45–52; 20:38–42—see the previous comment about dramatic structures in John's narrative), the theme of origins sets the narrative: Nicodemus comes *from* the Pharisees, acknowledging that Jesus comes *from* God. Jesus builds on origins. To be saved, to take on a new identity, to enter the kingdom of God (salvation), which is Jesus's kingdom from which he came (18:36), one must have a different origin; one must be born again or from above (3:3; i.e., from heaven or God, 3:31). The phrase γεννάω ἄνωθεν is inherently ambiguous, a riddle to be solved,<sup>13</sup> and Nicodemus does not solve it because he fails to pick up on the double

<sup>11</sup> van der Watt, "Salvation in the Gospel according to John," 116. See also Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Pharos, 1996), 280.

<sup>12</sup> For a nuanced treatment of Nicodemus, see Craig Koester, "Theological Complexity and the Characterization of Nicodemus in John's Gospel," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner, LNTS 461 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 163–79.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore*, SBLMS 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 184.

meaning of γεννάω ἄνωθεν, meaning either physical rebirth or spiritual birth from above.<sup>14</sup> From an earthly perspective, we cannot reenter our mother's womb and be reborn; rebirth cannot be brought about by our own effort or self-improvement. However, from the heavenly perspective we can be reborn when God gives us new parentage and identity. "God must become Father to those who would 'see the kingdom of God.'"<sup>15</sup>

Jesus proceeds to explain to Nicodemus his riddle, or better, to extend it. He supplements the double meanings on which the riddle rests with two other riddles. To be born from above is to be "born of water and wind" (3:5). Both "water" and "wind" have double meanings here. On the earthly level, "water" (ὕδωρ) here might mean water involved in diverse aspects of physical conception and birth.<sup>16</sup> However, "water" understood from the heavenly or divine perspective connects to purification.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, πνεῦμα can mean either "wind" or "spirit." Jesus trades on this ambiguity, such that Nicodemus, from the earthly perspective, likely takes it as "wind," whereas Jesus, from the heavenly perspective, means it as "spirit." The proverb in 3:8,<sup>18</sup> which likewise trades on this ambiguity, further muddies the riddle. The obvious earthly meaning of the proverb is that we feel the wind but can neither trace its origin nor track where it goes. Similarly, from the heavenly or divine perspective, those born from above know that something has occurred but cannot explain how it came about. Using these double meanings, Jesus contrasts the earthly perspective (flesh, σὰρξ) with the heavenly perspective (spirit, πνεῦμα) (3:6). Physically, we experience life in the waters of maternal birth. Spiritually, our rebirth is from above, such that purification or salvation is ultimately of the Spirit, from God (1:33). In short, salvation or the new birth, which gives us our new identity, comes from God, at his initiative, not ours. Yet, we acquire this changed identity, this new parentage and new life, through our believing (3:15).

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Whinton argues that Nicodemus understands what Jesus says but, because he fails to grasp who Jesus is and thus believe, assumes the role of a dissembler, lavishing praise on Jesus and putting himself down. Jesus, he claims, recognizes this and instead of addressing Nicodemus's misunderstanding of the metaphor, turns to the matter of his unbelief. To make this stick, Whinton must claim that in the later portraits of Nicodemus, when his belief seems to emerge, he is no longer a dissembler. "The Dissembler of John 3: A Cognitive and Rhetorical Approach to the Characterization of Nicodemus," *JBL* 135 (2016): 141–58. This interpretation of Nicodemus's misunderstanding does not comport well with the numerous other instances of misunderstanding in John. Others suggest that given his religious position, Nicodemus should have understood the play on words. "Because Jewish teachers spoke of gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like 'newborn children,' Nicodemus should have understood that Jesus meant conversion. Yet it never occurs to him that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel," according to Craig S. Keener, *John*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary 2A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 28.

<sup>15</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 180. See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, Rupert W. N. Hoare, and John K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 137–38.

<sup>16</sup> Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John*, 270; Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 89–90.

<sup>17</sup> Whether in this text water also indicates baptism is much disputed. For diverse views see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, AB 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 141–42; Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 21; and Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 82–93.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *These Things Have Been Written: Studies on the Fourth Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 139.

As birth brings life, so does rebirth. It brings *qualitative life* here and now. That life is to know the Father (17:3). In this sense, the Jews, though Moses's disciples and Abraham's children, are ignorant of the Father, for they do not know Jesus and will die in their sin of unbelief (8:19, 21, 24). They fail to see the Father in Jesus who was sent to reveal him (14:9). New birth gives us new sight, insight into the Father through Jesus, so that we are no longer blind (9:7, 41). New birth also gives us *quantitative, eternal life*, for knowing and experiencing Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, saves us from ultimate death. We will be raised up at the last day (6:40).

But how does rebirth or salvation take place? Jesus suggests that, like determining the coming and going of the wind, its "how" is fundamentally inexplicable (3:8). Yet like our understanding of the wind, we know that rebirth occurs and has its effects. We can experience it. The point of the dialogue with Nicodemus is to establish not the precise mechanism of rebirth but rather the fact that by changing our origin we acquire a new identity: we become new persons, children of God through the Spirit. Rebirth makes entry into the kingdom possible. In his post-resurrection message, Jesus proclaims that God is our Father and we are his children (20:17).<sup>19</sup> But *how* does his death facilitate our new identity? The Nicodemus drama goes on to affirm that salvation comes to earth in the person of the Son of Man who came from heaven, and what happens to Jesus—being lifted up—in some way facilitates our rebirth and eternal life (3:13–14). John shifts the discussion of rebirth to another motif.

### 3. *The Lifted-up One*

For the evangelist, Jesus came into the world to save it (3:17; 4:42; 12:47). This salvation becomes effective through believing in Jesus or believing in his name (which is the same thing) (3:16, 18; 12:46–47). John's double meanings appear again. To believe in Jesus is both believing *that* he is the Word of God, that what he says and claims is true, and also *receiving* him, an existential event (1:12).<sup>20</sup> All of this comes about because God loves the world, the world he created and that still rejects him. He does not give up on it but sends his unique (μονογενής) Son to it to save it.

How is this world-saving brought about? The evangelist analogizes the drama that will unfold of Jesus crucifixion with that of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14; Num 21:8–9). In the Moses story, the Israelites wandering through the Sinai grumble about their traveling experience. In complaining not only against Moses but against God, they sin against God. God punishes them with a plague of venomous snakes, and they, confessing their sin, plead with Moses to intercede with God to remove their punishment. In response, the LORD instructs Moses to erect a bronze snake and place it on a pole, so that whoever looks on it will be healed. The bronze snake, in some mystical and ironic fashion, brings about their healing.<sup>21</sup> An icon of deceit, temptation, and death becomes their

<sup>19</sup> Contrary to Bultmann (*The Gospel of John*, 688), Jesus's death—his being lifted up (3:14)—not his departure (ascension) makes the relationship possible. Departure facilitates the coming of the Spirit (15:26; 16:7).

<sup>20</sup> "To 'believe' is the same as to 'come' (5:40; 6:35, 37, 44, 65; 7:37), to 'follow' (8:12), to 'enter' (10:9), to 'drink' of the water Jesus provides (4:13; cf. 6:35; 7:37), to 'accept' (1:12; 5:43)," according to George Allen Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," *JETS* 19 (1976): 272.

<sup>21</sup> Keener notes that "ancient Egyptians used images of snakes as magical protection against snakebites, which also cursed the snakes" (*John*, 30).

healer and life-giver.<sup>22</sup> Jesus too will be raised on a pole so that sinners can believe in (look on) him and have eternal life (be healed) (John 3:15). The Gospel story does not parallel every element of the Mosaic story (for example, those who crucify Jesus are not like Moses), but John draws on the story's healing or life-giving essence.<sup>23</sup> In both dramas, the source of the healing is raised above them. By looking on (believing in) Jesus lifted up, one moves from perishing to being given life.

For the evangelist, multiple meanings again play a role, here with "being lifted up." On the one hand, to be lifted up (ὕψωθῆναι) is to be honored or glorified, exalted and set above—as done to a king (12:13). On the other hand, the evangelist tells us that it refers to the cruel means by which Jesus will die, a stark, ironic contrast with the first meaning of glorification (12:32–33). In both cases, Jesus's death is in view. But how being lifted up brings about salvation or becoming children of God through rebirth Jesus (or the evangelist) does not tell us. What is affirmed is that belief in Jesus (3:15–18) and living by the truth (3:19–21) are necessary and sufficient for eternal life. Interestingly, John does not speak of repentance or confession here or elsewhere in the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> Rather, he presents a gospel of unambiguous choice. If one continues in doing evil out of love for darkness, one will both fear and miss the Light and the eternal life that the Light makes possible. Only by changing so that one lives by truth (understood both propositionally and as a person) can one enter the Light and have eternal life (3:19–21). The criteria for judgment are based on acceptance of Jesus and the discipleship deeds that follow therefrom. However, John here does not directly discuss how being lifted up facilitates our rebirth or healing.

What purpose lies behind being lifted up? In a later dialogue, the second of three passages or scenes concerned with being lifted up, Jesus explains that by being lifted up the Jewish leaders will know his identity ("that I am") and that he has a special relationship to the Father (8:27–29). He was sent from and experiences the presence of the Father, who never abandons him (16:32). He does and speaks what his Father tells him to do and say, which pleases the Father (8:28). That he was sent from the Father, emphasized in the first part of the Gospel, cannot be separated from his returning to the Father, emphasized in the second part and part of his exaltation.<sup>25</sup> However, being lifted up in chapter eight has nothing *directly* to do with salvation. In fact, it has nothing directly to do with anything Jesus *does* to bring about our reconciliation with God. Rather, it functions to affirm Jesus's self-testimony of identity.<sup>26</sup> He is the I am; his identity derives from the one he came from and on whose behalf he speaks and acts. When he is lifted up, people will see that his claims about his close relation to his Father are

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<sup>22</sup> Second Temple authors were understandably uncomfortable with the irony of a healing serpent, particularly since Hezekiah destroyed the allegedly preserved bronze serpent (2 Kgs 18:4) because the people named and worshiped it as a graven image (prohibited in Exod 20:4–6). The author of the Wisdom of Solomon (16:5–12) attributed the healing to God, not the serpent.

<sup>23</sup> "The serpent's bite was deadly, the Lord's death is life-giving. A serpent is gazed on that the serpent may have no power. What is this? A death is gazed on, that death may have no power. But whose death? The death of life.... Is not Christ the life? And yet Christ hung on the cross.... But in Christ's death, death died. Dead life slew death.... Just as they who looked on that serpent perished not by the serpent's bites, so they who look in faith on Christ's death are healed from the bites of sin," according to Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 12.11, (NPNF<sup>1</sup>7:85).

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the closest the evangelist comes to repentance is in his quote from Isaiah 6:10, where he speaks of a turning (ἐπιστραφῶσιν) or change that those who heard Jesus could not do (12:40). Jesus does not ask Simon Peter to repent, only to love him (21:15–19).

<sup>25</sup> Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel*, 247–48.

<sup>26</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 401.

true. Any connection with salvation comes through establishing Jesus's connection with the Father and thus his power and authority to bring about our salvation. At the same time, John indicates that Jesus's identity is critical to his saving act by noting that his affirmation of his identity leads many to "put their faith in him" (8:30), and in this way connects with the next lifted-up passage that emphasizes drawing people to him.<sup>27</sup>

The third discussion of being "lifted up" occurs at the end of Jesus's public ministry (12:32–33), this time with the crowd. Here again John employs double meanings. On the one hand, the narrator informs us by an aside that "being lifted up" signifies the kind of death—crucifixion—Jesus will die. On the other hand, being lifted up is to be exalted. For Jesus, it is his promised glorification. "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself" (12:32).<sup>28</sup> This drawing, too, is ambiguous. On the one hand, by his death he will "produce many seeds" (12:24), for many will be drawn to him. Jesus draws on an agricultural analogy, already mentioned (4:34–38). As grains of wheat must first die before they produce a great crop, so he too must die before he produces a great crop of believing disciples (4:36). His death is necessary for his program of bringing about children of God to fruition. Once he dies, his bounty will be part of his glorification. "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them" (17:10). Jesus's glorification thus has two sources: from the Father (17:1, 5, 24) and from those given to him by the Father who believe and accept him (17:10). On the other hand, the drawing of people's attention will occur when those who see him lifted high above them and look up to him recognize and are attracted, even if in horror, to the one hanging on the cross. Attached to that cross is also his identification: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (19:19). The kingship noted by Nathanael, in whom there is complete integrity, is confirmed by Pilate, who has no concern for the truth but unwittingly affirms the truth in vengeance against the Jewish leaders. Being lifted up on the cross points beyond the horrific, tragic event to his kingship. As Augustine might have said, paralleling his statement about the fall: "For [God] judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist."<sup>29</sup>

However, what lifting up has to do with atonement, salvation, and becoming people of a new origin and why this particular method is necessary to accomplish this, is ambiguous. A possible hint, however, exists in Jesus's use of "being lifted up" (ὑψόω) and "glorified" (δοξάζω). These two words are used in Isaiah 52:13 LXX, where the prophet says that "my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high."<sup>30</sup> This leads to describing the servant as being "despised and rejected," physically marred and suffering. The cup the Father gives Jesus (John 18:11), which is likely the cup of suffering, echoes Isaiah 53:3–4. The Isaiah passage continues with several salvation motifs. A healing view is described, where this servant takes up human infirmities in his death and heals us by his wounds (53:4–5). Isaiah also presents a vicarious atonement, where in his death the servant takes on our sins and endures punishment to bring us peace (53:5–12).<sup>31</sup> There is reason to believe a linkage exists between

<sup>27</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC 36 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 1:131–32.

<sup>28</sup> A third interpretation of "drawing all men to him" is that this refers to the general resurrection (6:44). Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 697–700.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *The Enchiridion* 27 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 3:246).

<sup>30</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 50; Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, 145.

<sup>31</sup> "Sacrificial language pervades the text: 'sprinkle' (Is 52:15), 'carried' (Is 53:4), 'lamb that is led to the slaughter' (Is 53:7), 'offering for sin' (Is 53:10), 'bear' (Is 53:11,12) [See Lev. 16]. The sacrificial character of the text is particularly evident with the reference to the guilt offering in Isaiah 53:10," according to Thomas R. Schreiner, "Pe-

Jesus's use of these terms and Isaiah 53, since in John the third lifted up/glorification passage is followed immediately by quotations from Isaiah, including 53:1.<sup>32</sup> If the evangelist is linking Jesus's use of these words to the Isaiah passage, he is at least intimating though not developing soteriological dimensions of substitution and healing, to which we turn shortly.

John treats being lifted up not merely as a description of fact but the expression of necessity: the Son of Man *must* be lifted up (ὁ υἱοῦ θῆναι δεῖ).<sup>33</sup> It echoes 3:3–7: one *must* be born again. But why the necessity? The answer is unclear. The analogy with Moses's serpent does not answer this question, for it was not necessary that healing be accomplished by creating and erecting a bronze serpent. No reason is given why God chose and commanded this specific ironic method.

If we maintain the soteriological significance of Jesus's death, to explain crucifixion as the *necessary* method for salvation, one must understand the matter of God's will. It is necessary that Jesus die in this fashion because that is what the Father willed. The necessity is what Michaels refers to as "divine necessity." "The impersonal verb *dei*, 'it is necessary,' points to a divine necessity (in John's Gospel alone, see 3:14, 30; 4:4, 24; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). Yet the necessity is not an inevitability.... Rather, what 'is necessary' is what God has decreed *as the means* by which a person sees or enters the kingdom of God."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the claim that Jesus *must* be lifted up or crucified means that God has decreed, without explanation, this as the means by which salvation is achieved.

#### 4. *The Lamb of God*

C. H. Dodd writes, "In the Fourth Gospel the death of Christ is first and foremost that by which Christ is 'glorified' or 'exalted' (xii. 23, 32–33, xiii. 31), and by virtue of which He 'draws' all men into the sphere of eternal life (xii. 32, xi. 52).... It is not a sacrifice for the expiation of sin."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Bultmann "viewed atonement as 'a foreign element' in this Gospel and dismissed allusions to atonement as being from a non-Johannine source, even a later accretion."<sup>36</sup> He viewed John's central theme as Jesus's incarnation to reveal God; his crucifixion as glorification merely brings his mission to a close. However, as Dennis suggests, the reasoning behind this, aided by excluding from John's text passages that run contrary to the thesis, appears question-begging.<sup>37</sup>

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nal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 86.

<sup>32</sup> Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 247–48.

<sup>33</sup> Jesus asserts this necessity in John 3:14; the crowd who hears him raises it in a question in 12:34.

<sup>34</sup> Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> C. H. Dodd, "The First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel," *Biblical Journal of Religious Literature* 21 (1937), 144–45. For a detailed assessment of Dodd's argument, see Jintai Kim, "The Concept of Atonement in the Gospel of John," *JGRChJ* 6 (2009): 9–27.

<sup>36</sup> Gieschen, "The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 244. From Bultmann, *John*, 54–55. "The thought of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin has no place in John" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1955), 2:54). For Ernst Käsemann, Jesus's death primarily points to his departure. *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 17–20.

<sup>37</sup> John Dennis, "Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Johannine Hyper-Texts," *CurBR* 4 (2006): 334.

The evangelist uses the symbol or metaphor of a lamb to point to the atoning work of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> As Craig Koester suggests, for John “[a] symbol is an image, an action, or a person that is understood to have transcendent significance.”<sup>39</sup> A symbol has a double meaning; it begins from our common experience and generally refers to something that we experience by our senses: an object or action. At the same time, it goes beyond the sensible to have a deeper meaning, often pointing to something intangible.

In the Gospel’s opening drama, the Baptizer twice identifies Jesus in this way: “Look, the Lamb of God” (1:29, 36). The first time, the exclamation is followed by a statement of Jesus’s mission or function: as God’s Lamb, he is the world’s sin-remover, both universally (κόσμος understood broadly) and individually (3:16–18; 4:42). In the second instance the identification leads to discipleship: once Jesus is identified, two of the Baptizer’s disciples turn and follow Jesus.<sup>40</sup> The appellation “lamb” (ἀρνός) not only appears to be equivalent to the other titles given to Jesus in John 1 (Messiah, Prophet, Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man), it gives Jesus’s both identity and function.

The lamb was a common sacrificial animal in the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup> Not only were lambs offered regularly, but they were offered to atone for sin. According to Leviticus, the community member who sinned, whether intentionally or unintentionally, was to bring a lamb to the priest to make atonement for the offerer’s sin, and “he will be forgiven” (Lev 4:32–35; 1:4; 5:6). Likewise, a diseased community member was to bring two lambs to be slain, one as a guilt or sin offering (Lev 14:10–20).

Because of the evangelist’s knowledge of the Old Testament, it is difficult not to interpret the lamb symbol in light of dramatic passages like Genesis 22:8, 13; Exodus 12:3–11; or Isaiah 53:7. In Genesis, Abraham receives God’s command to travel to Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham obeys willingly but expresses his confidence to Isaac that God will provide a lamb in place of his son. God provides a ram (not a lamb), which Abraham sacrifices as a substitute for Isaac. Jesus becomes the ram figure exemplifying the substitutionary sacrifice of one life for another.

In Exodus, the drama involves a lamb that is slain for the protection of the Israelites from the destroying LORD who passes through the land (Exod 12:1–13). Seeing the blood, a sign that the inhabitants of the house are protected, the LORD passes over them. Where there is no sign, he brings death. The blood obtained by the death of the lamb and painted on the doorpost with hyssop (Exod 12:22) protects the inhabitants from death and thereby gives life: “for the life of a creature is in the

<sup>38</sup> Zimmermann, “Jesus—the Lamb of God,” 81–82. It is the “root metaphor and orientation point for all John’s other Christological imagery,” according to M. Eugene Boring, *Hearing John’s Voice: Insights for Teaching and Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 211.

<sup>39</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, and Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Although “no such title is attested in the Hebrew Bible or early Judaism” (Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 109), the motif was familiar within the Johannine community. “Lamb” (though a different word, ἀρνίον, is used, both with and without the definite article) appears twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation.

<sup>41</sup> Redemption of the firstborn (Exod 13:11–13); regular offerings (Exod 29:39–41); peace offering (Lev 3:7). For other regular offerings, see Numbers 28–29. ἀρνός is used 90% of the time in the OT to refer to a sacrificial lamb, according to Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 207–9. It is found only twice outside of John, in Acts 8:32 quoting Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Peter 1:19, where it refers to Jesus’s atoning work. “The evangelist has chosen the term ‘lamb’ to present Jesus as the one who removes sin by means of his violent death,” writes Maarten J. J. Menken, “‘The Lamb of God’ (John 1,29) in the Light of 1 John 3,4–7,” in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Gilbert Van Belle, BETL 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 590.

blood” (Lev 17:11). The Passover, where an animal was to be slain (Deut 16:2; 2 Chr 30:15), was to be celebrated annually to remember salvation from death. “The Passover lamb was the cultic and liturgical symbol of Israel’s deliverance. In Judaism, the Passover lamb was not viewed as a sacrifice for sin, but the early church quickly reinterpreted Passover symbolism in light of the eucharist (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7–8).”<sup>42</sup> The centrality of the exodus in Jewish thought makes the slain Passover lamb an appropriate messianic symbol for John.<sup>43</sup>

The Passover plays a central role in John.<sup>44</sup> John indirectly refers to the pascal lamb by reference to Jesus’s legs not being broken at crucifixion as fulfilling a pascal scripture (John 19:32, 36; Exod 12:46)<sup>45</sup> and by the lifting the hyssop plant to Jesus’s lips (19:29), the hyssop being used to sprinkle blood in an atoning ritual (Exod 12:22; Lev 14:4–7; 52–56). Although John does not elsewhere directly refer to a pascal lamb, salvation from death or perishing is a Johannine theme (3:16; 8:51–52; 10:28). Furthermore, John mentions the Passover in three occasions as a festival in connection with Jesus (2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1). In one instance, Jesus tells his audience to eat his flesh, for “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (6:53). The statement echoes Moses’s command to kill the lamb “roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast” (Exod 12:8).<sup>46</sup> Jesus ties them together in himself to be eaten in his proto-Eucharistic discourse;<sup>47</sup> the bread must die (be consumed) in order to give life.<sup>48</sup>

In Isaiah 53, the servant is “led like a lamb [ἀμνός, LXX] to the slaughter... He is cut off from the land of the living; for the sins of my people he was stricken” (Isa 53:7–8). However, death is not his end; though he is crushed, bruised, and made to suffer, and though our sins are laid on him so that “his life is a guilt offering,” yet “he will see the light and be satisfied,” for by his action he “will justify many” (53:10–11). By bearing “the sin of many, he is made intercessor for the sinners” (53:12). It is true that the lamb features specifically in maintaining silence, while the other features apply to the servant, such as bearing away sin.<sup>49</sup> Yet it is easy to see John through the Baptizer making a broader analogical linkage between the lamb and the sin-bearing servant. John was well aware of Isaiah, here sandwiching the Lamb of God identification between John 1:23 (Isa 40:3, where by extension in v. 5 all will see the glory of the LORD) and 1:34 (Isa 42:1, where all will experience his justice). Elsewhere he quotes Isaiah 53:1, though with a different focus (John 12:38).

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<sup>42</sup> Gail O’Day, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, NIB 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 528.

<sup>43</sup> Friedbert Ninow, *Indicators of Typology within the Old Testament: The Exodus Motif*, Friedensauer Schriftreihe 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 98.

<sup>44</sup> Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> C. H. Dodd argues that the prophetic fulfilling text, “Not one of his bones will be broken,” while possibly coming from Exodus 12:46, most likely comes from Psalm 34:20, to match other fulfillment quotes from the Psalms. *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 233–34.

<sup>46</sup> The connection of Christ with the Passover lamb was known already in the church (1 Cor 5:7).

<sup>47</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 95; Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, 281–94; Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 338; Kim, “The Concept of Atonement in the Gospel of John,” 22–25.

<sup>48</sup> Taken as a whole, this evidence runs contrary to Loader’s claim that 1:29 is “not as a reference exclusively or even primarily to his death, nor to his death as a Passover lamb” (*Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 159–60).

<sup>49</sup> Zimmermann, “Jesus—the Lamb of God,” 85.

The crucifixion scene contains several allusions to Isaiah 52–53. Jesus is raised up (John 19:18; Isa 52:13); is crucified with others (John 19:17; Isa 53:12); speaks briefly only three times but not in protest (John 19:26–27, 28, 30; Isa 53:7); is pierced (John 19:34; Isa 53:5); and voluntarily gives up his life (John 19:30; presaged in 10:11, 15, 17; Isa 53:12).

Zimmermann speculates that the evangelist deliberately uses metaphorical language because, as ambiguous, it allows for diverse and rich ways of understanding what he wants to communicate.<sup>50</sup> Although other rich associations are present, yet one common theme that pervades all the reference texts is that in the lamb motif we have a vicarious view of salvation from death (Genesis and Exodus) and sin (Isaiah).<sup>51</sup> It is not a mere accident that Jesus is killed on Passover, at the very time that the Passover lamb was slain (19:14). He is the unblemished sheep (John 8:46; Lev 1:10; 4:32) who, as Caiaphas prophesied, “dies for (ὑπέρ) the people” (11:49–50).<sup>52</sup> By moving from Caiaphas’s statement to the Passover (11:55), “John has fused the picture of the bleeding Passover Lamb with that of the Suffering Servant ... and conceived of the significance of the cross in the light of this synthesis.”<sup>53</sup> An important difference between traditional sacrifice and Jesus’s sacrifice is that in the former the sin-remover was passive; in Jesus’s case he is actively and willingly engaged in sin-removal.<sup>54</sup> Cross and salvation are linked, not only here but elsewhere. “The notion of Jesus’ death as like a sacrifice for sins ... is present in other literature considered to be the product of the Johannine community.”<sup>55</sup>

John does not tell us how substitutionary atonement works in terms of “taking away” or removing (ἀίρων) sin.<sup>56</sup> Is sin to be understood in a generic sense or as the composite of all individual sins? Given John’s frequent movement between singular and plural, likely both are in view.<sup>57</sup> Van der Watt sees this lack of account and specificity as reducing the importance of the substitutionary view. “How sin is to be taken away is also not explained in these verses.... This remark by John the Baptist is made at a prominent place in the Gospel, but without sufficient clarity as to the meaning, relationship and functioning of the elements mentioned.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, neither does the Old Testament develop the mechanism of atonement as removing sin except in symbolic drama. Both the cross and the cultic sacrifice are dramas of significance, enactments of salvation, not mechanical processes.

<sup>50</sup> Zimmermann, “Jesus—the Lamb of God,” 90.

<sup>51</sup> “Lamb” is “an old [cultic] symbol being used in a new way,” as noted by Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, SP 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical: 1998), 59 n. 29.

<sup>52</sup> “By this period, Passover lambs seem to be viewed as sacrificial (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.248, 294; 11.110; *J.W.* 6.423)” (Keener, *John*, 16).

<sup>53</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh (London: SCM, 1955), 132. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 417.

<sup>54</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, “Atonement in John’s Gospel and Epistles,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, eds. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>55</sup> Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Some suggest forgiveness (ἀφίημι), but it is found only once in John (20:23), where Jesus gives his agents power to forgive sins, or better, in line with 1 John 1:9, to dispense God’s forgiveness. The conditional of 1 John is absent here, though it may be implied by John’s contention that sin is unbelief. See Rudolph Bultmann, “ἀφίημι, etc.” *TDNT* 1:509–12.

<sup>57</sup> Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 152.

<sup>58</sup> van der Watt, “Salvation in the Gospel according to John,” 117–18.

John makes no direct mention of the sin offering. Yet, although John does not link sin and death as overtly as Paul (Rom 6:21–23), disobedience and death are linked (John 8:51). “It is characteristic of this Gospel, however, that the emphasis in the passage [6:51–54] falls not on Christ’s death *for sin* but on his death *for life*.”<sup>59</sup> The Gospel is about life, which is in the blood (Lev 17:11), and in the shedding of blood atonement is made and life given. John reiterates this link between blood and life. To drink Jesus’s blood is to have eternal life (6:53–56).<sup>60</sup> It creates a new identity, a shared life, for the participants are united with Jesus and Jesus with them. Participation in the death of Jesus on the cross, in which he gives his life for (ὑπέρ) the life of the world (6:51), brings life.<sup>61</sup> As in the Levitical offerings, the death of one being, there an animal, here Jesus, substitutes its life for another. Yet, for life to be given, sin and death must be dealt with, which is what in the drama the Lamb vicariously does (1:29; 5:24; 8:51). Believing replaces the sin of unbelief, leading to life overcoming death (8:21–24).<sup>62</sup>

In short, John symbolically tells us that Jesus engages in substitutionary atonement, repeated by the author of 1 John (3:16), and although John does not provide the detailed mechanism by which this act accomplishes salvation,<sup>63</sup> his emphasis falls on the underlying feature that ironically death brings life.<sup>64</sup> As Turner notes, the Baptizer in “1:29–34 is the *first witness* to Jesus, and so, like the prologue, the one, above all, *through which the rest of John is inevitably read*.”<sup>65</sup>

### 5. The Shepherd

The sheep motif returns in conjunction with an emphasis on the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus’s death again comes into view in his discourses about the good (ὁ καλός) shepherd (10:11–18). He invests in his sheep, whether in his pen or outside, so that they know him and his voice and willingly follow him (10:3–4, 14). Contrary to the hired hand who tends but does not own the sheep, the good Shepherd looks to benefit and voluntarily risks his life for *his* sheep: “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (10:17). It is not a matter of necessity, but a free act of obedience that becomes a reason why the Father loves him. It is not that the Father would not have loved the Son had he not

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<sup>59</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> Even if this only refers to the Eucharist (Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 169), the Eucharist is the symbolic presentation of the bodily death of Jesus on the cross, tying present celebration with past event.

<sup>61</sup> “The beneficial quality (ὑπέρ) of the death of someone, even in the categories of Jewish martyr theology, can be understood only against the background of the sacrificial concepts of the OT. Exclusively an act of self-sacrifice, the negative fact of death can become a positive event which may produce fruitful results for others,” according to Harald Riesenfeld, “ὑπέρ,” *TDNT* 8:511.

<sup>62</sup> Sacrifice for sin is not only found in 1:29, it is also specifically reaffirmed in the Johannine literature; see, for example, 1 John 2:2 (αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν); 4:10 (ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν).

<sup>63</sup> “John’s Gospel never articulates a real *doctrine* of atonement. In very general terms, we find recorded here the ‘benefits of his passion,’ but without specifying *how* Jesus’ death ‘gives life to the world’ or *on what basis* he ‘takes away sin’” (Michaels, “Atonement in John’s Gospel and Epistles,” 109). Yet “the atonement theme ... is part of the warp and woof of John’s gospel” (Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 415).

<sup>64</sup> Dennis, “Jesus’ Death in John’s Gospel,” 341; “John may not emphasize this explanation [about expiation and propitiation for us], but he can barely have failed to realize his readers were likely to assume it” (Max Turner, “Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell,” *EvQ* 62 (1990): 122).

<sup>65</sup> Turner, “Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John,” 121.

willingly died. “John does not mean that the Father loved Christ because the crucifixion took place. However, the love of the Father for the Son is a love that is eternally linked with and mutually dependent upon the Son’s complete alignment with the Father’s will and his obedience even unto death.”<sup>66</sup> Jesus does not seek to escape his death but willingly absorbs it as part of his mission (12:27–28).

How does the Shepherd’s voluntary death benefit his sheep? On the one hand, his death would not be beneficial, for then they become sheep without shepherd, wanderers (John 16:32; Zech 10:2; Mark 14:27). Jesus is aware of this, for after laying down his life he takes it up again (10:9–10) and eventually returns to take them to the place (metaphor of rooms rather than pastures) he prepared for them (14:3). On the other hand, Jesus’s death benefits as being the means to life. Jesus illustrates this through two analogies. First, in a bread analogy, Jesus came down from heaven and vicariously gives himself (flesh, σάρξ) so that those who eat it will live and not die (6:48–51). The eucharistic nature of the discourse ties Jesus’s death to the cross and eternal life (6:58).<sup>67</sup> In the second analogy, also tied to the crucifixion, Jesus likens himself to a wheat kernel that, unless it dies, produces nothing. The vicarious death of the kernel makes possible eternal life (12:23–25). The benefit of the Shepherd’s death is the provision of eternal life.

Vicarious death is a central theme of the Gospel; Jesus dies for his friends out of love (15:13),<sup>68</sup> for the nation (11:50; 18:14),<sup>69</sup> for those present and scattered (11:49–51), and for the world (3:16–17; 6:51).<sup>70</sup> John makes other suggestions of vicariousness: in the garden Jesus offers himself for the freedom of his disciples (18:8–9); his life is exchanged for that of Barabbas (18:39–40).<sup>71</sup> Pilate is even rescued from his persistent antagonists by giving up “the man” (19:5). Although the reason in each case may vary, the overall point of these substitutions is that Jesus dies to benefit others, not himself. These statements “form a semantic network, so that the individual statements must be understood not in isolation but only in their consonance in the whole Gospel,” including 1:29.<sup>72</sup>

Although 10:11–18 contains no explicit statement of an atoning death for sin on behalf of (ὐπέρ) others, can vicariousness here be understood as atonement? Van der Watt contends that at best we get insinuation of substitutionary atonement in John; it does not “come into focus at all,” but is “secondary to the revelatory function of the cross events.”<sup>73</sup> However, we must see the shepherd motif in light of the entire Gospel presentation, where death results from the sin of unbelief (5:24; 8:51) while becoming children of God and having eternal life grows from belief (1:12; 6:27–29, 40; 3:16; 10:27–28) and where

<sup>66</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 377.

<sup>67</sup> As Bauckham points out, in John, as in the Synoptics, “the ‘eucharistic’ acts are there to interpret the ongoing narrative, giving its sacrificial significance.... [John provides a] very concrete picture of Jesus dying for those who are having supper with him” (*Gospel of Glory*, 67).

<sup>68</sup> Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 64–71.

<sup>69</sup> Whether the vicariousness here involves atonement is debated, though in light of John’s multiplicity of meanings, reasonable. Loader, *Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 174–75.

<sup>70</sup> John intentionally has Greeks coming to worship in Jerusalem immediately after the statement of the Pharisees about belief in 12:19.

<sup>71</sup> Jörg Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. Wayne Cop-pins and Christoph Heilig (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 192.

<sup>72</sup> Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One*, 188.

<sup>73</sup> Van der Watt, “Salvation in the Gospel according to John,” 116. Loader (*Jesus in John’s Gospel*, 172–73) notes other possibilities, including facing rejection in order to reveal the Father, surrendering himself to free his followers, showing that he is good and cares for his own.

the shepherd of the sheep motif relates to the motif of the Lamb addressing sin (1:29). And as we have seen, the lamb motif there suggests a strong and primary connection with the OT cultic offerings. In short, the shepherd narratives must be seen in light of the entire Gospel characterization of Jesus's role in bringing salvation and life.<sup>74</sup>

### 6. *Defeater of the Enemy*

The “dying on behalf of” (ὑπέρ) motif may have another interpretation.<sup>75</sup> Unlike hired shepherds who flee in the face of mortal danger, Jesus voluntarily dies defending the sheep (10:12–13). Interpreted this way, Jesus's death is a deadly battle with the enemy, the thieves and wolves, who threaten the flock. Vicarious death is in view in John 10, but not a death where the one killed bears away the sin of others. Rather, it is a vicarious death by one who, like soldiers, dies defending others from the enemy.<sup>76</sup> The passage hints at a view of soteriology where in the context of being lifted up Jesus dies battling spiritual forces. The devil comes (14:30) but will be judged, condemned (16:11), and driven out (12:31).<sup>77</sup>

Jesus says, “Take heart! I have overcome the world [κόσμος]” (16:33).<sup>78</sup> The Gospel is situated amid the cosmic conflict of light and darkness (1:5; 12:35–36). The world is under the influence or hold of the devil, who is a murderer and father of lies (8:44) and who prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus (13:2, 27). John sees the devil behind Jesus's death. The devil's role “will grow louder and louder as the hour of Jesus approaches, until the Passion is presented as the struggle to the death between Jesus and Satan (12:31, 14:40, 16:11, 17:15).”<sup>79</sup> By killing and thus eliminating Jesus, the evil one contemplated attaining victory. However, the crucifixion is not the end of the narrative; God has the last word by raising Jesus from the dead. Satan is driven out (12:31), Judas disappears unheralded from the scene, and the Shepherd continues his mission via his proxies (21:15–17). Salvation frees us from the power of the devil to adopt the truth (with its double meaning of propositional truth and truth found in a person) that sets one free from sin (8:24, 32–34). The emphasis on truth at Jesus's trial speaks to this: truth conquers lies, betrayal, murder, and death. It enables Jesus's followers to walk in the light, and by believing become children of the light (12:36).

In conquering the devil, John extends his soteriological themes to the conquest of sin. The Jews are slaves of sin (8:34) and by extension slaves to the devil, whose desire is that they sin and not believe the Truth (8:44–47). Thus, the Jews in their parentage stand in opposition to Jesus, who traces his parentage to the Father whom he seeks to obey.

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<sup>74</sup> “The death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is understood as a ‘salvation-creating’ act of God, through which the removal of sin, salvation from death, and the opening of new life takes place,” writes Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One*, 195.

<sup>75</sup> The application of this interpretation of ὑπέρ in 6:51; 11:50–52; and 15:13 would be strained.

<sup>76</sup> Michaels, “Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles,” 110.

<sup>77</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 258.

<sup>78</sup> George L. Parsenius discusses the fusion of future and past events in the narrative, which is written from a post-resurrection perspective (“‘No Longer in the World’ [John 17:11]: The Transformation of the Tragic in the Fourth Gospel,” *HTR* 98 (2005): 6–7). See R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), ch. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 354 n. 8.

But how, one might ask, do Jesus's death and resurrection win the cosmic battle and the subjugation of evil powers?<sup>80</sup> Part of the answer is that although Jesus died, his resurrection reveals that the devil "has no hold on" him (14:30). Jesus's death and resurrection foretold our own victory over the evil power and his works by our sharing in Jesus's victory and resurrection.<sup>81</sup> "Because I live, you also will live.... I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (14:19–20). Again, salvation for John addresses the theme of giving life (11:25–26).

## 7. *The Healer*

From John's analogy of Jesus being lifted up with Moses raising the bronze serpent so that those who gaze on it are healed (John 3:14; Num 21:8–9), we glimpse salvation as healing, a view generally overlooked in formal treatments of salvation and atonement.<sup>82</sup> Sickness and sin are connected in the OT.<sup>83</sup> The psalmist writes, "Have mercy on me, LORD; heal me, for I have sinned against you" (Ps 41:4). Sin begets suffering, though not all suffering results from sin, as the book of Job makes clear. The Levitical laws did not require a sin offering for every illness, only for those that were prolonged or possibly contagious.<sup>84</sup> However, this connection continues into the NT worldview (John 5:14; 9:1–2; Jas 5:13–16).

Themes from Isaiah 52–53 again are relevant. In being lifted up (John 12:32; Isa 52:13), Jesus takes on "our infirmities and carries our sorrows," to the extent that "we consider him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.... By his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:4–5; John 19:1–3, 34). Isaiah's diagnosis is that we are without well-being, for we are a sinful people (Isa 1:2–4).

Sickness describes not only our spiritual condition but our physical, economic, political, social, and environmental conditions. In his dramatic stories, John records a litany of persons lacking well-being: a wedding host, temple merchants, an ostracized woman, an official's son, an invalid, hungry listeners, terrified disciples, a blind man and blind Pharisees, Lazarus, betraying Judas, impetuously denying Peter, and doubting Thomas. The biblical view is that restoration is needed—of individuals, the people (Isa 10:21), their land (2 Chr 7:14; Joel 2:25), their institutions (Hos 6:6–7)—for their spiritual and physical health (Ps 41:3–4, 8). The sufficient condition is to turn to God who restores—"I am the LORD, your Healer" (Exod 15:26). When the LORD comes, "No one living in Zion will say, 'I am ill'; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven" (Isa 33:24).

<sup>80</sup> "The cosmic significance of Christ's work is ontologically more fundamental than its soteriological significance," according to Gregory A. Boyd, "Christus Victor View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 33.

<sup>81</sup> "In [Second Temple] Jewish texts, the defeat of Satan is part of the events of the end of the age, but for John, Satan's defeat, consistent with John's realized eschatology, comes as a result of the cross event.... Satan is 'cast down/out,' that is, his power and subterfuge over those who believe are decisively defeated in the cross," according to John Dennis, "The 'Lifting Up of the Son of Man' and the Dethroning of the 'Ruler of this World': Jesus' Death as the Defeat of the Devil in John 12,31–32," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. Van Belle (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 685.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Healing View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 129–37.

<sup>83</sup> Michael L. Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Megory Anderson and Philip Culbertson, "The Inadequacy of the Christian Doctrine of Atonement in Light of Levitical Sin Offering," *AThR* 68 (1986): 308–9.

John develops the link between sickness, healing, and salvation in four healing stories. In the drama of Jesus and the official with the dying son, Jesus proclaims, “Your son will live” (4:50). John twice repeats the phrase for a total of three (three being symbolic of completion). Here John bonds his central themes of believing, life, and salvation (3:16–17) with healing; Jesus gives life to the son through the official’s believing response to Jesus’s promise.<sup>85</sup>

In the second healing story (5:1–15), Jesus comes to a porticoed healing pool located near the temple, where he encounters a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years. Jesus asks the invalid if he wants to be made well or whole (ὕγιής), a term not ordinarily used for healing but whose double meaning manifests a typical Johannine play on words.<sup>86</sup> The invalid, understanding the question from the below-perspective of human experience affirms his desire to become physically well.<sup>87</sup> Jesus offers this and more: wholeness as salvation seen from above, for when the former paralytic returns, Jesus commands him to sin no more (5:14). Salvation as healing from sin restores to wholeness, but it requires persistent attention to prevent the sin that attacked the wholeness from returning (8:11).

The third healing story also conjoins healing with sin (9:1–3). On the one hand, the disciples initiate the discussion by asking whose sin precipitated the man’s blindness, and the Pharisees accuse the formerly blind man of being conceived in sin (9:34). On the other hand, as the story goes from scene to scene, the Pharisees and people ponder whether the healer of the blind man is the sinner, since he healed on the Sabbath (9:16, 24–25, 31). Despite Jesus rejecting the view that the man’s sin caused his blindness,<sup>88</sup> the relation between the two lies in the background. In the end, from the from-above perspective, believing leads to sight and worship; disbelieving to spiritual blindness (9:40–41). The drama finishes with Jesus doing God’s work, the sin of unbelieving, and the possibility and actuality of healing.

In the final healing story, the disciples inquire whether Lazarus will be healed or saved (σωθήσεται), whether from the illness or from death is unclear (11:6, 11). The double meaning of from below and from above is again evident. Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life (11:25–26), brings physical and salvific life out of death.

Two other passages may allude to salvation by healing. In 13:10 the source of purification (καθαρός) is not given; in 15:3 purification comes through Jesus’s word (λόγος). In neither case does John make clear from what we are cleansed, although he gives the purpose of bearing fruit in 15:3. This same word (καθαρίζω) is used by Matthew to refer to the healing or purification/cleansing of lepers (Matt 8:2; 10:8; 11:5), whose unclean, diseased status prevents them from participating in religious rituals. Given John’s penchant for double meaning, it is very possible that from the perspective-from-above, salvation as healing/purification/cleansing is in view in these verses.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Christopher Thomas, “Healing in the Atonement: A Johannine Perspective,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14 (2005): 27.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, “Healing in the Atonement,” 27.

<sup>87</sup> Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 6. This distinction of origins—between being from above and being from this world (below)—is central to Jesus’s thought (3:31; 8:23).

<sup>88</sup> Rightly so, since no longer were the sins of parents to be visited on their children (Ezek 18:4, 20), and for the blind man to have sinned required him to pre-exist, which was a Greek notion.

<sup>89</sup> The theme of cleansing from sin and impurity is found in Zechariah 13:1, which some take as concluding the previous prophecy (Zech 12:10–14). John 19:34 is thought to echo Zechariah 12:10, where “some think the

In the OT, although sickness connected with sin, the Levitical system was not designed to provide healing for persons with infectious diseases (Lev 13–14), and the priests were not healers but rather certifiers that healing had occurred. When certified as healed, the ill were to return to the community with a burnt and a sin or guilt offering, which the priest used to atone for the sin related to their disease. The offering involved bodily washing and sprinkling with blood, which symbolically and ceremonially purified the impure person (Lev 14:7–8, 14). Thus, it is symbolic that on the cross, when Jesus was pierced, blood and water—both symbols of purification—flow from his body (19:34).

For John, sickness is not only individual, as our examples illustrate, but also cosmic, in line with the Old Testament. Jesus came to save the κόσμος (3:16), a word that John presents in the Prologue as having multiple meanings. The Word enters the cosmos which he created to bring light; but the cosmos, understood as the world inhabitants, is in sin (1:29) and does not recognize him (1:9,10); in unbelieving it chooses darkness rather than light (3:19). However, John's primary salvific emphasis is on individuals in the cosmos, for their belief in what God has done (3:21) is sufficient to save.

John does not theorize about salvation as healing. Rather, through careful construction of his four dramatic healing narratives he *shows* how Jesus's saving action brings healing, physical and spiritual. "His initiative to heal, restore, and give life dominates the narrative."<sup>90</sup> The healings are also signs, part of the double dimension that permeates the Gospel. They attest not only to Jesus's identity but also to his mission and thus are an intrinsic part of the drama of the first part of the Gospel.<sup>91</sup> Ironically, in the Lazarus account, John hints by Jesus's weeping that the giver of life will himself need the Father's resurrection healing (11:35). However, although John speaks of healing in connection with the lifted-up motif, John leaves unclear how healing relates to Jesus's crucifixion. This may not be unexpected in a culture where conjunction of events was more familiar and possible than detailing a causal relation.

### 8. A Soteriological Dramatic Medley

As Alan Culpepper notes, it is important, in considering soteriology in the Gospel of John, that we don't import traditional or contemporary theories of salvation into the text. "Reading ancient texts faithfully, while reading with contemporary issues and sensitivities in mind, is always tricky.... The Gospel of John ... is subtle and paradoxical, presenting differing perspectives without reconciling them."<sup>92</sup> Although the evangelist does not directly exposit a theory of salvation, hints of what later theologians treat as soteriological theories run through the Gospel as the drama develops from seeing the Lamb to its death. As the apostle Paul does not shy away from mixing soteriological motifs (Rom 5:9–11), so John dramatizes diverse ways of understanding salvation.

From statements about the Lamb of God, we glimpse salvation as vicarious substitution. "The animal victim is a substitute for the worshipper, makes atonement for him, and thereby restores him

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pierced one is the same as the suffering servant of Isa 53," according to Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 (Dallas: Word, 1982), 278.

<sup>90</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, "Christus Victor: The Salvation of God and the Cross of Christ," *Theology, News & Notes* 59.2 (2012), 10.

<sup>91</sup> Jean Zumstein, "The Purpose of the Ministry and Death of Jesus," in *Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith Lieu (London: Oxford University Press, 2018), 336.

<sup>92</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Fourth Gospel," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John*, eds. John Painter, R. Alan Culpepper, and Fernando F. Segovia (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 85.

to favour with God.”<sup>93</sup> The lamb is sacrificed on our behalf for the removal of our sins, its death for our death, giving us life. Our sins are transferred in some way to the sacrificed animal and taken away. John also sees that salvation has a conquest dimension. The world, the place of lies, darkness, and death, is overcome (16:33). Although in one sense, on the cross (being lifted up) the battle is finished (12:31–32), in another sense it has just begun. It becomes the ongoing work of the Spirit to expose that the devil is condemned (16:11). The Gospel of John portrays Jesus as a divine healer. Jesus takes on himself our sin and the sickness of the world and bears it, suffering, to the cross to bring about healing (1 Pet 2:24).

Although John does not reconcile these salvation motifs, what holds them all together is this Gospel’s central concept of life. Salvation is giving life (3:16), overcoming death (perishing) and the one who occasions death and resists the truth (8:44). Since sin is the sickness unto death, only (3:14, 12:34) by Jesus being lifted up (both crucified [12:32–33] and resurrected [10:17–18]) and by the world’s believing in him can the sickness be removed and life (both qualitative and quantitative) restored (3:14–15).

However, how this is accomplished through Jesus’s death John leaves unsaid. Thus, in the end we must move from theory and return to the dramatic narrative itself, which conveys John’s testimonial argument for his thesis about Jesus’s messianic mission. The story of the cross is the climax of Jesus’s victory over sin, sickness, and the devil. In this John gives us not so much a theology as a drama of salvation. Through symbol, metaphor, and story, he affirms that we attain a new parentage, not from earthly parents but from above. In rebirth, we do not reenter the natural order, but by our believing in and receiving Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, we are united with Jesus in life and death, and thereby gain new parentage through a new origin from above, a new identity as children of God, abundant life, and a new mission of obedient discipleship (21:19, 22).

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<sup>93</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 84.

# The Placement of Paul's Composition of 1 Corinthians in Troas: A Fresh Approach

— Daryn Graham —

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**Abstract:** Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in Troas. This is the argument of this article, using Acts and 1 and 2 Corinthians as the main sources of information. By drawing upon primary sources and critical modern scholarship, it is argued that 1 Corinthians was not written by the apostle Paul in Ephesus, as is the main consensus, but in Troas to the north, after Paul had his vision of the man from Macedonia begging him to preach throughout Macedonia, from where Paul journeyed to Corinth, as he stated he would in 1 Corinthians, after which he then travelled to Ephesus, for the first time. It is concluded that before he embarked for Macedonia from Troas, Paul completed writing 1 Corinthians.

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The majority of Bible commentators place the composition of 1 Corinthians in Ephesus. This widespread assumption draws on the tradition that many believe began with Theodoret of Cyrhus (Syria) who lived AD 393–466, who simply stated, ‘I think he [Paul] wrote the first one [of the two biblical epistles] to the Corinthians in Ephesus.’<sup>1</sup> Euthalius who lived in the fifth century, and Pseudo-Athanasius who lived sometime from the fourth to sixth century, followed his lead.<sup>2</sup> Ebedjesu (d. 1318) tried to encapsulate European Medieval tradition and espoused that 1 Corinthians was written in Ephesus and delivered to Corinth by Timothy.<sup>3</sup> 1611 produced ‘The Authorised Version’ of The King James English Bible. A subscription added to 1 Corinthians assures the reader, based on evidence written by Euthalius, who is actually an otherwise unknown deacon from the fifth century, it was written in Philippi in Macedonia, and was delivered to the Corinthian church by Stephanus, Fortunatus, Achaicus,

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<sup>1</sup> Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 82 cols. 37B–40A.

<sup>2</sup> Euthalius, 85 col. 752D; Pseudo-Athanasius, *Synopsis of Sacred Scripture* 28 col. 416B.

<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Lardner, *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner, Vol. 4* (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1829), 321; George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals, Vol. 2* (London: Joseph Master, 1852), 362–63.

and Timotheus, the first three of whom the letter states visited the church beforehand.<sup>4</sup>

Hodge believed the letter was written just before his last trip to Corinth via Macedonia, on his way to Jerusalem, on an itinerary that did not include Ephesus between Corinth and Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Thiselton has suggested the letter was written by Paul at the end of his first stay in Ephesus that lasted a few months.<sup>6</sup> Garland provides no clear date for 1 Corinthians in his commentary, but in the same year of its publication Murphy-O'Connor promoted it was written in Ephesus, along with Paul's letters to Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon—although he expresses in the same pages that dating 1 Corinthians can be a complex matter.<sup>7</sup> Keener also provides no clear date for 1 Corinthians in his brilliant and influential commentary on the Corinthian correspondence.<sup>8</sup> Huntsman presumes it was written just after Paul's first visit to Corinth, much as 2 Corinthians was.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, articles by Keener and Morgan place no written work by Paul on 1 Corinthians in Troas, at all.<sup>10</sup>

This article demonstrates, using evidence from the Corinthian epistles and Acts that 1 Corinthians could very well have been written by Paul while he lived in Troas, just after his vision there, in which he saw a man from Macedonia begging him to journey west from Troas to Macedonia to preach the gospel—after which, Acts states, Paul got ready at once to leave for Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10). 1 Corinthians states the writer, Paul, was going to travel through Macedonia and then journey to Corinth, where the letter had been sent, before Paul had arrived in Macedonia. It is the argument of this article that 1 Corinthians was written before Paul left for Macedonia from Troas.<sup>11</sup>

Troas was known in Roman times by a full title, 'Colonia Augusta Troadensium.'<sup>12</sup> It was a coastal gateway port city for Europeans to Asia,<sup>13</sup> and for Asians to Europe.<sup>14</sup> Dreams and visions like the one Paul had were not unheard of in his times. Among god-fearing pagans, dreams sent by the gods appear in Pliny the Younger, Suetonius and Plutarch.<sup>15</sup> Among Jews, Josephus and the Essenes of Qumran, took

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred William Pollard, ed., *The Holy Bible: A Facsimile in a Reduced Size of the Authorized Version Published in the Year 1611* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), comment at 1 Corinthians 16:17.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 Corinthians*, reprint ed. (Albany: Books for the Ages, 1997), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31.

<sup>7</sup> See throughout David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians', in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75.

<sup>8</sup> See throughout Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Eric D. Huntsmans, 'The Occasional Nature, Composition, and Structure of Paul's Letters', in *How the New Testament Came to Be: The Thirty-Fifth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank J. Judd Jr (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 2006), 190–207.

<sup>10</sup> Craig S. Keener, 'Paul's Asian Mission to Europe—Acts 16:9', *Bible Background: Research and Commentary from Dr. Craig Keener*, 5 November 2013, <https://craigkeener.com/pauls-asian-mission-to-europe-acts-169/>; Robert J. Morgan, 'Supreme Lessons from Acts 16', 28 June 2015, <https://www.robertjmorgan.com/uncategorized/supreme-lessons-from-acts-16/>.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor 16:5–9; Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians', 86.

<sup>12</sup> *CIL* 3:39.

<sup>13</sup> Seneca, *To Polybius on Consolation* 4.46.1.

<sup>14</sup> Lysias, *Orations* 2.28.

<sup>15</sup> Pliny, *Epistles* 1.18.1–4; Suetonius, *Augustus* 91; Plutarch, *Themistocles* 30.

an interest in recounting and interpreting their own dreams and visions.<sup>16</sup> Among early Christians, visionary dreams appear to the magi who worshipped Jesus, and to Joseph in Matthew 2:1–18. In fact, Paul himself had many visions and visionary dreams, which he interpreted and drew inspiration from, more than those recorded in his letters or Acts, just like the great Jewish prophet Daniel, who was given the gifts of vision and dream interpretation, and could interpret visions and dreams in response to his prayer (Dan 1:17; 2:19; 2 Cor 12:1–9).

### 1. *The Origins of the Jerusalem Donation*

Around the time Nero became emperor in AD 54, and probably drawing inspiration from the excitement of a new era, the church of Corinth responded to those in Jerusalem struggling and made voluntary requests on their own behalf to Paul, asking and demanding that they be allowed by him to help and support the church in Jerusalem financially.<sup>17</sup> Paul would have prayed for something like it to happen, so would have many other Christians. Perhaps extensive letter exchange occurred between the Christians of Jerusalem, and those around Corinth, Macedonia and Galatia. The Gentile churches suffered, but the Jerusalem church suffered worse. Paul was a Jewish Christian, but a great espouser of Gentile Christianity. Augustine of Hippo temporarily assumed the community of goods failed, early on in his career. Later, he reconsidered the extant material—material that had not enlightened him earlier on in his career, because later on he became a great advocate of the community of goods.<sup>18</sup> When he drew up his rules for his monastic order, Augustine endorsed the model of the community of goods to serve as the model for the finances of his monasteries, singularly and collectively.<sup>19</sup>

Still, some commentators have claimed it failed. These have argued that Christians in Jerusalem were only drawn from the poorer classes, and that the Sanhedrin's hostility towards Christianity there took a toll financially, and also that these Christians' hospitality towards missionaries used up resources excessively. However, the church at Jerusalem actually sent many missionaries out to other destinations. Still, these commentators propose that in every act of sharing the community of goods reduced what little capital it had, despite the fact that if they did share it amongst themselves they still would have possessed, and shared, that same capital. These also argue that money-making ventures by the Christians on account of these 'facts' rendered those ventures 'null and void'.<sup>20</sup> Thus, some scholars also believe the Jerusalem Church was made up of itinerant beggars.<sup>21</sup> However, it was not until AD

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.22–25, 125–129; 17.345–346, 350, 353; 4Q530 2:4–5, 11–12.

<sup>17</sup> Josef Hainz, *Koinonia: 'Kirche' als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), 123–51; John S. Kloppenborg, 'Paul's Collection for Jerusalem and the Financial Practices in Greek Cities', in *Paul and Economics: A Handbook*, ed. Thomas R. Blanton IV and Raymond Pickett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 309.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 82.11; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 397; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary On Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 128.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Sermon on Psalm 131 (132); Sermon on Psalm 132 (133); The Work of Monks* 25, 32; T. J. V. Bavel, *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 41–52.

<sup>20</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 284; Margaret E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 161; Raymond F. Collins, *Second Corinthians*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 166.

<sup>21</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians', 87–88.

54 that the Jerusalem Donation first came into being, after the long famine under Claudius had raged for up to nine years throughout the empire. Thus, the community of goods had acquitted itself well. Indeed, the Donation would not be carried to Jerusalem by Paul until AD 57, adding to the lustre of the community of goods, and its wise acquittal.<sup>22</sup>

Not long after the Corinthian church volunteered its donative request to Paul, in order to financially help the struggling Christians of Jerusalem, the believers of Macedonia likewise volunteered their own special request to Saint Paul so they could contribute some sort of monetary donation, as well. That's why Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 8:1–4, 10:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service to the Lord's people [in Jerusalem].... Last year you [the church in Corinth] were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

The enthusiasm continued to spread and expand, and before too long the churches featuring throughout Galatia also responded, sending out their own private request to Paul, perhaps as he stayed in Galatia just prior to his vision of the Macedonian man in Troas and his writing of 1 Corinthians, and his maritime trek west from Troas to Samothrace, so that they could also contribute some sort of monetary aid to their fellow Christians in Jerusalem and the wider Judean region. David J. Downs agrees that the seed of the 'Jerusalem Donation' was planted after Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians prior to AD 53, yet before 1 Corinthians was completed and delivered.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Galatians

In response, Paul addressed the Galatian churches first, at a time when some of their ambassadors were before him in Galatia no doubt presenting their special request to him, probably in both speech and writing. Unfortunately, Downs and others confusingly have pressed that Paul merely replied to the Galatians by letter, although during which timing most cannot find a majority consensus, although Downs has conceded that the Galatian churches were initially enthusiastic to contribute money, and did, but in the end contributed no money to the 'Jerusalem Donation' at all.<sup>24</sup> Among these scholars, Georgi alternates between timing such a discarding letter to both before and/or after the completion of the Galatians epistle.<sup>25</sup> Martyn questions whether Paul's collection letter could have been quickly penned by

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<sup>22</sup> Daryn Graham, 'The Apostle Paul and the Success of the Jerusalem Donation,' *RTR* 78 (2019): 117–40; Daryn Graham, 'The Genesis of the Jerusalem Donation,' *Themelios* 45 (2020): 58–73.

<sup>23</sup> David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 40.

<sup>24</sup> David Horrell, 'The Lord Commanded ... But I Have Not Used: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on 1 Cor 9:14–15,' *NTS* 43 (1997): 587–603; Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection*, WUNT 2/124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 157; Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 41–43.

<sup>25</sup> Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 49.

the apostle to calm emotions after the deliverance of the biblical epistle to the Galatians.<sup>26</sup> Downs, on the other hand, finds no solution as to when such an only hypothesised letter, if it ever existed, was written.<sup>27</sup> Becker and Joubert argue in the seeming absence of evidence that the churches of Galatia carried out an independent collection, linked but unrelated to the 'Jerusalem Donation'.<sup>28</sup> However, Downs argues that since Romans 15:26 refers to Macedonia and Achaëa together as contributors to the Jerusalem Donation collection, that this means they were the only provinces to contribute at all.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Paul's Addresses

Thereupon, Paul gave his addresses to the Corinthian and Macedonian church communities, most likely through these same Galatian ambassadors or their representatives among the Galatian Christians, endorsing their bids to contribute funds to the Gentile Galatian churches' drive to bring aid to their Jewish Christian Judean brothers and sisters. Some biblical scholars have theorised that perhaps the question of the requirements of the collection made by Paul were initially broached to him by a lengthy letter full of repetitions of questions relating to the collection and other matters.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Mitchell has warned against deriving all of Paul's concerns towards the Corinthian church to the questions written down in a single letter from the Corinthian church.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, adding to Mitchell's point, De Boer and other critical analysers of the Corinthian correspondences also argue that 1 Corinthians was never a singular inclusive sequence of two separate letters, maintaining and sustaining that 1 Corinthians was instead, and always was, a single letter.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, a brief reading of the epistle discloses that the ambassadors from Chloe's household church breached certain several issues to Paul in person.<sup>33</sup>

While he was in Galatia, Paul orally instructed the churches how to go about raising funds for the Jerusalemite Christian believers, setting aside small amounts of money every first day of every week indefinitely in proportion to each person's wage or income in each household. Paul then travelled to Troas where he wrote down for the Corinthian Christians in his first letter to them the same instructions. This is set forth clearly in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4, with the rider that when Paul eventually arrives in Corinth, no special church tithes and offerings collection was to ever be made to him to pass on to the Jerusalem church and the rest of the Judean household churches suffering from famine. Paul writes,

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<sup>26</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 226 n. 79; J. Louis Martyn, 'A Tale of Two Churches', in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Saint Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 25–36.

<sup>27</sup> Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 24–25; Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 157. But, see also Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, 'Paul's Collection: Chronology and History', *NTS* 48 (2002): 95–110.

<sup>29</sup> Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 81–83; Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, 'Concerning ΠΕΡΙ ΔΕ in 1 Corinthians', *NovT* 31 (1989): 229–56.

<sup>32</sup> Martinus C. De Boer, 'The Composition of 1 Corinthians', *NTS* 40 (1994): 229–45.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example 1 Corinthians 1:11; Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians', 75–76.

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. (1 Cor 16:1–4)

For Paul, a long slow series of Sunday collections was far more effective, gradually building up funds until the appropriate time for their final delivery. Notice too, that in the second last sentence of this passage, Paul writes that he *intends* to give 'letters of introduction' to approved Corinthian Christian adult males to be sent on to Jerusalem with their completed accumulated monetary 'gift'. But there is no evidence they made it to Jerusalem at all. Instead Paul states that only if it might seem 'advisable for me to go also', would they accompany him. In the end, Paul only made a total of two more seaborne maritime odysseys to the west coast of Judea. There's no evidence he took any donations from his Galatian, Corinthian, or Macedonian churches back to Jerusalem on his second last voyage in late AD 54 or early AD 55, although he might very well have sent something back. Still, the total amount would have been only very meagre, seeing that the Corinthian church only began saving up their donations after the receipt of the letter of 1 Corinthians in the midst of awful famine conditions there too. Even though some biographers of Paul place his visit to Corinth to around AD 50, more than likely Paul stayed in Corinth at this time for a year and a half from the beginning of AD 54 to roughly mid-AD 55 (Acts 18:11).<sup>34</sup>

To some, this seems like some simple, unadorned, mere errand.<sup>35</sup> However, it's rich in subtle information divulging some the kinds of conditions faced by the Corinthian Christians of the time, as well as the inside financial workings of the great Corinthian church itself. It also tells us exactly how the wider collection called the 'Jerusalem Donation' was carried out, serving as a lens through which we see the Corinthian microcosm expanding throughout the larger mandala-like kaleidoscopic macrocosm.<sup>36</sup> What is abundantly clear is that Paul stipulated that on the first day of the week—most likely the day when the Corinthian church came together for worship<sup>37</sup>—over an undisclosed extended period, each person was to 'set aside a sum of money in keeping with one's income, saving it up' throughout that week (1 Cor 16:1–2).<sup>38</sup> This meant that men and women of all ages and financial, as well as physical and psychological capabilities contributed, if according to different degrees. 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 emphasises that the unification of the body of Christ, which is the universal Church of all believers, as a

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 38–40; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 18–22; L. L. Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence', in *All Things to All Cultures: Paul Among Jews, Greeks, and Romans*, ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 206; Karen Armstrong, *St Paul: The Misunderstood Apostle* (London: Atlantic, 2015), 63.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Jewett, 'Romans', in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

<sup>36</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 151.

<sup>37</sup> On the matter of worship on the first day of the week in the early Church, see Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.67.6. See also Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 227.

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 483–85.

high priority. This included those of able-mindedness and any with physiological, intellectual, or other disabilities, or physical illness such as addiction or bodily ailments.<sup>39</sup> Paul may also have contributed to the Donation himself, while at Corinth and elsewhere. Paul says that as he lived in Corinth he was not a burden, but was helped financially by his brothers (and sisters, no doubt) from Macedonia, most likely those who accompanied him (2 Cor 11:9–10). So it appears he did not accept a collection for himself while he lived there. Perhaps he also worked as a tentmaker, as he did in Thessalonica, earning money to support himself and others, and contribute to the fund for Jerusalem (2 Thess 3:9; cf. Acts 18:3).

This most certainly brought the Corinthian wider church together in fresh and new ways, which was Paul's aim throughout his first Corinthian letter. Although Paul describes each person as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), he also calls the Corinthian community of believers the temple of God's Spirit (3:16). Of course the implication is clear: 'each person in Christ', to paraphrase Nijay K. Gupta, is a temple of the Holy Spirit in themselves and part of a wider and greater worldwide and universal temple of God's very own loving and communal Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

#### *4. The Collection of the Jerusalem Donation*

In order to make a contribution, each Christian had to donate a sum, no matter their financial institution or financial situation. In Roman eyes, money-changers acted as bankers, however in rudimentary form—accounts were savings accounts and credit accounts.<sup>41</sup> In Plautus's plays, bankers were expected to calculate the account statuses of clients of their own, although each banker was expected to keep his accounts records up-to-date. As long as client accounts stayed open, he did not have to repay overdrafts, but closing the account meant that the clients were expected to pay back all credited funds to the banker.<sup>42</sup> Given the crediting nature of banking in Roman times, the funds for the Jerusalem Donation were saved in a home of each church community perhaps, on Sundays for safekeeping in each participating church's treasury.<sup>43</sup>

Inside his churches, Paul intended to collect donated funds using specifically appointed collectors from Macedonian, Corinthian, and Galatian churches, and to bring them to one place, Ephesus, where Paul and his collectors would pass on the funds to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:2–4; 2 Cor 8:19–21). In Roman times state businesses were conducted using tax-collectors. Private businesses were led by people, usually males, using their own personal networking and financial and lending arrangements.<sup>44</sup>

Donators were expected to contribute to each church treasury in current currency. Donations could also be converted into Judean currencies using money-changers in the eastern provinces, at the

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Brock, 'Theologizing Inclusion: 1 Corinthians 12 and the Politics of the Body of Christ', *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 15 (2011): 351–76.

<sup>40</sup> Nijay K. Gupta, 'Which "Body" is a Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19)? Paul Beyond the Individual/Communal Divide', *CBQ* 72 (2010): 521.

<sup>41</sup> Jean Andreau, *Banking and Business in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Plautus, *Aulularia* 526–31; *Captivi* 192–193; *Curculio* 371–374; Dominic Rathbone, *Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third Century AD Egypt: The Heroninos Archive and the Appianus Estate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 328–29; Andreau, *Banking and Business*, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 227–28.

<sup>44</sup> Andreau, *Banking and Business*, 20.

cost of a commissioners' fee.<sup>45</sup> For those unable to pay commissions throughout Macedonia, Corinth, and Galatia, money-changers at the far-away Jewish Temple in Jerusalem were equipped to change imperial and local currencies into Judean currency to buy food and other resources.<sup>46</sup> Relevant were those money-changers' and lenders' ability to convert huge foreign totals to smaller coinage via exchange rate, allowing ease of distribution for Jerusalem church leaders to use their congregation, to ease the use of these coins to buy food for each person.<sup>47</sup>

### 5. *We Come to Troas*

In the discussion that follows, this article draws primarily on the biblical evidence itself. Notably, Paul repeatedly refers to the 'door' that God would open for him in Ephesus for effective missionary activity. The timing of Paul's composition of 1 Corinthians, which states unequivocally that this 'door' was in 'Ephesus' (1 Cor 16:8–9), fits best within AD 54. Actually, the Corinthian 'church' did not consist of just one single group or building, but rather was a network and amalgamation of numerous household 'church' gatherers, that met under the banner, to use Paul's own description, of 'the church of God in Corinth' (1:2). In fact, the word 'church' did not originally mean anything like a building, be it a cathedral, or a chapel, or even a shrine. In fact, it didn't mean any physical building at all. The word normally rendered 'church' in English, ἐκκλησία in Greek, is a synonym of συναγωγή: both terms refer to a congregation that assembles and meets together, usually for religious gatherings. According to Paul, the great Corinthian Christian leader Stephanas hosted such a household church, as did a certain Chloe, both in Corinth (see 1 Cor 1:11, 16). In 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions that Stephanas was a supplier and refresher of the spiritual health of the 'church' of Corinth, and he also refers to other male Christian leaders: Fortunus and Achaicus. They also clearly ran household churches of their own, as well (1 Cor 16:17). Finally, but not exhaustively, the apostle Paul names and commends Phoebe the great deaconess of a household church in Cenchrae in his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:1). Without question there were also many other household churches that came under Corinth's banner at the time also, because 2 Corinthians 1:1 goes much further than 1 Corinthians, labelling the 'church of God in Corinth' as that which belongs to Corinth as well as 'all his [Jesus's] holy people throughout Achaia.'

Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 16:7–9:

For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay [ἐπιμενῶ] on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

Notice, Paul uses the future tense ἐπιμενῶ to describe his 'stay' as Ephesus. He clearly planned a short stay in Corinth, before travelling by the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, to stay for Pentecost. In other words, Paul's intended 'stay' at Ephesus appears intended for a future date. This does not mean he was at Ephesus at the time of writing, but that he had planned to live there, sometime in the future. In New

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<sup>45</sup> Andreau, *Banking and Business*, 37.

<sup>46</sup> Andreau, *Banking and Business*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Grant, 'The Pattern of Official Coinage in the Early Principate', in *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly*, ed. R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 96–112, esp. 102–12; Andreau, *Banking and Business*, 37.

Testament times, writers did not use such accents in terms of punctuation as appears in this word ἐπιμενῶ—that did not happen until after classical times, and was not regularly used until Byzantine times and modern times. However, this punctuation, as appears in Greek versions of the Bible, was derived from pronunciation in ancient times, during which time this letter was written.<sup>48</sup> Of course, as Schreiner points out, there was always the risk of a language barrier between Paul and later generations, and that Theodoret of Cyrillus may have misunderstood in the fourth century AD that 1 Corinthians intended to state Paul was already staying in Ephesus while writing the letter (mistakenly reading the future ἐπιμενῶ as the present tense ἐπιμένω).<sup>49</sup> In any event, given Deuteronomy 16:9 and Leviticus 23:16 state that Pentecost fell seven weeks after Passover, Paul must have left Ephesus sometime in late May, just after the Pentecost festival was celebrated there.<sup>50</sup>

Obviously Paul faced hardships at the outset of his eventual arrival, and stay, in Ephesus, well before the incident regarding the temple of Artemis. Consider Paul's words to the Corinthian Christians:

We do not want you to be uniformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. (2 Cor 1:8)

That this was written well before the Artemis incident is evidenced by Paul's insistence he had only not long earlier conducted himself well during his first visit to in Corinth (2 Cor 2:12); that he was pained to make 'another' visit, after this topical first visit (2 Cor 2:1–4), especially because of the painful nature of that previous visit both for himself, and the locals there; and that his earlier first trip into Macedonia and then into Corinth just before his seafaring journey to Ephesus, was still topically full of conflict and fears (2 Cor 7:5).

## *6. Pushing West*

Arguably, one can arrive at the exact day, or days of the writing of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians was written either on precisely the same night of Paul's vision described below, or shortly after, throughout the next morning, or over the next few days and nights that followed, before he left Troas for Macedonia, and thence onto Corinth. Paul states unequivocally that this 'door' for himself in Ephesus had been opened and sent by the Lord while in Troas before his sojourn to Macedonia:

Now when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went to Macedonia. (2 Cor 2:12–13)

On his way to the province of Asia for the first time, Paul dreamed of heading to Ephesus, to use it as a base to visit other places, like Macedonia and Corinth, for instance—and also Rome, for in Romans 15:23 (written in AD 57) Paul states he had 'longed for many years' to visit the Christians of Rome. There were Jewish Christians in Rome following the first Pentecost after Jesus's ascension, no doubt (cf. Acts 2:10). In 2 Corinthians, Paul outlined his purpose for his first planned itinerary. In it he states

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<sup>48</sup> Donald J. Mastrorarde, *Introduction to Attic Greek*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas P. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 62.

<sup>50</sup> Armstrong, *St Paul*, 63.

his original intention was to visit Corinth, then Macedonia, and then Corinth again, and then return by ship to Jerusalem. It was an ambitious plan, but it wasn't as ambitious as his ideas, and his efforts, would eventually turn out to become. God had bigger plans for Paul, and in time so would Paul, in places like Corinth, Macedonia, and Ephesus—but they would be realised in ways Paul would never have expected—such was his success (2 Cor 1:16).

While he lived in Pisidian Antioch, on his first mission towards the west, 'the word of God spread throughout the whole region,' on account of Paul and his associates there (Acts 13:49). Paul refers to a 'previous letter' to the Corinth believers in 1 Corinthians 5:9.<sup>51</sup> As Freed notes, earlier letters between Paul and Corinth, as well as Silas, Timothy, and Corinth, are certainly permissible; and as Harrill hypothesises, not without reasoning, there may have been 'an extended and complex history of correspondence' between these for some years, in the build-up to the eventual writing of 1 Corinthians.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps he wrote it in Pisidian Antioch. He certainly saw Ephesus key to his great 'door,' already while there, for when he returned to Syrian Antioch from his mission to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, Paul told the Christian assembly there, God had opened a great door of faith for him. No doubt this was the same 'door' that God was opening up to him in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:7–9), and that the Lord continued to open to Paul while he was in Troas (2 Cor 2:12–13). As Acts 14:27–28 states,

On arriving there [Syrian Antioch], they [Paul and his associates] gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

In Acts 16:6–8, on his second missionary journey, Paul and his companions struggled to enter Asia, to preach there, and its neighbouring province Bithynia. They dallied in Phrygia, and then in Galatia, trying to get into Asia and Bithynia, but all in vain.<sup>53</sup> The Holy Spirit kept them out of Asia—perhaps there was danger, and evidently the time had not yet come for gospel ministry there. Then Jesus kept them from entering Bithynia—a double wall. Again, the time had not yet come (Acts 16:6–7). Paul was pushing west, and in 2 Corinthians he states he planned to visit Corinth, then Macedonia, then Corinth again, and then planned to return to Jerusalem. History would have been altered. He might have planned to retire to Jerusalem, for good. Still, Paul was God's chosen individual for his uniquely grand, and successfully extended missional role. He was not to retire (2 Cor 1:16).

Paul was arguably trying to reach Asia and Ephesus, its capital, and from there perhaps push west by sea to Corinth, and then onto Samothrace and Philippi in Macedonia, and then back to Corinth—probably all by boat considering all of the above cities were harbour cities—and then head back to Jerusalem by ship. Paul seems to have envisaged a sea-borne expeditionary mission, but as it turned out, Paul's mission in these areas would turn out to be mostly land-borne. This meant that they were longer-lasting, with more person-to-person contact, among larger populations (on land rather than sea), and with more friendships formed. This had far-reaching consequences for the immediate population, and following generations. World history was altered, and he introduced, because of this change in plans, new impressions and experiences of new Christian love, both individually and collectively. However, if

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<sup>51</sup> See Edwin D. Freed, *The Apostle Paul and His Letters* (London: Equinox, 2005), 64; Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians,' 75.

<sup>52</sup> Freed, *The Apostle Paul and His Letters*, 65; J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15–16.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 216.

Paul had not written this ‘previous letter’ to Corinth back when he tarried in Pisidian Antioch (1 Cor 5:9), perhaps it was at this point—when he could not enter either Asia or Bithynia. In that case, it was delivered sometime shortly before the letter we know as 1 Corinthians. Paul probably had deliberations with people from the west by letter and in person, in Pisidian Antioch and for a long time afterwards, before he arrived in Macedonia and Corinth, and later, Ephesus.

### 7. *They Arrived in Troas*

Soon after Paul and his friends bypassed Asia, Phrygia, and Mysia, they arrived in Troas. There, after an undisclosed time, Paul might have founded a church, according to Bruce.<sup>54</sup> Paul also had a vision there. According to Acts 16:9, Paul saw a Macedonian man standing in front of him, begging him, saying ‘come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Immediately after Paul had this remarkable vision, he and his friends ‘got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them’ (16:10). This vision was the primary ‘positive guidance’ Paul had received from God to embark for Macedonia, from where he travelled to Corinth, by land.<sup>55</sup> Titus isn’t mentioned as being present in the Acts account. Paul and his friends, without Titus, might have set sail for Samothrace in Macedonia to the west, the first port of call in Macedonia from east usually, the very night of the vision in the early hours of the morning before dawn, or shortly thereafter, in the hustle and bustle of people movement in those parts in those times, by ship. It was Paul’s definitive move to journey to, and arrive at Corinth, via Macedonia. This means that 1 Corinthians was posted to the church in Corinth that very night, or perhaps more likely shortly afterwards, a day or two later, just before he embarked on ship for Samothrace to fulfil this vision and journey to Macedonia, and visit Corinth afterwards. All the while, the letter we call 1 Corinthians sailed on board another ship, as postage, to what was one of the largest seafaring commercial cities in the entire Aegean. As Schreiner and Murphy-O’Connor point out, although Paul addressed the church of Corinth (1 Cor 1:2), this letter may have been formally received by Apollos, who conducted his own ministry in Corinth, and Achaia.<sup>56</sup> According to Freed, it was written soon after the foundation of the Corinthian church by Paul, Silas and Timothy, somehow.<sup>57</sup> Harrill places this foundation sometime in AD 51.<sup>58</sup> However Acts demonstrates that at the first Pentecost festival in Jerusalem following Jesus’s ascension, there were locals from ‘every nation under heaven’ there, presumably including Greeks from Achaia, of which Corinth was the capital, and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, and Crete, from which any believer in Jesus at any stage could have migrated to Corinth after that Pentecost, and founded a church there, or several, with local Corinthians and other Achaians (Acts 2:5, 9–11).

It is true that the remarks about the visit to Corinth via Macedonia appear at the end of the letter (1 Cor 16:5), suggesting that Paul may have written the earlier portion of the letter before his vision of the Macedonian man, while in Troas, or even before. However, it is likely that Paul’s first realisation of a

<sup>54</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 218.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 218.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 18:27–19:1; 1 Corinthians 1:12; Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 27; Murphy-O’Connor, ‘1 and 2 Corinthians,’ 75.

<sup>57</sup> Freed, *The Apostle Paul and His Letters*, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Harrill, *Paul the Apostle*, 62.

definite mission to Macedonia and Corinth appeared only upon the timing of this vision—presumably, Paul had stayed in Troas up to that point in order to wait for an opening by God to enter Asia, and Ephesus. In any case, 1 Corinthians may have been written after some consideration by Paul, and deliberation between Paul and his associates, about the best route to take into Macedonia, and perhaps, the checking of boarding pass costs and ship departure and arrival times, by whatever means necessary and available. In any event, the letter was written with a sense of some immediacy, and falls into two neat parts, which may imply two main compositional sittings, according to Murphy-O'Connor (chs. 1–9, and 10–16).<sup>59</sup> According to Welborn, the first part can be divided into three main sittings (1–6:11; 6:12–20; 7–9); and the second part also into three main sittings (10:1–22; 10:23–11:34; 12–16).<sup>60</sup> However, these did not constitute separate letters, but rather parts of a constituent whole.<sup>61</sup> Paul also seems to have interspersed several topics not necessarily otherwise contained throughout the rest of the letter, such as factions (1:10–12; 11:18–19), food offered to idols (8:1–13; 10:1–22), and travel plans (4:17–21; 16:5–9), with some abrupt transitions and changes of subject.<sup>62</sup> In any event, Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch both make attestations to the entirety of 1 Corinthians, revealing that this letter was written by Paul himself as a composite, unified whole.<sup>63</sup> This evidence strongly suggests that the whole letter is one composite, authentic, whole work,<sup>64</sup> forming a correspondence on reconciliation, within the Corinthian church, and with God.<sup>65</sup>

### 8. *The Journey from Troas*

In Acts 20:6 the journey from Philippi to Troas, the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia, took just five days. From Troas to Samothrace, Luke gives no set timeframe for the sea-journey. From Samothrace to Neapolis, it took Paul just one day to reach. There is also no timeframe given for his

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<sup>59</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, '1 and 2 Corinthians,' 76, 86–88.

<sup>60</sup> Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence,' 214–30.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975), 141; Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence,' 212.

<sup>62</sup> Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xxxix–xliii; Wolfgang Schenk, 'Der 1. Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung,' *ZNW* 60 (1969): 219–43; Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*, 140–41; Robert Jewett, 'The Redaction of 1 Corinthians and the Trajectory of the Pauline School,' *JAAR* 46 (1978): 389–444; Hans-Josef Klauck, *1. Korintherbrief* (Würzburg: Echter, 1984); Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence,' 212.

<sup>63</sup> On Clement's use of 1 Corinthians, see L. L. Welborn, 'On the Date of First Clement,' *BR* 29 (1984): 29–54; L. L. Welborn, 'Take Up the Epistle of the Blessed Paul the Apostle,' in *Reading Communities, Reading Scripture: Essays in Honor of Daniel Patte*, ed. Gary A. Phillips and Nicole Wilkinson Duran (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 345–57. On Ignatius's use of 1 Corinthians, see William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 9; Timothy D. Barnes, 'The Date of Ignatius,' *ExpT* 120 (2009): 119–30. See also Freed, *The Apostle Paul and His Letters*, 64–65; Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence,' 211.

<sup>64</sup> J. Paul Sampley, *Walking in Love: Moral Progress and Spiritual Growth with the Apostle Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 27.

<sup>65</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, HUT (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991); L. L. Welborn, *An End to Enmity: Paul and the 'Wrongdoer' of Second Corinthians* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); Welborn, 'The Corinthian Correspondence,' 206.

journey from Neapolis to Philippi (Acts 16:11–12).<sup>66</sup> However, it took Paul just five days to reach Troas from Philippi on his return journey (20:6), and given the prevailing western winds, it might have taken some days longer for Paul to reach Philippi from Troas.<sup>67</sup> If 1 Corinthians was written by Paul shortly after his vision of the man from Macedonia in Troas, then the letter was journeying by a ship, which was perhaps island hopping, to Corinth, while Paul was sailing west to Macedonia aboard another ship that was hugging the coast (Acts 16:11–12).

One year later, Paul recounted the apparent confusion over his original intention to visit Corinth, before moving into Macedonia, and then back into Corinth, and then into Judea:

I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I fickle when I intended to do this? (2 Cor 1:16–17)

Later, Paul also states this regarding his first visit to the Corinthian Christians:

Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. (2 Cor 2:12)

This evidence demonstrates that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians either during his first stay in Ephesus, or mostly likely, early on during his second stay there when he faced mounting opposition in Asia. Despite Paul's best efforts, his first visit to the Corinthian church, as referred to by 2 Corinthians, not 1 Corinthians, had its own consternations and misgivings, which were intermixed, no doubt, with successes. It was a 'painful visit' that grieved the locals at times, mostly because of his hard-hitting letter to them known as 1 Corinthians (2 Cor 2:1–3). The letter pained them with its advice, instructions and commands. Yet Paul explains that he wrote 'not to cause you pain but to let you know the depths of my love for you' so they would 'share my joy' (2 Cor 2:3–4).<sup>68</sup>

## 9. Looking Ahead

In any event, the original plan and itinerary to travel to Corinth first, and then to Macedonia, before returning to Corinth, and then retiring to Judea, as referred to in 2 Corinthians 1:16, came to nought. For when Paul had his vision at Troas, he decided resolutely to board a ship for Samothrace and thence enter Greece from Macedonia. In confirmation and fulfilment of his amended plans in 1 Corinthians 16:5–9, after his arrival in Macedonia first, and then Corinth second, Paul made his way to Ephesus. According to Acts 18:18–23, when Paul left Corinth, he made for Cenchreae, and then boarded ship for Ephesus, where he stayed for a short time and 'reasoned with the Jews,' in a local synagogue, no doubt until the following Pentecost. The 'door' was starting to open. From Ephesus he sailed to Caesarea (Maritima), and from there he went by land to Jerusalem, Antioch (in Syria), Galatia and Phrygia, and then back to Ephesus for his second and longest stay (approximately two years and three months). The opened 'door' had swung wide. This itinerary also stands inverted to Paul's last return to Jerusalem, as does his unfulfilled initial itinerary, showing that those plans were discarded dreams.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 340; A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997), 135.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 340.

<sup>68</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: His Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62.

In regard to the itinerary of Paul's last return, it differs from Paul's earlier travels to Ephesus, confirming that 1 Corinthians could not have been written so late—for Paul never stayed in Ephesus at all on this last sojourn. According to Acts 20:1, after the riots in Ephesus in AD 57 over the loss of profits to the Artemis temple and its silversmiths on account of Christian conversions, Paul 'sent for the other disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia' in accordance with his first plans. Then, Paul travelled to Achaea briefly, for three months, whether by ship or by land we are not told, where he spent time especially in Corinth and perhaps other places. Then, he decided not to sail directly for Antioch or Ephesus, but instead returned to Macedonia vexed, until he found passage from Philippi back to Troas, from where he went onwards by foot to Assos. From there he took a ship to Mitylene, and then ferried on to the Greek island of Chios, and then Samos, and then Miletus (Acts 20:13–16). Paul had sailed past Ephesus and its harbours, not surprisingly, without even docking at all, in his bid to reach Jerusalem before the approaching Pentecost festival, there. His next stop was the Grecian island of Kos, and then the islands of Rhodes and Cyprus, from where he travelled east by boat to the great Phoenician and Hellenistic city of Tyre—and then finally he reached Caesarea (21:1–8). Paul, attended by his retinue, made his way to the house of Mnason on its way to Jerusalem—before final arrival there (21:15–16). In Jerusalem, Paul famously gave a full story-length account of all of his missions to the Gentiles and their nations, amidst great and loud acclamation by Jesus's younger brother James, and a large gathering of Jerusalemite and Judean church elders (21:17–19).

### *10. Onwards to Philippi*

Sometime during or before his trip to Philippi from Neapolis, Samothrace and Troas, Paul was joined by Titus—as 2 Corinthians 7:6 states. However, Titus soon parted company from Paul, for he does not appear in the account of the visit to Philippi (Acts 16:11–40). There Paul and his associate, Silas, were beaten and locked in a Philippian prison after exorcising a spirit of divination from an enslaved girl. Silas and Paul then explained to the jailer that he should try to believe in Jesus to be saved, and that it was well worth his own household doing the same. Appreciative, to say the very least, he then washed all of Paul's and Silas' wounds personally, and 'he and all his household were baptised' (16:33). Paul and Silas were then escorted by the jailer himself into his own private home where they were fed a nourishing meal. He was so overwhelmed by the whole experience, but he and his entire household were so 'filled with joy' because they now believed 'in God' (16:34). The very next morning Paul and Silas were freed together.

Not surprisingly, after their gloomy but enlightening Philippian prison experiences, Paul and Silas re-joined their other compatriots and moved on to Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica. There he taught to the locals in the one of the city's synagogues that Jesus, was the Messiah the Law and the Prophets had pointed ahead to, and that his suffering and shame throughout his life and crucifixion were also in accordance with many of those very same scriptural indicators. This caused a near riot there, but Paul and his team escaped the clutches of their pursuers and that night Paul and Silas fled alone to Berea (Acts 17:1–10). They both began teaching in the only synagogue there too, this time together. According to 17:11, the Jews of Berea were 'of more noble character than those in Thessalonica', and they lovingly and happily embraced Paul and Silas and their teachings as they studied the Jewish Scriptures together and began to understand its messianic themes and indications. Many of them became Christians on the spot together with numbers of prominent local Greek women and men. Jealous and envious of Paul and

Silas, and hateful towards their new Christian neighbours, the Thessalonians then conspired, agitated, and whipped up the crowds against them, to such an extent that Paul had to be hastily sent off to the coast and on to Athens, as Silas and Timothy hid out in Berea (17:13–15).

Writing a year later to the Corinthians, Paul reminisced on these hardships:

For when we came to Macedonia, we had no rest but we were harassed at every turn—  
conflicts on the outside, fears within. (2 Cor 7:5)

But he would not stay there forever.

### *11. Athens and Corinth*

Paul's helpers escorted him to Athens. There, he commanded Silas and Timothy to re-join him (Acts 17:15–16). After they were reunited (18:5), Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his time in Corinth with Silas and Timothy:

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No'. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me [that is, Paul] and Silas and Timothy—was not 'Yes' and 'No', but in him it has always been 'Yes'. (2 Cor 1:18–19)

During his stay in Athens, the central city of the ancient political state of classical Attica, Paul debated and discussed Jesus with local Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the city's main synagogue and the infamous Areopagus, once home to the Athenian equivalent in the fifth century BC to Rome's Senate, where membership was determined by elitism, wealth, familial contacts, and aristocratic paternal lineage. After spending much time reasoning with many interested minds philosophically, Paul then journeyed, freely and safely, to Corinth, where he was immediately met by his friend Aquila from Pontus, and his wife, companion, and co-worker, Priscilla (Acts 18:1–2). Paul lived in Corinth for a year and a half (18:11).

### *12. In Ephesus*

Soon after, Paul, Aquila, Priscilla, and their other Christian brothers and sisters, set sail for Syria. Just prior to embarking Paul had all the hair on his head shaven at Cenchrae, a town on Corinth's outskirts, perhaps even at the household church that Phoebe served (Rom 16:1), commemorating the fulfilment of a vow he had made according to traditional Jewish law (Acts 18:18). After embarkation, the team set sail and as stated, arrived at Ephesus. From there, Paul parted with Aquila and Priscilla, and spent many days reasoning in the main synagogue there with local Jews, teaching them about Jesus. The 'door' Paul had found in Ephesus was finally starting to open. From there he again set sail and the next stop was Caesarea on the Judean coast, and from there, as mentioned, Paul trekked overland to Jerusalem. After spending some time there, he fared north to Antioch in Syria (11:19–30). Happily encouraged by the Christian believers there, the apostle then journeyed north once again, encouraging and preaching to many Christians throughout Galatia and Phrygia. Then finally, after a long but important ground-breaking and pioneering roundabout detour, Paul entered Ephesus at long last for a long-term stay, where the 'door' he had expected to open for him for so long was opened, and where he appears to have most likely written 2 Corinthians—not 1 Corinthians, which as this article has shown on the basis of Acts 18:18–19:1, was most likely written earlier in Troas.

### *13. Conclusion*

We have now argued that 1 Corinthians was written in Troas, with composition of it beginning very shortly after Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia, there. It was written by Paul in perhaps six separate sittings, each taking hours to plan and fulfil. It was from Troas that Paul entered Macedonia, and Corinth, and it was from Corinth that Paul eventually entered Ephesus, completing a major mission in his career to walk through the door to the Gentiles there, that God had placed in front of him. Paul had dreamed of evangelising throughout Ephesus and Asia, perhaps for years, and from there evangelising Corinth, Macedonia, and even further abroad, perhaps for as long a time. Paul's hopes for gospel ministry were realized in Ephesus and in Corinth, but not without struggle, and not without God's help, and perfect timing.

This article has numerous ramifications. First, it seeks to demonstrate God's and Paul's intentions from a New Testament perspective. Paul had hoped to enter Ephesus for some time before his vision in Troas, but was hampered by God from doing so. Eventually, he entered it, and it became his marvelous door to the Gentiles, as he hoped it would be, but not without troubles, and not without added blessings beyond Paul's wildest dreams both for himself, and his career. This teaches us that when we place God in control of our lives, he will see his plans through that include our dreams, hopes, and aspirations. We need to be patient, and we need to be prepared for added blessings.

In all, to understand Paul's letters, we need to try to understand Paul. We need to seek out the historical person, who thought, and felt, and who dreamt one day of honouring his God to such an extent that he wanted a door to the Gentiles to open, so he could fulfill his commission to carry the gospel of his Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentile world at large. Paul was very much a human, like us, who needed to pray, to confide in the Lord Jesus, with whom he had a close relationship. As part as that close relationship, God answered his prayers, in ways he didn't expect, but somehow suspected. Not all people are the same, and not all talents are the same. But God invested in the talents he gave to Paul and used them mightily, and so did Paul. We too, can take time to invest in our talents given to us by God, and use them, as God does, as wonderfully and powerfully and creatively as we can throughout this life, and into eternity, for our joy, and for others', and for God's. May we do so.

# Genre-Sensitive Biblical Interpretation in 1 Peter

— Jordan Atkinson —

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**Abstract:** This article argues that 1 Peter 1:10–12 contains Peter’s hermeneutic for interpreting Old Testament messianic prophecies in 1 Peter. Though the scholarly consensus is that these verses govern every use of Scripture throughout 1 Peter, an exegesis of 1 Peter 1:10–12 reveals that Peter only discusses Old Testament prophecy in these verses. In addition to quoting prophecies, though, Peter also quotes the Law and wisdom literature. The hermeneutic for the Law and wisdom literature in 1 Peter is distinct from that of prophecy and is a model for how Christians should continue to interpret biblical texts according to their genres.

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## *1. Introduction*

How does Peter interpret the OT in his first letter?<sup>1</sup> Since 1 Peter features such a high concentration of OT quotations and allusions, the OT hermeneutic at work in this book may be profitably investigated. This epistle is also important for its explicit statement about the nature of OT prophecy in 1 Peter 1:10–12, where Peter claims that OT prophets prophesied about the grace that Christians receive because of Christ’s sufferings for them. Most scholars consider 1 Peter 1:10–12 to explain how Peter interprets the OT throughout the letter.<sup>2</sup> However, these verses specifically concern OT

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to the author of 1 Peter as Peter because he identifies himself as such (1 Pet 1:1). Many scholars consider 1 Peter to be pseudonymous (e.g., Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 1–43). However, others have demonstrated that this argument is speculative and that both biblical and extrabiblical evidence most strongly supports the apostle Peter being the author of 1 Peter (e.g., Gene L. Green, *Vox Petri: A Theology of Peter* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020], 71–96; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 14–19; and Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021], 8–25).

<sup>2</sup> Joel Green, *1 Peter*, Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 30; Abson Prédessin Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, LNTS 440 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 55; Andrew Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter*, LNTS 345 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007), 8; Dan G. McCartney, “The Use of the

prophecy, which is but one genre among many in the OT. Later in 1 Peter, he also cites passages from the OT Law and wisdom literature (Lev 19:2; Ps 34:12–16; Prov 3:34; 11:31).<sup>3</sup> One therefore cannot assume that 1 Peter 1:10–12 governs these quotations. I contend that Peter’s hermeneutical statement in these verses specifically concerns the interpretation of specific OT prophecies and not the interpretation of other types of OT literature quoted later in 1 Peter.

To defend this thesis, I will first exegete 1 Peter 1:10–12. Abner Chou has rightly said, “Hermeneutical philosophy still rests upon our theology which is based upon our understanding of Scripture. Thus, in the end, the Bible becomes foundational for our hermeneutic.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, though “some would suggest the starting point should be on the hermeneutical practices of the biblical authors’ contemporaries ... the approach is inconsistent with our concern for authorial intent.”<sup>5</sup> My contention that 1 Peter 1:10–12 concerns the interpretation of OT prophecy in particular, then, must be based first on an exegesis of 1 Peter 1:10–12. The consensus of other scholars that 1 Peter 1:10–12 contains Peter’s hermeneutical lens for the OT as a whole should then be seen as exegetically unsound. Finally, I will demonstrate that Peter’s interpretation of non-prophetic OT texts in the rest of this letter is distinct from his hermeneutical statement of 1:10–12, which concerns only OT messianic prophecies. These points together will show that 1:10–12 provides a hermeneutic for particular OT prophecies but not for OT texts of other genres. By recognizing Peter’s sensitivity to prophetic, legal, and wisdom texts, contemporary interpreters of Scripture may follow his apostolic example in being precise in our own interpretations of the OT literature.

## 2. Exegesis of 1 Peter 1:10–12

First Peter 1:10–12 concludes the long introductory sentence begun in 1:3 and describes the present nature of the “salvation” that Peter’s audience is presently “receiving,” even though it is “the goal of [their] faith” (v. 9).<sup>6</sup> Both the dependence of the participle κομιζόμενοι (v. 9) on Christians’ present faith-induced joy (expressed by πιστεύοντες δὲ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε in v. 8) and the adverb νῦν (v. 12) indicate that the salvation, though not consummated until the second coming of Christ, is a present reality for the Christian readers of the epistle.<sup>7</sup> Though numerous well-documented exegetical difficulties are present in verses 10–12, Peter’s main point in these verses is that Christians are privileged above not

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Old Testament in the First Epistle of Peter” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989), 31; Benjamin Sargent, *Written to Serve: The Use of Scripture in 1 Peter*, LNTS 547 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 30; William L. Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition in 1 Peter*, WUNT 2/30 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 34 in English Bibles is Psalm 33 LXX. This paper uses English chapter and verse numbers for Psalms when they differ from Hebrew or Greek versification.

<sup>4</sup> Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Scripture quotations are the author’s own translation unless otherwise specified.

<sup>7</sup> So also, e.g., Jobes, *1 Peter*, 91–96; against J. Ramsey Michaels, who considers “salvation” in 1 Peter 1:5, 9–10; and 2:2 to be “essentially future” (*1 Peter*, WBC 49 [Waco, TX: Word, 1988], 23).

only OT prophets but also heavenly angels in their experience of God's grace in salvation through the now-exalted Christ who suffered for them. Therefore, they should bless God (v. 3).<sup>8</sup>

Interpreters have debated the identity of “the prophets who prophesied about the grace to you” (1:10). Edward Selwyn made the most significant sustained argument that these prophets are first century Christian prophets rather than OT prophets in his 1946 commentary on 1 Peter.<sup>9</sup> Among subsequent English-language scholars, Duane Warden is most notable for defending and bolstering Selwyn's argument.<sup>10</sup> Many other scholars, however, have rejected Selwyn's argument and have continued to identify the prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12 as OT prophets.<sup>11</sup> The following additional evidence further supports these scholars' arguments for considering the prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12 to be OT prophets.

First, Selwyn is wrong that ἐξηραύνησαν “suggests work on written materials as in John 5:39.”<sup>12</sup> As BDAG has shown, the verb ἐξεραυνάω means “to make careful inquiry.”<sup>13</sup> The verb ἐξεραυνάω does not specify its object. Selwyn requiring ἐξεραυνάω to refer to searching “written materials” breaks the lexicographical rule that “the lexical meaning of a word is exactly what the word itself brings to the context and no more.”<sup>14</sup> Selwyn's assertion also fails to convince because in the only other biblical occurrence of ἐξεραυνάω, in Judges 18:2 (LXX), the object of ἐξεραυνάω is not any written materials but “the land” (τὴν γῆν).<sup>15</sup> According to 1 Peter 1:10–12, God revealed to the OT prophets that they were prophesying about salvation and grace that would befall Christians instead of the prophets themselves or their contemporaries. Verse 11 claims that these prophets wanted more information about this salvation.<sup>16</sup> Selwyn even admits this possibility: “if Jewish prophets are meant, indeed, then it is probably Daniel and the apocalyptic writers who are in mind rather than the prophets of the earlier periods.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, Daniel “sought to understand” one of the visions he had (Dan 8:15 LXX: ἐζήτουν διανοηθῆναι), just as the prophets of 1 Peter 1:10 “sought” details “concerning this salvation” (Περὶ ἧς σωτηρίας

<sup>8</sup> I am here following the rhetorical analysis of Lauri Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis*, JSNTSup 114 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 101–5.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter with Introduction, Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 260–68.

<sup>10</sup> Duane Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” *ResQ* 31 (1989): 1–12.

<sup>11</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 108; Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter*, 13; McCartney, “Use of the Old Testament,” 28; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 40–41; and Thurén, *Argument and Theology*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 262.

<sup>13</sup> BDAG 347.

<sup>14</sup> John A. L. Lee, *A History of New Testament Lexicography*, SBG 8 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 160.

<sup>15</sup> Many thanks to Brian Tabb for bringing the instance of ἐξεραυνάω in Judges 18:2 LXX to my attention.

<sup>16</sup> “What person or time” (ESV) is the correct translation of τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν (1 Pet 1:11). John H. Elliott has argued that τίνα should be translated as a masculine singular accusative pronoun, as in Matt 3:7, 16:13, Luke 5:21, and John 8:53, to avoid redundancy (*1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 37B [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 345–46; similarly, Mark Dubis, *1 Peter: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010], 19). Greg W. Forbes adds that τίνα is more often a pronoun than an adjective in the NT and that elsewhere in 1 Peter, interrogative τίς is always a pronoun (*1 Peter*, EGGNT [Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014], 30). These considerations overturn the alternative interpretation that τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν means “what time or what manner of time” (Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 109; Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, ICC [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903], 108; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 103; Michaels *1 Peter*, 41–42; and Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 135).

<sup>17</sup> Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 262.

ἐξεζήτησαν). Furthermore, after receiving his visions, Daniel asked, “What shall be the outcome of these things?” (Dan 12:8 ESV). Daniel thus fits Peter’s description of a prophet who “searched and made careful inquiry” about the visions given him (1 Pet 1:10). The OT does not explicitly ascribe such questions to other prophets like David or Isaiah, but Peter’s quotations of their messianic prophecies later in 1 Peter seems to indicate either that he surmised that they did ask these questions or that the Holy Spirit revealed that information to him.<sup>18</sup>

Second, Selwyn’s claim that the OT prophets’ “messages were emphatically for their own times, even when the prophets felt them to have a further meaning” and that their “ministry was primarily to their contemporaries” contradicts how the OT functions in 1 Peter.<sup>19</sup> For example, the apostle quotes Isaiah as directly prophesying “the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these things” (1 Pet 1:11). Jesus is the “stone” that causes “stumbling” and “offense” in Isaiah 8:14 and the “chosen and precious cornerstone” of Isaiah 28:16 (1 Pet 2:4, 6, 8). The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was likewise a messianic prophecy (1 Pet 2:21–25).<sup>20</sup> Selwyn contends that Isaiah, as an OT prophet, ministered primarily to his contemporaries, but Peter does not interpret Isaiah in this way in this letter.

Finally, Warden’s attempt to strengthen Selwyn’s case that the prophets of 1 Peter 1:10 were acting like Christian prophets similarly fails to convince. According to Warden, Christian prophets exhort and edify churches, which “corresponds” to the way that the prophets of 1 Peter 1:12 “ministered not to themselves but to their readers.”<sup>21</sup> However, the apostle uses OT prophecy to exhort Christians throughout 1 Peter. In his conclusion, he describes 1 Peter as a letter in which he “briefly wrote” to his audience, “exhorting” them to “stand firm” in “the true grace of God” (5:12). Specifically, in 1:22–25, Peter appeals to Isaiah 40:6–8 to describe the means by which Christians have been born again, which is the basis of the love that they should have for one another. In 2:4–8, he quotes Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14 to encourage Christians to offer “spiritual sacrifices” because they are the temple being built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. In 2:21–25, Peter tells his audience that Jesus’s bearing of sins as prophesied in Isaiah 53 is exemplary for them, and they should follow his example by being subject to appropriate authorities.<sup>22</sup> Then, in 3:14–15, Peter commands Christians directly from Isaiah 8:12–13. Therefore, exhorting the church is not a task unique to NT prophets but one that NT apostles and elders had in common with OT prophets.<sup>23</sup>

Peter, then, teaches in 1 Peter 1:10 that the OT prophets prophesied about the salvation and grace that Christians would experience. This salvation and grace would come through “the sufferings of Christ” (τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα) and would be part of “the glories after these things” (v. 11). Selwyn and Warden both consider εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα to refer to the suffering of Christians for Christ, and they use this interpretation to support their primary argument that verses 10–12 refer to Christian prophets,

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<sup>18</sup> “The great revelation of suffering and glory awakes [in the prophets] an eager desire to know when and how these things shall be” (Bigg, *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 108).

<sup>19</sup> Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 265.

<sup>20</sup> “Isaiah 53 is in mind at 1 Peter 1:10–12” (Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter*, 13).

<sup>21</sup> Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” 11.

<sup>22</sup> He commands everyone, “Be submissive for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Pet 2:13). He then singles out “servants” as a group who should follow Jesus’s example (2:18). Finally, he commands, “Likewise, wives, be submissive to your own husbands” (3:1), and “Husbands, likewise, live with the woman according to knowledge” (3:7).

<sup>23</sup> Peter refers to himself as an apostle (1 Pet 1:1) and as an elder (5:1).

not OT prophets.<sup>24</sup> However, many commentators have pointed out that τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα (v. 11) is grammatically similar to εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος (v. 10); just as “you” receive grace, so Christ received “sufferings.”<sup>25</sup> Warden has tried to deny this last point: “the verbal force inherent in the word ‘suffering’ is considerably stronger than it is in ‘grace.’”<sup>26</sup> However, “grace” implies the giving of a gift.<sup>27</sup> In the language of verses 10–12, Christians receive grace in the form of “salvation,” “glories,” and “the gospel” being preached to them, whereas Christ received “sufferings.” Warden also claims that εἰς in 1:25 and 2:14 means “in consideration of.”<sup>28</sup> However the prepositional phrase εἰς ὑμᾶς in 1:25 identifies the recipients of the gospel; “the gospel was preached” not *in consideration of* but “to you.” The use of εἰς before ὑμᾶς in 1 Peter 1:25 “enhances ... [and makes] it clearer how the nominal group functions.”<sup>29</sup> The word εἰς must not be treated independent of ὑμᾶς, since “the headterm of the prepositional group is the nominalized element, not the preposition.”<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, εἰς functions differently in 1 Peter 2:14. There εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν (“for the punishment of evildoers but the praise of those who do good”) communicates the purpose of the emperor “sending out” (πεμπομένοις) governors. Indeed, “purpose or result” is one of the circumstantial relationships that εἰς can convey.<sup>31</sup> Warden’s error is to assume that εἰς must function identically in all of its uses in 1 Peter. On the contrary, as a preposition, εἰς has “expressive potential ... [that] is immense, as the semantic potential ... is almost inexhaustible.”<sup>32</sup> Even in a letter as short as 1 Peter, the reader should expect to encounter the same preposition (εἰς) used in a variety of ways. In 1 Peter 1:10–11, εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος and τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα alike indicate reception. Christians receive grace because Christ received prophesied sufferings and subsequent glorification.

The argument of 1 Peter 1:10–12 climaxes when the apostle says that the prophets “were serving these things not to themselves but to you, which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, into which things angels long to look” (v. 12). Peter’s audience is privileged to live after the sufferings and exaltation of Christ. They have received the announcement of this good news, and it has resulted in their new birth and living hope that they have an imperishable inheritance in heaven that they will receive at the second coming of Christ (1:3–5). Not only did the OT prophets long to know the details of this good news, but the angels also at present “long to look” into the grace that Christians experience (v. 12). Most significantly, the same Spirit who “predicted the sufferings of Christ” to the prophets is the same “Holy Spirit sent from

<sup>24</sup> Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 263; Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” 9.

<sup>25</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 110; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 347; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 100; and Michaels, *1 Peter*, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” 6.

<sup>27</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 575.

<sup>28</sup> Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” 6.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Greek Prepositions in a Systemic Functional Linguistic Framework,” *BAGL* 6 (2017): 22. Porter also translates εἰς in 2 Corinthians 10:16 as indicating the addressees of gospel preaching, though there it may indicate places where the gospel would be preached (Porter, “Greek Prepositions,” 37). If locations of gospel preaching are metonymic for the people to whom the gospel is preached, Acts 8:25, 40; 14:21 would be additional examples of εἰς referring to those who hear the gospel.

<sup>30</sup> Porter, “Greek Prepositions,” 21–22.

<sup>31</sup> Porter, “Greek Prepositions,” 39; BDAG 290 (s.v. εἰς 4f).

<sup>32</sup> Porter, “Greek Prepositions,” 38.

heaven” by whom Christian evangelists have “preached the gospel” to Peter’s audience (vv. 11–12).<sup>33</sup> In 1:10–12, Peter claims that Christians live in the age in which OT prophecies are fulfilled and are therefore more privileged than either the OT prophets or even angels. This truth is the final reason why Christians should ascribe blessing to God (v. 3).

### 3. *Scholarly Misapplication of 1 Peter 1:10–12*

As argued above, 1 Peter 1:10–12 teaches that the OT prophets prophesied the death and resurrection of Christ and were thereby serving Christians rather than themselves. Many scholars have made a broader argument that this passage provides a schema for how the OT in general functions throughout 1 Peter. Schutter claims that 1:10–12 is “a key to the author’s hermeneutic.”<sup>34</sup> McCartney refers to these verses as Peter’s “theoretical hermeneutic.”<sup>35</sup> Joseph claims that 1:10–12 contains “the author’s theological hermeneutic of the OT.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, Peter’s “scriptural hermeneutic [is] apparently expressed in these verses,” according to Sargent.<sup>37</sup> Schutter argued for continuity between OT Israel and the NT church, and most scholars have followed him in this regard.<sup>38</sup> Sargent, by contrast, considers discontinuity between OT Israel and the NT church to be predominant in 1 Peter.<sup>39</sup> Though these scholars disagree about the mechanics of Peter’s OT hermeneutic, they agree that 1:10–12 presents the author’s hermeneutic for interpreting and applying the OT in general in 1 Peter. However, this view does not describe with adequate precision how these verses function in relation to the rest of the letter.

In light of the above exegesis of 1 Peter 1:10–12, both scholars who emphasize continuity between OT Israel and the NT church and those who emphasize discontinuity go beyond what these verses actually teach about OT hermeneutics in 1 Peter. The exegesis above demonstrated that Peter claims that the OT prophecies about “the grace to you,” “the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after them” were prophesied for the benefit of Christians, who received them through faith when these things “were announced to you through those who preached the gospel” to them (1 Pet 1:10–12). However, Peter did not actually claim that his words were for interpreting all the OT. Rather, the hermeneutic of 1 Peter 1:10–12 applies to particular messianic OT prophecies.

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<sup>33</sup> So also Green, *1 Peter*, 31, 216; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 103; Joseph, *Narratological Reading*, 56; Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter*, 73 n. 18; and McCartney, “Use of the Old Testament,” 41. Others consider the Holy Spirit to be at work in Christian prophets rather than OT prophets (e.g., Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 262; Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” 9) or that “the Spirit of Christ” in v. 11 refers to Christ rather than the Holy Spirit (e.g., Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 109–10; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 350). However, those who deny that the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit can refer to the same person are wrongly assuming that Peter cannot refer to one person with two terms. They also overlook the fact that the spirit of Christ refers to the Holy Spirit in Rom 8:9.

<sup>34</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 123.

<sup>35</sup> McCartney, “Use of the Old Testament,” 102.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph, *Narratological Reading*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 123. Among those following him are Green, *1 Peter*, 30; Joseph, *Narratological Reading*, 55; and Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 40.

Though he overemphasizes discontinuity between OT Israel and the NT church, Sargent is rightly concerned with affirming determinate meaning.<sup>40</sup> Based on his interpretation of 1 Peter 1:10–12, he says, “It seems most unlikely that Peter thought of Scripture as having a prior referent.”<sup>41</sup> Rather, “Scripture is ... oriented toward [Christians] exclusively.”<sup>42</sup> However, these claims are broader than Peter’s point in 1:10–12. The apostle does not claim that all of Scripture is oriented toward Christians “exclusively.” Nor does he write as though all Scripture had no referent except Christ and Christians. Rather, Peter claims that prophecies concerning the grace that Christians now enjoy or concerning Christ refers to Christian experience or Christ, respectively.

Though Schutter better emphasizes continuity over discontinuity in 1 Peter, he similarly overstates his case. He contends that Peter’s sufferings/glories schema operates “as an organizing principle in the way the author has read the Scriptures.”<sup>43</sup> However, the letter’s first OT quotation, Leviticus 19:2 in 1 Peter 1:16, does not follow this pattern. Schutter admits, “The unwavering aim of the author [in 1:13–2:10] is to enunciate what Leviticus 19:2 means for his addressees in the light of the Christ-event.”<sup>44</sup> He later describes Leviticus 19:2 as a “proof-text,” even though “the quotation is responsible for the introduction of the holiness terminology into the exposition.”<sup>45</sup> Though its quotation initiates a portion of 1 Peter that later does feature Bible passages illustrating a general pattern of suffering to glory, Leviticus 19:2 itself does not contribute to that theme. This point undermines Schutter’s thesis about the centrality of 1 Peter 1:10–12 in describing the general OT hermeneutic at work throughout the letter, but it is consistent with 1:10–12. Peter’s point in these verses is not to explain his hermeneutic of the OT in general but to use his hermeneutic for particular OT prophecies to encourage Christians throughout Asia Minor.

As this analysis demonstrates, Peter is more precise in his hermeneutic than many of his recent interpreters. Though McCartney, like other scholars, wrongly considers 1 Peter 1:10–12 to contain Peter’s hermeneutic for the OT as a whole, he rightly distinguishes Peter’s “practical hermeneutic” (how individual OT quotations function in the letter) from Peter’s “theoretical hermeneutic” (the discussion of OT prophets in 1:10–12).<sup>46</sup> As noted above, scholars disagree whether 1 Peter 1:10–12 indicates continuity between OT Israel and the NT church. However, they all argue that Peter’s use of Isaiah throughout the letter is consistent with the hermeneutic of 1:10–12.<sup>47</sup> I seek to contribute to Petrine scholarship a recognition that the hermeneutic of 1:10–12 concerns OT prophecy, not OT law or wisdom literature. To make this particular point, the remainder of this article examines quotations from

<sup>40</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 177–91.

<sup>41</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 175.

<sup>42</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 187.

<sup>43</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 123.

<sup>44</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 59 n. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 80 n. 172.

<sup>46</sup> McCartney, “Use of the Old Testament,” 102.

<sup>47</sup> On the use of Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14 in 1 Peter 2:6–8, see, e.g., Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 77–78; and Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 136–37. On the use of Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:22–25, see, e.g., Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 130–31; and Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 144.

the Pentateuch, Psalm 34, and Proverbs in 1 Peter and shows that Peter interprets these passages as Law and wisdom literature, not as prophecies.<sup>48</sup>

#### *4. The Interpretation of OT Law and Wisdom Literature in 1 Peter*

The first OT quotation in 1 Peter is not from the Prophets but the Law. The apostle cites Leviticus 19:2 as the basis for his exhortation to holiness: “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15–16). His interpretation of Leviticus 19:2 is distinct from the hermeneutic for OT prophecies given in 1 Peter 1:10–12, as this legal text does not function as a prediction of Christ or as a prophecy exclusively for the benefit of Christians. As noted above, Schutter does not claim that Leviticus 19:2 follows the schema of 1 Peter 1:10–12.<sup>49</sup> Sargent, by contrast, does consider Peter’s use of Leviticus 19:2 to be consistent with the single-referent prophecies described in 1 Peter 1:10–12: “Whilst it is possible that Peter does understand Scripture to have a dual referent when it functions as paraenesis, the direct application to the communities as well as the conviction that the Prophets served not their own situation but that yet to come in 1:12 demonstrates that the present is what has importance for Peter.”<sup>50</sup> Sargent here creates a false dichotomy between the past significance of Scripture and the present significance of Scripture. As Joseph has shown, by contrast, 1 Peter affirms the “unity and continuity in the way God deals with his children,” which “is evident in the author’s articulation of his understanding of the story of salvation.”<sup>51</sup> Peter’s point in 1:10–12 is that some OT prophecies referred to Christ and in that sense were for the church’s benefit. OT laws, however, were binding on their original hearers and on subsequent generations.<sup>52</sup> Peter interprets Leviticus 19:2 as a law and affirms it as a command for his Christian audience. Christians should be holy like God their Father is holy.

More precisely, Peter’s citation of Leviticus 19:2 in 1 Peter 1:16 is an example of appropriating law as wisdom. Dryden has argued, “Epistles ... are wisdom literature.”<sup>53</sup> He has identified “commands,” “virtue and vice lists,” “conversion and antithesis,” and “moral exemplars” as “literary tools” by which “paraenetic authors seek to habituate virtuous actions, not only as a means to changing behavior but also a means to reeducating the affections and fostering the skill of discernment.”<sup>54</sup> First Peter contains all these features. The appeal to Leviticus 19:2 in 1 Peter 1:16, “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” follows commands in 1:14–15 that may be more specifically labeled as part of conversion and antithesis, which contrasts “the old life associated with vice, and new life resulting from the salvific agency of God in

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<sup>48</sup> Peter cites Psalm 118:22 in 1 Peter 2:7 as a messianic prophecy, alongside quotations of the “stone” passages of Isa 28:16 and Isa 8:14. He treats all these passages as prophetic of Christ’s suffering and glorification. This use is consistent with his perspective on OT prophets in 1 Peter 1:10–12. For space limitations, this article limits itself to OT quotations and does not include the dozens of OT allusions in 1 Peter.

<sup>49</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 136–37.

<sup>50</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 57–58.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph, *Narratological Reading*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Chou writes, “Law not only has jurisdiction over the present generation but also over the ones to come” (*Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 104).

<sup>53</sup> J. de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 165.

<sup>54</sup> Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 171–78.

Christ.”<sup>55</sup> In these verses, Peter contrasts “the passions” of his audience’s “former ignorance” with the holiness that should characterize them now as the holy God’s “obedient children.” Similarly, Peter prefaces his citation of Psalm 34:12–16 in 1 Peter 3:10–12 with a virtue list in 3:8–9. He contrasts vices in 1 Peter 4:3 with virtues his audience should cultivate in 1 Peter 4:7–11. Christians should refrain from “sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” but “be self-controlled and sober-minded,” “loving one another earnestly,” “show[ing] hospitality to one another without grumbling,” and “serv[ing] one another” with their various gifts of speech and of service (ESV). Christ is the moral exemplar Christians should emulate in 1 Peter 2:21–25. As a wisdom text, 1 Peter appropriates Leviticus 19:2, a law, as wisdom.<sup>56</sup>

The next non-prophetic text that Peter cites is Psalm 34:12–16 in 1 Peter 3:10–12:

For “Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;  
let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.  
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (ESV)

As with his interpretation of the use of Leviticus 19:2 in 1 Peter 1:16, Sargent likewise misidentifies the Peter’s quotation of Psalm 34:12–16 as an example of how OT prophets were “serving the Christian community by offering them direction and encouragement.”<sup>57</sup> Admittedly, John 19:36 may allude to Psalm 34:20 as typological of Christ’s death.<sup>58</sup> However, 1 Peter 3:10–12 quotes a section of Psalm 34 that bears more in common with OT wisdom literature.<sup>59</sup> The quotation of Psalm 34 in 1 Peter 3:10–12 functions not as a prophecy but as proverbial wisdom that has direct application to Peter’s Christian audience. “The wisdom sentences of the psalm very well suit the reasoning of the letter,” and “in the psalm the way of the righteous is depicted,” which to Peter “was a good description of how a Christian should live his life in this world and in expectation of life eternal.”<sup>60</sup> As biblical wisdom, Psalm 34 had immediate application to its original audience (the “children” addressed in Psalm 34:11) and ongoing application for subsequent generations of readers. Like Christ, Christians should not be deceitful (1

<sup>55</sup> Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 176.

<sup>56</sup> The use of law as wisdom is grounded even in the Law itself, according to Brian Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 175. As Deuteronomy 4:6 states, God’s people should obey his law because “that will be your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples, who when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (ESV). Both Paul and Second Temple Jewish writers also appropriated the law as wisdom (Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 175–77, 181–205).

<sup>57</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> LarsOlav Eriksson, “Come, Children, Listen to Me!” *Psalm 34 in the Hebrew Bible and in Early Christian Writings*, ConBOT 32 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991), 121–23.

<sup>59</sup> Psalm 34 shares some vocabulary, “its central theme: to teach,” and its form with OT wisdom literature (Eriksson, *Come, Children, Listen to Me*, 80–81).

<sup>60</sup> Eriksson, *Come, Children, Listen to Me*, 118.

Pet 2:22; 3:10, quoting Ps 34:13). They should do good (1 Pet 3:11, quoting Ps 34:14), even if they are slandered as being evil (1 Pet 2:11–12; 3:13–17; 4:12–19).

The apostle cites Proverbs 11:31 in 1 Peter 4:18 (ESV): “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” This quotation does not illustrate the OT prophetic hermeneutic of 1 Peter 1:10–12; rather, it further illustrates Peter’s hermeneutic for interpreting OT wisdom literature. In 4:17–19 Schutter finds an example of his sufferings/glories schema: “the culpable and the blameless suffer alike, just as in previous judgments of God’s Temple-community, but possibly with unprecedented ramifications.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, 4:17 begins with an allusion to Ezekiel 9:6 (ESV: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God”), but Proverbs 11:31 does not follow a narrative arc of sufferings to glory alone. Christians are “saved with difficulty” through life’s sufferings (1 Pet 4:18). They go from suffering to glory, but Proverbs 11:31 has an additional implication: “the ungodly and sinner” will not experience glory but condemnation and shame (1 Pet 4:18; cf. 3:16). Proverbs 11:31 makes these points not as a prophecy but as a proverb, and it must be interpreted as such. Sargent is therefore similarly wrong that Proverbs 11:31 is here exclusively “reflecting the prophetic vocation of [Scripture’s] writers to serve those who have had good news proclaimed to them.”<sup>62</sup> As wisdom literature, Proverbs had significance not only for later generations but also for its original audience.

Granted, 1 Peter 4:18 quotes Proverbs 11:31 LXX, which differs substantially in meaning from extant Hebrew texts. The ESV translates the Hebrew: “If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!” However, the NETS renders the LXX: “If the righteous is scarcely saved, where will the impious and the sinner appear?” Beetham has summarized the differences between these two versions of Proverbs 11:31 well: “The [Masoretic Text’s] focus is on recompense and the certainty of it for the wicked.... These compensations will be meted out in this life. There is no thought of afterlife in context. On the other hand, the [Septuagint’s] focus is on the difficulty of being rescued by God.”<sup>63</sup> Beetham rightly affirms that 1 Peter 4:18 finds “a maxim from an ancient book of wisdom in Israel ... to be immediately relevant to gentile Christian communities.”<sup>64</sup> However, he neglects to point out that the proverb’s “thoroughly eschatological context in 1 Pet 4:12–19” originates not with Peter but with the LXX translator of Proverbs.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, he rightly notes that Peter’s “conviction appears to be that God’s judging activity runs along the same principles whether the judgment is decreed within history or at its climactic conflagration.”<sup>66</sup> Even acknowledging the eschatological nature of Proverbs 11:31 LXX, Peter uses this proverb consistent with its genre as a timelessly true proverb, not as a prophecy that had no significance prior to the sufferings and glories of Christ that have now been proclaimed to his Christian audience (1 Pet 1:10–12). The eschatological warning of Proverbs 11:31 LXX is not only for Peter’s Christian audience but also for previous generations of Jewish readers of that proverb in the LXX.

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<sup>61</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 165.

<sup>62</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 95.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher A. Beetham, “Eschatology and the Book of Proverbs in 1 Peter,” in *The Crucified Apostle: Essays on Peter and Paul*, ed. Todd A. Wilson and Paul R. House, WUNT 2/450 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 50–51.

<sup>64</sup> Beetham, “Eschatology and the Book of Proverbs in 1 Peter,” 53.

<sup>65</sup> Beetham, “Eschatology and the Book of Proverbs in 1 Peter,” 53.

<sup>66</sup> Beetham, “Eschatology and the Book of Proverbs in 1 Peter,” 53.

The citation of Proverbs 3:34 in 1 Peter 5:5 is a final example of how Peter's OT hermeneutics are more nuanced than he indicates for prophecy in 1:10–12. Here Peter writes, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (ESV). As with Leviticus 19:2, Schutter does not claim that Proverbs 3:34 follows the sufferings/glories schema specifically.<sup>67</sup> However, Sargent again mistakenly brings this Scripture citation under the hermeneutic of 1 Peter 1:10–12 for predictive prophecies: "there is simply no evidence that Peter has any interest in what a scriptural text may have done in the past. As far as 1 Peter is concerned, the present is the only context of any significance."<sup>68</sup> Jobes, by contrast, has a better understanding of how Scripture works: "God has instructed his people ... whenever and wherever they have lived."<sup>69</sup> Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34 in order to motivate his audience to humble themselves before one another and before God. They should do so because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Christ is the ultimate proof of this proverb, and Peter wants Christians to follow Christ's humble example (1 Pet 2:21–25). However, this truth is proverbial and therefore is evident in the OT, as well. God resisted proud Saul (1 Sam 15), Haman (Esth 7), and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:1–33), but he exalted humble David (1 Sam 16–17), Esther (Esth 2), Mordecai (Esth 6; 10), and Daniel (Dan 2). God even restored King Nebuchadnezzar to his exalted position once he humbled himself to God (Dan 4:34–37). To claim that passages of the Bible have meaning and significance only for generations subsequent to the original audience is a false dichotomy. Scripture has inherent authority and significance both for its original audience and for all subsequent readers, however far removed by time and space from its original composition. First Peter does not deny this point; on the contrary, the use of Scripture in 1 Peter, whether OT prophecies, legal texts, or wisdom sayings, is consistent with the original and ongoing authority of Scripture for its readers.

## 5. Conclusion

The hermeneutic of 1 Peter 1:10–12 concerns specific OT prophecies. It does not contain a hermeneutic for the OT in general. Though the interpretation of Proverbs 11:31 in 1 Peter 4:18 may be similar to the apostle's interpretation of OT prophecies, those interpretations are similar because of the timeless nature of proverbial sayings and because of the eschatological translation of Proverbs 11:31 LXX. Peter's appeals to Leviticus 19:2, Psalm 34:12–16, and Proverbs 3:34 likewise reflect how the OT teaches Christians how to live, precisely because that is how these texts function as law and wisdom literature. Interpreting OT texts according to their genres, as Peter does in this letter, has two primary benefits in light of previous scholarship on biblical hermeneutics in 1 Peter. First, against Sargent, it safeguards against an interpretation that claims that Peter sees no meaning or significance in the OT prior to his current audience. Second, it helps contemporary interpreters attend to Peter's variegated interpretation of the OT so that they, too, may interpret the OT rightly. Evangelical Christians should learn from Peter that the OT must be interpreted with sensitivity to its various genres, whether Law, prophecy, or wisdom literature.

Genre-specific biblical interpretation is not a new method of biblical interpretation but a method the apostles themselves practiced, as evidenced by Peter's nuanced interpretations of various OT texts in

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<sup>67</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition*, 165–66.

<sup>68</sup> Sargent, *Written to Serve*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 309.

1 Peter.<sup>70</sup> He does not interpret all OT passages as prophecies referring directly to Christ or Christians, though he does interpret particular prophecies that way, in accordance with his statement in 1:10–12. Peter appropriates OT law, specifically Leviticus 19:2, as wisdom. His practice is that commended by Köstenberger and Patterson concerning how to interpret the OT law in light of later revelation: “determine the theological and moral principles inherent in the particular law.”<sup>71</sup> Peter does not apply all the Holiness Code of Leviticus to Christians, but he defines holiness in terms of wisdom. As Dryden rightly affirms, Peter in this letter aims “to foster growth in Christian affections and practice”; his concern is “the spiritual formation of God’s people as those called by his righteousness.”<sup>72</sup> Psalm 34:12–16, Proverbs 11:31, and Proverbs 3:34 function in the same way later in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter, OT Law and wisdom literature apply to Christians just as much as prophecies do, not because the Law and wisdom literature had no application to previous generations of God’s people but because as Scripture, they apply not only to the original audience but also to every generation of God’s people thereafter.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Similarly Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 187–89.

<sup>71</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 168.

<sup>72</sup> Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 185.

<sup>73</sup> I presented an earlier version of this paper, “The Old Testament Prophetic Hermeneutic of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” at the General Epistles session of the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (November 2020). I am grateful to Dr. John J. R. Lee for mentoring me and giving me invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Any and all shortcomings in this article, of course, remain my own.

# Revelation and Religions: Towards a More ‘Harmonious’ Jonathan Edwards

— Iain McGee —

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**Abstract:** This article provides an overview and interpretation of Jonathan Edwards’s thought on God’s revelation of himself to adherents of non-Christian religions. The study engages in some detail with Gerald McDermott’s well-known interpretation of Edwards on this subject, and critiques it on the issues covered. Concerning the methodological approach adopted, Edwards’s deist context, and his comments on reason are considered key interpretation aids. I suggest that these, together with the identification of dominant themes in his writings, can help the reader overcome some of the challenges faced when attempting to understand Edwards’s comments on the *prisca theologia*, inspiration, typology and type readership. I argue that the alternative interpretation of Edwards forwarded in this article has certain advantages over McDermott’s, the most important being that it results in a more ‘harmonious’ reading of Edwards’s thought.

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Gerald McDermott is, without doubt, the most significant interpreter of Jonathan Edwards’s thoughts on revelation and religions today. His most important work in this area—*Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*<sup>1</sup>—has been lauded by some,<sup>2</sup> and described as a ‘genuine and important contribution’ to the field.<sup>3</sup> McDermott has co-written a notable book on Edwards’s theology, edited books on Edwards, and has written many book chapters and journal articles on the subjects of revelation and religions.<sup>4</sup> New, and future, scholars of Edwards’s thought on revelation and religions

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Leigh E. Schmidt, ‘Review: The Edwards Revival: Or, The Public Consequences of Exceedingly Careful Scholarship Source,’ *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 480–86.

<sup>3</sup> Steven M. Studebaker, ‘Review of *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*,’ *Pneuma* 23 (2001): 168.

<sup>4</sup> The following list is representative and not comprehensive: Michael McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: Introducing America’s Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008);

will, doubtless, encounter Edwards, in large part, through the lens of McDermott’s significant scholarship. McDermott has appealed to Edwards, more than any other Reformed scholar, to lend support to his own views on religions, most clearly documented in *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?* alongside more recent publications.<sup>5</sup>

My goal in this paper is to critique McDermott’s interpretation of Edwards’s thought on the *prisca theologia*, pagan inspiration, and types and to offer an alternative reading of Edwards’s ideas. I will argue that on one occasion McDermott overly complicates Edwards’s thought (concerning types in religions) and on two others (on pagan inspiration and type readership), he gives undue weight to comments made by Edwards, or does not give sufficient consideration to the background context in his interpretation. Although this may sound like an exercise in scholarly nit-picking, I believe a re-interpretation of these three points (alone) to have profound implications for our understanding of Edwards’s thought.

### *1. Methodological Issues*

Edwards was not a systematic theologian,<sup>6</sup> but his thought is regularly systematized. Anderson suggests that the non-systematic nature of Edwards’s writings and the preconceptions of scholars have been responsible for the varied understandings of his work.<sup>7</sup> A related explanation for different views of Edwards’s writings is offered by McClymond and McDermott. They suggest that one’s theological convictions, i.e., one’s seating in relation to the different parts of the ‘Edwards’s orchestra’ (in their analogy) impacts what one hears.<sup>8</sup> These are, no doubt, valid points. There is, however, another issue which must be recognised, and which I attempt to draw out in this paper: there are discordant notes floating in the air in the Jonathan Edwards Concert Hall auditorium. Edwards makes what appear to be contradictory comments on all of the subjects discussed in more detail below. How one ‘manages’ these notes *also* impacts what one hears.

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Gerald R. McDermott, ‘Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and Non-Christian Religions’, in *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Paul Helm (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 127–37; Gerald R. McDermott, ‘Response to Gilbert: “The Nations Will Worship: Jonathan Edwards and the Salvation of the Heathen”’, *TJ* 23 (2002): 77–80; Gerald R. McDermott, ‘A Possibility of Reconciliation: Jonathan Edwards and the Salvation of Non-Christians’, in *Edwards in our Time: Jonathan Edwards and Contemporary Theological Issues*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee and Alan Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 173–202; Gerald R. McDermott, ‘Was Jonathan Edwards an Evangelical? Scripture and Tradition in America’s Theologian’, in *Jonathan Edwards and Scripture: Biblical Exegesis in British North America*, ed. Douglas A. Barshinger and Douglas A. Sweeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 233–48.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from Non-Christian Religions? Jesus, Revelation and the Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Gerald R. McDermott, ‘What if Paul Had Been from China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions’, in *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001); Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See Brian K. Sholl ‘The Excellency of Minds: Jonathan Edwards’s Theological Style’ (PhD diss., The University of Virginia, 2008), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Anderson, *Reason and Faith at Early Princeton: Piety and the Knowledge of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 36.

<sup>8</sup> McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 8.

There are different ways of coping with some of the apparent disharmony in Edwards's writings. A simple appeal to the output associated with Edwards's more mature years (i.e., giving emphasis to his later, rather than earlier work) would be one way to manage some of the discordance. However, I suggest adopting an 'abrogation' style approach to Edwards's thought carries with it more problems than it solves, not least in that it is blind to the specific context of his individual writings. Accordingly, I suggest this attempt to filter out some of the material in order to achieve greater harmony in hearing Edwards to be an unsatisfactory one.

Another methodological approach adopted to 'manage' some of the difficulties in listening to Edwards has been to question the status of *The Miscellanies*, around 1400 notebook entries of varying lengths. Some scholars have contrasted the contents of these journal entries with what Edwards taught publicly, and argued for a tension between the two: the public face conservative, the private *Miscellany* notes more liberal.<sup>9</sup> McDermott himself, has, at times, hinted at the validity of this distinction.<sup>10</sup> Others, however, have strongly argued against the legitimacy of this interpretation.<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested by another group of academics that *The Miscellanies* be considered incomplete musings, and therefore less representative of Edwards's final thoughts. As such, it has been argued they should not be given equal status to the work published in his lifetime.<sup>12</sup> While there may be some validity to these arguments, Chamberlain has forcibly argued that *The Miscellanies* not be considered merely private contemplations, in part because of the way they are written.<sup>13</sup> Marsden believes them to be part of the source material for the great *magnum opus* Edwards planned to write, but never did,<sup>14</sup> and the fact that Edwards was not unwilling to let colleagues borrow journals of *Miscellanies* also supports the argument that they were not just private notes.<sup>15</sup> Further, as Waddington observes, it is clear that Edwards frequently transferred ideas from *The Miscellanies* into his public materials.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, it would seem appropriate to give material in *The Miscellanies* equal standing with other material in the corpus. Dropping the *Miscellany*

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<sup>9</sup> See John J. Bombaro, 'Beautiful Beings: The Function of the Reprobate in the Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards's' (PhD thesis, King's College, London, 2001), 22; John J. Bombaro, 'Dispositional Peculiarity, History, and Edwards's Evangelistic Appeal to Self-Love,' *WTJ* 66 (2004): 123; Jeffrey C. Waddington, 'The Unified Operations of the Human Soul: Jonathan Edwards' Theological Anthropology and Apologetic' (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2013), 49.

<sup>10</sup> 'While he [Edwards] made some cryptic remarks in the *Miscellanies* about how the heathen might use religious truth for the good of "their own souls" (Misc. 1162), these concessions were largely limited to his private notebooks; in his published treatises and sermons, "heathen" was usually a synonym for "damned", according to McDermott, 'Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman and Non-Christian Religions,' 130.

<sup>11</sup> See Oliver D. Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 94.

<sup>12</sup> See Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 35. Daniel Strange expresses similar reservations in 'The Secret Diaries of Jonathan Edwards Aged 54 1/2: A Reconstruction (and Deconstruction?) of the New England Theologian—A Review Article,' *Themelios* 47 (2001): 42.

<sup>13</sup> Ava Chamberlain, 'Editor's Introduction,' in Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 501–832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain, *WJE* 18 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8–9. *WJE* stands for the online edition of the Works of Jonathan Edwards, <http://edwards.yale.edu/>.

<sup>14</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 472.

<sup>15</sup> See Ava Chamberlain, 'Editor's Introduction,' 9–10.

<sup>16</sup> Waddington, 'Unified Operations,' 49.

'notes' from the orchestra does not appear to be a wise way to enhance harmony, although it certainly reduces the size of the orchestra.

I adopt a two-pronged approach in this article to try to manage the apparent discordance in Edwards's thoughts on revelation and religions. Firstly, I acknowledge where there appear to be contradictions in the corpus and try to understand reasons for these. To give equal 'weight' to every note played in the Edwards's orchestra can only result in discord and disharmony, resulting in an incoherent Edwards. Identification of the dominant themes is more important than a simple recording and discussion of different notes being played, outside of the consideration of these themes. Secondly, I argue that where a simpler harmony is readily apparent, this should be preferred to a more complex alternative requiring more input from the interpreter. In short, the methodological approach I adopt is governed by a frank recognition of the challenges, and a desire to try and hear a more harmonious Edwards.

## 2. *Edwards's Deist Context*

Before presenting the four points I will argue in this paper, it is important to provide some context to Edwards's world and works. The Arminian 'threat' was traditionally understood to have been the key foil to Edwards's writings and sermons.<sup>17</sup> That this was a serious concern to be addressed head on by Edwards is beyond dispute.<sup>18</sup> However, in a newer analysis of his thought, taking into account a much wider range of his writings, McDermott, Zakai and others have persuasively argued that Edwards perceived deism to be the key challenge of his day.<sup>19</sup> Embodying as it did a whole range of issues which he felt strongly about,<sup>20</sup> Edwards spent considerable time and effort preaching and writing against this 'movement'. With its strong emphasis on the sufficiency of reason, its suspicion, rejection or qualified acceptance of the need for revelation, and its appeal to morality and religious practice in non-Christian religions in support of, amongst other things, the sufficiency of 'natural law', deism threw up multitudes of areas of 'disbelief'<sup>21</sup> requiring redress. Given this context, I suggest the principle '*Reason is not sufficient in matters of true religion*' to serve as the hermeneutical master key to resolve some of the challenges in reading Edwards on the subject of revelation and religions.

## 3. *The Prisca Theologia*

**Point 1:** The *prisca theologia* (and its deterioration) is the cornerstone of Edwards's theology of non-Christian religions.

My first point is one which, at first glance, only tangentially challenges McDermott's thought. How it actually does so will become apparent as the argument proceeds. Edwards believed that the light of

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<sup>17</sup> On this see Paul Ramsey, 'Editor's Introduction', in Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1:70.

<sup>18</sup> An example would be Edwards's writing and publication of *Freedom of the Will* (1754).

<sup>19</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 5; Avihu Zakai, 'The Age of Enlightenment', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83.

<sup>20</sup> A summary of what Edwards believed the deists to be arguing for and against can be found in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:719.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 13.

nature was rarely a lone voice from God.<sup>22</sup> Typically, God spoke in more than one way to humans. A key additional medium of God's communication, supplementing the light of nature, was traditionary revelation.<sup>23</sup> This revelation is commonly called the *prisca theologia* (hereafter, PT).

There is no single definition of the PT, as Levitin notes;<sup>24</sup> therefore, before considering Edwards's thought, and the version of the PT to which he subscribed, a little background information is required. By the 16th and 17th centuries the PT (i.e., different versions of it) already had a long history.<sup>25</sup> Revival in interest in the PT in the 17th century was, according to Mori, due to the deist threat.<sup>26</sup> What appears to have been the specific 'test case' resulting in the contentious flare up was the source of Chinese religion: was it due to Noahic/Judaic revelation, nature, or an independent tradition/revelation? While some scholars attempted a grand project of synthesis or harmony of religious materials,<sup>27</sup> others attempted to explain religions by minimising, or even excluding, revelation from the enterprise.<sup>28</sup> Another group argued for Egyptian primacy of wisdom;<sup>29</sup> and finally some scholars sought to establish Noahic or Judaic religion as the source of all religion and possibly also, all wisdom.<sup>30</sup> Theophilus Gale belonged to this last camp, and Brown believes that Gale was probably the most important influence on Edwards in developing his own ideas of the PT.<sup>31</sup>

Gale summed up his thesis thus: 'the wisest of the Heathens stole their choicest Notions and Contemplations, both Philologic, and Philosophic, as wel [sic] Natural and Moral, as Divine, from the sacred Oracles.'<sup>32</sup> In other words, he argued that *whatever* was good and true in the world (religious or otherwise) had as its basis God's original revelation, meaning Adamic, Noahic and Judaic revelation—and Gale stressed the Judaic. Edwards copied numerous sections of Gales' 'findings' in his *Miscellanies*, and he embraced and endorsed Gale's thesis.<sup>33</sup> Edwards, in large part, argued against deists on the

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:355.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:142–43.

<sup>24</sup> Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>25</sup> See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 106; Kuni Sakamoto, *Julius Caesar Scaliger, Renaissance Reformer of Aristotelianism: A Study of His Exotericae Exercitationes*, *Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy and Science* 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 27; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Guilano Mori, 'Natural Theology and Ancient Theology in the Jesuit China Mission,' *Intellectual History Review* 30 (2020): 200.

<sup>27</sup> See Charles B. Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 515.

<sup>28</sup> See Mori, 'Natural Theology,' 189; Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), 155.

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2013), 83; Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 158.

<sup>30</sup> An example of a scholar adopting this position would be Muzio Pansa (ca. 1560–1640): See Sakamoto, *Julius Caesar Scaliger*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 161.

<sup>32</sup> Theophilus Gale, *Court of the Gentiles* (Oxon: H. Hall, 1672), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:423–24; *Notes on Scripture*, WJE 15:418; *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:222.

basis of an appeal to this particular version of the PT. The argument included the following points: that the deists were wrong about the idea that 'pure' natural religion could exist (reason normally being informed by PT revelation);<sup>34</sup> that extra-biblical data from nations around the world confirmed the Bible accounts;<sup>35</sup> that ancient philosophers stated their dependence on revelation, rather than reason;<sup>36</sup> that God had revealed himself universally;<sup>37</sup> and that it was quite reasonable to expect mystery in religion.<sup>38</sup>

Given his astuteness elsewhere, it is fair to say that Edwards displayed a certain amount of naivete in his handling of his PT sources—a point noted by a number of scholars, including McDermott.<sup>39</sup> The atmosphere in which Gale and others wrote was hardly an objective and disinterested one. Brown notes: 'Both sides [deists and non-deists] mined classical sources with remarkable credulity, grasping onto any shred of evidence, no matter how tenuous, in favor of their theory of cultural priority.'<sup>40</sup> As a result, almost everyone found what they were looking for in an appeal to their own particular version of the PT.<sup>41</sup> The possible problems of chronology<sup>42</sup> and the rather forced interpretations of the data<sup>43</sup> did not seem to have raised questions in Edwards's mind as perhaps they should. This could be viewed either as a lack of discernment on Edwards's part or, more charitably, an *historical* naivete related to his *theological* desire to see God communicating to all.

One of the possible problems in appealing to the PT was that if other religious traditions contained *enough* revealed truth to lead to salvation, then Christianity was not necessary—hardly a position which Edwards would have wished to support.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, alongside the transmission of the PT, Edwards was keen to document its deterioration and corruption, spiralling downwards (from true religion based

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<sup>34</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:459.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:13–14; *The 'Miscellanies', a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:136.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:953; *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:459.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:355.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:248.

<sup>39</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 108. See also Bombaro, 'Beautiful Beings', 289; Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press), 129–30.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 159.

<sup>41</sup> 'Thus Toland [a deist] argues for the Jewish mythologizing of pagan history; Voltaire sees Moses as a Jewish translation of the Bacchus myth. Where Edwards seizes on the fact that Indian Brahmins have a tradition about Adam as proof of Semitic priority and influence, Voltaire takes this Vedic figure of Adimo as proof of the opposite,' according to Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> For more details see Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 159; Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy', 524.

<sup>43</sup> See Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy', 527; Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 153; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 187; Sakamoto, *Julius Caesar Scaliger*, 22, 31.

<sup>44</sup> This particular point has become quite contentious. Gilbert comments, 'The deists would have been overjoyed if Edwards had truly believed that the *prisca theologia* provided enough truth to lead to salvation.' Greg D. Gilbert, 'The Nations Will Worship: Jonathan Edwards and the Salvation of the Heathen,' *TJ* 23 (2002): 60. He argues it never did (p. 62). Bombaro concurs that the *prisca theologia* 'was never intended to redeem' ('Beautiful Beings', 266). However, cases such as Job and Melchizedek seem to fit well with the argument that the PT was understood by Edwards to have been a redemptive tool (as McDermott rejoins, 'Response to Gilbert', 79). At what point it became too corrupt to serve such a purpose is not clear, but that it did in Edwards's thought seems reasonable. Sweeney recognises the time-dependent element in his comment: 'it seems to me ... that neither the *prisca theologia* nor extra-biblical inspiration provide a knowledge of God sufficient for salvation—at least not

on God's original revelation) to end in the practice of human sacrifice among other perversions.<sup>45</sup> Departures from revealed truth in distant geographical areas of the world were explained in a number of ways: because of a preference to resort to reason rather than revelation,<sup>46</sup> a losing sight of the original revelation of God,<sup>47</sup> or a confusing of signs to what they pointed.<sup>48</sup> This being so, Edwards's argument for the deterioration of the PT should be seen as an essential counterbalance to the idea that massive amounts of revelation were available to those outside the borders of the church of his own time, or indeed in other eras.<sup>49</sup> In various comments Edwards was either agnostic about the speed at which the PT was corrupted, or he argued for a quite rapid descent into idolatry.<sup>50</sup> In his own time, he believed non-Christian religions to be full of error due to humankind's degenerate nature.<sup>51</sup>

It seems clear that Edwards had to walk a fine line between admitting too much and too little revelation in the world in order to argue a convincing case against one of the deist arguments, namely that God would be unjust if he had revealed himself to just a small corner of the world. It is hard not to conclude that Edwards was actually inconsistent in his argumentation.<sup>52</sup> Along with his insistence that revelation was virtually universal, he also argued that many in the world had received no revelation.<sup>53</sup> This latter admission could be seen to work *against* one of his reasons for utilising the PT, namely, a vindication of God's fairness. Needless to say, the claim about the more universal spread of the PT was for deist ears to hear. It is fair to say that different perceptions of Edwards's balancing act have led to different interpretations of his thought. No matter which of these is more faithful to Edwards's thinking, I believe that the PT and its deterioration should be considered the *cornerstone* of Edwards's theology

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*now*. Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Jonathan Edwards and the World Religions: A Response to Gerald McDermott', Unpublished Lecture Notes, 4 (emphasis mine).

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Controversies' Notebook, WJE 27: Part IIa, 'Justification'.

<sup>46</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, 'Editor's Introduction', in Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:13; see also *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:446.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:452.

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:190–91.

<sup>49</sup> McDermott interprets Edwards thus: 'Edwards insisted that human beings before the advent of Christ and outside the borders of Christian nations were not and are not deprived of revelation, as deists claimed, but have been fairly inundated with the voice of God calling to them from many different directions.' McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 43. While Edwards did, at times, suggest what McDermott says here (e.g., *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:355), this was not the full story: 'Thus all the Gentile nations throughout the whole world, all nations but only the Israelites and those that embodied themselves with them, were left and given up to idolatry, and so continued a great many ages even from this time till Christ came, which was about fifteen hundred years.' Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE 9:179–80).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1737*, WJE 52: §443 (II Peter 1:19[a]); *Notes on Scripture*, WJE 15:370; *The 'Miscellanies', a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:448; *Original Sin*, WJE 3:171–73; *A History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE 9:179.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1737*, WJE 52: §443 (II Peter 1:19[a]).

<sup>52</sup> For example, balancing the above noted comments on the swift descent into idolatry, Edwards, at times, seemed to argue for a great deal of revelation being present in history: *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:355.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:172, 717; *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:535.

of religions. In stating this, I do not mean to deny the additional important communication of God to humankind through the light of nature and implanted knowledge of God, for which he also argued.<sup>54</sup>

#### *4. Pagan Inspiration*

**Point 2:** Edwards suggested it was possible that pagan philosophers were inspired to proclaim God's redemptive revelation. Spurious data and its misinterpretation prompted this idea, and the hypothesis should be understood in this light.

Edwards believed inspiration to be one of four ways in which God revealed himself to humankind before the close of the canon.<sup>55</sup> Examples of men who were so inspired include Elihu,<sup>56</sup> Job and Melchizedek.<sup>57</sup> He believed that 'wise men of all nations'<sup>58</sup> learned from the 'wise men of the church of God',<sup>59</sup> often by means of travel, as part of his PT argument, and he stated that what knowledge the heathen had was due to this contact, passed down over time.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, he suggested that those who gained this knowledge second-hand were actually aware of the divine source of their learning.<sup>61</sup>

Given this background, *Miscellany* 1162 opens with what may be described as a bolt from out of the blue: 'It may be worthy of consideration whether or no some of the HEATHEN PHILOSOPHERS had not, with regard to some things, some degree of INSPIRATION of the Spirit of God, which led 'em to say such wonderful things concerning the Trinity, the Messiah, etc.'<sup>62</sup> The critical 'new' issue raised in this *Miscellany* is that those who may have been so inspired were not biblical characters (in context, the heathen philosophers are Socrates, Plato and unnamed others). It is important to note that the opening of the *Miscellany* is framed hypothetically: inspiration in the manner described was a point that was 'worthy of consideration' and the three qualifying *comes* in the title should also be observed. Indeed, Edwards could hardly have framed the statement more hesitantly. Admittedly, he goes on to provide some argument for it, but this does not discount the hypothetical approach to the subject.

After starting the *Miscellany* thus, Edwards states that the gift of inspiration does not mean that the person is in a right relationship with God. He closes the *Miscellany* by noting three benefits of such inspiration: (1) to create a kind of bridge between other nations and Israel; (2) as a preparation for the gospel; and (3) as a post-conversion corroboration tool. He also added a fourth comment in which he

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<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:710; *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 381–82; *The 'Miscellanies', a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:373. It should be noted that Edwards sharply differentiated *revelation* from the light of nature (e.g., *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:710). The specific focus of this article precludes an overview and analysis of Edwards's comments on the light of nature, implanted knowledge and the light of reason.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:710.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The 'Blank Bible'*, WJE 24:1190.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:710.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:193.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:193.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:13.

<sup>61</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 833–1152*, WJE 20:245.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 1153–1360*, WJE 23:84.

more conjecturally opined whether ‘benefits to the soul’ may have accrued to those who received such inspiration.<sup>63</sup>

Given this context, how is the inspiration hypothesis in *Miscellany* 1162 best understood? Firstly, we can say what it is not: it is not a claim. McDermott takes the hesitant hypothesis and upgrades it to a full-blown belief of Edwards: ‘For Edwards, truth in classical thinking—and there were considerable stores of it—had complex and diverse origins, ranging from Jewish borrowings to tradition from the fathers of the nations to direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit.’<sup>64</sup> I suggest, given the phrasing of the introduction to the *Miscellany*, that the above interpretation is far too strong; indeed Edwards actually suggested the opposite point concerning inspiration, as will be noted below. It may be that McDermott recognised the problem in this earlier interpretation, as in a later article in 2016, he speaks in a more measured tone: ‘In a cryptic note in the *Miscellanies* he remarked on heathen philosophers who wrote “wonderful things concerning the Trinity [and] the Messiah,” and opined that they might have been inspired by the Holy Spirit.’<sup>65</sup> Whether this is a correction to McDermott’s earlier interpretation or not is not clear.

Dealing with the *Miscellany* as a hypothesis, rather than an assertion is still a challenge as it seems to both contradict and be redundant in Edwards’s wider thought. Concerning possible contradictions, there are at least three major ones. Edwards seems to offer a different explanation for heathen inspiration than his hypothesis in *Miscellany* 1162, in *Miscellany* 953. In this earlier *Miscellany* he downplays the notion that philosophers were inspired, stating that what was thought inspired was no more than borrowing from the (truly) inspired.<sup>66</sup> The heathen ‘inspiration’ was, in effect, ‘borrowed inspiration,’ and Edwards suggests the same point elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> Put another way, Edwards attributed the religious insights hypothesised as inspired in *Miscellany* 1162 to the PT, rather than inspiration. For example, he stated concerning appropriate notions of the divine in Plato’s thought, ‘These points, so much insisted on by Plato, are far from being the growth of Greece, or his own invention, but derived from Eastern traditions, which we know he traveled for, at least as far as Egypt.’<sup>68</sup> Another contradiction relates to clarity. In *Miscellany* 1162 the revelation seems clear (though the inspiration is not clear to the hearers). However, on other occasions Edwards suggested that Socrates’s and Plato’s knowledge of God was obscure.<sup>69</sup>

Turning to redundancy, in following Gale (see earlier) Edwards seems to have approved the idea of a single source for all religious and secular knowledge.<sup>70</sup> At face value, this reference *must* exclude

<sup>63</sup> Of what these consisted see Gilbert, ‘Nations Will Worship’; McDermott, ‘Response to Gilbert’; Sweeney, ‘Jonathan Edwards and the World Religions’; and Jenson, *America’s Theologian*, 129. The point is not directly relevant to my argument here, so I leave it to one side.

<sup>64</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 179. This is not the only time that McDermott makes the assertion. For similar comments see McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 21 and 597; McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 20–21.

<sup>65</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, ‘Jonathan Edwards and Islam,’ *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 6.2 (2016): 100.

<sup>66</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’*, 833–1152, WJE 20:225.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:193.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’*, 1153–1360, WJE 23:447.

<sup>69</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’*, 833–1152, WJE 20:288, 291–93; *The ‘Miscellanies’*, 1153–1360, WJE 23: 433

<sup>70</sup> See e.g., *Miscellany* 962 in Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’*, 833–1152, WJE 20:245, Corol. 2; and *The ‘Miscellanies’*, a–z, aa–zz, 1–500, WJE 13:423–24; *Notes on Scripture*, WJE 15:418. On the single source theory see Pe-

religious inspiration outside the Church, and Plantinga Pauw implies as much in the following comment on the logic of the argument Edwards forwards in discussion on this subject: "The apologetic argument in these entries [*Miscellanies* 953, 959, 962, 986] was that the truths of the ancients were derivative of the church's revealed wisdom, not an independent, competing source of knowledge."<sup>71</sup> The problem is that inspiration as suggested in *Miscellany* 1162 is clearly 'independent', and could even be considered a 'competing source.' The question remains, therefore, why Edwards felt it necessary to make the inspiration hypothesis, which, at face value, seems both contradictory and redundant within his wider thought. I consider four possible answers below, and then suggest which I consider to be the most plausible.

The first is to consider the *Miscellany* 1162 hypothesis in the same manner as Holy Spirit enabling of conscience and reason.<sup>72</sup> Such an interpretation can sit comfortably with *some* religious notional knowledge (specifically, light of nature knowledge) and possibly even knowledge of the Trinity, given that Edwards suggested, on one occasion, that reason could discern the Trinity.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, it could be argued that the inspiration concerning the Trinity reference in the *Miscellany* be explained by the Spirit 'illuminating' part of the light of reason.<sup>74</sup> However, the second reference in the *Miscellany* to the Messiah works against this explanation: knowledge of the Messiah is specifically excluded from the light of nature by Edwards,<sup>75</sup> and therefore could *not* be known without revelation.<sup>76</sup> This explanation is, therefore, an incomplete one.

A second way to try to understand the inspiration hypothesis would be to consider it a kind of 'back-up contingency plan' to manage any chronological problems with the P.T. It is clear that Edwards did not *pursue* the 'inspiration' idea, as some Protestant thinkers did. In some ways this is surprising given Edwards's strong typological view of the world. We might have expected him to have suggested that humankind's God-given creativity (assisted by the external support of the Spirit) would show forth shadows of truth. However, rather than arguing this, when discussing Homer's writings (for example), Edwards argued for historic dependency on, or confirmation of, biblical truth, not direct inspiration of ideas, or a shadowy prefiguring of truth.<sup>77</sup> Peter Sterry (1613–1672), a prominent Protestant nonconformist writer argued that hints of Christian truth in the writings of Ovid, the Roman poet, could be due to inspiration.<sup>78</sup> He chose to explain such insights in pagan writers by appealing to this,

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ter Harrison, *Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 131.

<sup>71</sup> Plantinga Pauw, 'Editor's Introduction,' in Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies,' 833–1152*, WJE 20:13.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:410–11; *Religious Affections*, WJE 2:207; *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, WJE 21:192.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies,' a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:262.

<sup>74</sup> For the idea of Spirit illumination of philosophers in Edwards's thought see *Religious Affections*, WJE 2:315–16.

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:49; *The 'Miscellanies,' 833–1152*, WJE 20:52–53.

<sup>76</sup> What exactly Edwards had in mind by the rather vague "etc." after mentioning the Trinity and the Messiah does not help the interpreter here.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, WJE 15:408–409; *The 'Blank Bible'*, WJE 24:161.

<sup>78</sup> See Nabil I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and the Puritan Defense of Ovid in Restoration England,' *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991): 110–21.

rather than arguing that such truth was PT dependent.<sup>79</sup> For Sterry, pagan fables could be viewed as *pointing to* the Truth, rather than resulting from right knowledge of it,<sup>80</sup> and he believed such insights to be due to a kind of inspiration.<sup>81</sup> Appeal to a vague miraculous inspiration has a certain advantage over dependence on the PT, being immune to dating problems. While this ‘back-up’ explanation is possible, the obvious weakness with it is that Edwards’s thought on religious knowledge seems to have stood firmly in the historical transmission model of revelation and tradition, as documented above.

A third alternative interpretation would be to argue that the inspiration hypothesis was necessary to account for some of the *strong* claims to Christian truth knowledge outside the church, as documented by Gale and others. This is Brown’s explanation for the hypothesis.<sup>82</sup> If it really was the case that the Trinity was so clear to Plato (as argued by Gale and recorded by Edwards) and the idea of the Messiah was so evident, such specificity of knowledge seemed to be even clearer than prophetic references in the Old Testament. How then could such amazing insights be accounted for? *The one certainty from Edwards’s point of view was that it could not be possible by the light of nature or reason.* If we consider the means of revelation in Edwards’s thought, some kind of miracle, vision or inspiration would be needed if such an insight was not from the PT.<sup>83</sup> In the twenty-first century we now know that a number of Edwards’s sources were problematic: the claims made by Gale and others were, typically, grossly over-Christianized,<sup>84</sup> and some documents were dated incorrectly. McDermott candidly acknowledges issues with the Chinese sources and their interpretation which he believed influenced Edwards’s thought so much.<sup>85</sup> If Gale and his contemporaries had been more circumspect and measured in what they were claiming, would Edwards have *needed* to appeal to heathen inspiration? Perhaps not. Is the hypothetical appeal to inspiration purely a polemical one, made *solely* to exclude reason as responsible for the insights mentioned? McDermott, as far as I can tell, does not forward polemic as a possible explanation for the inspiration hypothesis, although he does recognise Edwards’s more general polemical approach elsewhere.<sup>86</sup> The bigger issue with which Edwards was engaged was the place of reason in religion—not the issue of inspiration, per se. Inconsistency of apologetic<sup>87</sup> (whether that be contradiction or redundancy of thought) was arguably less important to Edwards than his primary aim to exclude revelation truths from the realm of reason.

Fourthly and finally, it is not obvious in *Miscellany* 1162 that Edwards considered the kind of inspiration he was hypothesising to belong to the same class as that described in his standard definition

<sup>79</sup> Matar, ‘Peter Sterry’, 115, 120.

<sup>80</sup> Matar, ‘Peter Sterry’, 120.

<sup>81</sup> Matar, ‘Peter Sterry’, 118, 120

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 157. While I believe Brown’s explanation to be plausible, I am not convinced that Edwards can be described as readily embracing this type of inspiration as Brown claims. Given the discussion above about contradictions and redundancy in Edwards’s argument, I suggest the ‘ready embrace’ evaluation of Brown to be too strong.

<sup>83</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:710.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 188–89.

<sup>85</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 215–16.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Plantinga Pauw notes this inconsistency in Edwards’s approach to dealing with heathen insights: ‘What linked these persistent but not always consistent apologetic strategies was Edwards’ heavy investment in refuting deist claims’ (‘Editor’s Introduction’, in Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’, 833–1152*, WJE 20:15).

of inspiration.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, he clearly differentiated it. His reference to ‘some degree of inspiration’ could be interpreted as support for this distinction. In addition, the set of benefits arising from this inspiration (noted earlier) are quite distinct from those for biblical inspiration. This being so, the particular inspiration described in this *Miscellany* can be considered a separate class to normal inspiration, with a preparatory role, not a full-blown equivalent to biblical prophet inspiration.

While I believe there are points worthy of consideration in all four of the explanations offered above, I suggest that the third is the most convincing—particularly if the polemic angle is dominant. If this *Miscellany* is considered both strongly polemical in nature (perhaps even reactionary) and hypothetical, I believe the most appropriate response to its subject matter (i.e., pagan religious inspiration of key doctrinal truths) is to give it very little weight in interpreting Edwards’s thought on revelation and religions: to give it more weight would be to make his thought *less* rather than *more* coherent.

### 5. *Planted Types in Religions*

**Point 3:** There are no independently planted types in religions in Edwards’s thought. The perverted PT can account for type-like elements in religions.

Edwards used the term ‘type’ in two distinct ways: as a hermeneutic tool in interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New,<sup>89</sup> and as a ‘vertical reality’<sup>90</sup> tool to see spiritual reality in a concrete world.<sup>91</sup> It is this second perspective that is in focus in this section of the article. Edwards believed that post-biblical history and nature were types of their spiritual antitypes.<sup>92</sup> Edwards had a strong ahistorical, ontological (but also eschatological)<sup>93</sup> view of types, in addition to a historical fulfilment understanding. Edwards claimed that the whole world was ‘but the shadow of beings, ... so made as to represent spiritual things.’<sup>94</sup> For Edwards, nature was replete in communicating God, containing as it does microcosmic images or reflections of him. Edwards’s enthusiasm about types seems to be a necessary element of his larger project to see God in everything, and to break down the newly built enlightenment wall dividing

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<sup>88</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies’, 833–1152*, WJE 20:518.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Drew Hunter, ‘Hebrews and the Typology of Jonathan Edwards,’ *Themelios* 44 (2019): 339–52.

<sup>90</sup> I have coined this term based on the collocation ‘vertical typology’ used by Wilson H. Kimnach, ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, WJE 10:229.

<sup>91</sup> See Janice Knight, ‘Typology,’ in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 190–209.

<sup>92</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, WJE 10:230; *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:31.

<sup>93</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:129–130; cf. 11:9–10, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, WJE 10:230.

science and true religion.<sup>95</sup> Such a viewpoint was, arguably, an important stimulus to his thought in this area. But what of non-Christian religion belief systems and cultic practices? Are these also ‘typical’?<sup>96</sup>

McDermott claims that Edwards believed there to be a special category of types—types in religions:

Others have shown that Edwards pushed beyond the boundaries of traditional Christian typology to include history and nature; I propose that he went even further to bring other religions into his system.<sup>97</sup>

Edwards pressed those implications [that all the world was typical] even further by proposing that God had planted types of true religion even in religious systems that were finally false. God outwitted the devil, Edwards suggested, by using diabolically deceptive religion to teach what is true.<sup>98</sup>

McDermott forwards his argument about implanted types in religions in a chapter entitled ‘Parables in All Nations: Typology and the Religions.’<sup>99</sup> In large part the interpretation he forwards centres on his consideration of *Miscellany* 307. In this *Miscellany* Edwards documented how God had prepared the Israelites for the idea of satisfactory punishment through the OT sacrificial system. Edwards states that the devil had instituted sacrifice (including child sacrifice) for his own (unspecified) purposes, thereby mimicking God’s work. However, Edwards believed that in God’s providence the devil’s work could actually prepare people to accept the idea of Christ’s sacrifice. He makes a similar point in relation to the practice of idolatry (divine and material substance combined) as also being preparatory in some way for the Christian doctrine of incarnation. On the basis of his analysis of this *Miscellany*, McDermott believes that for Edwards, ‘God had planted types of true religion even in religious systems that were

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<sup>95</sup> On this idea Zakai comments, ‘Edwards reacted against the growing tendency to differentiate sharply between nature and God. In response, he constructed his own theology of nature, or typology, interpreting the physical world as a representation or a “shadow” of the spiritual, which celebrates God’s glory and sovereignty as they are evidenced in the coherence and beauty, order and harmony, of world phenomena. Against the scientific disenchantment of the world of nature, Edwards’s quest was for its reenchantment.’ Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 37. See also Knight, who makes a similar point: ‘The typologizing of nature, then, was the fruit of Edwards’ larger project of joining the lessons of the new science and psychology to the verities of the old piety’ (‘Typology’, 192).

<sup>96</sup> My question here is not about anthropology or human nature, but rather non-Christian religious beliefs and practices.

<sup>97</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 125.

<sup>99</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 110–29.

finally false’<sup>100</sup> and ‘God used false religion to teach the true.’<sup>101</sup> In McDermott’s view these types point to Christ,<sup>102</sup> and he considers them comparable to Old Testament types.<sup>103</sup>

Before considering possible interpretations of *Miscellany* 307, it is helpful to make a couple of clarifying comments. Firstly, Edwards does not call the satanically planted perversions ‘types’. He compares the sacrificial system of Israel instituted by God to the sacrificial systems in parts of the heathen world. He does not say, as McDermott interprets him, that ‘God had planted types’. The mechanism involved is different (the subject of the verb used is the devil, not God). The devil mimics God in this activity.<sup>104</sup> Further, Edwards implies (but does not state) that God permitted this Satanic work, rather than instituted the ‘type’, *per se*.

I believe that there are two plausible interpretations of this *Miscellany*. Turning to the first, it is possible (within the context of the *Miscellany alone*) that Edwards could be understood to be saying that the planted ‘types’ are *independent* of the PT. In McDermott’s view, Edwards differentiated religious types from the PT:

For him [Edwards] there was no inconsistency whatsoever between the possibility of reconciliation for the heathen (because of the *prisca theologia*, God’s types in the religions, and a dispositional soteriology) and the probability that only a precious few of the heathen had ever been saved.<sup>105</sup>

He [Edwards] intimated at times that there were some heathen who might have taken advantage of the light they had been given through the Jews and from their own forefathers [i.e., the PT] and with the light of the Holy Spirit been able to understand the types [in context, *types* must be understood to cover types in religion].<sup>106</sup>

In McDermott’s more developed thinking (his, strictly speaking, though based on Edwards’s thought, and ‘akin’ to it) he gives the religious types a special revelatory class status (neither general

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<sup>100</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 125.

<sup>101</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 126.

<sup>102</sup> McDermott writes, ‘When there is a revealed type of Christ in non-Christian religions, it is Jesus Christ speaking and acting’ (‘What if Paul Had Been from China?’, 32). ‘Furthermore, they [pagan religious activities] were developments (albeit twisted and broken) of original perceptions granted by Jesus Christ himself’ (‘What if Paul Had Been from China?’, 28).

<sup>103</sup> McDermott writes, ‘So if the types in non-Christian religions are only broken and partially distorted access to divine realities, they are similar to Old Testament types—which point to truth but sometimes obscurely’ (‘What if Paul Had Been from China?’, 29). For weaknesses in this idea, see Adam Sparks, *One of a Kind: The Relationship between Old and New Covenants as the Hermeneutical Key for Christian Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere McDermott (with McClymond) notes the devil’s role: ‘Even the ghastly practice of human sacrifice, inspired by the devil, was used by God to prepare peoples for the sacrifice made by the God-man’ (*The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 129). Note that in this quotation the inspiration is from the devil, not from God.

<sup>105</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 145. I do not discuss the dispositional soteriology point in this article.

<sup>106</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 126.

nor special revelation).<sup>107</sup> It would not be unfair to say that much of McDermott's thought on learning from world religions is based on this distinction, namely, the existence of a special revelatory category of God-implanted types in religions in the world today.<sup>108</sup>

But is it necessary to make such a distinction between types and the PT to understand Edwards's thought? The second interpretation of the *Miscellany* I forward here would be to understand child sacrifice and idolatry as *perversions* of the PT. In such a reading, it is the PT (alone) which is the original source of the types. In support of this understanding are Edwards's own comments relating the heathen practice of sacrifice to the PT tradition, rather than the light of nature.<sup>109</sup> Edwards believed that the pristine PT broke down over time, and he saw various actors playing a role in this, including the devil. McDermott himself states that 'the original purity of divine truth is continually breaking down, corrupted by profane and demonic mixture.'<sup>110</sup> In other places too, McClymond and McDermott recognise this demonically inspired deterioration, indeed specifically noting the consequences to be idolatry, and by implication human sacrifice.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, McDermott states that 'they [pagan religious practices] were not merely human insights but developments (albeit twisted and broken) of original perceptions granted by Jesus Christ himself.'<sup>112</sup> This statement suggests a PT *dependency*, not independent type implantation.

It is submitted that this second interpretation (not the one that McDermott applies to *Miscellany* 307, but one, nonetheless, that he and McClymond apply to Edwards) is better able to account for the existence of both truth and perverted truth types in religions both in terms of beliefs and practices. Not only is the explanation simpler (applying Occam's razor), it avoids the unnecessary complications that arise from the creation of a separate class of revelation, a class that Edwards nowhere specifically espoused.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, I suggest making a distinction between religious types and the PT (or even the perverted PT) leads to various, serious problems, not least because types in religions, even perverted ones, point to Christ (as above). If what is deposited or implanted in a religious type are 'scattered promises of God in Christ',<sup>114</sup> why is the PT (or its perversions) insufficient to cover such promises?

In terms of McDermott's wider argument, it is not clear to this reader why he ends his chapter on *typology* by referring to a number of issues also covered in his discussion on the *prisca theologia*. McDermott refers to writers who argued that mythical figures came to be as a result of the perverted PT (*not* because of independent type planting). However, he then interprets these figures typologically: Saturn a symbol of Noah, and Hercules a shadow of Joshua. However, McDermott's 'type' understanding of these phenomena do not seem to be what Edwards argued for. In a comment in the Blank Bible,

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<sup>107</sup> McDermott writes, 'These types [in religions] are neither part of general revelation (for they are not ideas generally available to all human beings) nor special revelation (they do not reveal salvation through Jesus Christ). They are akin to the types that Jonathan Edwards found in many world religions' ('What if Paul Had Been from China?', 27).

<sup>108</sup> See McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*

<sup>109</sup> Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE 9:134.

<sup>110</sup> McDermott, 'A Possibility of Reconciliation', 181.

<sup>111</sup> McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 133, 584.

<sup>112</sup> McDermott, 'What if Paul Had Been from China?', 28.

<sup>113</sup> It should be stressed that Edwards focuses on nature and history, not religions, in his thought on types.

<sup>114</sup> McDermott writes, 'My claim is that among non-Christian religions there are scattered promises of God in Christ and that these promises are revealed types planted there by the Triune God' ('What if Paul had been from China?', 29).

Edwards stated, ‘Of Adam the first man. Heathen fables of Saturn seem, many of them, to be taken from the story of Adam.’<sup>115</sup> Edwards did not suggest that these were types independently put into religions by God. He stated that they were dependent perversions, types indeed, but ‘broken’ ones. Stein comments, ‘Edwards’s overriding premise informing these entries [including the Saturn reference] was that such “heathen” tales were drawn from the biblical record rather than arising independently.’<sup>116</sup> While these particular ‘types’ are indeed specific to particular religions (i.e., they are not *general* or *specific* revelation using McDermott’s language), they can just as easily, or indeed, more easily, be called national or ethnic linguistic misunderstandings of the antitype (an explanation that McDermott endorses), or perversions of the PT, rather than specially implanted types.

The fact that a shadow of truth remains in a perverted truth can, of course, be used by God for his own purposes and glory, and Edwards clearly spoke of God’s preparatory work here, but not ‘teaching’ per se. In its original form, the PT can be called special revelation: types were present in the PT (whether from creation, Noahic, Abrahamic or Mosaic religion) and as the PT was corrupted, the types too were perverted. McDermott points to references where Edwards suggested that characters in the Old Testament, both within Israel and outside it, were saved through the Spirit’s work alongside the (pristine) PT.<sup>117</sup> Such appeals make perfect sense in Edwards’s thought, without the need to appeal to specially implanted religious types. The idea of ‘broken types’ being present in non-Christian religions seems to accord well with Edwards’s generally negative view of religious beliefs and practices outside the church.<sup>118</sup>

## 6. Types and their Readership

**Point 4:** Redemptive and non-redemptive truth types in nature can be seen by the biblically literate regenerate. The unregenerate cannot see types in nature properly.

In his chapter on typology, McDermott argues that the types in nature are all ‘folded’ into the work of redemption.<sup>119</sup> He goes on to qualify this understanding shortly afterwards stating that most types were so folded, but that *all* worked within Edwards’s ‘generally christological frame of reference.’<sup>120</sup> There is no doubt that some of Edwards’s nature types have their antitypes in Christ. For example, Edwards stated, ‘The rising and setting of the sun is a type of the death and resurrection of Christ,’<sup>121</sup> and the

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<sup>115</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Blank Bible’*, WJE 24:126.

<sup>116</sup> Edwards, *The ‘Blank Bible’*, WJE 24:29.

<sup>117</sup> See McDermott, ‘Response to Gilbert’, 80; and *Miscellany* 27b in Edwards, *The ‘Miscellanies,’ a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:23–25.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:717; *The ‘Miscellanies,’ 1153–1360*, WJE 23:443. While McClymond and McDermott state that Edwards showed an ‘astonishing interest in and openness to non-Christian religions’ (*The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 726), McDermott paints a rather different picture elsewhere: ‘Edwards was not really open to other religions as viable, living faiths. He was interested in them primarily because they provided both ammunition for his battles with deism and support for other polemical claims made on behalf of Reformed Christianity’ (*Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 12).

<sup>119</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 121.

<sup>120</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 125.

<sup>121</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:64, Image 50.

silkworm is a 'remarkable type' of Christ.<sup>122</sup> In terms of the specific images Edwards provided, D'Andrea Winslow classes the majority as doctrine of God (75), followed by spiritual formation (49) with the same number of Christology (44) and Evil / temptation (44) references, and finally, the Church/eschatology (29).<sup>123</sup>

When McDermott writes that 'most of the natural types still pointed to the work of Christ's redemption',<sup>124</sup> this claim does not seem supported if we consider the 241 images analysed by D'Andrea Winslow to be representative of Edwards's typologising in nature as a whole. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that *some* point to the *consequences* of the work of Christ's redemption (e.g., the Church, heaven, Christian life), with a relatively small percentage pointing to the work of redemption narrowly defined. Edwards did not mine nature as deeply as he mined the Old Testament for redemptive types.<sup>125</sup> I suggest there are two main possible explanations for this reluctance.

First, if these redemptive truth types were present in nature, then it could be argued that revelation, as he understood it, was not needed: dimly perceived salvific truths could be used by the Spirit to bring a new sense of the heart through the reading of redemptive types in nature. Doubtless some deists would have been quite happy to endorse such ideas. Second, creation is not redemption: it is the stage upon which redemption is played out, and while it anticipates redemption, it does not achieve it.<sup>126</sup> The fact remains, however, that Edwards *was* willing to see redemptive types in nature, which raises the question of the readership of these types.

In his chapter on typology, McDermott describes Edwards's position concerning type readership to be that types in nature and history can only be read by people who have the Bible and are regenerate.<sup>127</sup> Edwards's reference to the need of 'a mind so prepared and exercised'<sup>128</sup> to read the types is, however, more ambiguous, *possibly* excluding biblical knowledge. McDermott seems to interpret Edwards as suggesting this in a later publication in which he claims, *inter alia*, that Edwards believed that the types in nature *can* be discerned by all people with understanding (note 'ordinary unregenerate reason' in the quotation below), and that a correct reading of them could lead the reader to proceed to God.

Edwards believed that the creation is full of types pointing to the Trinitarian God. There is proportion or analogy between things in the world and their Creator. Ordinary unregenerate reason can discern many of these types and proceed from them to God. That is, unregenerate minds can see something from the world that can give them truth about the true God. This does not mean that reason or types can save. For Edwards, only the sense of the heart, given by the Spirit to those who see the beauty of holiness in

<sup>122</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:59, Image 35.

<sup>123</sup> D'Andrea Winslow, 'A Great and Remarkable Analogy: A Trinitarian Theology of Nature' (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2018), 130.

<sup>124</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 125.

<sup>125</sup> Stephen J. Stein notes the following regarding Edwards's extensive type reading of the Old Testament: 'Edwards' typological hermeneutic provided a means to connect virtually any text with Christ and his work of redemption' ('Editor's Introduction', in Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, WJE 15:26).

<sup>126</sup> See Knight, 'Typology', 199; Sholl, 'The Excellency of Minds', 207.

<sup>127</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 112, 117–18, 122. See also Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, WJE 10:70, 232, 235.

<sup>128</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies,' a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, WJE 13:363.

God's Son on the cross, conveys saving knowledge of God. Nevertheless, reason can tell the unregenerate a host of things about the true God by rational reflection on things of this world. Among other things, reason can use types to tell the unregenerate that they need to come to saving knowledge of God.<sup>129</sup>

In this quotation McDermott seems to equate the light of nature with types, or at least suggests that for Edwards types are *part* of the light of nature, or similar in some way. Further, the types seem to be interpreted by McDermott as relatively clear (*contra* Edwards on the light of nature, though he vacillated on this),<sup>130</sup> and can be seen by all. What exactly McDermott means by 'truth about the true God' is not spelled out in detail. If this is 'light of nature truth' the reference would seem to agree with Edwards's *thought*, though it is *terminologically* different, in the sense that Edwards did not use types as a synonym for the light of nature, or consider them to be some kind of special subset of this light. However, if McDermott means *redemptive* truths are apprehended by the unregenerate (see the comment above on his redemptive types claim) this is a significant change in interpretation. Although McDermott does not spell out in the above quotation the particular source for this interpretation of Edwards, I can only surmise that the support for it is to be found in Edwards's reference to Ovid, in one of his *Images*. I engage with this *Image* in more detail after considering type readership.

A considerable number of Edwards's commentators have argued that the types are *only* read and understood correctly by the (biblically-literate) regenerate, in line with McDermott's first interpretation of Edwards (provided earlier), and against the interpretation just documented. These scholars include (in alphabetical order): Butler,<sup>131</sup> D'Andrea Winslow,<sup>132</sup> Knight,<sup>133</sup> Lowance,<sup>134</sup> Lowance and Waiters,<sup>135</sup> Ramsey,<sup>136</sup> Schweitzer,<sup>137</sup> Sweeney<sup>138</sup> and Waddington.<sup>139</sup>

So which interpretation makes more sense? Stepping back a little from the specific question, it is helpful to find some certainty in Edwards's thoughts on related issues. First, Edwards insists that the light of nature does not communicate redemptive truths to anyone,<sup>140</sup> but he does admit the existence

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<sup>129</sup> McDermott, 'Was Jonathan Edwards an Evangelical?', 238–39.

<sup>130</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1731–1732*, WJE 47: §232 (Matt. 11:21); *The 'Miscellanies'*, 1153–1360, WJE 23:457–58; *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, WJE 19:713; *The 'Miscellanies'*, 833–1152, WJE 20:143; *Religious Affections*, WJE 2:275.

<sup>131</sup> Diane Butler, 'God's Visible Glory: The Beauty of Nature in the Thought of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards', *WTJ* 52 (1990): 24.

<sup>132</sup> Winslow, 'A Great and Remarkable Analogy', 195–96.

<sup>133</sup> Knight, 'Typology', 205.

<sup>134</sup> Mason I. Lowance, Jr., 'Images or Shadows of Divine Things: The Typology of Jonathan Edwards', *Early American Literature* 5 (1970): 171.

<sup>135</sup> Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance, Jr. and David H. Watters, 'Editor's Introduction', in Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:164.

<sup>136</sup> Paul Ramsey, 'Editor's Introduction', in Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, WJE 8:758.

<sup>137</sup> William M. Schweitzer, 'Interpreting the Harmony of Reality: Jonathan Edwards's Theology of Revelation' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2008), 38.

<sup>138</sup> Sweeney, 'Jonathan Edwards and the World Religions', 4.

<sup>139</sup> Waddington, 'The Unified Operations', 147.

<sup>140</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies'*, 1153–1360, WJE 23:344, 457.

of some redemptive truths in nature types. The two positions *can* appear contradictory. Second, there are *no* examples of redemptive types available to humankind in Edwards's discussion of the light of nature—although some light of nature truths communicate what is also communicated in type truths. While there are overlaps (e.g., truths about the doctrine of God are seen through the light of nature *and* types) there are also clear differences, e.g., truths about Christ's resurrection or the Church are seen through the types, *not* the light of nature. Therefore, it is clear that for Edwards the types cannot be *equated* with the light of nature. Thirdly, according to Edwards, reason (along with other elements comprising man's natural faculties) is, after the fall, lacking in spiritual guidance or supervision (i.e., misdirected in orientation, not being sanctified by the Spirit, and therefore inclined to self-love). It is also corrupt in and of itself.<sup>141</sup> Admittedly, he believed it to function more or less competently in the realm of natural affairs,<sup>142</sup> namely secular or worldly matters,<sup>143</sup> apprehending religious notional truths,<sup>144</sup> and in appreciating aesthetics or proportion.<sup>145</sup> In Edwards's thought competencies in secular knowledge and religious truth knowledge could be enhanced by the external assistance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>146</sup> However, being doubly disadvantaged (not correctly guided by supernatural faculties and also darkened)<sup>147</sup> Edwards was adamant that reason guided by the light of nature could in no way help man proceed to God. Edwards went about establishing his argument concerning reason's impotence in spiritual matters in a number of ways.

The first of these was to argue that reason is not the appropriate faculty to know God.<sup>148</sup> Second, Edwards believed that while the facts of God's creation and implanted knowledge are communicated to humankind, reason cannot make sense of these facts and how they relate to each other.<sup>149</sup> Third, for Edwards what reason apprehends is not the idea itself, but only the sign of the idea.<sup>150</sup> Fourth, the problem of not interpreting facts correctly, or viewing things in their right relations is due to a fundamental antithesis between the nature, or disposition, of the receiver of communication, and the communication itself.<sup>151</sup> The fifth point that Edwards employed against reason's religious competence

<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, WJE 8:236; *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:333–34; *The 'Miscellanies', 501–832*, WJE 18:156.

<sup>142</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:192.

<sup>143</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3:150.

<sup>144</sup> McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 65.

<sup>145</sup> Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, T&T Clark Studies In Systematic Theology (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 155.

<sup>146</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2:207; *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, WJE 21:192.

<sup>147</sup> Douglas J. Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 71.

<sup>148</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:410, 422. See also William J. Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God', in *Divine Hiddenness*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108; William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>149</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies'*, a–z, aa–zz, 1–500, WJE 13:470.

<sup>150</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies', 501–832*, WJE 18:455–456.

<sup>151</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, WJE 17:421.

was an empirical, historical argument, namely the failings of philosophers to make sense of the world, and to reform it.<sup>152</sup>

Having covered these points, it is now appropriate to remember what Edwards says *positively* of nature, and how he differentiates the roles of nature and revealed religion: 'The light of nature teaches that religion which is necessary to continue in the favour of the God that made us; but it cannot teach us that religion which is necessary to our being restored to the favour of God, after we have forfeited it.'<sup>153</sup> Nature, as he describes it, has a distinct role in terms of God's communication—to teach (as opposed to *prepare*) those who have already been restored to God's favour. Like Calvin, Edwards held a strong commitment to *theologia naturalis regenitorum* (natural theology of the regenerate). While nature did not hold out redemptive truths for the unregenerate, believers could read the book of nature correctly once they have a new sense of the heart and have previously apprehended revelation. In his comments on secondary beauty (i.e., creation in this context), Edwards believed it to be correctly seen and interpreted *only* by those with regenerate hearts.<sup>154</sup> I am not aware of any claim made by Edwards that humankind appropriately receives the emanations of the Son of God in nature *apart from* revelation preceding this.<sup>155</sup> Concerning pagan knowledge of God, he makes essentially the same point: 'Except we have some tolerable notion of him [God], we shall not worship any more than the Athenians did, who inscribed their altar to the Unknown God.'<sup>156</sup>

Perhaps the strongest case to support McDermott's more recent interpretation of the universal ability to read types is Edwards's reference to Ovid in *Image* 134. Sweeney comments, 'Edwards did entertain the thought that some of the ancient pagan thinkers were given a special, though only partial, view of the meaning of some of the types.'<sup>157</sup> In the *Image* Edwards stated, 'The very wiser heathens seemed to be sensible that the divine Being, in the formation of the natural world, designed to teach us moral lessons: so Ovid, concerning the erect posture of man.'<sup>158</sup> What Edwards is saying in this reference is that the idea of types or images in nature is not just his 'pet project': the validity and legitimacy of looking at the world typologically was recognised around the time of Christ by a reputed Roman poet. Further, not only was the system perceived, a specific example of a type was also provided. This is the example: 'And, though all other animals are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven.'<sup>159</sup> Edwards does not assume that Ovid was regenerate; indeed, one feels that such a consideration would actually run counter to his purpose to add credence or weight to the types project by appealing to another authority. Such appeals to philosophers, poets or ancient scholars are not unusual in Edwards's argumentation style; for example, he appealed to Cicero to support his argument concerning the insufficiency of the light of

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<sup>152</sup> Edwards, *The 'Miscellanies,' a-z, aa-zz, 1-500*, WJE 13:423; *A History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE 9:278; *The 'Miscellanies,' 833-1152*, WJE 20:293.

<sup>153</sup> *Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:491.

<sup>154</sup> Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, WJE 8:565.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729*, WJE 14:265.

<sup>156</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723*, WJE 10:417.

<sup>157</sup> Sweeney, 'Jonathan Edwards and the World Religions,' 5.

<sup>158</sup> Edwards, *Typological Writings*, WJE 11:98.

<sup>159</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1:84-86, trans. Frank J. Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, LCL 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

nature.<sup>160</sup> How then can we understand the Ovid reference? In making the claim for Ovid, Edwards does seem to contradict himself (compare the first interpretation of McDermott, discussed earlier). Why then does Edwards make the appeal? As with the case with inspiration, I believe that the lone specific example is best viewed as polemical, an occasion where Edwards was looking for support, wherever it may be found, to bolster a particular argument—his typology project—a project which he knew to be viewed suspiciously by some. Ovid was a useful ally here and for this purpose alone, Edwards brought him in to support his position. Edwards argues elsewhere that human religious awareness (the key insight from Ovid) is available from the light of nature.<sup>161</sup> This being so, I suggest we should not read too much into *who* can read the types from this reference given Edwards's *focused* treatment on the subject of type readership elsewhere in his writings.<sup>162</sup>

### 7. Conclusion

In this article I have interpreted Edwards's thoughts on revelation and religions through the presentation of four main points. I have suggested that the deist background and threat led Edwards to employ a version of the *prisca theologia* in response to his understanding of deism's appeal to the sufficiency of reason over against revelation in matters of religion. Further, I have argued that the PT is the cornerstone of Edwards's theology of religions. Unlike McDermott, who argues that there are *additional* sources of revelation available to non-Christians in Edwards's thought, namely specially planted types in religions, nature types, and inspiration, I have suggested that Edwards is best understood as arguing *solely* for the dwindling effects of the PT in educating reason (also informed by the light of nature and implanted knowledge of God). In constructing this argument, I have interpreted the exceptional comments Edwards makes (on types and inspiration) as purely polemical, one of these a possibly reactionary response to misinformation / misinterpretation. I have also brought forward a case for the adoption of a simplified interpretation of the idea of types in religions, dependent on the PT alone. In my attempt to engage with Edwards's ideas I have sought to grapple with the apparent (and real) contradictions, rather than giving all the various notes in the Edwards's orchestra equal weight, which can only lead to disharmony and incoherence. If my interpretations are considered a feasible alternative to those provided by McDermott, a very different understanding of Edwards's ideas on revelation and religions emerges. I believe such a reading to be more harmonious and in tune with the main themes present in his writings and thinking.

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<sup>160</sup> Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, 833–1152, WJE 20:287–88.

<sup>161</sup> Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723–1729*, WJE 14:232.

<sup>162</sup> See Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, WJE 10:70, 232, 235.

# The Theological Vision of Geerhardus Vos: Theological Education and Reformed Ministry

— Bradley J. Bitner —

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**Abstract:** Gerhardus Vos’s lesser-known first inaugural address (1888) entailed a theological vision. Its subject was not biblical theology, but theological method and theological education for Reformed ministry. Vos first identifies cultural, theological, and curricular challenges to the kind of theological formation he thinks students need. Then he exemplifies the kind of confessional framework, theological patterns of thinking, and historical humility that he envisions as necessary for ministry that bears lasting, robust gospel fruit for the church. Vos’s vision provokes us to reconsider the shape and aims of contemporary theological education as well as the relationship between systematic and biblical theology in his theological method.

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## *1. Introduction*

**A**lthough Geerhardus Vos is best known as a biblical theologian, this is not an essay about biblical theology. Nor does it deal with his well-known 1894 Princeton inaugural address.<sup>1</sup> It is instead a reflection on important aspects of the larger theological method that founded and funded Vos’s later work in biblical theology. It also traces how Vos’s method entailed a vision of vital Reformed church life and the kind of theological education required to sustain it and see it flourish. The basis for this study is Vos’s little-known “other” inaugural address, “The Prospects of American Theol-

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<sup>1</sup> May 8, 1894: “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980), 3–24 (hereafter *RHBI*).

ogy,” delivered at a small theological college in Grand Rapids in 1888.<sup>2</sup>

The “father of Reformed biblical theology” began his career there with incisive reflections on doctrine, history, theological method, philosophy, and cultural analysis. This may strike some as strange, regrettably “scholastic,” or even suspiciously backwards. Why wouldn’t Vos simply expound a biblical text? Why not trace a redemptive-historical theme? And why (and how?) did Vos *begin* with systematics and *then* move to biblical theology from the 1890s onward?<sup>3</sup> Surely the direction of travel ought to have been reversed?

We would be mistaken, however, to dismiss this address as the misguided, academic idealism of one who later matured and took his stand more “squarely” on the Bible. To take this view would in fact be a grave error because it would fail to recognize the organic connections between Vos’s early work in doctrine and his subsequent work in biblical theology. This sequence and these connections also hold significant methodological implications and practical consequences for the task of theological education and the health of the church. Vos’s concern from the outset, as we shall see, was for a deeply *theological* Reformed theology to be preserved and consistently worked out—in theological colleges, seminaries, and pulpits—for the sake of the life of the church, for the flourishing of the gospel, and above all for the glory of God.

The Grand Rapids inaugural has intrinsic interest. But it also has special relevance given renewed attention in the past several decades to a Vosian biblical theology,<sup>4</sup> both within Reformed confessional circles and more broadly within evangelicalism.<sup>5</sup> From at least three different angles, questions have arisen to which Vos’s “other” inaugural begins to provide some helpful answers. First, Craig Carter has recently queried whether Vos’s biblical theology sits within a larger, stable theological method and just how it might relate to the “Great Tradition” of patristic and pre-critical theological metaphysics, epistemology, and hermeneutics. Carter suggests that, despite its strengths and surface similarities to the proto-biblical theology of Irenaeus, Vos’s biblical theology may not be robustly theological enough.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> September 4, 1888: “De Uitsichten der Amerika Theologie,” An English translation by Ed M. van der Maas and a brief editorial introduction by James T. Dennison are found in Geerhardus Vos, “The Prospects of American Theology,” *Kerux* 20 (2005): 12–52 (hereafter “Prospects”). Available at [www.kerux.com/doc/2001A3.asp](http://www.kerux.com/doc/2001A3.asp).

<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by Vos’s five-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2016), written from 1888–1893.

<sup>4</sup> Vos’s best-known works include his Princeton inaugural (1894, “The Idea of Biblical Theology”) and his 1948 book *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, reprint ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), which bookend his life’s work in biblical theology with a remarkable consistency of method; see Gaffin, “Introduction,” in Vos, *RHBI*, xv.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), group Vos and the “Philadelphia school” together with the “Chicago school” (exemplified by D. A. Carson) and the “Dallas School” in their category BT2, “History of Redemption.” This is an understandable but overly broad categorization, as others have pointed out, and as the evidence from Vos’s total *oeuvre* demonstrates. Among those who have taken a significantly “Vosian” line in major works are Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 256–57. Testing this comparison between Irenaeus and Vos will be the focus of a separate article.

From a slightly different angle, Michael Allen has argued in a pair of recent articles that Vos (and those following him) developed Reformed biblical theology as a “crisis measure” that may have unintentionally yet significantly strained the relationship between the Bible and systematic theology. Here, the suggestion is that biblical theology in a Vosian mode is at best a “temporary interpretive therapy,” but one that may jeopardize, misalign, or intrude upon the fundamental theological relationship between the properly apostolic disciplines of dogmatics and exegesis.<sup>7</sup>

From yet another direction, some have argued that Vos’s biblical theology is *too* covenantal and dogmatically bent and thus may threaten to override the text of Scripture, either by misconstruing the redemptive historical structure of the canon or by overemphasizing divine authorship at the expense of human authors and individual Bible books or *corpora*.<sup>8</sup> The implication here is—ironically, in light of the critiques of Carter and Allen—that Vos’s method is overly theological and perhaps not sufficiently biblical or exegetical.

By carefully laying out below the arguments and implications of Vos’s 1888 address we aim to engage with these critiques only indirectly. The primary purpose for this close reading and reflection is to identify some fundamental aspects of the larger theological method from within which Vos’s biblical theology emerged and to trace the thoroughly *theological* vision he presented for training ministers who would serve in the “small spiritual colonies” of the Reformed churches of his day.<sup>9</sup>

Undoubtedly, the substance and context of *this* address—Vos’s “other” inaugural—render it a programmatic statement from the very beginning of his teaching career; we may rightly call it his theological vision.<sup>10</sup> An examination of Vos’s vision will be helpful in at least three respects. First, a return to Vos’s diagnosis—over a century ago—of the challenges facing American theology will provide us with a salutary, self-critical mirror, particularly in contemporary Anglophone and Western contexts. Second, engagement with Vos’s reflections on the opportunities for fostering a coherent, vibrant, and Reformed churchly theology on American soil may helpfully stimulate constructive reflection concerning models of theological education among contemporary churches, denominations, and seminaries, perhaps even beyond American shores. Third, a clear grasp of the pattern of Vos’s theological vision will help us more clearly to discern just how fundamentally his Reformed confessional commitments provided a theological foundation and framework for the biblical theology he would go on to develop. We will return to these three areas of relevance in the concluding reflections of this essay.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Allen, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology—Part One,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 14 (2020): 52–72; Michael Allen, “Systematic and Biblical Theology—Part Two,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 14 (2020): 344–57.

<sup>8</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 80–84.

<sup>9</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 50.

<sup>10</sup> For “theological vision” as a concept, variously defined, see Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 312–34; Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 95–97.

## 2. Vos's Context

In order to read Vos charitably, we must consider his circumstances. He composed his Grand Rapids address as an unmarried, highly-educated young man. We must allow for some idealism. The young professor was linguistically gifted, theologically astute, and had been privileged to travel widely, living in Amsterdam, Philadelphia, Berlin, and Strasbourg. Thus, as he returned to his adopted small-town home, he came with some insider knowledge but also with the reflective distance of one granted broad cultural horizons and time to study and think. His time in Europe had given Vos a deep awareness of the legacy of German Enlightenment philosophy and theology; he had a keen sense of the challenges it presented to orthodox Reformed theology and piety.<sup>11</sup> His own family, his Dutch Reformed community, and key correspondents in the Netherlands had given him insight into ecclesiastical and theological debates in the homeland. And Vos's time as a student at Princeton Seminary had helped him to grasp not only the doctrinal tensions within American Presbyterianism but also some of the larger cultural currents swirling in American life more broadly.

It is also helpful to recall that, although Vos had other options, his acceptance of the call to Grand Rapids was a considered choice. He might have taken up Kuyper's offer to teach in his homeland but felt obligated to return to the relative rural obscurity of Grand Rapids.<sup>12</sup> So we must also grant him a measure of clear-eyed, sober commitment and prayerful reflection as he surveyed the cultural context and the task before him. The role that the twenty-six-year-old Vos undertook was professor of didactic and exegetical theology at the institution that would later become Calvin Theological Seminary. He was charged to provide theological instruction to prepare Dutch students for *Reformed* ministry. But this was a ministry which needed to adapt and thrive *in America*.<sup>13</sup> His task was to educate *Dutch-American* theological students who would minister faithfully and effectively in old world Reformed churches in their new world context.<sup>14</sup>

This meant the challenges before him were not only intellectual and pedagogical; they were churchly and theological in the deepest sense. It was not merely a matter of business as usual and teaching a set curriculum. This was necessary but not sufficient. Vos sensed that his students and their churches—part of an ethnic, linguistic, and theological minority with increasingly permeable boundaries—faced significant cultural and confessional difficulties as they sought to steward a vibrant Reformed faith

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<sup>11</sup> See the account in James T. Dennison, ed., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 14–26 (hereafter *Letters*). Vos mentions his interest in philosophy, particularly epistemology, while in Berlin and Strasbourg (1885–1888). See, e.g., his letter to Herman Bavinck (June 16, 1887): “From an encyclopedic point of view [i.e., the division and inner organization of theology], Philosophy is a study which gives more satisfaction than German theology.... With special fondness, I am keeping busy now with Philosophy—and indeed most of the time with the theory of knowledge” (*Letters*, 125–26). Vos also mentions his critical engagement with lectures by the noted neo-Kantian Wilhelm Windelband, on whom see F. C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 365–92.

<sup>12</sup> Gaffin, “Introduction,” in Vos, *RHBI*, x.

<sup>13</sup> See George Harinck, “Geerhardus Vos as Introducer of Kuyper in America,” in *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Larry Wagenaar (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 243–61.

<sup>14</sup> These churches were increasingly formed by and pressured within their American context. See James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

for their churches. At various points in his address, Vos insisted that the “theological calling” of the minister was to kindle and sustain the living and growing truth of the Reformed doctrine.<sup>15</sup>

A further glimpse into how Vos perceived the challenge of his American context comes in his correspondence with Herman Bavinck. Just over a year prior to his installation, as he was preparing to return briefly to Grand Rapids and struggling with illness, Vos wrote to his friend of the coming visit: “I have been appointed to teach English and to promote the importance of the English language; yet under the present circumstances there is nothing that I consider more harmful for our little church there than to introduce English ideas. No doubt the ideas follow the language closely.”<sup>16</sup> This passing comment in a private letter is telling. As someone who travelled internationally and possessed skilled communicative competence in at least three languages (Dutch, German, and English), Vos knew the intricate connections between language and culture and knew that language is a form of life. He felt the English language, insofar as it was a fundamental vector of American cultural assumptions and categories, was in sharp contrast to the Dutch Reformed history and life. And in Vos’s estimation the American form of life was less theological. “Here,” Vos began his address, “one breathes in a different atmosphere than that of [Dutch] theology.... It is not an interest in things theological that propels the mighty machine of American life.”<sup>17</sup> He alluded several times in his correspondence with Bavinck, Kuyper, and Warfield over the years to similar ideas, commenting on the lack of sufficient “taste” for deep, coherent theological thinking which he thought characterized much American life, especially among the churches.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, we must also picture the occasion of Vos’s address. In his father’s church, Vos was among friends; it was a safe and perhaps slightly awed audience. He addressed other Dutch Americans in Dutch. He spoke freely and without over-qualification. His tone seems measured and formal, not jaded or overly critical. On that Tuesday evening at Spring Street Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Vos admitted that his choice of topic had been difficult. He might, he said, have spoken on any of several “concrete” topics related to the subjects assigned to him by the Curatorium to teach at the school.<sup>19</sup> Yet Vos proposed to engage broadly in theological cultural analysis of his 19th century American context and then to outline his vision for the ways in which a confessional Reformed theology might flourish in spite of cultural pressures.<sup>20</sup> We do not know whether it seemed ambitious and abstract to some in the audience that evening. But from our vantage point, over a century later, the context of Vos’s calling renders his choice of subject understandable, prescient, and provocative.

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<sup>15</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 43: “Our dogmas must once again leave the classrooms and be carried into the hearts of the people, especially the hearts of a young generation, with fresh power of thought.”

<sup>16</sup> Vos, Letter to Herman Bavinck (June 16, 1887), in *Letters*, 125; see also “Prospects,” 49.

<sup>17</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 14.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Letter to Benjamin B. Warfield, October 22, 1889: “My own impression is that there is not much demand in this country for discussions of this sort, as people are apt to consider theology under an exclusively practical aspect, so that perhaps an *Encyclopedia of Theological Science* [such as Kuyper was undertaking] would be received with a certain indifference which it would be hard to overcome” (Vos, *Letters*, 129).

<sup>19</sup> Vos taught widely across the curriculum in subjects such as exegesis, systematic theology, philosophy, and non-Christian religions; see *Letters*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 13.

### 3. Vos's Critique

Now that we have set Vos's Grand Rapids inaugural address in context we may turn to its central concerns. Vos outlined "three phenomena" that he deemed to be at the root of "the obstacles to the flowering of our theology."<sup>21</sup> These were (1) pragmatism and fragmentation, (2) a lack of theological thinking, and (3) a lack of historical humility.<sup>22</sup> In a broad sense, each of these was a *theological* shortcoming. But as we attend carefully, we realize Vos was moving from metaphysics and epistemology to theological *principia* and then to the historical inheritance of the Great Tradition, mediated especially through the Reformed confessions. In this section we will summarize Vos's thoughts about these challenges and their effects. In the next section we will turn to Vos's vision for how these obstacles might be overcome or their effects mitigated. Finally, we will seek to draw together the strands of his theological vision and ask what it might imply for contemporary church life and theological education.

#### 3.1. Pragmatism and Fragmentation

The first obstacle Vos identified is foundational; the others that follow flow from it. He called it "the influence of practical empiricism," which ultimately results in the fragmentation of the spheres of life.<sup>23</sup> Vos observed that American life was fragmentary, shattered, lacking a unifying principle. Why was this? It was not because of ethnic or political diversity, he argued. Rather it was the result of a worldview that Vos characterized as a pernicious combination of pragmatism and empiricism.<sup>24</sup> The external, visible world was the most real and experience—both of the sensory world and of personal, inner life—constituted the sole criterion of truth. Vos described in some detail a powerful cultural orientation, a way of thinking that was not just "out there" in the world but also "in here" among the churches.<sup>25</sup>

Herbert Spencer was the "prophet" who had granted to Vos's American age its "deepest philosophy of life."<sup>26</sup> The "reality of nature," as Vos described it, eclipsed the larger, embracing reality of the unseen and ultimate "realm of grace."<sup>27</sup> Throughout his address Vos hinted that this cannot but lead to a practical, philosophical materialism, which in turn blunts the hunger and thirst for the truly real in spiritual terms. Vos was adamant that the reason this pragmatist-empiricist disposition was so damaging was *because it begins with the creature*. And having begun with the creature, it inevitably ends in idolatry and amnesia with respect to the Creator.<sup>28</sup> Because the external world and human experience do not contain or reveal within themselves the ultimate, unifying whole (the glory of the Creator), the American experience was

<sup>21</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 15.

<sup>22</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 15. Van der Maas, the translator, remarks that in the manuscript Vos uses the terms "empiricism" and "realism" as virtual synonyms (p. 15 n. 4). The larger context of the address confirms this. We will use "empiricism" throughout for consistency. By "realism" Vos indicated the externalism of a philosophical materialism or naturalism.

<sup>23</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 15–16.

<sup>24</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 16–17.

<sup>25</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 18–19.

<sup>26</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 19–20.

<sup>27</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 20–21.

<sup>28</sup> Vos is making a claim about the general epistemological orientation of American culture rather than an absolute epistemological claim. For a recent engagement with his epistemology, see J. V. Fesko, "The Scholastic Epistemology of Geerhardus Vos," *Reformed Faith and Practice* 3 (2018): 21–45.

one of living in a “disorganized world.” Life became fragmented and knowledge remained atomized, compartmentalized, and unintegrated.<sup>29</sup>

It was evident to Vos that this lack of integration was to some degree caused by, but also causative of, an unhealthy focus on the trees rather than the forest. Vos argued that in American culture generally there was “no eye for the whole.” Life and thought too often remain “stuck in the individual pieces.”<sup>30</sup> As Vos probed this state of affairs, he diagnosed a deeper root cause that was particularly lamentable in connection with American churches. There was, he claimed, “an antipathy toward everything [especially in theology] that is abstract and theoretical.” This “anti-doctrinal” posture, he believed, signaled a result of the loss of a felt need for any dogmatic or theological unity of thought and a habit of being satisfied with practical solutions.<sup>31</sup>

Vos gave some examples of this tendency. In the home, there was often very little in the way of patient catechism which might provide an integrative framework for faith. In the churches, there was too little focus on support for “theological preparatory school” that might set potential seminary students in good position for their studies and ministries.<sup>32</sup> From the pulpits, there was too little theologically or doctrinally-oriented preaching that would help believers place individual truths with reference to the whole of God’s revelation and apply them to the whole of their lives.<sup>33</sup>

Vos saw this pragmatism working itself out in other ways that made him wary. He warned against “those levelling attempts that seek here to promote the external unity of the churches at the expense of the purity of doctrine.”<sup>34</sup> As a Princeton seminarian Vos had witnessed first-hand the tensions within American Presbyterianism that would later lead to crisis.<sup>35</sup> He was aware of the ecumenical, cooperative urge in many quarters to move away from a perceived denominational narrowness and to establish a kind of “useful” unity among diverse churches (what would decades later become American Fundamentalism and eventually Evangelicalism).<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to observe the basis for Vos’s concern. A thinning of confessional and doctrinal commitment in the name of unity was a problem for Vos *not* for reasons of tradition, nor because of a parochial or defensive small mindedness. Instead, his rationale was positive and theological: the kind of pragmatism he observed that was driving a false ecumenism was a sign, he argued, of a lack of confidence in “the veracity of our God and his infallible revelation.”<sup>37</sup>

If the churches were implicated in this state of affairs, then so were the seminaries. How did American pragmatism manifest itself in the institutions of theological training and ministerial formation?

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<sup>29</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 21–22, and 21 n. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 21.

<sup>31</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 22–23.

<sup>32</sup> Vos does not elaborate on what form this might take.

<sup>33</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 23.

<sup>34</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 24.

<sup>35</sup> James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), esp. 311–39.

<sup>36</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 24. See also George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 31–52; P. C. Kemeny, “From “Old Time” Christian College to Liberal Protestant University: The Forgotten Interlude in the History of the Secularization of Princeton University,” in *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education: Historical Analysis and Contemporary Reflections*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 35–53.

<sup>37</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 24.

“Seminaries in this country,” Vos stated, “are much more geared toward training evangelists than theologians.”<sup>38</sup> The pragmatic drive and its attendant dis-integration of knowledge and the theological curriculum too often gave seminaries, in Vos’s view, “the character of artificial breeding grounds of ministers of the gospel.”<sup>39</sup> Although Vos admitted that theology and theological study could at times too easily tilt in an unhealthy theoretical direction, he did not believe this was at all the case in the American context. Vos observed that there was an overly practical approach, “a small-minded striving for utility,” that was no doubt well-intentioned but which, he predicted, would backfire in the long run.<sup>40</sup>

The unintended consequence was that churches would be left without the ripe gospel fruit that only theologically mature, incisive, and resilient ministers could provide for their congregations. The “practical” bent of his day was leading, Vos saw, to an increasingly unbalanced focus on “the critical and exegetical” (i.e., Biblical Studies as well as both lower and higher criticisms) at the expense of “ethics, dogmatics, or encyclopaedia.”<sup>41</sup> This in turn, he observed, only exacerbated the tendency to dis-integration and the exposure to theological error. In a striking line, Vos asserted that if a self-aware and articulate ability to systematize was a sign of theological maturity, then its absence surely indicated spiritual immaturity at best, and a kind of theological madness at worse.<sup>42</sup>

Vos continued to explain with reference to the theological curriculum, preferring the metaphor “organic” over against “mechanical.”<sup>43</sup> American seminaries, he argued, tended toward the latter to the great detriment of students, ministers, and churches. Vos was free with his indictment: “The fact is then that all too often theology in this country is absorbed in a collection of subjects and skills of whose interconnectedness the young student must remain in deep darkness even in his most lucid moments, because he has never as yet seen the architectural structure of his discipline rise before his mind’s eye.” And, Vos lamented, “who can enumerate all the harmful effects that flow from this lack?”<sup>44</sup>

In closing this first section in which we have considered Vos’s diagnosis of the challenge the Reformed churches faced because of American pragmatism, we sense powerfully what it was that exemplified, for the young professor, the ideal profile of a gospel minister. The typical graduate of an American seminary “may feel himself to be a preacher, or evangelist, or historian, or linguist,” Vos said. But without “the beautiful coherence in which the Lord God put together for us all elements [of his divine revelation] ... he will never become in the true sense of the word a theologian.”<sup>45</sup> Vos’s vision was for seminarians—evidently all of them—to become pastor-theologians rather than pragmatist-preachers.

<sup>38</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>39</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>40</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>41</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 26.

<sup>42</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 26.

<sup>43</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 26. On the organic motif in Dutch theology, and in Vos’s contemporaries Kuyper and Bavinck in particular, see James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 17 (London: T&T Clark, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 26.

<sup>45</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 27. The final word theologian was underlined in Vos’s manuscript.

### 3.2. Lack of Theological Thinking

The second obstacle that Vos identified followed from the first. Pragmatism fostered in the American churches an antipathy to thinking rigorously in relation to theological foundations or *principia*.<sup>46</sup> There was a general distaste, in his view, for the kind of theological thinking that was patient and coherent. For Vos, these *principia* were the Reformed *principia*.<sup>47</sup> But as becomes clear from the following context, in referring to “principlal” theological thinking, Vos also had in view commitments to fundamental Reformed doctrines such as the Creator-creature distinction and the glory and sovereignty of God.<sup>48</sup>

Vos observed in American churches a “remarkable lack of thinking through the implications of *principia*”—that is, knowing where the theological anchor points are and being able to consider the theological consequences of exegetical decisions and ethical or practical commitments.<sup>49</sup> This was an intellectual weakness as well as a theological and spiritual matter. “Every thought,” Vos noted, “is the daughter of another thought.” This demands, especially on the part of Christian ministers, the ability to think from consequences back to principles and vice-versa.<sup>50</sup> In language reminiscent of Ephesians 4:14, Vos insists that “we must know whence the wind blows and in what direction it goes, unless we want to let it freely blow toward fruitfulness or destruction.”<sup>51</sup> The pragmatic, anti-theological wind of Vos’s day was chilling. Its numbing effect, he warned, ensured that the *principia* of the age and not the *principia* of our theology “will make us, in spite of ourselves, the instrument of her intentions.”<sup>52</sup>

What this means, Vos argued, is that without “principlal reflection” rooted in the theological tradition, two things might result. One is confusion even among well-meaning Christians. If they were not able coherently to integrate in a living way the various elements of their theology and practice, either because they were unable or averse to thinking in terms of *principia*, then their doctrinal knowledge and instincts were at serious risk of being in conflict rather than providing mutual reinforcement. Another outcome was that we “come altogether under the influence of the hostile *principium*.”<sup>53</sup> The assumptions and spirit of the age would cause Christians unknowingly to warp their theology and practice precisely because they were not moored properly to the *principia*.<sup>54</sup>

We can tell this provoked Vos by what he said next: “Thus it may fill us with legitimate concern for American theology—also to the extent that it is and wants to be Reformed—when we see it incorporate, in fatal blindness for this inescapable demand, so many heterogeneous elements.”<sup>55</sup> Despite wanting

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<sup>46</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 27.

<sup>47</sup> For the Reformed *principia*, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1, Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) and John Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 56–71.

<sup>48</sup> Vos refers to the two formal Reformed *principia*, that is, the *principium essendi* (the Triune God) and the *principium cognoscendi* (Holy Scripture). He also uses the terms *principium* and *principia* more broadly to encompass fundamental Christian doctrines or presuppositions.

<sup>49</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 27–28.

<sup>50</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 28.

<sup>51</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 28–29.

<sup>52</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 29.

<sup>53</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 29.

<sup>54</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 29–31.

<sup>55</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 29.

to be and remain Reformed, the churches and ministers that drifted from the principal anchor points became unwittingly eclectic and therefore theologically unmoored and exposed. And the real possibility loomed that what might sound useful or appear benign in theological or practical terms could sneak in under the radar. Or worse, error might be positively embraced without a realization that it did not grow from the Reformed principal seed. Vos continued,

Misled by appearances, [American theology] wants to appropriate results and use fruits that have grown on an utterly reprehensible tree. We already find ourselves in a period in which for most people it is rather a matter of indifference how one arrives at one's faith or theology and what the foundation for this faith or theology is, as long as one has this or that theology.<sup>56</sup>

This "indifference toward principia," Vos insisted, was deadly. The danger lay especially in the syncretistic theology and ethics that grew up in the "fertile soil" of indifference towards theological foundations.<sup>57</sup>

Vos illustrated this with the doctrine of Scripture. What is fascinating is how Vos analyzed the errors threatening the Reformed orthodox doctrinal formulations. He did not make what we might consider a traditional case for the inerrancy, authority, or trustworthiness of Scripture. Nor did he make the kind of elegant argument from Biblical Theology for the divine coherence and beauty of Scripture that he would make five years later in his Princeton inaugural.<sup>58</sup> Instead, Vos appealed to the Reformed *principia* and to theological consequence. This section of his address is worth quoting at length in order to observe and reflect on the theological and logical moves Vos makes:

Among the brethren of Presbyterian descent who call themselves Reformed more than one now accepts the newer view of Scripture that has been imported directly from Germany or via England. If we think this through on the basis of principium, there can be no doubt that this view of Scripture is a direct offshoot of the doctrine of God's exclusive immanence, i.e., of a pantheistic philosophy. But it is doubtful that if one wants to hold on to the theistic concept of God, and to a corresponding revelation, one must accept the doctrine of inspiration in its classical, full meaning.<sup>59</sup> Attempts have been made to escape this by conceiving of a theism that is comprehensible without inspiration, but without success. Even as it is impossible for pantheism to view inspiration as a possibility, so it is impossible for a clearly thought-through theism to maintain itself without [a doctrine of inspiration]. In spite of this we see that men of name and authority indulge in the foolish illusion that they can through their own ingenious inventions link together that which cannot be joined. Such a thing would be impossible if, instead of being satisfied with accepting things as they are, one viewed them in terms of their spiritual relatedness and origin on the one hand, while on the other hand consistently extending the line of one's own principia. Not only this [newer]

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<sup>56</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 29.

<sup>57</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology," in *RHBI*, 21–22.

<sup>59</sup> Although this sentence reads awkwardly, Vos's meaning is clear from context: the Reformed *principia*, emerging from Scripture itself, necessarily entail a Bible that is fully inspired, inerrant and authoritative.

view of Scripture, but many other intrusions would thus be excluded that now uselessly cover the earth and overgrow the native plants.<sup>60</sup>

Note Vos's assumptions, definitions, and argument. He began by pointing out that among those who "call themselves Reformed" there are some who have embraced false views of Scripture. The root cause for this, he believed, was that they had forgotten or let go of the Reformed *principia*. As a result, scholarly views from abroad appealed to them, for whatever reasons, without setting off their theological and confessional alarm bells. Vos did not reply with either exegetical or detailed scholarly responses here. Instead, he went straight to the Reformed doctrine of God. His confessional upbringing, his training, and his *theological* instincts engendered in him a principial reflex ("If we think this through on the basis of *principium* ..."). His philosophical, historical, and cultural awareness enabled him to see both the root causes and the theological consequences of deviating from the "classical, full" (i.e., Reformed confessional) doctrine of Scripture.<sup>61</sup> It was "pantheistic philosophy" that had led to an aberrant view of "exclusive [divine] immanence," which in turn gave rise to a deficient doctrine of Scripture.

Vos did not assert that the "new" view of Scripture was "unbiblical" (though he knew it was, and he would argue in these terms elsewhere). What he did say was that "if" one were to remain anchored firmly in the Reformed *principia* (God himself, the *principium essendi*, and divine revelation in Scripture, the *principium cognoscendi*), then one *must* remain committed to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, inspiration and all. Vos saw the reciprocal and absurd effects that an uninspired, errant, fallible Bible would have with reference to a transcendent Creator who graciously reveals himself to the creature. He saw too, conversely, that only a transcendent Creator could possibly grant to the creature a reliable, true, inspired Bible. Vos knew that alterations of this kind with respect to one doctrine would necessarily lead to the distortion of other fundamental doctrines upon which the living and coherent theological system depends for its integrity.

Vos could have gone further in teasing out the theological consequences of this line of thought. But he prepared to move on. Yet there are several further comments he makes in this section that are worth attending to before we follow him to his analysis of the third obstacle he perceived. In dealing with the doctrine of Scripture, Vos noted that although the Reformed theological foundations and framework provide a healthy constraint in the face of erroneous doctrine, nevertheless "men of name and authority" often persuaded themselves and others that they could "link together that which cannot be joined."<sup>62</sup> Vos alluded also to "many other intrusions" that similarly disregard the *principia* and yet tend to capture the imaginations of even the so-called Reformed. He mentioned three without elaborating: (1) many were attempting "to make theology *Christocentric* instead of *theocentric*,"<sup>63</sup> which, he implied, would lead to distortions;<sup>64</sup> (2) prevalent everywhere was the "spirit and method that characterise the critical studies of the Scriptures;" and (3) there were certain forms of "biblical theology" that contradicted the

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<sup>60</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 29–30.

<sup>61</sup> See further Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1. Vos returned to and developed this theme in many of his book reviews and articles.

<sup>62</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 30. Perhaps the Briggs controversy was in the background, on which see Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 30, italics mine.

<sup>64</sup> See J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 104–5.

“dogma of inspiration.”<sup>65</sup> Vos would address these theological and methodological concerns in various ways over the coming decades.

### 3.3. Lack of Historical Humility

The third and final obstacle Vos identified was the “lack of a sense of historical continuity.”<sup>66</sup> Having earlier pointed to the need for logical, systematic-theological integrity, Vos now turned to the striking ignorance and arrogance with respect to historical theology. It is evident that by this he meant a sense of Reformed identity and a knowledge of orthodox creedal formulations and confessions from church history. Vos was not speaking of the Bible as redemptive-historical but of the church’s doctrine when he remarked,

If it is true that every thought (and thus also the thoughts of God), instead of standing alone, stands a link in the logical chain, so that when we pick a link up or let it go we at the same time pick up or let go of the entire chain, so it is with the thoughts of God, of the entire structure of theology, that constitutes a part of a historical line that reaches back from the present to the earliest times of the church. There is thus not only a logical but also a historical coherence—the latter is in fact nothing but the former as it took shape before us in time.<sup>67</sup>

For Vos, the knowledge of God articulated by the church over time on the basis of divine revelation and with divine providential aid was a rich inheritance to be received gratefully rather than spurned. This was not only an implication of the doctrine of God’s self-revelation; it was linked also to Vos’s sense of humility as an interpreter. “The truth of God,” he asserted, “is so powerful and full that not one single generation, let alone one single person, could master it.”<sup>68</sup> Vos’s commitment to the churchly *locus* of theology appears strongly here. He claimed that engagement with historical theology is not merely intellectual, nor is it individual. It is in fact taught by God “with all the sharpness of living contrast through the consciousness of the church.”<sup>69</sup> Vos clarified further that the “church lives the truth and must, as it were, capture it piece by piece in the continuous battle against the power(s) of the lie; blood and tears cling to her dogmas.”<sup>70</sup>

If this is the case, then “it would not only be a lack of piety, but foolish vainglory and self-overestimation if one wanted to build single-handedly a [*comfortable*] theological house without taking into account the work of previous generations.”<sup>71</sup> No person, Vos insisted, no church, no denomination or gospel partnership, no seminary is a historical island. To think or act or to “do church” otherwise is hubristic. The Dutch diminutive Vos employed to describe the result of such historically myopic theological endeavors was not particularly flattering: a *huisje* is a “small” or “cozy” cottage.<sup>72</sup> The

<sup>65</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 30.

<sup>66</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 31–32.

<sup>67</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 31–32.

<sup>68</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 32.

<sup>69</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>70</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>71</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>72</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33 n. 66.

impression one has from the context is a vision of theology and ministry that orbits around small, independent family homes where the theological project is naively begun afresh in each generation, independent congregations in each locale operating with very little reference to definitions already tested and honed or to battles previously fought. By contrast, Vos painted a very different picture of what it would mean properly to embrace historical continuity:

Theology is not a house but a temple of God whose dimensions are so large, the materials of which it is built so exalted, that it is like the gothic temples of the Middle Ages, in which not the idea of a single architect but the deepest vision of generations found expression. All that we can do is contribute building blocks, and we must see it as an honour to be able to place them on the foundation that was laid by our forefathers through the concerted effort of all their spiritual powers. Only insight into this truth, only a sense of solidarity with the church of God of all centuries can teach us the truly scholarly caution and humility that are the necessary obverse of principial reflection.<sup>73</sup>

We will return to the contrast between “house” and “temple” below. But for the moment, note Vos’s assumptions and argument. He assumed that theological caution and interpretive humility are desirable virtues in Reformed church life and ministry. As such, one sees more clearly how the creedal-confessional tradition supports this. One also realizes that contemporary churches (in any age) desiring to be and to remain robustly Reformed have a responsibility to cultivate a historical-theological consciousness. This proper love for and deference to the tradition creates, Vos said, “the courage of conviction, but also the awareness of responsibility, if we want to claim for this conviction the name and the authority of the historic church.”<sup>74</sup>

Instead of seeing creedal and confessional theology as a stifling constraint on biblical conviction and living piety, Vos urged the churches and seminaries to take the opposite view. Without strong historical-theological roots, he feared, the churches would far more easily be swayed by “the exuberant noise and all the excessive pretensions of novelty” that characterized the contemporary culture.<sup>75</sup> In the face of these pressures, churches that are fueled by an unexamined pragmatism, unimpeded by rigorous, principial thinking, untethered from the Reformed confessional formulations would wrongly think it necessary to engage afresh with “each old and new aberrant view.”<sup>76</sup>

Vos’s point was that small cottages are more exposed not only to doctrinal gales but also to “every gust of wind that blows.”<sup>77</sup> He readily admitted that divine authority is rooted in Scripture (not in the church itself) and is rightly interpreted with the help of the Spirit. Yet he pressed his point that “the theological enterprise must carefully consider what it is up to, in order that it does not waste its powers on work already done.”<sup>78</sup> Once again Vos is worth quoting at length as he gave a further example with reference to Chalcedonian Christology:

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<sup>73</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>74</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>75</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>76</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>77</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 33.

<sup>78</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 34.

What historical nonsense it is to think that, e.g., the Christological controversies shook the church of God for nothing and caused it to vibrate down to its finest nerves, in order that we may simply substitute for the dogma of Chalcedon, for which such a high price was paid, a doctrine of kenosis *or any other view on which judgment was already passed many centuries ago*. Such [an approach] betrays distrust in the leading of the Spirit, i.e., doubt as to the possibility of theology in general, and thus judges itself. This does not mean that the church would not be allowed to revise and further refine its own development of dogma; all that is asserted is that she must not take jumps into a vacuum. When she reaches back, it must be a reaching back to a position taken earlier; she must at all times stay in touch with history, and the line of continuity must at no point be broken.<sup>79</sup>

The creedal and conciliar tradition and the Reformed confessions offered to the churches a foundation on which to build and a framework which guides and protects. Exegesis and theological construction must align with the foundation; progress in theology may extend and refine earlier dogmatic conclusions, but it must proceed with reference to creedal and confessional formulations.

In Vos's view, the causes of the "contempt for history" that he observed in American Christianity were themselves historically and culturally complex.<sup>80</sup> He saw the radical break of modern churches with the historic formulations of the church as a result of Enlightenment epistemology, exemplified particularly by the rise of the natural sciences and their "mechanical method."<sup>81</sup> This in turn led to the overtaking of theological and exegetical method by rationalism and naturalism, which was further catalyzed by a "worldly wisdom" that privileged individual autonomy.<sup>82</sup>

None of this, however, was unique to the American continent. This toxic post-Enlightenment brew with its "practical rationalism" was imported to America where it was distilled by other New World factors with the ultimate outcome that churches "not only rejected [Old World] decayed and played-out institutions but also rejected her sound foundations."<sup>83</sup> In the end, for Vos, this meant an American attitude of "imperturbable self-confidence in an elemental natural force, which thinks to be able to achieve in a short time span what centuries have labored over." It fostered a "naive conviction, as if in science ... to artificially condense into a few moments through ingenious inspirations and clever inventions the development that took years."<sup>84</sup> Its effect in the churches and seminaries was a lack of historical and doctrinal humility and a mode of self-reliant exegetical and theological innovation with little regard for the historic creeds and confessions of the Reformed church.

### 3.4. Summary

As we step back momentarily from the three obstacles Vos identified it is worth asking what we make of his analysis over a century later. There is a sense in which we might say that the cultural dynamics Vos was critiquing are characteristic of worldliness in any age; certainly, there are resonances here of

<sup>79</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 34, italics mine.

<sup>80</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 35.

<sup>81</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 34.

<sup>82</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 34–35.

<sup>83</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 35.

<sup>84</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 35.

the cultural situation in many times and places in the modern West and not only in America. Yet if Vos's cultural critique sounds familiar, this is surely because it agrees in many respects with some of the perceptive analyses of contemporary intellectual historians.<sup>85</sup> Many of the same cultural phenomena and pressures Vos identified are still extremely familiar in our modern, western, and especially Anglophone contexts. Pragmatism, philosophical and economic materialism, the fragmentation of life, anti-intellectualism and anti-doctrinal biases in the church and wider culture, theological incoherence, and historical myopia are still with us, amplified and exacerbated by added layers of postmodern dis-ease, economic disruption, globalized mobility, and a disorienting media ecology. Yet for all the differences in context between us and Vos, there are some uncanny echoes in his critique that sound remarkably contemporary.

#### 4. Vos's Vision

Vos responded by asking, "What calling do these curious conditions demand of us?" His answer was realistic and confessional. There was no "removing" the obstacles he had identified. The way forward lay instead in "strengthen[ing] the organism" of the churchly Reformed theology in order to enable its "healthy flourishing."<sup>86</sup> As he responded with constructive suggestions, Vos gave his audience metaphors to think with, to work from and towards. Rather than following Vos's order of presentation as such, we will organize, summarize, and reflect on the constructive aspects of Vos's theological vision under headings provided by three key metaphors he employed.

##### 4.1. Temple *Not* Cottage: Inhabiting the Creeds and Reformed Confessions

As we saw earlier, Vos identified a contempt for historical-theological thinking. He contrasted the metaphors of a small, cozy cottage and an exalted, gothic temple.<sup>87</sup> His vision for a healthy, growing Reformed theology rejected the ahistorical, do-it-yourself comfort of the former and embraced the historically aware, humbly reverential inhabitation of the latter. The points of contrast are many: a contempt for historical theology versus a sense of generational solidarity; the exposure to each new (or old) wind of error versus the stability and shelter of a carefully constructed doctrinal edifice; a suspicion of tradition and a cultural short-sightedness versus a posture of trust in the considered consensus reflected in the church's dogmatic conclusions.

Vos's answer to the self-sufficient attitude embodied by the *huisje* approach to church life and theological education was to elaborate on the treasures available in the temple of historical theology. The naive cottage mindset believes it can "artificially condense into a few moments through ingenious inspirations and clever inventions the development that took years."<sup>88</sup> A living, vibrant theology that grows in, with, and for the church thrives only with a posture of humility and teachability. Theology "does not allow herself to be forced, but only to be conquered gradually through love and consistent

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<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Joel Isaac, James T. Kloppenberg, Michael O'Brien, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, eds., *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>86</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 38.

<sup>87</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 33.

<sup>88</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 35.

devotion.”<sup>89</sup> Vos was not interested in what might be perceived as an “arid scholasticism.” His concern was for cultivating piety and for fruitfulness in the faith.

Vos exhorted his audience,

All of us, especially to the extent that we are, or hope to become, ministers of the Word, have not only a calling to expand the kingdom of God and to introduce the church to the truth already found, but we are also charged with enriching the treasure of the truth through new finds from the mine of Scripture. *We have a theological calling, and that is the most glorious of all.* We must go on from the standpoint to which God has brought us and where he has kept us through his grace. And that we can go on, and in fact can make progress, will be the best proof for us that we are builders, not of a clever house of human scholasticism, but of the living temple of the Truth under the leading of the Spirit.<sup>90</sup>

Without idealizing the past, Vos proposed that it “must be seriously doubted whether even in our best-educated circles today the level of theological knowledge is as high as it was in the period of its flowering among the [Reformed] fathers.”<sup>91</sup> In context, Vos clarified that he was not merely speaking here of the *content* of Reformed theology, as if repristination were enough.<sup>92</sup> He meant, too, the “sharpness and clarity of [our] judgment and discernment.”<sup>93</sup> His plea was for the students in attendance that evening—and the churches who funded and supported and prayed for them—to “once again take up the historical line of our fathers, and do all the work that our hands find to do only in continuity with what their diligent hands did.”<sup>94</sup> Despite the allure of the new and novel that surrounded them, Vos urged them to be more enchanted with their “ancient family possession” preserved in a lively historical theology.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.2. Seed Not Weed: Principial Thinking and Theological Coherence

In pointing to the lack of theological thinking in American culture Vos highlighted the need for a more articulate and coherent ministry, self-consciously rooted in Reformed doctrinal commitments. He used a second image of a seed to depict these *principia* from which the healthy, robust tree of churchly, pastoral theology must grow.

This emphasis on *principia* was not, for Vos, merely an intellectualist impulse. It was a spiritual matter of chief importance. Fundamental commitments are spiritually anchored “in the higher, invisible world.”<sup>96</sup> The ability therefore to distinguish concepts, to trace antecedents and assumptions, and to project consequences and entailments was an intellectual *and* spiritual exercise. Even more important, Vos insisted, was the development of a “refined sensibility,” that is, a discriminating theological wisdom.

<sup>89</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 35.

<sup>90</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 44, italics mine.

<sup>91</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 49.

<sup>92</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 49; Vos spoke instead in terms of retrieval, revitalization, and construction.

<sup>93</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 48.

<sup>94</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 47.

<sup>95</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 48.

<sup>96</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 27.

A spiritual inattention to the seed from which theological concepts and their associated currents grew was deadly for the churches. As we saw earlier, Vos perceived this in his cultural setting: “Thus it may fill us with legitimate concern for American theology ... when, misled by appearances, it wants to appropriate results and use fruits that have grown on an utterly reprehensible tree.”<sup>97</sup>

Life-giving fruit for the churches would grow from the seeds of the Reformed *principia*. Vos maintained that the Reformed must “not be ashamed of our *principia*.”<sup>98</sup> Among the theological commitments he had in view, were notions such as the Creator-creature distinction and the possibility and necessity of analogical theological thinking. Vos began with (and returned repeatedly to) the *principium essendi* (“principle of being”). The “living God, who is transparent to himself, who actively moves outside himself, reveals himself, presents himself as object to, and in the subjects of, science [i.e., knowledge].”<sup>99</sup>

God alone possesses “the *Theologia Archetypa*, the patterning theology, the knowledge that God’s Being has of himself, because in the simplicity of that Being all distinction between the known and the knower disappears.”<sup>100</sup> But true theological knowledge, albeit analogical, is possible for creatures: “The possibility of our knowledge of God rests ultimately on the fact that we have been created in God’s image.”<sup>101</sup> The created structure of the *imago dei*, Vos noted, serves the purpose “that we might “truly know” him, as our Catechism so aptly phrases it.”<sup>102</sup> But a principial commitment to God as he is, as sovereign Creator, means “we must be satisfied with a *Theologia Ectypa*, a representative knowledge of God.”<sup>103</sup> This ectypal knowledge comes only with aid from the Holy Spirit “who ... searches the deep things of God [and] has revealed them to us and makes us inwardly receptive to the external revelation of the Scriptures.”<sup>104</sup>

Thus, from the *principium essendi* Vos moves to the *principium cognoscendi* (“principle of knowing”). Scripture alone is the cognitive foundation of our theology and assurance of God: “The witness of the Holy Spirit to the Scriptures, through which God validates to our souls as certain and authentic that which he says in his Word concerning His Word—that is the starting point of our theology, her unprovable, self-evident *principium*, the rock on which she builds.”<sup>105</sup> Any theological commitment that does not grow organically from this seed will not bear good fruit and must be challenged. But when these principial seeds are embraced—and only when they are embraced—there emerges a true, *theocentric* theological

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<sup>97</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 29.

<sup>98</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 45.

<sup>99</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 40. Recall that the Kantian divide between subject and object loomed in the background for Vos, together with various neo-Kantian reactions and developments.

<sup>100</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 41. See Franciscus Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology. With the Life of Fransiscus Junius*, trans. David C. Noe (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 86 (Thesis 7). Electronic edition available at [http://www.juniusinstitute.org/companion/junius\\_de\\_vera/index.php](http://www.juniusinstitute.org/companion/junius_de_vera/index.php). Vos repeats and expands on these formulations in *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 40.

<sup>102</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 6.

<sup>103</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 41.

<sup>104</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 41, where he seems to allude to 1 Corinthians 2:10. Vos distinguishes carefully the Reformed vs. Lutheran views of the Word as a means of grace in relation to the Spirit’s action in *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:81–82.

<sup>105</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 45.

tree that bears nourishing fruit for the churches. From the seeds of these *principia* grow the doctrines of divine sovereignty and covenant theology. “The sovereignty of God over his creature,” Vos remarked, “must be the great thought that dominates all our other thoughts. We can only walk soundly if we follow this guiding *principium*, since God in his Word has given us his sovereignty as the guiding *principium* of all his works and ways, and our theology is theocentric, that is, thinks from God as its starting point, or rather, thinks after him at a sacred distance.”<sup>106</sup>

And the “counterpoint” to divine sovereignty, Vos went on, was “the doctrine of the covenant.”<sup>107</sup> We comprehend God’s revelation “when, staying with God’s [revealed] point of view, we as it were observe and experience with him how he descends from his glory to deal with us as man deals with his brother.”<sup>108</sup> So even as we learn of God engaging as a covenant partner with his creatures, “the relative equal status of God and us in the covenant still remains such that is colored by the idea of sovereignty, precisely because the covenant descends as it were to us from heaven through divine omnipotence—which is why it is such a glorious and precious covenant.”<sup>109</sup> Thinking this from the seed-thoughts of our *principia*, Vos argued, would protect us from wrong construals of the covenant relationship between creature and Creator.<sup>110</sup>

Seeds require careful attention. Their cultivation needs time: for reflection, for developing logical and coherent thinking, for practice and formation. Intensive preparatory time is necessary if Reformed ministers are to grow up into what Vos termed “our theology.” The “gift of principial reflection,” he insisted, is critical for theological formation.<sup>111</sup> It requires an intellectual commitment that is also a joyful pursuit of the inner structure of the revealed knowledge of God: “Especially a Reformed theologian ... should know, not only *that* he believes, but also *why*, and must not cease digging until he has reached the bottom and sees the sunlight of the Spirit sparkle on the bedrock of God’s truth.”<sup>112</sup>

This kind of principial thinking, Vos alleged, was necessary because it enables the Reformed pastor-theologian to sense when the harmony and cohesion of the theological ecosystem is threatened by what is not properly native.<sup>113</sup> Only a developed ability to relate parts to the whole of the “organism” of divine truth will serve to protect us “against the adoption of alien elements.”<sup>114</sup> Despite his often abstract turns of phrase, Vos insisted only a loving, whole-person devotion to the seeds of true theology would help them to grow and to bear wholesome fruit.

### 4.3. Mature Tree *Not* Unripe Fruit: Practical, Resilient Ministry

We have already glimpsed a third powerful metaphor Vos employed, namely, that of pastoral theology as a tree. It is a tree that grows from a divine, heavenly seed and flourishes in the temple

<sup>106</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 45.

<sup>107</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 45.

<sup>108</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 45. The phrase “staying with God’s point of view” is repeated in Vos’s later writings and is important for understanding his approach to Scripture as “redemptive revelation” in his biblical theology.

<sup>109</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 46.

<sup>110</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 46.

<sup>111</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 30.

<sup>112</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 30.

<sup>113</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 46.

<sup>114</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 46.

courts of creedal, confessional theology. Vos cast a vision of a towering, crowning tree, slowly but surely maturing until its branches bend down, heavy with fruit for the nourishing of the church. This enticing vision is one Vos wished would grow as an organic unity throughout the curricular formation of all Reformed theological students. Worried that he might be misunderstood as dividing theology from “practical” ministry, Vos put it this way:

Now, it is not in the least our purpose to deny that theology is a practical discipline par excellence, which must inevitably bleed to death and die if it is severed from the church and its concerns. But precisely because we think of [theology] as linked to the church, we are also obliged to ascribe to it a dual calling. She is the highest top of the tree of faith that grows out of the church and strives upward from below. As such [theology] has to educate theologians, and cultivate knowledge of God for the church, apart even from all practical concern. But that same tree can also be considered as bowing down from above, to the extent that it spreads its branches, loaded with fruit, over the church and provides it with nourishment. As such theology has the calling to transpose all its theory into practice.<sup>115</sup>

Vos reminded his audience that it takes time for such a tree to grow, to bud and to bear fruit. It is the case, he contended, “that fruitful praxis can only be achieved by means of a slow growth of theory.”<sup>116</sup> Rushing too quickly to the question of utility, which was a real danger in a pragmatic cultural and churchly context, would not yield a resilient tree with mature fruit. There was a risk of hothouse flowers and resultant ministries that lacked lasting, life-giving theological power. Vos said that theological formation “must equally remember that it needs to allow the tree of theory time to cultivate fruit from bud and blossom, and that a premature looking for unripe fruit and a premature knocking of green fruit off the tree does not result in any gain and sometimes leads to great loss.”<sup>117</sup>

It is evident from the address that Vos believed in the kind of time-intensive, intellectual preparation and equally time-expensive, prayerful reflection required by a robust, traditional theological curriculum. As we have already glimpsed, Vos himself drew constantly upon historical theology, Reformed systematics, and philosophy (logic, metaphysics, epistemology). He assumed that theological students need rigorous preparation, both before and during their formal theological studies.<sup>118</sup>

But it was not only a rich and integrated curriculum that distinguished Vos’s vision of the mature, fruitful theological tree. There was also a doctrinal commitment that marked Vos’s proposal: an overriding concern for *the glory of God*. True and fruitful theology promotes a view of life that “has a richer content than the sum of the external things of this world” precisely because it “confesses that in all

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<sup>115</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>116</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>117</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 25.

<sup>118</sup> Five years later, as Vos prepared to move to Princeton, he expressed a measure of frustration at the preparation of the students in Grand Rapids: “I am naturally sorry to leave my present field of activity. At the same time, the appeal of the work here would not have been enough to keep me here in the long run. The young people who study are so poorly educated that despite the diligence of their instructors the results that they accomplish are so small that you have to lose heart. Again this year the examination was exceedingly poor” (Letter to Herman Bavinck [July 3, 1893], in *Letters*, 175). His tone is much warmer two decades later in writing to a former student about some young Dutch men from Grand Rapids who had come to study at Princeton; see Letter to Henry Beets (March 16, 1912), in *Letters*, 211.

areas of life God's glory as the highest idea must, as ultimate goal, be introduced and worked out."<sup>119</sup> This concern to keep divine glory central supported Vos's insistence that theology remain *theocentric* (and not only *Christocentric*). It also bolstered Vos's claim that a contemplative, theoretical aspect was proper to theology, indeed essential if theological formation was to resist the cultural gravity of pragmatism.<sup>120</sup>

Finally, the flourishing of pastoral theology needed constant cultivation, both in terms of the piety of the Reformed ministerial student and the project of Reformed theology taken as a whole. Although Vos's remarks were conceptually framed, he maintained repeatedly that the theological project must grow from and promote the further growth of an ardent Reformed piety. Vos averred, "Our theology is not a bare theory that can be learned, but, as our fathers said, [*it lies*] in the *affectus* of the person, that grows only in the depths of a sanctified mind."<sup>121</sup> As faith seeks the knowledge of God in this manner there should be no dissonance or separation between dogma and the devout life. Instead, Vos contended, "in that fervent practical piety hides the secret of the irresistible urge with which the tenderest of saints have consistently worked their way toward a clear, conscious knowledge of the ways of God."<sup>122</sup> This reverent approach on the part of the Reformed ministerial student to theology in turn benefits the church:

Let us confidently place over against all noisy advertising with which so often in this country religion dishonors itself, the slow but sure power of the truth, concentrated in a clear theology. If we want to arm the church against error and ignorance, we must not so much rely on the use of all kinds of clever devices that are aimed at effect but rather fill her head and heart with the healthy, nourishing teaching of the truth.<sup>123</sup>

The constant growth of piety should be matched, according to Vos, by a slow, reflective progress in constructive, contextualized Reformed theology that is living in each age:

A theology that was only a practical aid in the spread and establishment of Christianity could still be profitable and useful in case of a complete standstill, but a theology that wants to be the outworking of the knowledge of God in the church through the Spirit must never stand still, since otherwise she will [not] be convinced of her own genuineness.<sup>124</sup>

For Vos, then, the tree of Reformed theology must always be tended, always kept alive and growing if it is to nourish the ministers and the churches with the life-giving knowledge of the living God.

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<sup>119</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 20.

<sup>120</sup> Three years later in 1891, while still in Grand Rapids, Vos would similarly emphasize the glory-center of Reformed theology as *the* critical distinctive in its doctrinal system and its covenant theology. See Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *RHBI*, 234–67.

<sup>121</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 42.

<sup>122</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 42.

<sup>123</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 43.

<sup>124</sup> Vos, "Prospects," 43.

### 5. Concluding Reflections

Earlier on the same day that Vos gave his Grand Rapids inaugural, his father Jan Hendrik Vos delivered a solemn charge. The elder Vos was himself a minister. His text was 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”<sup>125</sup> The younger Vos’s theological vision, articulated in response hours later, and then over the course of his teaching ministry, presses us to re-evaluate what precisely 2 Timothy 2:15 might mean for those of us who take up that charge in our own teaching and ministries, our own curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment, and our own congregational and denominational support for ministerial formation.

As Vos concluded his address that evening at Spring Street Christian Reformed Church, he was optimistic, even slightly effusive:

Let us again and again through the Spirit, who knows neither distance nor time, establish ourselves in the heart of our God-consecrated history, establish ourselves, also through love and prayer, and through every communion of saints, in the brotherly heart of all who confess Christ, so that out of a high awareness of our glorious heritage and our beautiful calling we may find both courage and strength for the building of an AMERICAN REFORMED THEOLOGY!<sup>126</sup>

Given what followed in Grand Rapids and then later at Princeton, one wonders how the older Vos, decades later, might have evaluated, tempered, or qualified that first inaugural delivered by his younger self. We have no way of answering that. We might, however, consider whether this obscure address has anything to say to us today in our contemporary cultural contexts. If Vos’s vision has any merit, what might its implications be for contemporary seminaries and theological colleges, for our own churches and denominations? To what extent do the obstacles that he discerned and described remain challenges for us today? And what do we make of his vision? Which aspects strike us as attractive, which as misguided? Why? Are there features of his vision that have been or are being realized in part? Are there elements of his proposal that seem out of reach or endangered? And to what degree has Vos already answered many of our most natural critiques—that such a vision is too much academic and too little practical; too narrowly theological and not broadly evangelical enough; too difficult, expensive, and time-consuming, not accessible or quick enough? With questions such as these in mind, we conclude with several observations.

Vos’s vision remains in many respects counter-cultural, even in the Anglophone evangelical and Reformed world. His diagnosis of cultural pressures such as empiricism, pragmatism, and ecumenism was perceptive in its time. So too was his acknowledgment that the churches he had in mind were embedded in American culture and not somehow separate from or immune to it. These were pressures—intellectual and affective—that shaped expectations, often unconsciously, about what the churches looked for in their ministers and thus what they expected from their seminaries. Vos was particularly keen to point out the dangers of uncritically accepting these cultural commitments and dispositions; he believed they were linked to the perils of negotiating critical biblical and theological scholarship and

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<sup>125</sup> “Editor’s Introduction,” in Vos, “Prospects,” 12.

<sup>126</sup> Vos, “Prospects,” 50–51. The translator notes (n. 104) that in the manuscript “the words *Amerikaanische Gereformeerde Theologie!* are written larger.”

the difficulty of maintaining doctrinal faithfulness. If we hold up Vos's vision as a mirror of sorts to our own contexts, it offers several critiques and cautions worth pondering.

First, Vos argued, well over a century ago, that American pragmatism and utilitarianism threatened to undermine and dis-integrate the theological curriculum. He predicted that the lack of a deep and coherent curriculum would have deleterious long-term effects in ministry. In the history of contemporary North American theological education (including some Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries), there has been a steady, market-driven, consumer-focused transformation of the theological curriculum. Often this has meant trimming or cutting altogether original language instruction and required courses in systematic or historical theology. Increasingly, this has taken the form of modularized classes, smorgasbord options, drastically reduced credit requirements for MDivs, and significant proportions of electives catering to student choice. While the driving forces and affordances involved in this steady shift are complex, we can be sure that in very many cases Vos would be likely to label the results as "curriculum lite," "curriculum incomplete," or "curriculum confused."<sup>127</sup>

In a British context, some of the same challenges and trends apply. But there are also different pressures and debates into which Vos might speak as a critical friend. Among those with Reformed sympathies in the UK there is a widespread model of "Bible-handling" (typically careful, English-based, inductive Bible-study for teaching and preaching) that has borne much fruit, but which frequently comes packaged with a deep suspicion of both historical and systematic theology as well as an ambivalence towards the value of Hebrew and Greek instruction. This is often a model, which for quite particular historical and contextual reasons, has come to be preferred on the basis of, among other things, its perceived utility and efficiencies. It is an approach that favors local apprenticeships and regional Bible-focused training schemes over the more broadly integrated, deeply theological, historical, and biblical curricula of the best theological colleges. Whether this approach can provide deep foundations for the kind of sustained, fruitful gospel ministry Vos envisioned is perhaps an open question.

Second, and more constructively, Vos's vision implies a theological method and a pedagogy. His plea that church life and mission were best served by a rigorous, patiently integrated, Reformed curriculum was tied to his assumption that this kind of formation was an inheritance that, if renewed in each generation, would in fact produce ministries that were godly, coherent, fruitful, and *therefore* practical. In addition to Bible knowledge and evangelistic zeal, theological students require significant philosophical and historical training. They need cultural awareness and tools for cultural (and self-) critique. A theological curriculum should draw explicitly on the Reformed *principia* as well as creedal and Reformed confessional commitments as a way of integrating theological knowledge. Such a matrix enables the possibility of overcoming the tendency toward fragmentation inherent in subject-specific instruction; it checks the impulse to bypass a doctrinal ("encyclopaedic") framework in favor of an exclusive or unintegrated focus on biblical and "practical" subjects. An increasing historical knowledge should promote a proportional growth in interpretive humility, prayerfulness, and piety. The whole architecture of Reformed theology should in fact rise gradually, block by heavy block, in the minds and hearts of theological students. The sovereignty of God and (therefore) the glory of God must be the

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<sup>127</sup> And this is to say nothing of the breathtaking shift towards online, digital-distance modes of instruction and the equally complex affordances attending this. We may imagine that Vos might ask, among other things, what kind of sustained, theological, Reformed gospel ministries will be possible if a generation of pastors receive much or all of their theological education in this mode and manner.

nexus of this curriculum in order to sustain fruitful, gospel ministries and flourishing—even if modest—churches.<sup>128</sup>

One important thing Vos doesn't argue for, but which he assumes and exemplifies, is a deep, Reformed piety: a posture of love for the triune God, instincts that lead him always to foreground divine love, grace, and glory, a confident humility that takes its stand on a received inheritance, a lively personal theological knowledge, and an expectation of intellectual excellence in the service of the church. Vos contended that the key to this is "a sanctified mind." The head leads the heart (and life) of the minister-in-training. This happens as deep and incisive theological instruction and reflection in the seminary interfaces closely and thoughtfully with worship and practice in partnering churches. Of course, this project is bigger than any one educational institution; it is also, however, larger than any one church or local training partnership.

How do seminaries and theological colleges offer this kind of theological formation, with and for the churches? What sort of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment values and cultivates this kind of theological thinking and posture? In some ways these are perennial questions. Yet Vos's vision offers us thoughtful and provocative maxims to guide us in our self-examination and strategizing:

- 1. Theological education must have the glory of God as its lodestar and *telos*.** This was a deeply theological conviction for Vos that had implications for curriculum and ministry. He insisted at various points that this was the distinctively *Reformed* element in his theological vision. Of course, many would share this conviction. But working out its implications in practical terms needs patient collaboration between faculties and administrations; it needs close conversations with the churches they serve. Vos's own vision suggests this will work best when those involved in this collaboration draw together on a shared confessional system and a shared set of churchly histories.
- 2. Theological education must be Trinitarian and not only Christocentric.** This is a noteworthy point made by the one would go on to popularize a redemptive-historical approach to biblical interpretation that justly emphasizes Christ as the culmination and integrating center of Scripture. Vos believed an education that rightly attended to the glory of God would result in a minister and a ministry that held forth the majestic person as well as the creative and redemptive work of the *Trinity*. A robust, biblical, and confessional Christology would take its place within this Trinitarian framework. And as a result, the Reformed gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone would be anchored fathoms deep in the triune God himself and would be symphonically (and not monotonically) proclaimed. Perhaps it goes without saying that to accomplish this, the theological student must study historical and systematic theology and not only exegesis, homiletics, and ethics.
- 3. Theological education must train pastors to think theologically *and* biblically.** Vos's insistence on thinking from theological foundations and thinking through theological entailments requires more than the delivery of historical or systematic *content*. It also militates against "theological signaling" of the type that values positions, conclusions, or commitments that are often unmoored from the frameworks from which they emerge and within which they are sustained. Vos's example above of arguing for the orthodox doctrine

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<sup>128</sup> Vos referred to the flourishing Dutch Reformed churches he had in mind as "small spiritual colonies" ("Prospects," 50).

of Scripture remains instructive. It is *theological thinking* (in this case with reference to the biblical doctrine of God) that marks his method, not a mere biblicism or assertion from tradition. We would do well to ask what kind of teaching and assessment in the seminaries fosters precise, adaptable, and resilient theological thinking? And what kind of churchly, denominational, or fraternal cultures are willing to invest in this for theological students and to encourage and support ongoing theological growth for ministers?

- 4. Theological education must be coherent and not eclectic.** Time and again Vos maintains that a curriculum *designed for Reformed gospel ministry* should not remain at the level of unintegrated classes or subjects. Seminaries and faculties should certainly strive for excellent, judicious, constructively aligned teaching and assessment within individual classes and subdisciplines. But Vos's vision pushes us to consider further how true integration and cohesion among the various elements of the curriculum might best be achieved. As anyone who has ever served on a curriculum or re-accreditation committee knows, "integration" of this scope is a goal more easily named and claimed than attained. Yet Vos seems to suggest that not only a careful sequencing of or cross-referencing among seminary classes is needed. Even more, a kind of shared and confessional and theological framework should be offered to students in a lively, well-judged manner such that the pieces of the puzzle gradually fit together over their seminary years and set them up well for the demands of church life and ministry.

Third, Vos's vision should inform and guide ongoing debates over Reformed theological method. What we have encountered here were Vos's thoughts in 1888. Thus, together with his *Reformed Dogmatics* outlined in the following years, we should work to ascertain just how closely and in what manner Vos was working with the "Great Tradition" by the time of his better-known Princeton inaugural when he launched his biblical-theological project. That is to say, Vos was not first a biblical theologian. He develops his biblical theology after, with, and because of his theologically astute confessional, metaphysical, and epistemological commitments. We should also note that this background complicates the narrative that biblical theology was, particularly for Vos, largely a "crisis measure," somehow unintegrated into a larger theological method.

Significantly, for those who see great value in a Vosian redemptive-historical biblical theology and the exegesis it involves and energizes, this account of Vos's vision calls for a continued re-examination of the mutually-informing relationships among exegesis, biblical theology, and systematics. Vos's vision and the pattern and development of his own thought and teaching ministry suggests there is theological warrant for a close relationship. Among other things, he demonstrates how a specifically-confessional, strongly systematic-theological framework undergirds, constrains, and is enriched by careful biblical-theological work. Finally, one further question this raises concerns any method of "Bible-handling," or of exegesis tracing the unified, redemptive narrative from Genesis to Revelation that is abstracted from the larger Reformed architecture. One wonders whether such methods and readings can sustain themselves and the churches they aim to serve in the absence of the larger theological vision that rendered a redemptive-historical biblical theology so fruitful in the hands of someone like Vos.

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## — OLD TESTAMENT —

Reuben Bredenhof. *Hallowed: Echoes of the Psalms in the Lord's Prayer*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019. xi +119 pp. £15.00/\$18.00.

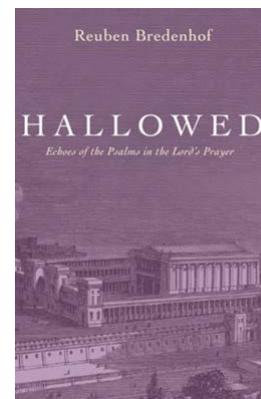
Could Jesus have used the famous Old Testament prayer book—the Psalms—as his basis for teaching the Lord’s Prayer? In this short volume, Bredenhof surmises that the Lord’s Prayer “wasn’t a new-fangled invention of Jesus, but each petition echoes the ancient prayers recorded in the Psalms” (p. 19).

Bredenhof divides the Lord’s Prayer into nine thematic sections, one for each chapter in the book, and views them through one or more psalms. In each chapter, he identifies a theme of the Prayer and uses it as the point of departure to one (or more) select psalm(s). Once that connection has been established, Bredenhof spends substantial space discussing the theme and helping his readers relate it to their lives. This book is easy to read and suitable for a wide range of readers. Its message is highly relevant and will be especially helpful to those who want to deepen their prayer life.

The first chapter begins with the theme of how one is to *call out to God* in prayer. Bredenhof connects this theme with Psalm 86 and highlights how David addressed the Lord with a spirit of affection and humility, and at the same time, with assured confidence in God. In the second chapter, Bredenhof connects the phrase, “Our Father,” to Psalm 103. This psalm magnifies God as the heavenly king who establishes his throne over the earth. The psalm also presents God as the Father who shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps 103:13; p. 22). Chapter 3 focuses on the phrase, “hallowed be your name.” Here, Bredenhof points out that the praise of the Father ought to be an unfettered expression of all nature, nations, and heavenly beings as seen in Psalm 29.

In chapter 4, the petition for “God’s kingdom come” is connected to Psalm 72. This psalm looks forward to a better king and that petition is answered in the coming of Jesus Christ (p. 44), who ultimately brings about God’s kingdom on earth. Chapter 5 examines the petition for God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Bredenhof adapts Psalm 25 to this theme. The desire to know God’s ways and follow his ways characterizes this psalm. The Lord will also make his covenant known to all who fear him (Ps 25:12–14; p. 60). The petition for “our daily bread” finds its expression in Psalm 65. Here, we see God caring for the earth like the gardener who tends his garden (p. 67). Bredenhof exhorts that “every gift and opportunity and success are from God—so we thank him today, and we trust him for tomorrow” (p. 72).

The petition for God to “forgive our trespasses” in chapter 7 is connected to both Psalms 51 and 32. Although Psalm 51 is well-known, the context behind the psalm was David’s adultery with Bathsheba, making it less applicable to the reader as compared to Psalm 32 which is more generic in nature. The focus of chapter 8 is to escape *temptation and be delivered from evil*. Here, Bredenhof wants us to see the “war prayer” of Psalm 35 where David requested God to fight his battles against his enemies and foes. Likewise, our battles belong to the Lord! The final chapter returns to the praise of God’s “kingdom, power, and glory.” Many psalms relate to the praise of God (e.g., Pss 41; 146–150), and Bredenhof rightly points out that praises are a good “corrective to [our] self-absorption” in prayers. And the final “Amen”



in the Lord's Prayer, also seen in Psalm 41:13, is an important expression of our confidence in God through Christ.

This book is valuable in three ways. First, by reading the Lord's Prayer with the Old Testament Psalms, Bredenhof helps readers see a more holistic and integrated Bible. Readers can see a specific theme of the Prayer in action historically in the Old Testament and then learn how that theme is understood and applied in the New Testament. Second, this volume speaks with a winning pastoral voice that is undergirded with academic rigour. Without allowing the latter to get in the way, Bredenhof writes in a conversational style, peppering the volume with many anecdotes and personal stories. Readers will find a light-hearted and relevant read. Third, Bredenhof provides several helpful questions for further reflection at the end of each chapter. These questions are intended for deeper engagement and praxis on the content and are carefully crafted so that readers can take time to pause, muse, and pray.

Yet, I wonder *how* Bredenhof's choice of the psalms can be identified by the readers themselves. Methodologically, this part of the work is obscure. It is unclear how, for instance, the idea of kingship needs to be connected to Psalm 72 since the motif of kingship occurs in many psalms (e.g., Pss 2, 45, 110) and in the rest of the Old Testament. Of course, Bredenhof did not mention that these are the only psalms with such themes, but it raises questions about how his message will change when these other texts/psalms are identified instead. Perhaps Bredenhof could also have written a similar volume that is based on Isaiah to the same effect. Readers should also note that Bredenhof is mostly working with thematic connections; he does not provide a full interpretation of the psalm that he has linked to the Prayer. However, reading the theme in the context of the entire psalm would help the reader better appreciate the psalm.

A final note: because of the digestible size of the book, it can be easily adopted for small groups to read and pray together. Ultimately, this book is designed for the deepening of prayer life—the intangible and invaluable goal that is offered to all who would read it.

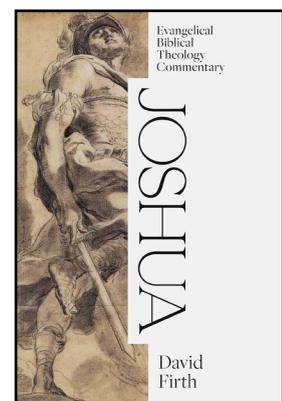
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David G. Firth. *Joshua*. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. xvi + 425 pp. £39.99/\$49.99.

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New commentary series are proliferating, and Joshua regularly is one of the first biblical books to be investigated. After Kenneth Matthews published his Joshua commentary in Baker's Teach the Text Commentary Series (2016), and Lissa M. Wray Beal hers in Zondervan's The Story of God Bible Commentary (2019), David Firth follows in the Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary series of the digital-first publisher Lexham Press. The EBTC series launched in 2021 with volumes on Joshua, Daniel (Joe Sprinkle), Romans (David G. Peterson), Pastoral Epistles (Andreas Köstenberger), and Hebrews (Thomas Schreiner). It presupposes inerrancy and inspiration of the bible. The commentaries present the text of the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) of 2017. The major contribution is "a thorough discussion of the most important themes of the biblical book in



relation to the canon as a whole” (p. ix), with an orientation towards Christian proclamation. This task seems to be in good hands with David Firth, tutor at Trinity College in Bristol, since he already wrote a 226-page application-oriented commentary on the book of Joshua: *The Message of Joshua: Promise and People*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015).

Although the commentary dedicates only a few pages to introductory questions and biblical theological themes (pp. 1–30, 33–66), it does not lack surprises. There are no introductory chapters on textual criticism or archaeology; rather, Firth sporadically includes these issues later in the commentary (e.g., concerning Jericho on pp. 127, 151, 164, 399, and Ai on pp. 129–30, 147–48). Regarding the date and authorship of Joshua, Firth solely depends on Brian N. Peterson (*The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History: Locating a Tradition in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014]), who assumes that Abiathar of Anathoth is the author of Judges and Samuel, editor of Deuteronomy, and compiler (not author) of Joshua. This is not a mainstream opinion, not even in conservative circles. Firth is a bit more hesitant with concrete names, but points to King David’s court as the “most likely point of origin” of the book (p. 4); dissenting evidence is dismissed. Firth starts with Hendrik Koorevaar’s fourfold division of the book (1:1–5:12, 5:13–12:24, 13:1–21:45, 22:1–24:33; *De opbouw van het boek Jozua* [Heverlee: Centrum voor Bijbelse Vorming België, 1990]). Drawing from the French literary theorist Gérard Genette, Firth develops the idea that Joshua 1–5 is characterized by a phenomenon called “external focalization”: the reader is purposely left without guidance about how to interpret the described events (p. 18). Of course, there is always a danger of reading the disorientation of modern readers back into the minds of the first readers, who would have had a much better understanding of spying, crossing the Jordan, and religious rituals.

The theological part of the introduction covers the themes of faithfulness/obedience, identity, Jesus, land, leadership, power/government, rest, and promise. Surprisingly, the theme of God’s presence (ark, tent) is left out; according to J. Robert Vannoy (“Joshua: Theology of,” in *NIDOTTE* 4:814), this is the most important topic of the book. The question of violence is dealt with twice in the introduction (pp. 24–27, 54–57; cf. 134–37, 203), and, like others, Firth argues that notions of complete destruction might be hyperbolic. The focus is not on killing innocent women and children, but city kings and their armed forces. His view does not silence but at least softens modern atheistic and humanistic objections.

The exegetical part of the commentary comprises three elements: “context,” “exegesis,” and “bridge.” Firth is not really interested in questions of literary criticism or structural analysis. Instead, he painstakingly explains the meaning of Hebrew words, and the historical and socio-cultural background of difficult terms. He tries to “feel into” the text, reflect on what the actual point of the author might be and when the reader might have expected otherwise. Important decisions are backed by references to relevant literature; however, they are not always up to date. For example, concerning the term אֶלֶף (“thousand”) in Joshua 4:13, he points to an article from 1967 (p. 108), but misses the development since then (summed up in Carsten Ziegert, “Die großen Zahlen in Num 1 und 26,” *Bib* 90 [2009]: 237–56).

Of course, it is always interesting to see a scholar’s decisions on controversial issues. For instance, based on Ralph K. Hawkins (*How Israel Became a People* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2013], 49–90), Firth assumes a late date for the conquest (p. 22). Against Josephus, Firth prefers a verbal understanding of “prostitute” (p. 84). The repeated “three days” in 1:11, 2:16, 3:2 are interpreted as an idiom like “a few days” (p. 74). The “we” in 5:1 (נָנוּ, *ketiv*) is ignored; the “we” in 5:6 (לָנוּ) is interpreted as referring to the new generation (p. 119). The “disgrace of Egypt” is interpreted as slavery (p. 120). Firth avoids any speculation on 5:13–15: God is present, but the warrior is neither identified with God nor his logos (p.

128). Firth believes that God has the power to delay sunset, but interprets Joshua 10:13 otherwise: there was a storm, but the sunlight was not reduced during the whole length of a regular day (p. 200). The Torah in 24:26 might be the Torah of Moses; however, Joshua did not manipulate the text but wrote an addendum on his scroll (p. 387).

I should note that the “bibliography” is merely a list of recommended literature since many of the works quoted in the text cannot be found there. Also, the fathers of the church, Calvin, and critical standard literature on Joshua (Noth, Fritz, Knauf, Dozeman, Bieberstein, van Bekkum, etc.) are missing.

Without question this commentary more than satisfies the practical purposes of the series. Even though it will not replace David Howard’s NAC commentary (1998) as the best-informed evangelical analysis of Joshua, it is a remarkable, and in some ways unique and surprising, contribution to modern conservative scholarship.

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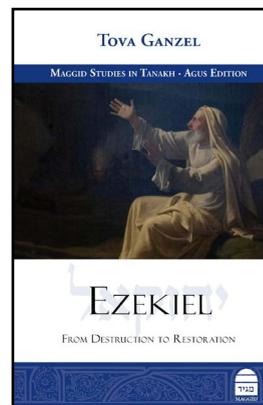
Tova Ganzel. *Ezekiel: From Destruction to Restoration*. Maggid Studies in Tanakh. Translated by Kaeren Fish. New Milford, CT: Maggid, 2020. xxii + 318 pp. £23.15/\$29.95.

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Tova Ganzel is a well-known scholar in the field of Ezekiel studies, teaching at Bar-Ilan University in Jerusalem. This study of Ezekiel was originally written in Hebrew (2012), and has recently been released in English. As an Orthodox Jew, her perspective on Ezekiel is different from the typical evangelical Christian fare, and so provides an interesting read.

*Ezekiel* is an expositional commentary, part of a series that melds rabbinic interpretation with modern scholarship. Ganzel often relies upon rabbinic interpretation. For example, in discussing Ezekiel 20:25, “I gave them laws that were not good,” she discusses interpretations from *Targum Yonatan*, Rashi, Eliezer of Beaugency, and Moshe Greenberg (pp. 154–55). She does not delve into many typical questions of critical scholarship, such as the relationship between the P source and Ezekiel, though she uses what she calls “intratextual exegesis” as a method, e.g., when comparing Ezekiel 6 and Leviticus 26 (p. 47; see also comparison with Deuteronomy on pp. 63–74). She studies Ezekiel in its final form as a whole text, taking the book at face value, written by the prophet during exile from Babylon.

Ganzel divides the book of Ezekiel into three parts: pre-destruction prophecies (chs. 1–24); prophecies against the nations (chs. 25–32); post-destruction prophecies (chs. 33–48). She argues that the prophecies revolve around the “central axis” of the movements of God’s glory in chapters 1, 11, and 43 (p. 8). Ezekiel’s purpose in the first section (1–24) was “to inform the people that God had departed from His Temple in Jerusalem” (p. 1). Ganzel helpfully emphasizes here that God’s decision to destroy was already made. God would not change from destroying Jerusalem even if the people did repent (which they would not do regardless). Thus, Ezekiel does not call the nation to repent, only individuals (p. 8). This is how, for example, she treats the calls to repentance in chapters 3, 18, and 33.



The second part of Ezekiel's book contains prophecies about the nations (chs. 25–32). Ganzel states that their purpose is “to lay the foundation for Israel's restoration” (p. 181). In fact, this is why many scholars consider Ezekiel 25–48 to be part of the prophecies of restoration (e.g., Block, Greenberg). As Ganzel goes through each oracle against the nations, she elucidates the historical context necessitating the mention of each nation.

The final part of Ezekiel contains prophecies after Jerusalem's destruction (chs. 33–48). While Ganzel is correct to say that Ezekiel does not lament destruction the way Jeremiah does, she overstates her case in saying, “These prophecies contain nothing in the way of consolation, sorrow, reconciliation, or compassion over what has happened in Jerusalem” (p. 215). Yet this portion of Ezekiel provides multiple prophecies of consolation. While promises such as a “covenant of peace” (Ezek 34:25; 37:26) and a new temple do not directly mention Jerusalem, they indirectly provide hope for the people. As for the restoration, Ganzel claims that its climax comes in God's purification of the nation (p. 231). She helpfully points out the use of water rather than blood to purify, signifying not mere forgiveness but cleansing (p. 233). Next, she interprets Ezekiel 37 as a restoration of Israel but stops short of saying that it will be an actual occurrence, calling it simply “timeless” (p. 250). She does, however, compare the establishment of Israel in 1948, after the Holocaust, to this vision of dry bones (p. 250).

Finally, Ganzel discusses the temple vision. She highlights its importance in the canon, calling it a “lone voice in a period of scant prophetic activity” (p. 280). However, the significance of the temple is not in the building, but that God will dwell amidst his people (p. 254). Ganzel's view on the temple is unclear. She does not seem to think the temple, as described, can possibly be built (p. 282), but later says, “It may well be that our prayers for the Third Temple are that it be rebuilt following Ezekiel's new plan” (p. 306). Finally, she makes a striking claim that the river vision (Ezek 47) is the climax of the book of Ezekiel as a whole. She calls it, “a way of bringing the Sanctuary into the very midst of the people” (p. 309). The cleansing ceremony of Ezekiel 36 now comes to all the people via this river. God distances himself from the people in the new temple, but connects the people to the temple by way of the life-giving river (p. 309).

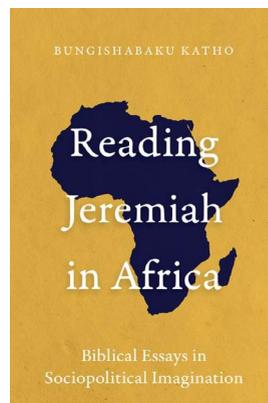
An obvious feature missing in this commentary is a “Christ-centered interpretation.” However, there is much that evangelicals will agree with in this work. In fact, her work can help many who tend to skip exegesis of the original text and jump to certain Christian doctrines (e.g., regeneration in Ezek 37) or “how this text points to Christ.” The unique Jewish perspective will be a help to many evangelical students by forcing them to look at the text with different eyes. For scholars, Ganzel's work provides a useful reference and unique perspective, but one should not expect discussion of critical minutiae. The work is most helpful to anyone teaching on Ezekiel in a local church context, whether pastors or laypeople.

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Bungishabaku Katho. *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination*. Langham: Carlisle, 2021. xii + 217 pp. £14.99/\$23.99.

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Bungishabaku Katho has lived an extraordinary life. Growing up in DR Congo his community suffered ethnic violence: fifteen thousand people were displaced and another thousand slaughtered. Although he might have chosen an easier path after obtaining a South African PhD, Katho returned to his homeland because he was persuaded that the gospel has the power to bring peace and justice. Since then, he has been held at gunpoint by child soldiers. He has traveled with his wife to churches in parts of the country where protection was necessary, only to recognize the bodyguard as one of the men who had been part of the militia that slaughtered his people. He has contended with dysfunctional leadership, political corruption, and false prophets that get rich at the expense of the poor. “As I am writing these words,” he pens, “demonstrators are being killed in the streets of Kinshasa” (p. 135). This book is about bringing these experiences, so often the tragic fabric of African life, into conversation with the book of Jeremiah (which of course, is set in its own tragic circumstances). But *Reading Jeremiah in Africa* is not a book of despair. It is a book born of a stubborn faith that God has a better plan for Africa than what Katho’s experience might suggest.



Katho frames the work as a series of reflections from Jeremiah. Each chapter selects a short passage, provides some context and a brief discussion of the pertinent themes, and then moves back and forth between Jeremiah and a contemporary African issue. He draws heavily on African history as well as his own life. Although he occasionally engages in a scholarly debate, his purpose is not to provide exposition. His previously published commentary on Jeremiah, now available in English, does that job (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Africa Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011]). In this work, Katho asks whether God, through the book of Jeremiah, has anything to say to the people of Africa.

Chapter 1 reflects on Jeremiah’s call (Jer 1:1–19), the nature of prophecy, and his own remarkable experience of being called through a “strange vision” to bring light to the darkness in DR Congo. He laments that so few prophets in Africa would suffer for the sake of Christ. Chapter 2 (Jer 2:4–6, 8) explores the way idolatry can lead to us telling wrong stories about our past. Katho wrestles with both the colonial past and the post-colonial present. Chapter 3 (Jer 4:19–22) explores the social consequences of poor leadership and the way this gives occasion to other types of injustice. Chapter 4 (Jer 5:1–6) examines poverty, which makes people vulnerable to temptation and becomes an obstacle to faith, destroying human dignity. Chapter 5 (Jer 9:2–9) reflects on the way Judah had ignored the covenant, relating this to the lack of spiritual formation in the African church. Christians should understand their calling to society. Chapter 6 (Jer 9:23–24) explores the knowledge of God as a primary societal virtue. Katho reflects that access to knowledge is often a means to perpetuate inequality in Africa, as the children of the rich are provided with better opportunities. Chapter 7 (Jer 22:13–19) assesses structures of political power. Although often hailed as a “Christian” form of government, democracy cannot be the savior of the African people and is not the only way to organize political power within a Christian worldview. Katho is neither for nor against it *per se* but calls for reflection. Chapter 8 (Jer 24:4–7) brings the problem of weak leadership into conversation with King Zedekiah, while chapter 9 (Jer 29:4–9) reflects on Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles and the massive displacement of African people. What would it

mean to “pray for the welfare” of your captors? The final chapter (Jer 31:31–34) explores a better vision for society that the new covenant offers: peace, healing, forgiveness, and justice.

Those who, like me, are accustomed to reading Jeremiah as a part of God’s unfolding story of redemption may wrestle with the hermeneutic Katho employs. (To be up front, Katho disagrees with the new covenant interpretation of my own PhD supervisor, so I am certainly reading his book through a hermeneutic lens of my own!) Throughout, his method is to apply analogy. Many situations in Africa are analogous to ancient Judah. The church, then, must recover the prophetic voice of Jeremiah. Katho explicitly conceives of his own ministry as a modern-day parallel of the prophet. But there is little reflection on the particularity of Judah within God’s salvific purposes for the world, nor how the book of Jeremiah contributes to a story that culminates with Jesus. Because of this, it is often unclear how Katho would have us connect the message of Jeremiah to the cross of Christ. How, precisely, does the gospel bring societal change when the broader culture is opposed to it? At many points, it seems enough for Katho that Africa claims to be “Christian” and so should do a better job of looking like it. Yet, even so, the book does articulate that social renewal is an implication and outworking of the gospel, without conflating the two. It just seldom reflects on what the gospel *is*.

The strength of this book is the relentless hope in God that pervades every page. Despite so many stories of pain and loss, Katho encourages us, and through the examples of his own and Jeremiah’s lives, shows us how to persevere in doing good with joy. He dreams of a better world, and he knows that only the gospel has a hope of realising it in any measure. He concludes the book with the Lord’s prayer: “Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

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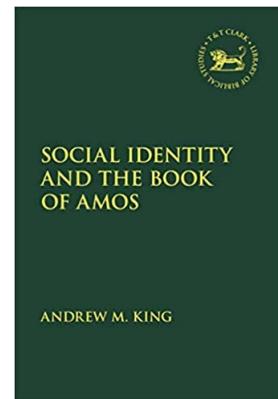
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Andrew M. King. *Social Identity and the Book of Amos*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 706. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. xii + 156 pp. £85.39/\$115.00.

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While socio-cognitive methods—specifically social identity theory and attendant approaches—have been making inroads into New Testament studies there has been little corresponding engagement in Hebrew Bible research. Bucking this trend is Andrew M. King’s adaptation of his doctoral dissertation on social identity in the book of Amos. This approach from King reads the book of Amos not only as a reader of history, but as a progenitor of identity. Seeking to “tell its audience who they are and who they can be in this world” (p. 4).

To examine the way that Amos constructs the audience’s identity, King draws on the socio-cognitive research of Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s Social Identity Theory and Turner’s Self-Categorization Theory. These theoretical approaches are well detailed in the second chapter. It provides a good basis for anyone new to the field without being exceedingly technical and requiring an extensive background in social psychology to understand. The theory is well elucidated with practical and pertinent examples that draw out the implications and insight of the framework for biblical scholars of all stripes.



Each of the following three content chapters highlights different aspects of how Amos constructs and communicates a social identity for its audience.

The third chapter opens with a consideration of the existing social identity embodied by the people of God as Amos comes to confront them within the narrative. Beginning with the Oracles against the Nations, King helpfully highlights the social identity functions of these various oracles as delineating outgroups and the impact of the rhetorical strategy to include Israel within this group. This effectively “leaves the audience wondering where the ingroup is to be found” (p. 45). The chapter then turns to the Bethel confrontation with Amaziah and highlights the way that Amos and Amaziah function as prototypical representatives for the ingroup and outgroup in the intergroup identity conflict. In this context it would have been interesting to further explore the function of the two group representatives as leaders of their own groups—especially given the research of Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) on social identity and leadership. Nevertheless, this chapter helpfully explores the intergroup conflict at the heart of the book of Amos and its implications for Israelite identity and behavior.

The fourth chapter covers the use of history and social memory to generate a specific social identity for the prophetic audience. Here King dives into the way that there is a “presentation of a shared history for group members ... [to] construct group boundaries and norms in historical terms” (pp. 66–67). Social memory and corporate history are highlighted as a distinct temporal othering strategy, defining the bounds of the groups at play within the prophetic narrative. This is reinforced through the strong intertextual links found within the historical appeals and draws implications for the audience’s social identity. While linkages between social memory and identity are often drawn, this investigation helpfully highlights the function that identity dissonance plays within the remembering process.

The fifth chapter turns to questions of eschatology and how the remnant and future restoration motifs drive the future social identities of Amos’s audience. Leveraging Marco Cinnirella’s concept of possible future identities, the chapter brings this together with the future of the people in the prophetic frame. The exploration of the Day of YHWH, remnant, and restoration motifs draws out strong ethical considerations and implications for Amos’s audience that need to be enacted for their inclusion as part of the ingroup. This positive social identity functions as the culmination of the historical remembering, prototypical exemplars, and the possible future social identities at hand.

Overall, King’s monograph represents an excellent exploration of the socio-cognitive dimensions within the prophetic literature, as exemplified by Amos. Despite diving deeply into the interdisciplinary space, the research is presented in a readable and understandable format for both exegetes and scholars. At times the socio-cognitive dimensions could be further explored through leveraging broader social identity approaches, such as the work of Stephen Reicher and Fabio Sani in the Structured Analysis of Group Arguments, or that of Haslam, Reicher, and Platow on leadership. Nevertheless, this volume is a solid contribution to a paradigm and pattern of prophetic identity formation that would be of interest to expand into other Hebrew Bible material.

Additionally, it is not hard to draw parallels between Israel in Amos’s time and the situation of the modern church. Into this space, King’s research and observations bring significant pastoral implications—in addition to the wealth of Hebrew Bible interaction. The church would certainly benefit from hearing Amos’s prophetic warnings refracted through the lens of our social identity formation.

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Tremper Longman III. *Confronting Old Testament Controversies, Pressing Questions about Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019. xi + 294 pp. £13.99/\$19.99.

The subtitle of this work is enough to catch one's attention: *Pressing Questions about Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence*. Tremper Longman III thoroughly addresses each question from his vast experience in the classroom and the church. He writes in a conversational style, complete with occasional anecdotes (e.g., pp. 204–5) related to various seasons of his life. Longman graciously engages the leading scholars of each question by finding common ground where possible, expressing appreciation for their contribution, fairly representing their position, and then clearly articulating his viewpoint.

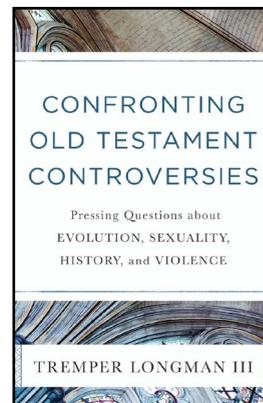
The outline of the book is straightforward: a chapter per question. Longman includes one to three excursuses with each question to address related texts or topics more specifically. Three out of the four chapters incorporate hermeneutical insights that provide the “cognitive environment” related to the issues (p. 16). Longman attributes this phrase to John Walton (*Lost World of the Flood* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018], 6–10). Longman repeatedly affirms his commitment to the authority and inerrancy of the Scripture (p. 11).

For those familiar with the works of Longman, there are no surprises regarding his conclusions. He wrote this manuscript to bring relief to Christians who struggle with the teaching of the Old Testament and the four topics (p. xi). The book's value is the compilation of topics in one volume, presented in a user-friendly manner by a seasoned scholar.

In chapter 1, Longman approaches the question of evolution and creation as an evolutionary creationist. He rejects evolutionism and advocates a divine providence-guided means of evolution (p. 60). A plain and reasonably argued pathway guides the reader through all the details. The foundational layer identifies the genre of Genesis 1–3 and, more accurately, Genesis 1–11 as theological history of actual events recounted with figurative language (pp. 26–28, 77). He carefully locates the presence and function of this language in its cognitive environment (pp. 16, 49, 150).

The tensions associated with Longman's presentation of evolutionary creationism revolve around the discussion of Adam, sin, and death. Based on the “overwhelming” evidence of evolution, Longman argues that Adam and Eve are literary representatives of the first humans who had the status of God's image and likeness (p. 69). Longman does believe in a historical reality behind these literary figures and the historicity behind the original act of disobedience. He argues that analogies between the literary Adam and the historical Christ do not subdue the theology of sin and death. He then contends that Augustine's mistranslation of Romans 5:12 does not demand an inheritance model of sin that would necessitate a connection with Adam. Instead, the books of science and faith allow for an imitation model of sin. According to Longman, science offers us a better reading of Romans 5:12 (p. 72).

Longman's presentation in chapter 1 has much to offer Christians troubled by the questions of evolution. The chapter could, however, be improved in a few ways. First, more methodological guidance regarding an interpretation based on science and the Bible. If one does not trump the other, does one lead the other? The exposition of Romans 5:12 and the discussion about the origin of humans are illustrative of this lack of precedence. Second, the interpretation of Romans 5:12 needs more contextual discussion than choosing how to translate a phrase to disqualify the inheritance model of sin. Finally,



since many readers will not share Longman's optimism about the evidence for evolution, perhaps more specific documentation for his view would be useful (pp. 58–59, 73, 76).

The question of history dominates the second chapter. More specifically, "Did the Exodus and Conquest Happen, and Does it Matter?" Longman addressed this issue in his 1994 *Introduction to the Old Testament* (co-authored with Raymond Dillard). In this 2019 *Controversies* publication, his pressing concern is to write for a Christian audience wrestling with the historical reliability of the Bible's recorded events. His approach involves defining the controversy, addressing genre and history, and explicitly addressing matters related to the exodus and conquest (pp. 80–82).

Longman engages the publications of Kenton Sparks, Peter Enns, Megan Bishop Moore, and Brad Kelle (pp. 83–89). These four scholars express some degree of doubt about the historicity of the exodus and conquest. Despite their shades of doubt, Longman rightfully acknowledges their full embrace of the theological message associated with these historical events (p. 102).

Longman approaches the question of genre and history with two concerns (pp. 90–91). First, to correct mistaken evangelical views regarding inerrancy and apologetics tend to overhistoricize the Bible. If a biblical text or a canonical book does not intend to communicate a historical story, it is a mistake to historicize it. Consider, for example, the intention of Job and Christ's use of parables. Second, to explain how genres grounded in history portray the past needs understanding.

Chapter 2 closes with a confident tone that the exodus and conquest took place and that both are declarations of the Lord's person and work. He views scholarship's insufficient evidence argument for the exodus and conquest as inconsistent when the same scholars affirm the resurrection's historicity, which lacks evidence (pp. 117–19).

The core concepts of chapter 3 are a summary of Longman's 1995 publication, *God is a Warrior* (co-authored with Daniel G. Reid). The chapter is, however, fresh and current (pp. 172–76). Longman devotes considerable attention to recent scholarly endeavors to silence and snuff out divine violence from the biblical text (pp. 144–72). The attempts include reconsidering the nature of the Bible, the nature of God, and the nature of sin and sinners (pp. 146–54). In addition, he addresses attempts to deny or uniquely interpret historical accounts of divine violence (cf. pp. 155–68).

Longman ends chapter 3 with two thoughts that remind us of our humanity and finiteness in the interpretative process (pp. 203–5). First, many divine violence questions leave us uneasy and without answers. He cites God's dealings with the family of Achan and Job as examples. Second, the Divine Warrior theme raises questions concerning hell and eternal punishment. Longman responds with a personal testimony of how the divine judgment message worked to bring about his relationship with the Lord.

The final chapter tackles the delicate topic of sexuality and the Bible's teaching on homosexuality. Although Longman indicates concern about writing on this topic, he demonstrates confidence in the Bible's clear teaching and the church's broad-based agreement on sexuality (pp. 207–8). He courageously writes with a desire to help the church understand difficult biblical texts (p. 210). Longman's methodology is consistent with his approaches to the other controversies. He makes a valuable contribution to the topic of sexuality with his investigation of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–19:26), the behavior of the Levite with his concubine (Judg 19), and the relationship of David with Jonathan (2 Sam 1:26).

Overall, *Confronting Old Testament Controversies* helps Christians accomplish two objectives. First, it offers believers an interpretative model of how to read Scripture, especially the problematic portions. Second, it provides reasonable answers to the delicate and challenging questions within the

framework of a biblical worldview. One may not agree with the conclusions of every chapter, but the book is a model of engaged biblical scholarship for the good of the church.

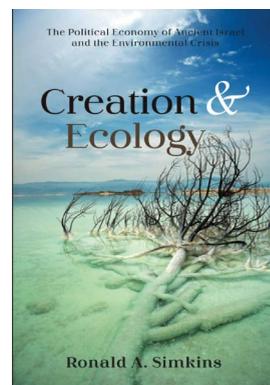
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Ronald A. Simkins. *Creation and Ecology: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel and the Environmental Crisis*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020. x + 359 pp. £32.00/\$43.00.

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This is the magnum opus of Ronald Simkins, a professor at Creighton University who has focused on creation in the Old Testament during his eclectic career. Building on earlier work in *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), *Creation and Ecology* advocates the OT's vision of subsistence economics as a better alternative to the free-market capitalism which is undergirded by fossil-fuel consumption and has ravaged the natural world. The result is the most wide-ranging treatment of creation care alongside modern economic theory yet available (the bibliography is more than forty pages and contains more than five hundred works). Simkins's thesis that "the central cause of the environmental crisis is how we humans have mediated the relationship between society and nature, and this meditation is all about political economy" (p. 1) is supported by abundant scientific data that should persuade most (apart from strident climate-change skeptics). However, his contention that OT economics provides biblical solutions for the environmental crisis is less convincing due to a lack of clarity on theological and methodological matters.



Simkins's stimulating book falls into two parts—on creation and ecology (mirroring the title). Following an introduction on conflicts between Christian faith and science (especially among "conservative Christians," whom Simkins equates with "evangelicals"), part 1 explores ancient Israel's economy in light of OT creation traditions. These chapters are divided into studies of Creation and Gender (ch. 1), Creation and Political Economy (ch. 2), Creation and Society (ch. 3), and Creation and the Body (ch. 4) which often address the same biblical texts and themes from different angles. Part 2 continues this topical approach with Ecology and Religion (ch. 5), Ecology and Political Economy (ch. 6), Ecology and the Anthropocene (ch. 7), and Ecology and Theodicy (ch. 8). The conclusion takes a pessimistic turn (its subtitle is "This Is the Way the World Ends") by framing modern society's collapse due to climate change as nearly unavoidable. Since "climate change is the result of human sin" (p. 300), Simkins closes with a summons to lamentation and repentance which juxtaposes the possibility of averting disaster with the inevitability that disaster will come, much like the complexity of the OT's own witness.

As evidenced from the repetition of wording in chapter titles, the book has an iterative structure that leads to substantial overlap between Parts 1 and 2 as well as the chapters within them. For this reason, a deeper dive into the sections on Creation and Society (ch. 3) and Ecology and the Anthropocene (ch. 7) will be representative of the work as a whole. The former chapter traces the rise of kingship in ancient Israel and how the Davidic dynasty used familial language (e.g., "house of David") to reorganize economic production around itself rather than clan-based subsistence agriculture (pp. 92–93; cf. 1

Sam 8:11–17; 1 Kgs 4–5). This historical transition is well-attested in the OT prophetic criticism of its excesses. However, Simkins also relies on debatable reconstructions of the Yahwist creation myth (Gen 2) and Deuteronomy’s “law of the king” (Deut 17:14–20) as texts supposedly coinciding with a political agenda to shift the loyalty of the Israelite *paterfamilias* away from tribal affiliations and toward kings as quasi-family members (pp. 94–105). By contrast, the post-exilic Priestly source (e.g., Gen 1) would reemphasize traditional kinship structures as hedges against both hierarchical economics as well as Persian interference in Yehud (pp. 105–15). The substance of Simkins’s argument for non-exploitative, sustainable economics could have come from the canonical shape of the OT without recourse to a JEDP-like framework that no longer commands a consensus even among critical scholars.

The analysis of Ecology and the Anthropocene (ch. 7) is similar. Drawing on wide reading, Simkins maintains that capitalism’s intrinsic need for growth has steered humanity toward an instrumental subject-object relationship to nature with devastating effects (e.g., rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels, decreasing biodiversity, rampant pollution). What is emerging is the geological age of the *Anthropocene*—a human-wrought end to the favorable conditions of the Holocene that began 11,700 years ago. Simkins fingers capitalism’s insatiability as the reason:

Capitalism in the form of the fossil economy, beginning around 1800 with the invention of the steam engine, enabled something never before seen on planet Earth: self-sustaining growth, which soon translated into an economy that experienced sustained per capita growth.... In creating self-sustaining economic growth, capitalist relations have depleted material resources, polluted environments, and have released billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels without limits, and all in the pursuit of endless accumulation. (p. 239)

As earlier, Simkins concludes by advocating the OT’s vision of human flourishing within the God-given boundaries of creation. He finds that the Yahwist’s theme of human fallibility (as in the Fall and Flood narratives) and the Priestly source’s emphasis on human limitations (as in the Noahic covenant of Gen 9) stand opposed to capitalism’s vision of growth without end. The rubrics of “fallibility” and “limitations” are inseparable, however, as Simkins inadvertently shows in identifying the Babel narrative in Genesis 11 (typically reckoned to post-exilic P due to its references to “Babel/Babylon”) as a polemic about both “human fallibility” (p. 262) and “the limits of human technology” (p. 263).

*Creation and Ecology* is a seminal but imperfect book on an urgent topic. It is unfair to expect more from a work of already unprecedented scope, but several basic questions remain unanswered: (1) Has “capitalism” become for Simkins a convenient but anachronistic catch-all for a host of vices that are less ambiguous (e.g., colonialism, consumerism)? (2) How would Simkins respond to apologists who defend capitalism on biblical grounds (e.g., the Acton Institute)? (3) In light of global population growth and modernization, is it realistic to turn back the clock to subsistence lifestyles? (4) How does Adam Smith’s concept of the “invisible hand” already provide a theocentric check on greed and inequality? (5) To what extent does the NT transform the OT’s creation traditions so that they cannot be straightforwardly principlized for Christians (not to mention the world at large)? These issues underscore the challenges of integrating theology and economics in the ambitious manner attempted by Simkins.

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## — NEW TESTAMENT —

David Alan Black and Benjamin L. Merkle, eds. *Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xi + 276 pp. £21.99/\$29.99.

*Linguistics and New Testament Greek* is a collection of eleven papers presented at a conference of the same name in April 2019 at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to these papers, the book's editors, David Black and Benjamin Merkle, provide a preface and postscript respectively. Many of the chapters are clear, helpful, and thought-provoking. However, while many "key issues" are discussed, one may wonder whether every chapter meets this criterion and whether every chapter meets the stated goal of the book: "to try to help our Greek students become more familiar with the significant contributions that linguistics can make to their study of New Testament Greek" (p. 2).

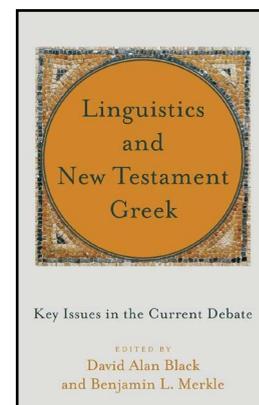
Black's preface ("Where Did We Come from?") successfully defends the need for this book. He notes that only very recently have we recovered a "temporarily mislaid interest in the science of linguistics" (p. 2) and then argues for the value and necessity of linguistics to the study of Greek. As his final remarks make clear, New Testament scholars and students can no longer afford to be ignorant of the field.

In the first chapter, Stanley Porter provides a history, summary, and analysis of the major linguistic schools that have underpinned and do underpin how we understand and analyze Greek (even if we are not aware of it). This chapter is a needed encouragement that those studying Greek ought to come to greater understandings of these schools. However, it is not clear how this chapter helps the typical student. The practical implications of subscribing to this or that school are not drawn out well. Moreover, there is an underlying theme throughout the chapter that pits Porter and his school of thought, Systemic Functional Linguistics, against everyone else. This results in one-sided critiques of other positions and an uncritically positive assessment of the place and value of SFL.

Constantine Campbell's chapter, "Aspect and Tense in New Testament Greek," details what is meant by these terms, summarizes the history of the debates surrounding the Greek verbal system, and considers the relevance linguistic insights into the Greek verbal system have for exegesis. Overall, this is a helpful chapter that is clearly written. However, given the nature of the debated topics and Campbell's own investment in them (in particularly his idiosyncratic perspectives on semantics/pragmatics and tense/remoteness), the lack of an additional voice is a missed opportunity. Campbell's section on "Relevance for Exegesis" is excellent, and I only regret that it was not longer, with more examples for students.

Michael Aubrey's chapter on the Perfect tense-form is exceptional. It provides a clear, linguistically based description of the perfect tense-form, successfully arguing that in order to understand it we must consider aspect, event structure, and transitivity. It is a dense chapter, but the plethora of examples and visuals demonstrate Aubrey's claims well. Aubrey's work is cutting-edge and will benefit scholars and students alike. (It has already made its way into my Greek lectures!)

In chapter 4, Jonathan Pennington discusses the history of the debate surrounding the middle voice and demonstrates how a linguistically informed understanding of middle voice helps us to read Greek well and benefits our exegesis. More interaction with Rachel Aubrey's work would have benefitted the



paper—generally but also specifically. For example, Pennington claims that the  $\theta\eta$  suffix was “the more familiar productive form for producing aorist passive endings” and that it “was encroaching into the aorist middle space” (p. 91), ignoring that  $\theta\eta$  was originally a marker of state predicates that became a marker of perfective aspect and middle-passive semantics (see Rachel Aubrey, “Motivated Categories, Middle Voice, and Passive Morphology,” in *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Steven E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016], 578–81). Nevertheless, Pennington is clear and convincing throughout.

In chapter 5, Stephen Levinsohn details the nature and benefits of discourse analysis, using Galatians as a case study. Levinsohn, a seasoned linguist and Bible translator, helpfully introduces the reader to the benefits of and need for discourse analysis. He then models a step-by-step method for determining the discourse structure of a text. This will surely be an invaluable resource for students and scholars for years to come.

Steven Runge’s chapter on constituent order in Koine Greek is impressive in its ability to take a complex issue and explain it clearly and concisely. Runge provides a linguistically based perspective on constituent order and information structure, models its application with numerous examples, and explains how it informs our understanding and exegesis of Greek texts.

I cannot do justice to chapter 7 (“Living Language Approaches” by T. Michael Halcomb), chapter 8 (“The Role of Pronunciation in New Testament Greek Studies” by Randall Buth), chapter 9 (“Electronic Tools and New Testament Greek” by Thomas W. Hudgins), and chapter 10 (“An Ideal Beginning Greek Grammar?” by Robert L. Plummer). I group them together as they are the most out of place in this book. This is to say nothing of their individual value. Indeed, they are thought-provoking essays that are worth engaging with and learning from. I particularly enjoyed Halcomb’s paper on pedagogy in the Greek classroom. Even though he and I are not *quite* on the same page (though I think we are close—perhaps on facing pages), it is a paper that challenged me and that will likely effect some change in my teaching. His concluding remarks were especially powerful. Nevertheless, these essays are pitched at those who teach Greek, such as myself, rather than students, and I cannot think of any instance where I would assign them. (Hudgins’s chapter on electronic tools is an exception here, as it is incredibly valuable for students, but it does not fit in a book on key issues at the intersection of linguistics and New Testament Greek.) Moreover, with a small caveat to be made for Buth’s chapter, these papers do not demonstrate the practical application of linguistics to our understanding of Greek text and our subsequent exegesis. I am glad to have read them, but their inclusion feels odd given the stated goals of the volume.

The final chapter, “Biblical Exegesis and Linguistics: A Prodigal History” by Nicholas J. Ellis, is a tour de force that examines the history of New Testament scholarship, its relationship with linguistics, and the resultant fractures within the field. It is a powerful and convicting essay that calls on biblical scholars to own their responsibility to engage with and become conversant in linguistics to be able to evaluate linguistic claims, to sharpen their knowledge, and to synthesize and disseminate knowledge. Ellis ends by surveying a few areas in Greek studies where linguistics provides practical contributions. It is an essay well worth reading by scholar and student alike, as it contextualizes the discussions in the field and motivates them to pursue excellence in biblical studies.

Benjamin Merkle’s postscript (“Where Do We Go from Here?”) reflects on the book’s contents and even evaluates some of the book’s papers. His insights are helpful, and I appreciated having him as a “conversation partner” as I reflected on the chapters and the book. Notably, given Merkle’s clear

preference for some views, it is commendable that he and Black invited such a range of views to contribute to this volume.

In the end, this is a valuable book, and Black and Merkle are to be commended for bringing it together. Though some chapters feel out of place, all are thought-provoking. As a whole, the book helpfully situates the relationship between linguistics and New Testament Greek and pushes us to move forward by engaging more with linguistics, to learn from it and apply its insights to the study of Greek. As an interdisciplinarian with one foot in linguistics and one in biblical studies, I view this as positive movement and am grateful for this book's contribution.

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James Diggle, ed. *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 1000 pp. £64.99/\$104.00.

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The *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (CGL): should you buy it? Before I answer that question, I want to alert readers to the expert observations and judgments regarding these two handsome volumes by Dirk Jongkind, Vice Principal at Tyndale House, Cambridge, who is a manuscript and ancient Greek specialist, which I am not. At the website for Evangelical Textual Criticism he offers four brief posts, each valuable for stirring interest and providing initial if informal guidance for assessing this landmark publication (<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2021/04/>).

Now my answer: yes, and no.

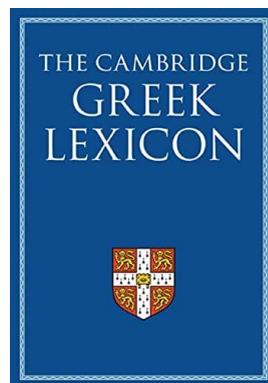
First, some reasons to answer yes. You should buy it, under the following conditions.

(1) You have some interest and facility in ancient Greek, and money is no object, or at least not a large one where your book budget is concerned. The list price is not chicken feed.

(2) You are learning classical Greek and your program prescribes *CGL* rather than *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889). That is the outdated book which *CGL* was explicitly designed to replace.

(3) You are a bibliophile (which most academics are), have shelf space (which most academics don't), and want to honor the 23-year effort by a distinguished team of scholars in the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge University, where the study of Latin and Greek has been a staple for centuries. According to the University website, study of the Greek and Latin classics "came to the fore" in the Cambridge academic community (dating back to the 1200s) in 1536 (<https://www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/history/sixteenth-century>). These two volumes are the result of that 23-year effort and millions of pounds of investment.

(4) You need a classical Greek lexicon but not one as exhaustive and expensive as the granddaddy in this genre, *Greek-English Lexicon* by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), commonly referred to as LSJ (for Liddell-Scott-Jones), costing close to \$300 new, and weighing 9.33 pounds (Amazon says). *CGL* weighs in at only 7.28 pounds (with each volume weighing half that).



(5) You are a biblical Greek student (or scholar who doesn't own LSJ), but you sometimes consult classical Greek texts. If you own the standard Greek lexicon for the New Testament, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), commonly referred to as BDAG, you will not find entries for innumerable classical Greek words, because the classical period (roughly 500–330 BC) predates the era in which Koine Greek emerged, and the New Testament is written in Koine not classical Greek. (BDAG is not to be confused with Franco Montanari, ed., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [Leiden: Brill, 2015].) So you will benefit from a pre-Koine guide. *CGL* fills the bill. It does not replace LSJ, and for research purposes does not rival it, since it is intermediate and lacks many of the words and features that mark LSJ as advanced. These would include the exact references (and not just authors' names) and sometimes the phrases in which Greek words are found. These are omitted, to save space and because beginning and intermediate students do not require them at their stage of learning the language.

(6) You read the New Testament (or the Septuagint, or the Old Testament Apocrypha, or the Apostolic Fathers) and are curious how a word was used in the earlier history of the Greek language. LSJ is still the standard and authoritative work (if that expression may be used in lexicography). But *CGL* is a fresh, neatly formatted, helpfully organized, and accurate entry point for surveying the background of words used in the New Testament's own era. And since the purview of *CGL* extends as far as the early second century AD (covering Plutarch's *Lives*; Plutarch lived AD 46–119), some New Testament uses are alluded to (though only in the Gospels and Acts). Or words are covered that are found not only in the Gospels and Acts but elsewhere in the New Testament, like κεφαλή.

Here are a few brief examples of what you find in *CGL* compared to BDAG. In some cases you'll find disappointment. For ἀθεντέω (1 Tim 2:12) there is nothing in *CGL*, because the verb apparently does not occur in the corpus it covers. For κεφαλή there twelve meanings offered ("source" not among them), none of them referring to one of the definitions found in BDAG: "a being of high status, head." This is mystifying, because this usage is found in the LXX (see the lexica by Muraoka and Lust-Eynikel-Hauspie) and the New Testament epistles. But the LXX and much of the New Testament are not taken into account.

In other cases you'll find striking contrast: words associated with boasting (καυχάομαι, καύχημα, καύχησις) are found 59 times in the NT. BDAG offers numerous references and meanings. *CGL* contains a sparse seven lines referring to καυχάομαι, καύχημα, and nothing more. There is also a seeming miscue here: *CGL* lists καυχάομαι as found in the NT, which should mean in the Gospels or Acts. But it is not found in either place. It is found in Paul, 30 times, and James, twice. But if *CGL* cannot acknowledge the meaning "a being of high status, head" for κεφαλή because it is found in the NT epistles, not the Gospels or Acts, it is inconsistent to list καυχάομαι as occurring in the NT when that is not true of the Gospels and Acts.

In plenty of cases one will find copious reference to words or word groups that may be rare in the NT. James 4:16 and 1 John 2:16 contain the two sole NT appearances of ἀλαζονεία (boastfulness, arrogance). *CGL* points to the word as meaning "pretence to superior knowledge or skill, **charlatanism, imposture, quackery**" (emphasis original) and directs the reader to Aristophanes, Isocrates, and Xenophon. Cognates of ἀλαζονεία are also numerous in *CGL*. It would be interesting to pursue the wealth of ἀλαζ- words in classical sources and the relative infrequency of the καυχ- word group, with the opposite emphases in the New Testament.

For ἔνι in Galatians 3:28 or Colossians 3:11, one can look to six lines and one meaning under that entry in BDAG, or seven lines and two meanings under ἔνεμι. *CGL* is richer here: 15 lines and four meanings for ἔνι, 27 lines and six meanings under ἔνεμι. In such cases *CGL* may give a better sense for the morphology and possible usage of a word.

So what possible reasons could there be for saying no to the question of whether to buy *CGL*?

(1) If you are learning Koine (or Hellenistic) Greek for biblical studies purposes, you may be strapped for cash and just beginning to build a library. Use precious funds for standard published works (whether book or digital) like BDAG or F. W. Danker's *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

(2) If you are learning Koine Greek for biblical studies purposes, or even if you are beyond that stage, you can't trust the definitions given in *CGL* without verifying them either inductively in the NT writings (or contemporary sources) or by consulting lexica (like BDAG or J. P. Louw and E. Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. [New York: UBS, 1988]) that treat the New Testament corpus comprehensively and with attention to the nuance of individual passages. BDAG is not perfect, but it is generally reliable for those practiced in using it. *CGL* does not purport to take the NT into account in a full and disciplined fashion, so it should not be relied on for first-stop guidance in defining words found in NT passages.

(3) It is somehow troubling to think of a project as well-conceived, highly publicized, and prestigious ... and then to realize that among the some 90 authors canvassed by the lexicographers, covering hundreds of works from the fifth century BC to the early second century AD, all Jewish and almost all Christian sources have been omitted. One can always plead lack of space, lack of time, lack of resources, and so on. Or one could say, "We are covering only classical Greek writings." But the dust jacket (and other publicity resources) claims, "Its coverage extends from Homer to the early second century AD. Most of the major authors who fall within that period are included." With apologies to Alasdair MacIntyre, one may ask, "Whose 'most'? Which 'major'?" Why leave out the apostle Paul but include Patrinus and Praxilla, whom fairly educated persons may never have heard of?

One could also say that the meaning of words in the LXX and the NT are already covered in works devoted specifically to those bodies of writings. But then why does *CGL* bring the NT (i.e., the Gospels and Acts) into the picture at all, and claim coverage into the second century AD? Moreover, BDAG, Muraoka, and Lust-Eynikel-Hauspie do not imply that they are relevant to "most of the major authors" of all the centuries from which their authors hail (*CGL*'s claim for itself) but rather just the New Testament (BDAG) and the LXX. *CGL*'s omission of all Jewish and the majority of Christian writings is a lexicographical loss, because the best synchronic understanding of words (how a word is used in a given era, say the first century AD, rather than across several centuries, which would be diachronic) requires consideration of all the extant uses of those words. *CGL* robs itself of rich and telling input. It is hard to see how this is of benefit to *CGL* users.

When one thinks of the increasing cultural importance of Judaism in the Roman empire in the Second Temple period, and the millions of Greek-speaking Jews using the LXX in synagogues across the empire, and the wealth of lexicographic evidence represented not just by the LXX considered as an OT translation but also as the repository of the Second Temple creations we call the OT Apocrypha, and many other sectarian or apocalyptic or epistolary Jewish writings extant (e.g., Letter of Aristeas)—when we consider that this entire corpus is ignored, what possible linguistic justification can be offered? And what about the fairly vast corpora of Philo and Josephus?

Viewed this way, the frame of reference constructed for users of *CGL* is decidedly skewed. It is as if the Jewish world did not exist, or is in any case irrelevant to the concerns of teachers and learners of Greek of that era. This strikes me as a dubious and dangerous lacuna in both lexicographical and educational philosophy, because it gives a false impression of who used the language and how they did so in the period purportedly represented.

This goes as well for the limited attention given to the NT writings. It is understandable that a classics faculty will be zealous for their primary subject matter, which I take to be the ca. 90 authors that the *CGL* team decided to focus on. But from the standpoint of cultural history and impact, the meanings of δίκαιος (39 times in the Gospels and Acts) and δικαιοσύνη (14 times in the Gospels and Acts) found in the New Testament are at least as important as the ways those words are understood and used in the sources mined by *CGL*—which, by the way, sloppily neglects to note that either δίκαιος or δικαιοσύνη is even found in the NT, where they occur over 50 times. I admit that I have not pored over all the lines in both volumes, so perhaps this failure to note NT occurrences is an anomaly. But if it points to piecemeal reference to the Gospels and Acts, which *CGL* says it takes into account, that is an unbecoming lack of rigor.

In sum, I love new, beautiful, and learned books. I will be using these volumes to raise interest in learning Greek when I begin teaching it again this fall term. For the price, it is a worthwhile acquisition for many libraries. But for reasons given above, beginning and intermediate students of Greek in the NT should not rely on it as a sole or primary source in their understanding of NT words and texts.

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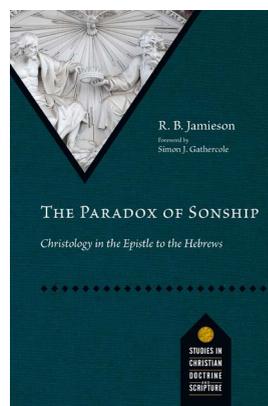
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R. B. Jamieson. *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. xix + 195 pp. £21.84/\$30.00.

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What does Hebrews mean when it calls Jesus God’s “son”? Jamieson, a pastor and author of several books, including *Jesus’ Death and Heavenly Offering in Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), answers that question in this latest entry into IVP’s Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture series. With the help of some early Christians, Jamieson argues that “son” in Hebrews refers to Jesus’s divine and messianic identities and, moreover, that these two identities are related. Jesus couldn’t be the exalted son, Jamieson insists, were he not also the divine son. Readers familiar with this conversation will at once recognize that this thesis is something of a minority report. It’s far more common for modern scholars to take an “either-or” approach, insisting that “son” refers to Jesus’s messianic *or* divine identity, or to take a “both-and” approach, like Jamieson’s, but to insist that the two ways of speaking about Jesus cannot be (or, at the very least, *aren’t*) reconciled in Hebrews.

What explains these dominant ways of reading Hebrews and, at the same time, the freshness of his thesis? Jamieson begins by answering this preliminary question (ch. 1). Simply put: modern readers try to read Hebrews without all their options open. An earlier generation of readers, specifically those



responsible for (or, later, who reflect) the church's conciliar traditions, read Hebrews with additional theological assumptions and exegetical tools that Hebrews *may* have intended its readers to have and to use, which is to say, assumptions and tools that *may* shed additional light on Hebrews's Christology. Jamieson offers three assumptions and three tools and illustrates each from patristic commentary on Hebrews: (1) Jesus is a single divine being, (2) with a human and divine nature, (3) whose human nature was added at a specific point in history. Therefore, some texts should be read as (4) addressing Jesus as he's always been (i.e., divine) and others as what he's become (i.e., incarnate), (5) addressing the incarnate Jesus's divine nature and others his human nature and (6) emphasizing Jesus's unity, by paradoxically joining one of his divine titles (e.g., "son") to one of his human predicates ("learned obedience").

Now, whether Hebrews *intends* to be read this way, whether it supports Jamieson's thesis and aligns with this earlier generation of readers, is the open question Jamieson turns to answer in the body of his book (chs. 2–5). He proceeds along three lines.

First, he argues that Hebrews presents Jesus as the *divine Son* (ch. 2), appealing to four places in Hebrews that, he insists, unambiguously predicate divine qualities of the Son: 1:1–4 (esp., 1:2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3d and 4), 1:5–14 (esp., 1:6, 8–9, 10–12, and 13), 5:8, and 7:3. Moreover, he concludes that "son" does not merely designate Jesus's divine identity in Hebrews but his *distinct* divine identity. That is, in Hebrews, "son" designates Jesus as God and distinguishes him from God the Father and the Spirit. To show this, Jamieson points, e.g., to 1:3a and, especially, to Hebrews's presentation of Scripture as *divine* speech (1:2), spoken by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see, e.g., 1:5; 2:12; 3:7).

Second, Jamieson argues that Hebrews presents Jesus as the *messianic Son*. Before taking this step, however, he first draws a preliminary line between the two predications, showing that Hebrews presents the one divine Son as qualifying for his messianic sonship by means of his incarnate mission (ch. 3). The Son had to first become human (2:14–16), live and suffer faithfully, die, and rise again to qualify for his priestly office and secure eternal salvation (5:7–10). It was, he goes on to argue (ch. 4), only *after* his incarnate mission, that this divine Son became the messianic Son. It was after his incarnate mission that Jesus sat down at God's right hand (1:3) and inherited the name God had promised to David's heir, a messianic anticipation Hebrews taps with its citation of both Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son, today I have begotten you," 1:5a) and 2 Samuel 7:14 ("I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son," 1:5b). It was then and only then that the incarnate divine Son became God's messianic Son.

Third, Jamieson argues that Hebrews presents these two categories of sonship as related (ch. 5). As he puts it, "The first [i.e., divine] is prerequisite to the second [i.e., messianic]" (p. 122). To prove this, Jamieson points to two places in Hebrews where statements are made about the messianic Son that, he insists, could be true only were he also divine: the messianic Son reigns from a place (God's throne, 1:3) and over a domain (the universe, 1:2b) that only God can. What's more, while it's true that a necessarily *divine* messiah exceeded common Jewish expectations, this messianic "hyperfulfillment" (p. 135) was already in the OT for those with eyes to see, at least according to Jesus's own reading of Psalm 110:1a (see Mark 12:35–37 and parallels), a text Jamieson calls Hebrews's "messianic master key" (p. 136—despite the fact, we might add, that Psalm 110:1a is the *only* part of Psalm 110:1 that Hebrews never actually cites!).

Jamieson concludes that what he argues about Hebrews's Christology largely aligns with conciliar Christology, including Chalcedon (for earlier pointers in this direction, see pp. 50, 52, 53, 64–65 n. 52, 77, 83–85, 87, 93–98, 99, 108, 113–16, 125, 126, 128–29, 130, 133, 134, 137, and 138–41). Unlike the common "either-or" or irreconcilable "both-and" approaches, Hebrews's Jesus is a single divine being,

with a divine and, “in these last days,” human nature, capable of being described as what he’s always been (divine) and what he’s necessarily become (i.e., his incarnate mission culminating in his messianic enthronement) and, in some cases and paradoxically, as a single divine being with decidedly-human predicates. Jamieson goes on to show that his thesis about Hebrews’s sophisticated use of “son” may shed light on texts outside of Hebrews (i.e., Acts 2:36 and Rom 1:3–4) and, moreover, that it provides the only adequate answer to the problem at the heart of Hebrews—“Is it worth it to be a Christian?” (p. 168). That is, only a Son like the one Jamieson describes—a Son who becomes Son—could provide everything God’s sons and daughters need for this life and the next.

The topography of Jamieson’s book is, of course, far more detailed and nuanced than this brief summary can describe. His thesis is fresh, vigorously argued, interesting and wide ranging. Biblical scholars, especially, will benefit from the attention given to patristic commentary and conciliar theology (as Simon Gathercole’s “Foreword” implies, p. viii)—not to mention the footnotes showing where all this can be tracked down! And this is to say nothing of the brief but insightful “Series Introduction” by Daniel Treier and Kevin Vanhoozer prefacing Jamieson’s book (pp. xi–xv). That said, I did want to conclude by registering two places where Jamieson’s thesis could use further strengthening.

First, I’m not entirely clear about the role conciliar Christology plays in Jamieson’s book. Does it point us to a way of reading Hebrews—an old and venerable one—that legitimizes Jamieson’s thesis? Is it retrieved to say, e.g., “Look, other trusted Christians agree with or share assumptions that point toward my reading of Hebrews” (see, e.g., pp. 20, 43–45, 47, 48, 50, 52, 138)? Or, conversely, is Jamieson’s thesis—his way of reading Hebrews—meant to legitimize the conciliar tradition? Is it retrieved to say, “Look, what these other Christians have said about Jesus or about Jesus in Hebrews is what Hebrews says—at least what *I think* Hebrews says” (see, e.g., p. 77)? Or, is it both? Is it that what Jamieson’s thesis asserts about Hebrews confirms and, at the same time, is confirmed by the conciliar tradition and patristic commentary on Hebrews (see, e.g., pp. 41, 42, 43, 83, 140–41, 146)? I tend to think it’s this last one, but that’s the problem—I’m not entirely sure.

What’s more, on any of these approaches, what are we to make of those places where Jamieson’s reading *diverges* from the conciliar tradition as expressed in patristic commentary on Hebrews (see, e.g., pp. 31, 47, 113–16, 130–31 n. 18)? Does this suggest that patristic commentary on Hebrews legitimizes his thesis, except when it doesn’t, or that Jamieson’s thesis legitimizes patristic readings of Hebrews, except when it doesn’t? If, in fact, the appeal to the conciliar tradition is meant simply to provide assumptions and exegetical options for Jamieson’s reading of Hebrews—not necessarily validation of his specific exegetical conclusions—then Jamieson’s appeal to the tradition validates his thesis only in the broadest sense. It leaves open whether Jamieson or, for that matter, the modern scholars he criticizes have read Hebrews *correctly*—or, at least, in line with patristic exegesis. Modern scholars, after all, might share the assumptions and tools of conciliar theology *and* still read Hebrews differently than Jamieson does (see, e.g., the authors listed on p. 17 n. 57, not least John Webster and Kavin Rowe). In short, there may be *other* reasons for the *status quaestionis* besides neglect of the tradition. Conversely, if Jamieson’s thesis is meant to validate the conciliar tradition, then it does so only in a broad sense. It shows that such assumptions and tools are legitimate according *Jamieson’s* reading of Hebrews, a reading that aligns with and at times diverges from the specific exegetical conclusions of the authors responsible for the tradition.

Second, and very much related, I’m not sure the conciliar tradition provides us with the *best* assumptions and tools to use for understanding Hebrews. Jamieson, of course, is right to push back on

many modern accounts of Hebrews's Christology. An evolutionary Christology must be proven, not simply assumed. And any decent bit of historical exegesis requires attending to, not simply bracketing out, the conciliar tradition. To his credit, Jamieson has done this. However, I'm not convinced Jamieson's thesis, reliant as it is on conciliar assumptions and tools and, here and there, selected patristic commentary on Hebrews, is the approach *required* by Hebrews itself. After all, if Hebrews was written to dissuade Christians from giving up on their confession, then the assumptions of the conciliar tradition might be assumptions the author would hold but still not *use*. That is, in a persuasive, apologetic context, I'm not sure it would make sense for an author to assume the very conclusions his audience doubts.

That Hebrews implies such a persuasive context is suggested above all by the letter's exegetical method, which takes pains to show that what the author asserts was *already confessed* in the Scriptures his audience treasured. He takes pains to show that their Scriptures anticipated a coming, exalted messiah (see, especially, the royal psalms bracketing 1:5–13), the elevation of human beings above the angels (2:5–9), the continued availability of Sabbath rest (4:7), a Melchizedekian priest-king (5:5–6), a new covenant (8:8–13), a new sacred space (9:8), better sacrifices (10:5–10), and so forth. Why take such pains to argue from these shared premises only to abandon this approach as thoroughly as Jamieson's thesis would require (see, especially, pp. 144–45)?

What's more, one need not hold to an evolutionary account of early Christology to note the *many* points of similarity between Hebrews's prologue and the Jewish wisdom (and, indeed, *logos*) tradition(s) or, for that matter, to see a trifle more restraint in what the author implies with his use of Psalm 45 and a trifle less restraint in what he implies about the extent of humanity's dominion in 2:5. One need not follow George Caird or Lincoln Hurst or Kenneth Schenck in every respect, much less look askance at Chalcedon, to insist on the potential of Jamieson's category of "messiah-delegate" for explaining 5:8 or the ambiguity introduced by the LXX of Psalm 102, much less to point out the Jewish precedent for angelic worship of humans (Life of Adam and Eve 13–14; Genesis Rabbah 8.10) or the fact that when Hebrews finally gets around to explaining the efficacy of Jesus's sacrifice, appeal is made not to his divinity but rather to the agency of the Holy Spirit (9:14) and (likely related) the quality of Jesus's life (5:7–10; see also, e.g., 1:8; 7:23–28). In short, Hebrews's "pressure" (p. 24) may *allow* for the kinds of assumptions and exegetical tools found in some patristic commentary on Hebrews and in the conciliar tradition. Jamieson's thesis is, in other words, *one* way to account for it. But it's not the only way, and, in the end, I'm not sure it's the best.

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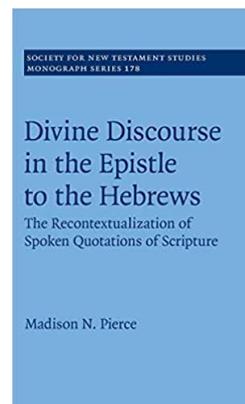
Madison N. Pierce. *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 178. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xi + 237 pp. £75.00/\$99.99.

It's a commonplace in Hebrews scholarship to note that Scripture is presented not as written text but as speech, even *divine* speech, spoken by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Pierce, however, takes this observation one step further. In this revised version of her 2017 PhD thesis (Durham University), she insists that Hebrews's speech assignments aren't random; rather, each (or, *almost* each) is assigned to a specific divine character and for a specific reason. Each allows the author to consistently and, therefore, distinctively characterize its divine speaker. Thus, according to Pierce, Hebrews's citations not only tell us how this early Christian author understood Scripture but, even more, how he understood *God*.

Pierce previews all this in her opening chapter (ch. 1, pp. 1–34), showing that Hebrews's exegetical method—i.e., assigning speeches to speakers—is similar to a method used by patristic authors called *prosopological exegesis*, where “faces” (*prosōpa*) are assigned to unidentified (un-*faced*) or *under*-identified persons in the Bible. Here too she also lays out criteria an interpretation must meet in Hebrews to be called prosopological. The interpretation must be of an authoritative text (e.g., the Bible), contain speech, and admit to some uncertainty about its speaker or recipient (or, in some cases, its subject matter). Plus, the interpretation must add a “new element” to the text. It must *disambiguate* its source text, as Pierce puts it, by adding in something “not obviously indicated by a plain reading” (p. 21).

In the heart of her book (chs. 2–4, pp. 35–174) she then explores each citation in Hebrews 1–10:18, organizing her chapters by divine speaker: God first (ch. 2), then the Son (ch. 3), then the Holy Spirit (ch. 4). She argues that texts assigned to the Father consistently characterize him as speaking to (or about) the Son (1:1–14; 5:1–10; 7:1–28; 8:1–13). Texts assigned to the Son characterize him as responding to the Father (2:1–18, excluding 2:5–9; 10:1–10). And texts assigned to the Spirit consistently characterize him as one who addresses the audience (3:7–4:11; 10:15–18). Here and there Pierce's text assignments are somewhat surprising. For example, she characterizes Hebrews 8:8–12, which cites Jeremiah 31:31–34, as God's speech about the Son, even though Hebrews leaves both the citation's speaker and recipient unidentified. To establish her claim, Pierce, in fact, performs her own prosopological reading of Hebrews (p. 85)! (Along the way, she rightly prefers αὐτοῦς to αὐτοῖς in v. 8, which removes at least one obstacle in the way of her reading by leaving the indirect object of λέγει and, thus, the speech's recipient unidentified.) Here too Pierce claims that the audience—the referent of “them” (αὐτούς) in 8:8—with whom God finds fault is not God's old-covenant people, critiqued in Hebrews's three previous exhortations and in the citation itself (see v. 9), but God's old-covenant priests (p. 89).

In a penultimate chapter (ch. 5, pp. 175–99), Pierce explores the uncharacteristic speech assignments in Hebrews 10:18–13:25. Elsewhere, speeches follow a particular order: God speaks, then the Son, then the Spirit. In fact, when this order repeats itself in Hebrews 5:1–10:18, Pierce insists that it gives readers one more reason to follow Nauck's (et al.) three-part outline of the letter (i.e., Heb 1–4; 5–10a; 10b–13). Here, however, in Hebrews's final third, that order is abandoned, as is Hebrews's consistent characterization of its divine speakers. The Holy Spirit speaks first, though still to the audience (10:30). The Father speaks second, still about the Son (10:37–38). Then an unattributed exhortation “speaks” to



the audience (12:5–6), as do the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, first singly (12:25–28) and then in chorus (13:5). Finally, the audience speaks, responding to God’s speech with a declaration of faith (13:6). The departure from Hebrews’s earlier patterns, Pierce notes, suggests that the author’s argument at this point in the letter simply “need[s] to accomplish something different” (p. 198; cf. 210). After all, “What would we say,” she asks in another place, “if ‘God’ never spoke to us” (p. 200)?

Pierce concludes (ch. 6, pp. 200–11), summarizing her argument and, here and there, extending its reach. She suggests, for example, that Hebrews may not be explicitly Trinitarian, but its exegetical method surely provides a “grammar” or “logic”—a way of reading the Bible and understanding God—that aligns with later orthodox developments. What’s more, after rehearsing the characteristics of each divine speaker, Pierce summarizes each in a fresh way, noting that Hebrews presents the Father, fundamentally, as one who loves, the Son as one who serves and the Spirit as one who exhorts and admonishes, not least *in his own voice*.

Pierce’s fresh and far-reaching proposal does, however, leave me with a handful of lingering questions. Here let me simply register three.

First, I can wonder, *must* the “new element” introduced by prosopological exegesis be as new as Pierce insists? For example, she seems to say that unless Psalm 2:7 implies eternal generation (“an eternal event,” p. 43) in Hebrews 1:5, then even though the author of Hebrews applies this messianic psalm to Jesus, he hasn’t read the psalm prosopologically (p. 45). It’s not enough, in other words, to identify the psalm’s previously-unknown (and, therefore, ambiguous) referent. Prosopological exegesis must introduce something even newer. I’m not sure, however, based on Pierce’s earlier definition and criteria, why this must be the case. To put it another way: couldn’t someone read the opening catena like, for example, Lincoln Hurst or Kenneth Schenck (see p. 41, n. 18), and still use the label prosopological? If not, why not?

Second, and along the same lines, how does prosopological exegesis relate to other, more traditional descriptions of Hebrews’s exegetical method? Promise-fulfillment and typology would, I suspect, both lay some claim to resolving ambiguities. And, surely, it can’t be that prosopological exegesis has exclusive rights to interpreting citations containing speech. Here it would have been helpful for Pierce to put her proposal in more explicit dialogue with these traditional categories, showing us why prosopological is the *best* label for what the author is doing with, say, Psalms 2, 22, 40 and 110, much less with Jeremiah 31 or Psalm 95. Or, to use another example, why it’s the *best* label for what Jesus does in Luke 4 when he claims to “fulfill” Isaiah 61:1–2 (p. 12). It’s speech and there’s ambiguity about Isaiah’s referent, *but* there’s also fulfillment-language. Again, what makes prosopology a better label in this case than any others? I can wish Pierce had disambiguated *this*.

Third, how significant is the author’s characterization of God to his citation-selection and, therefore, to his overall argument? Pierce is surely right: there do seem to be patterns of text-assignments in Hebrews, though not always as consistent as we would like. In fact, to the extent that certain citations “bend the rules”—e.g., Heb 2:5–9 (Ps 8:4–6); 8:5 (Exod 25:40); 8:8–12 (Jer 31:31–34 [38:31–34 LXX])—then one may wonder whether the assignments were quite as intentional as Pierce insists and begin to look for even more important considerations behind the author’s text-selection and, even, more apt descriptions of his exegetical method. Are there other features that each—or, at the least, *even more*—of Hebrews’s citations share in common? I’m inclined with George Caird (and his kin) to think there are. And I’m now curious to explore how Pierce’s thesis maps onto these other approaches.

These questions and minor quibbles notwithstanding, Pierce has indeed given us a probing study of Hebrews, at once well-researched and, here and there, freshly-illuminating. And, beyond this, she's drawn our attention to matters of central importance in this letter, both to Scripture and to God. Hebrews insists that we must pay close attention to "the one who is speaking" (12:25; cf. p. 211) and Pierce's study helps us do just that.

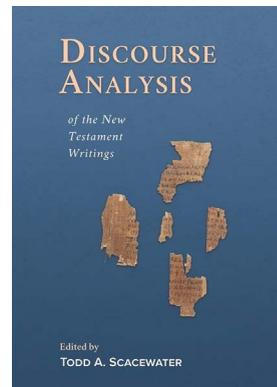
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Todd A. Scacewater, ed. *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*. Dallas: Fontes, 2020. 772 pp. £37.99/\$49.95.

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For the average Greek NT student or pastor without a linguistics background, discourse analysis can seem like learning the rules of an unfamiliar sport. Grappling with linguistic concepts like "coherence relations," "semantic structural analysis," or "action peaks" can appear as enthralling as the uninitiated absorbing the technicalities of test cricket or American football. Yet the ability to trace the linguistic structures in text and speech is crucial to the competent translation, exegesis, and teaching of the NT. Within this field, practitioners like Stephen Runge have previously sought to introduce discourse studies to the non-specialist NT Greek student, pastor or scholar (*Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010]).



Todd Scacewater's *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings* is to be commended not just for bringing together a wide array of contributors and their discourse analyses of the entire NT (the first single-volume work to do so), but also for offering a precise introduction to the discipline of discourse analysis in the first 30 pages. This introduction is well worth the price of the entire volume; in it, he summarizes the aims of discourse analysis as being concerned with three elements (pp. 2–3):

1. language beyond the level of the sentence;
2. language use itself;
3. the social and interpersonal aspects of communication.

A better understanding of discourse, Scacewater argues, "may help us to better understand texts as holistic entities (not as a linear sequence of sentences), to resolve exegetical problems, and to better discover communicative intent" (p. 4). Where traditional Greek NT exegesis privileges the close study of lexical meaning and syntax within a sentence, discourse analysis processes the biblical text beyond the sentence level to identify macrostructures (topics), microstructures (pericopes), and prominence (main themes, key thrusts)—whatever the exact method used. The exegetical potential of this kind of study for preachers and teachers is obvious—but how accessible are these tools for the non-specialist?

In the same way as watching or playing a new sport helps one understand its charm, the unique value of Scacewater's work lies in its book-by-book demonstration of discourse analysis from a wide range of expert "players" such as David Allen, Stephen Levinsohn, Robert Longacre, William Varner, and Cynthia Long Westfall. The diversity of approaches, however, also results in an unevenness to

the book when read chapter by chapter, akin to the experience of channel-surfing between different Olympic events. For example, the non-specialist may be confused when Scacewater and David J. Clark describe “Narrative/Discourse Blocks” in Matthew’s Gospel (pp. 31–62), while Stephen Longacre (a key “founding father” of NT discourse analysis) opts to outline Mark’s Gospel using “Episodes” containing “Didactic/Action Peaks” (pp. 63–90). Conversely, it is not always apparent how, for example, Cynthia Long Westfall’s treatment of Hebrews using “Systemic Functional Linguistics” (pp. 539–68) differs significantly from Ervin Starwalt’s use of “Semantic Structural Analysis” in 1 Peter (pp. 589–620), other than introducing a new set of terms and assumptions. This ultimately reflects the discipline’s current lack of standardization and its diverse origins from anthropology, structuralism, philosophy of language, and other disciplines (pp. 5–6). Nevertheless, stating each contributor’s adopted approach upfront, either in the table of contents or chapter headings (and perhaps a comparative table of key terms), would help the non-specialist more quickly grasp the approach underlying each book’s discourse analysis.

What of the exegetical payoff? Readers will find much in this book to enlighten their personal study, teaching and preaching of the Greek NT text. While not as comprehensive as full-length discourse analyses (which several of these chapters draw from), there are enough interpretive “a-ha” moments well worth the “cross-cultural” shock of immersing oneself into the discourse analyst’s world. For example, Scacewater’s division of Matthew as alternating “Discourse” and “Narrative” blocks helps readers to appreciate the Gospel as a deliberately-crafted account, and how individual scenes contribute to the dominant themes each major section (pp. 59–62). William Varner’s identification of James 3:13–18 as the discourse peak of the letter helps readers to appreciate James not as a collection of unrelated sayings, but as a concerted appeal to divine (not human) wisdom that sparks a lifestyle in keeping with being “a friend of God” (pp. 571–72).

One may quibble over certain assumptions or conclusions, such as whether “choice always implies meaning” when a biblical writer picks one connective over another (e.g., Stephen Levinsohn’s analysis of Galatians, pp. 297–330), or whether the absence of “formulaic” evidence still reflects a literary plan (e.g., Scacewater’s treatment of Matt 19:1 as the beginning of a new Act, p. 34). But this should not detract from the overall achievement of collating such a comprehensive set of essays in service of the church. Furthermore, each contribution is marked with a humility and modesty where the benefits of their analysis are not overstated or exaggerated, and presented with careful reference to the structural proposals of other commentators. The diligent student or pastor will find a treasure trove of well-reasoned linguistic arguments to better understand the overall structure, division, and purpose of each NT book. As a single-volume introduction to the application of discourse analysis of the NT, this collection succeeds admirably in its purpose.

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## — HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Jonathan C. P. Birch. *Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment: Radical Gospels from Thomas Hobbes to Thomas Jefferson*. Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xix + 493 pp. £69.99/\$99.99.

Major historical shifts affect the life and thought of individuals and societies over centuries. Accordingly, one can hardly undervalue the Age of Enlightenment. Many of its protagonists tried to rethink old truths and articulate new ideas while promoting different (and differing) worldviews in the long term. Considering their commitment to progress, intellectual autonomy, and the like, how did the proponents of that era assess the religious imprint of their time and culture?

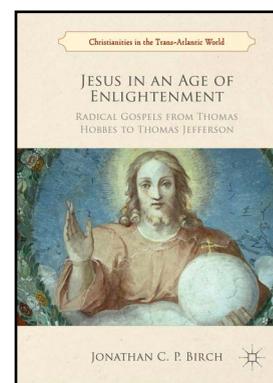
In his well-researched study, Jonathan Birch, tutor at the School of Critical Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK, analyzes some famous and lesser-known figures of the Enlightenment. He takes a closer look at their interpretations of the Christian faith, retraces their lines of reasoning, and compares their positions. These thinkers concerned themselves with Jesus, not for personal reasons, but to promote their vision of history, morality, and political theology.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, where Birch clarifies his subject matter, outlines the current state of research, and lists his working definitions. In addition, he explains the organization of his thorough study while also presenting his four main theses. First, in the Age of Enlightenment, one can identify prototypes of theological discourse with a focus on Jesus, which still today subsist in various forms. Second, the “religious Enlightenment,” actually, grew out of paradigms of scholastic and post-Reformation theology, which frequently stressed a theological-moral realism. Third, as the thinkers’ metaphysical convictions differed, so did their sociocultural visions of how the Enlightenment was to be implemented and lived out in society. Finally, the Enlightenment in general tended toward religious heresy and influenced our modern societies immensely (p. 24).

Because the *Enlightenment* is not as clearly defined as it seems, the author discusses in chapter 2 various conceptions of this key term. He also examines the philosophical, political, and religious context, which in turn brings him to describe the Enlightenment as “a more or less interconnected set of intellectual and social movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with identifiable reforming (or revolutionary) concerns, and ‘enlightenment’ as an ideal, aspiration, or ethos, which might be said to underlay those different projects” (p. 42).

Following relevant philosophical paths (e.g., Plato, Marcion, Thomas Aquinas, medieval scholasticism, Erasmus, Spinoza, and the anglophone Deists), chapter 3 shows how four key factors favored heterodoxy: a rationalistic vision of the goodness of God, the priority of the natural law as divine law, the supposed moral capacity of humans, and the ethical example of Jesus. Thus, the cultural elites generally accepted and presumed “that moral development was at the heart of the Christian life” (p. 124).

Chapter 4 focuses on Thomas Hobbes as a transitional figure of his time. Because he promoted a materialist monism, his emphasis on the immanent world strongly shaped his view of the Christian faith and personal and political ethics. In chapter 5, Birch analyzes the work and thought of three



representative dualists, who stood in contrast to Hobbes on many levels: the Quaker James Nayler, the Christian rationalist Henry More, and the radical positivist historian Hermann S. Reimarus.

Regarding religious tolerance, chapter 6 compares the paradigms of Spinoza, Locke, and Pierre Bayle. Because they differed in their views on revelation, in their theological arguments and worldview, they spoke out differently on the relationship between state and Church. Still, “all thought it necessary to go back to the roots of Christianity in order to address the religio-political challenges of their present” (p. 292).

Shifting to the North American context, Birch turns the readers’ attention in chapter 7 to Joseph Priestley and Thomas Jefferson, who built on materialist metaphysics and repudiated orthodox Christianity. The former was practically a Unitarian who saw the use of Christianity in its facilitation of humanity’s progress. The latter, in turn, elaborated a minimalist version of a historical Jesus, who could serve as “a symbol of moral and spiritual unity” (p. 352) for the nation.

Finally, chapter 8 concludes the book by bringing together the various themes and positions. Birch explains that public intellectuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth century demonstrated an eclectic attitude towards the Christian faith. They all embraced and advanced various heresies, but none of them was an atheist in a strict sense. In order “to imagine a brighter spiritual, moral, and political future” (p. 374), they criticized or used the Christian tradition according to their presuppositions. Therefore, the Enlightenment is not to be understood as a monolithic era. Rather it is a set of interwoven narratives, which contributed to “the pluriform origin of liberal modernity” (p. 374), and whose effects we witness still today. The book closes with an extensive bibliography and both a helpful author index and a subject index.

Using intellectual history as his fundamental approach, Birch manages to present a multi-layered study on an unusual, exciting topic. Not only does he interact actively with secondary literature, but he also models how to grapple with the history of ideas methodically. Although the author works with a rather functional, context-bound understanding of heresy, he treats the various intellectuals fairly and in light of the *zeitgeist*. Hence, *Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment* connects several dots and presents a nuanced picture of the Enlightenment. Readers who prefer a more linear approach to history will have some difficulty following Birch in his extensive analyses, which regularly go beyond the abovementioned thinkers. Occasionally, the author also expresses theological or personal judgments, which evangelical scholars will see differently for good reasons. However, ultimately Birch makes an important contribution within the field of Enlightenment studies. Scholars and students of history, cultural studies, and apologetics will find many stimulating perspectives in this volume worth reading.

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Robert Tracy McKenzie. *We the Fallen People: The Founders and the Future of American Democracy*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 283 pp. £20.50/\$27.99.

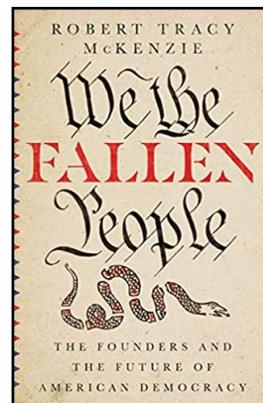
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We live in an age awash with political commentary yet often lacking in serious political thought. Robert Tracy McKenzie's book *We the Fallen People* is a well-written exception to that trend. His thesis, which he adapts from C. S. Lewis, is simple. There are two reasons to believe that government by majority rule is a good thing: because we trust the goodness of the people or because we don't (p. 11). McKenzie wants us to consider the latter view.

With that proposition laid out, the architecture of the book is simple and persuasive. In the first section, McKenzie considers the founders and the Constitution era. He argues that the founding fathers viewed human nature as flawed and fallible. This is a different argument than proposing that the founders were Christians. McKenzie urges the reader to "set aside the question of whether the framers were *Christian* and focus instead on thinking *Christianly* about the framework of government they constructed" (p. 34). Following James Madison, McKenzie suggests that we view the Constitution as itself a form of commentary on human nature (p. 34, 74)—and, if so, the Constitution-as-commentary suggests an anthropology that is very close to the biblical view of man. Humans are capable of self-government because they are made in the image of God. But humans are fallen, and thus the best form of government is one that protects us from our proclivity to abuse power. However, the founding era's distrust of human nature quickly morphed into a different view.

The second part of the book, "The Great Reversal," deftly sketches the contours of the American political landscape in the 1820s, the years that saw Andrew Jackson first defeated by John Quincy Adams in the 1824 presidential election, then elected handily four years later. Jackson viewed the 1824 election as a failure of democracy in which the will of the people had been thwarted, and he set himself in the 1828 campaign to vindicate that wrong. McKenzie argues that the nature of these elections shows a "great reversal" in the way Americans viewed themselves, especially in the concept of "the people." "Andrew is the *candidate of the People*.... He has always been found upon the side of the People ...'the People' have always been for him" (p. 115, emphasis original). Thus, Jackson's election was, in his own words, "a triumph of the virtue of the people" (p. 123). In roughly a generation from the founders' time, Americans had largely come to view themselves as intrinsically virtuous and innately trustworthy. McKenzie evaluates this reversal as a move to a blind democratic faith: democracy is good because the people are good (p. 128).

This change is important enough that McKenzie devotes the next section to Jackson's presidency. If this era represents the ascendancy of democratic faith, what were its fruits? McKenzie considers two key episodes, the forcible removal of the Cherokee Indians from their homelands and the controversy over the Second Bank of the United States. In the first case, McKenzie argues that, in the most accurate sense of the word, this action was *democratic*: it reflected the majority will of the people and thus challenges our blind faith in democracy as intrinsically just. In the second case, the rhetoric surrounding the Bank War showed Jackson positioning himself as the defender of the people's liberty while simultaneously increasing his power as the supposed sole defender of liberty. McKenzie argues that here Jackson began the populist stream that would remain in American politics to the present.



In his fourth section, McKenzie undertakes an extended survey of Alexis de Tocqueville's writings. The two chapter titles in this section capture the goal well: "Puncturing Faith in Democracy" and "Nurturing Hope for Democracy." Shallow, Twitter-sized engagements with de Tocqueville notwithstanding, McKenzie believes de Tocqueville does have something to teach us about our American experiment, but only if we listen carefully to him and engage the whole of his thought, which will lead us to consider both the perils and possibilities of democracy.

Finally, the fifth section of the book offers McKenzie's lessons for contemporary readers. McKenzie wants us to "renew our thinking" (the subtitle of chapter nine), primarily by considering how not merely Jacksonian Americans, but *we ourselves* have rejected the founders' view of human nature, placing blind faith in democracy (p. 252). This requires that we be alert to our "false assumptions about human nature" that are embedded in our current political practices (p. 256). We must also transform our behavior, which requires that we resist melding Christianity with any political party (p. 268), acknowledge the danger of political power (p. 272), and recognize that rhetoric matters (p. 275)—in short, that we resist externalizing threats to democracy and recognize instead that the most dangerous threats to democracy come from ourselves (p. 279).

*We the Fallen People* is a compelling read, well researched, and written by a careful historian with a gift for narrative summary. It would have been interesting to see McKenzie engage not only the Constitution but also the Declaration of Independence for its commentary on human nature. McKenzie acknowledges that Jefferson's view of humanity was "rosier" than his peers (p. 42), which raises the question of whether the Declaration's preamble creates a strand of American political anthropology in tension with a distrust of "we the fallen people." Such a question, however, in no way takes away from McKenzie's achievement but rather illustrates how well it stimulates reflection on the founding and future of American democracy.

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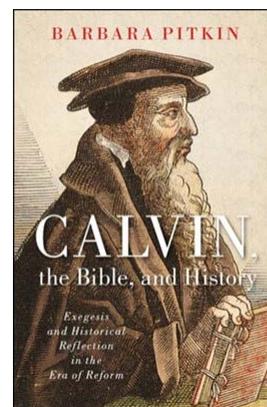
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Barbara Pitkin. *Calvin, the Bible, and History: Exegesis and Historical Reflection in the Era of Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 250 pp. £64.00/\$99.00

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Stanford historian Barbara Pitkin presents seven case studies of Calvin's "historicizing approach to scripture" (p. 2). Granted scripture's purpose, how did the Genevan commentator, lecturer, and preacher understand sacred history as related by the Bible? How did he distinguish between historical anachronism and enduring instruction? Pitkin contextualizes Calvin the exegete in two ways: She illumines the continuities his work bears to medieval Christian biblical interpretation, as well as how he was shaped by the interpretive tools of Renaissance and the "theological priorities of contemporary reforming movements" (pp. 2–3).

The opening chapter introduces issues relevant to Calvin's historical consciousness, hermeneutics, and exegetical practice. Then, the volume proceeds through a series of investigations into the reformer's interpretation of various biblical books,



motifs, and figures spanning both testaments, a range of genres, and the length of his career. One thing that emerges from these studies, each significantly reordered and updated for the present work, is a finely textured sense of the varied ways Calvin's understanding of historical past relates to the present. Thus, although Calvin's portrait of Paul includes historical remoteness, the apostle's writings also contain "universal, doctrinal lessons" which "transcend" their original setting (p. 45) and contain the "central Christian truths that guided the interpretation of all of scripture" (p. 67). Pitkin highlights that in his commentary on John's Gospel, Calvin often focuses on the salvific mission of Christ in history rather than the more traditional prioritisation of Christological and Trinitarian doctrines.

Calvin's historical consciousness becomes more pronounced in his later works on the Old Testament. There he prioritizes David's exemplary faith more than his prophetic status, emphasizes a more ecclesiological than Christological interpretation of Isaiah's prophecies, and delimits the fulfilment of Daniel's messianic prophecies to Christ's first advent. Equally compelling is how Calvin's training in contemporary French historical jurisprudence inflected his rearrangement of the legal and historical material in his harmony of Exodus through Deuteronomy. Calvin's sermons on 2 Samuel indicate how Israel's experience of the strife between Saul and David is instructive for contemporary Christians living through the coming of religious war to France.

The coordination of historical past and meaning for the religious present is one of the most interesting features of these studies. For Calvin, the biblical past both possessed "its own integrity and remoteness" and was "nevertheless profoundly meaningful and relevant for Calvin and his contemporaries" (p. 219). As Pitkin notes, Calvin's derivation of instruction for his readers and auditors depends upon his understanding of "the overall purpose of scripture, [and] the kind of history it relates" (p. 200). What, then, undergirds these commitments?

The Bible, although undoubtedly a historical text and source, is also God's "normative foundation" for Christian teaching and life in the present (p. 211). In Calvin's view, scriptural history is connected to the present through divine providence. Therefore, rather than extraneous details, the peculiarities of the biblical past are themselves "the very locus ... for contemporary relevance" (p. 223). Such is clear in Calvin's frequent appeal to the metaphor of the "mirror" of the past for present instruction of the church.

Throughout the book, Pitkin treats the reader to an astonishing range of scholarship on both early modern exegesis and Calvin's place in the history of biblical interpretation. The volume contains the highest historical scholarship as well as appealing, lucid writing, inviting the reader to enjoy the depths of the reflection contained here. It is both an important addition to work on early modern hermeneutics and a steep but ascendable introduction to scholarship on Calvin's exegesis.

Pitkin is precise and careful throughout, qualifying and weighing judgments and observing where further study is needed. The observations and conclusions contained here invite application and reflection to a range of neighboring conversations. How does Calvin's understanding of history differ from the historical consciousness operative in various models of hermeneutics? More specifically, how might such a portrait of the indispensability of history—especially history as providentially ordered by God—contribute to contemporary debates about scriptural exegesis, historical-critical, theological, or

otherwise? Whatever questions one brings to this work, Pitkin's volume is an illuminating study and an offering of the highest level to the growing literature on Calvin's exegesis.

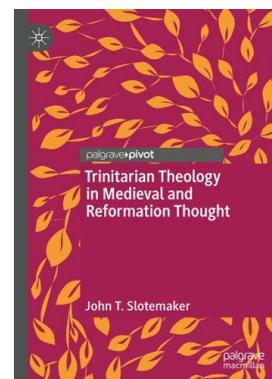
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John T. Slotemaker. *Trinitarian Theology in the Medieval and Reformation Thought*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020. 131 pp. £44.99/\$24.99.

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When one thinks of medieval Trinitarian theology, “introductory” does not often come to mind. The heights of reflection achieved in the 13–15th centuries have rarely, if ever, been matched. Yet, what transpired in this period largely set the table with the questions and solutions that have kept theologians busy for the past five hundred years. The early 13th century saw the adoption of Peter Lombard's *Sentences* as the standard text for theological education in the universities, as well as the official approval of his Trinitarian theology at the Fourth Lateran Council. These decisions would have widely felt effects. Sadly, much of these developments remains in obscurity for those who have not braved the imposing Latin tomes of commentary on the *Sentences*. And among Protestant evangelicals, Nicaea can often struggle to get a hearing, to say nothing of Lateran IV. Recently, however, medievalists such as John T. Slotemaker have begun to make this period more accessible to non-specialists.



Slotemaker canvasses the “long medieval period” from around 1000–1550 for the sake of outlining “a common or basic trinitarian theology held by almost all medieval and Reformation era Christians” (p. 2). Mainly he has in mind a series of commitments surrounding theological epistemology, the divine processions and relations between the divine persons, and how we conceive of “person” and personal distinction in Trinitarian discourse. Three main chapters touch on each of these themes, framed by a brief introduction and conclusion.

The chapter on theological epistemology traces some ways theologians came to a broad set of shared commitments on how we know the Trinity. Mostly, these commitments center on the need for divine revelation and the ministerial but large role for reason in tracing out the implications of revelation. The necessity of reason being guided by divine revelation asserts itself most forcefully as 14th-century theologians think through the compatibility of Aristotelian logic with the doctrine of the Trinity. The third chapter takes up some of these issues in an overview of how theologians in the 13–14th centuries thought about the divine processions and relations. Here, a set of questions concerning the Father's eternal generation of the Son would push theologians to the heights of Trinitarian speculation and back down again to more apophatic approaches, the influence of which would be felt in Reformation theologies. Wrestling with different language in the Nicene and Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds, theologians had to ask what the relation of the Son's eternal generation was to the divine essence. Although the question might strike casual readers as a bit fussy, there were some serious metaphysical issues in play. Every divine person is identical to the divine essence and only conceptually distinct from it. So, if one divine person begets or spirates another, can we not say that the divine essence begets and

is begotten, or spirates and proceeds? That would appear to be the consequence of a normal Aristotelian syllogism. But it was an unacceptable conclusion for theology.

For various reasons, Lateran IV decided that the divine essence itself is neither the agent nor product of generation. This decision elevated a particular reading of the fathers, notably Augustine, and shaped subsequent discussions of this issue. Augustine's distinction between two ways of speaking about God, which he elaborates in *De Trinitate* 5–7, became increasingly important for Trinitarian theology in this period. Slotemaker economically discusses the various approaches to how Lateran IV's reading of Augustine influenced accounts of the Son's eternal generation and the Spirit's procession, as well as the kinds of relations obtaining between them. Here we are given brief treatments of the various solutions provided by Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and others like Gregory Rimini. What emerges is another set of common commitments. First, the divine emanations were "limned by a very particular set of conciliar statements emerging from Lateran IV as well as an Aristotelian philosophy of substances" (p. 74). Second, the debate about the relations between the persons rested on an agreement that there were four relations in God: active and passive relations in both the Son's begetting and the Spirit's procession. Even where these constraints were resisted, as in some Reformers, the common commitments were mostly retained.

Finally, the fourth chapter gives an overview of personal distinction in the Trinity. Through the various construals of Richard of St. Victor, Aquinas, and Scotus, there was a commonly accepted view that there are three distinct subsistent beings in God (p. 88). Beyond this very basic common denominator, there were questions about what distinguishes them and how. Peter Abelard's interest in demonstrating the Trinity from the triad of "power, wisdom, and goodness" led him to distinguish the persons with these attributes. This view won him no small degree of censure and ridicule, leading theologians to distinguish carefully between "appropriations" and personal properties. Here again, books 5–7 of Augustine's *De Trinitate*—as read by Lombard—loomed large. Lombard argued that the persons were distinguished by personal properties. And his commentators would proceed to ask whether personal properties are the divine persons themselves, or whether the properties are "constituted" of the divine essence and the persons. Slotemaker's discussion of the four different approaches to this question between 1250 and 1550 is illuminating and arguably the book's chief contribution (p. 94–107).

In part of his conclusion, Slotemaker summarizes the constraining forces on trinitarian speculation in medieval theology. These forces end up coming back again and again to Lombard and Aristotle. First, there is the influence of Lombard's *Sentences*, and the way it affected how theologians treated the issues and what questions they thought were relevant. Second, there was the narrowing effect of Lombard's sources, which were mostly occupied with (a certain reading of) Augustine. Third, the influence of Lateran IV, which vindicated Lombard against some of his critics, shut down many of the paths explored in the 12th century—a development which Slotemaker neither praises nor condemns. The fourth and fifth points are very alike. For better or worse, the importance of Aristotelian metaphysics and logic channeled Trinitarian discussions in directions that are historically contingent and might have been otherwise.

Apart from the brief discussions of the material issues, these summary points are the main takeaways from the book. Slotemaker states them all with appropriate nuance and care, avoiding grandiose judgments about the historical trajectory of trinitarian theology. Overall, this is a useful little volume for teachers, advanced students, and scholars looking for entryways into these issues.

The book's shortcomings pertain to its brevity. One wishes for *more*: discussion of different perspectives on the divine missions, more intricate overview of appropriation, and more extensive quotation of original sources (particularly of those that are hard to find). Sometimes the discussion of intricate arguments errs so much on the side of brevity that it can be hard to follow. And though "Reformation thought" is in the title, it plays little role in the actual argument.

But these shortcomings are small. There remains much to glean from this slim volume, with the hope of more to come from its author. Summarizing the main currents of medieval reflection on one of the faith's most mysterious truths is no easy task, much less in such a short compass. That Slotemaker largely succeeds is impressive and an occasion for gratitude.

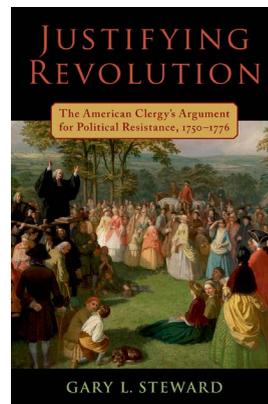
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Gary L. Steward. *Justifying Revolution: The American Clergy's Argument for Political Resistance, 1750–1776*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 232 pp. \$74.00.

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Colonial American pastors were vocal participants in debates over revolution and independence. Some opposed what they saw as rebellion, while others advocated revolution. More recently, the pro-revolution pastors have themselves been subjects for debate. Modern Christian political activists claim them as their forefathers. Other contemporary Christians see them as examples of faith being trumped by political commitments. Some academic historians have argued that the "patriot preachers" of the 1750s–70s allowed liberal, rationalist political ideology from the Enlightenment to supplant their commitment to Scripture. In *Justifying Revolution*, historian Gary Steward offers an insightful new study of the clergy's arguments for revolution. According to Steward, the pro-revolution pastors of the eighteenth century were not choosing enlightenment liberalism over Scripture. On the contrary, they drew on deep traditions in Reformed theology and English legal thought.



Steward starts the story with Jonathan Mayhew's celebrated 1750 sermon, "Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission," defending a right of resistance to tyrannical rule. Jonathan Mayhew was a prominent Congregationalist pastor in Boston. This sermon was one of the more famous defences of resistance to the tyranny of the era. It became a touchstone for the revolutionary generation and was reprinted again as the American colonists' conflict with the mother country grew into a full imperial crisis. Mayhew was a theological liberal. Does this suggest a connection between religious liberalism and revolutionary political attitudes? Steward says no. Despite Mayhew's heterodoxy in other areas, Steward shows that his arguments on resistance belong firmly in a long tradition of Reformed thinking on the duties of citizens and magistrates. Mayhew drew on decades of reflection by orthodox Calvinist English Puritans and French Huguenots.

Steward introduces readers to the pro-resistance arguments—not only of Mayhew but of numerous other American colonial preachers. He then traces the roots of these arguments to their sources earlier

in the Reformed tradition and English history. After all, the American Revolution was not the first time English preachers had to grapple with the appropriate scope of the duty to obey the civil government.

As Steward explains, in the early sixteenth century, Puritans led the opposition to the Stuart monarchy's notion of an unlimited divine right to rule. According to the Puritans and their Scottish Reformed allies, the Bible sets out a normative presumption to obey the civil government. But that obligation is not absolute. There are exceptions when a ruler has abdicated his duties to rule justly. On this view, Romans 13 builds in limitations on the duty to obey, for it describes the ruler to whom obedience is due as one who punishes evil and praises the good. Examples from the Old Testament abound in which the godly navigate unjust rulers and don't always passively obey. Righteous kings are bound by the law of God (Deut 17:18–20) and take oaths to God and to the people to obey God's law (2 Kgs 11:17).

In short, this biblical framework imposes duties on a king and limits the citizen's duty to obey. As Steward explains, this informed the Reformed interpretation of English history. The Puritans in the English Civil War argued that Charles I had violated the laws of England and that the war was not an ungodly rebellion but a righteous defense of English law. Similarly, many English preachers believed the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was justified as a righteous defense of English rights and liberties against James II's interference. Similar arguments appeared in the American colonies to justify the deposition of the royal governor of Massachusetts in 1689 after news of the Glorious Revolution reached the colony.

Steward argues that the American Revolution belongs firmly in this tradition of theological and legal argument. For Americans in the 1760s and '70s, Parliament's efforts to regulate the colonies were affronts to their rights as Englishmen. These rights included the ability to govern themselves through their colonial legislatures (including the levying of taxes), be tried by juries of their peers, and even have religious self-government (called into question by efforts of some to introduce an Anglican bishop to the colonies).

Steward guides the reader through this history and theology clearly and concisely. He provides a persuasive rebuttal to the historians who trace American revolutionary thought primarily to the Enlightenment and a powerful case for the importance of the Reformed resistance tradition in revolutionary America. Steward is sometimes a bit too concise, at least for scholarly readers, who might like to know more about some nuances. For instance, were there regional variations in attitudes towards resistance? (The book's coverage skews toward New England ministers.) Were there differences among denominational traditions beyond the importance broadly ascribed to the Reformed tradition? But there is only so much a short book can cover. And for most readers, the concision will be a virtue.

*Justifying Revolution* is a valuable addition to the literature on American history and church history alike. Academic historians and casual history buffs will all learn new things. And pastors grappling with age-old questions about how far duties are owed to the government can read this book with profit too, as an introduction to an important line of Reformed thought about the duties owed by the citizen to the civil government.

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Brad Vermurlen. *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle Over American Evangelicalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. £65.14/\$99.00.

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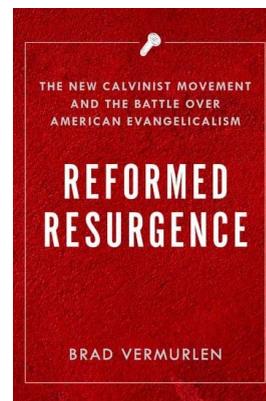
Those who, like the reviewer, hot-footed their way through Collin Hansen's *Young, Restless and Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), a book based on extensive in-person interviews with major figures in the 'new Calvinist' movement, will find Brad Vermurlen's *Reformed Resurgence* similarly hard to put down. But even for those who have never yet read Hansen's 2006 work and yet want to better understand the new Calvinist movement, *Reformed Resurgence* makes for a fascinating read.

The book does make demands on the reader. It is a re-worked doctoral dissertation in the field of sociology of religion. But of its seven chapters (the first of which is introductory), the six which follow are evenly divided between narrative-explanation (chs. 2, 3 and 7) and interpretation informed by sociological insight (chs. 4, 5 and 6). One might be tempted to read the in-depth interviews and analysis about the movement (which far surpass anything I have seen elsewhere) and skip the social analysis. To do so would be a mistake. Such social analysis is perfectly appropriate since the new Calvinist movement is a social phenomenon in which group behaviour, leadership dynamics and competition with other viewpoints operate.

On Vermurlen's analysis, the New Calvinist movement is one of four competing versions of American evangelical Protestantism, each of which has been confronted with massive cultural shifts in the areas of gender, same-sex marriage and cultural pluralism. First (and largest) is mainstream Evangelicalism, the broad trans-denominational coalition which came to the fore in the 1940s. Second, there is what has come to be known as emergent Evangelicalism, often characterised as re-fashioning the Christian message in light of post-modern concerns. Third, there is a neo-Anabaptist Evangelicalism which is most intent on applying Christian ethical principles in an increasingly secular America. The rise of New Calvinism, the fourth variety, reflects dissatisfaction with the disarray increasingly found in mainstream Evangelicalism, driven too often by pragmatism and a lack of readiness to spell out Christian teaching in an articulate way. As well, New Calvinism's rise reflects a rejection of emergent Evangelicalism's attempt to move beyond the sheer pragmatism of the mainstream by the embrace of the post-modern assumptions shared by so many younger Americans.

Numerically speaking, the New Calvinism (whose existence he dates from Hansen's 2006 reporting) is the largest and most vocal of the three alternatives to the evangelical mainstream. *Themelios* readers know it from its websites, blogs, Twitter feeds, and the public conferences from which its most high-profile preachers and church planters hold forth. How large is it? In appendices, Vermurlen points to the approximate measurement accessible through the numbers of Twitter-feed followers gained by various public figures. Among New Calvinists, the highest rated is the hip-hop artist Lecrae (1.6m), followed by John Piper (1m). Neither of these equal the followings of mainstream evangelical figures like Rick Warren (2.2m). But there are other ways of gauging New Calvinism's influence within the associated streams of Evangelicalism.

In what the reviewer found the most thought-provoking segment of the book (ch. 6), Vermurlen documented how New Calvinist bloggers and preachers were first to respond to a number of challenges to received evangelical doctrine and ethics early last decade, shaping the response of broader



Evangelicalism to these same questions. His examples? The approximations of universalist teaching in the writings of Rob Bell (2011) and the temporary indication that World Vision was willing to deploy same-sex married couples as its agents in various regions of need (2014). Vermurlen, not inappropriately, singles out these instances as occasions in which New Calvinists have functioned as ‘gatekeepers’ of the evangelical world, taking it upon themselves to be the arbiters of permissible beliefs and practices for the larger evangelical movement. But the reviewer is not convinced that the examples themselves support the larger point for which Vermurlen contends. Does American Evangelicalism have *any* gatekeepers? *Christianity Today* magazine once functioned in this way—less so in modern times. I think that a fair response to Vermurlen’s line of argument is that adherents of Reformed theology have always punched above their weight in cooperative evangelical enterprises just because they take theology and ethics more seriously than some other expressions of Evangelicalism. So it was in these cases. But with this reservation stated, the reviewer grants that Vermurlen has correctly pinpointed a pattern of rapid and non-consultative response shown in these episodes. The reviewer agrees that such tactics do not reflect well on the movement. Earnest Evangelicalism is not confined to the New Calvinist movement, and the registering of grave concerns about threats posed to the faith needs to reflect a wider trans-confessional constituency.

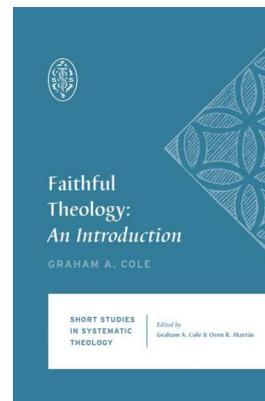
I cannot praise Vermurlen’s work too highly and urge it upon the readers of this journal. We will not soon see evaluative writing about the New Calvinist movement carried out with this same blend of understanding and critical evaluation. If *Reformed Resurgence* has a blind spot, it may be that the commencing of this study in 2006 works to obscure the fact that an earlier generation of aggressive, innovative American Calvinists such as John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul were staking out highly similar territory in the preceding two decades. Clever use of digital media, open denunciation of suspect orthodoxy, and large-scale conferences that featured passionate proclamation are tactics already illustrated by those who came before.

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## — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Graham A. Cole. *Faithful Theology: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 118 pp. £10.73/\$14.99.

Many lay Christians struggle to explain their doctrinal beliefs, or they simply doubt the importance of having and maintaining any convictions. However, according to Graham Cole, an ordained Anglican minister and recently retired professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, all Christians are theologians and are called to know God in the right manner. The goal of his recent work, *Faithful Theology*, is to lay the groundwork for faithful thinking about God “that arises from wise reflection on the self-revelation of God” (p. 14). In the introduction, Cole centers theology around the core priorities of belief (*orthodoxy*), value (*orthokardia*), and practice (*orthopraxy*). He then proceeds to devote a chapter each to five elements of faithful theology.



In the first chapter, “The Word of Revelation,” Cole discusses the means of our knowledge about God—his inspired Word. Cole frames Scripture as “the definitive source for our knowledge of God ... the verbally inspired, definitive witness to the words and acts of God ... [and] the norm by which theological proposals are to be tested” (p. 24). Throughout the chapter, Cole relates Scripture’s authority and inerrancy to the areas of Christology, hermeneutics (e.g., the self-interpretation of Scripture), and the bearing that authority has on our “operational theology” (p. 32). The second chapter, “The Witness of Christian Thought and Practice,” engages the role of tradition in our theology. Contrary to a strict biblicist approach, Cole defends ancient creeds like the Nicene Creed and the wisdom that “biblical teaching is often captured in terminology from outside the biblical text” (p. 48). As he concludes that chapter, he writes, “We need Scripture to be the final court of appeal because, as we have seen, there are healthy traditions and unhealthy, even toxic, ones for the life of the church” (p. 52).

In the third chapter, Cole weighs the effects of sin on our theological pursuits, and calls our fallen estate the “New Normal” (p. 54; written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic!). He argues that our theology can stray from the truth due to our idolatrous desires and our pessimistic outlook as finite creatures. However, our theology is done within a particular space and time, the groaning creation in these last days. In some sense, this means that our theology will be limited as we await the consummation. With these principles in mind, Cole aptly asserts, “The unteachable theologian is an oxymoron” (p. 60). Chapter 4 explains the role that wisdom plays in the theological journey, including the importance of dogmatic rank, biblical theology, and Cole’s three criteria for wise judgement—that theology done wisely should be scriptural, rational, and livable (pp. 82–83). In the final chapter, “The Way of Worship,” Cole drives home the central point that right doctrine leads to worship, not mere intellectual stimulation.

The most helpful aspect of *Faithful Theology* is the constant focus on the Trinity and Christology. Simply turning to a few random pages in the book will give readers an idea of how essential these doctrines are to having a genuinely faithful theology. Every chapter includes several considerations of each given topic in relation to the Trinity and Christology. This is important for two reasons. First, readers are introduced to the key tenets of the Christian faith. Not only do they learn why they’re essential, but they also learn to avoid heterodox understandings from the church’s past. Second, by

including historical theology and the church's creeds, Cole exposes readers to the vitality of the "healthy traditions" that are the lifeblood of Christian orthodoxy. A good theologian never does theology in a vacuum (as if that is even possible). Especially in the book's second chapter, Cole implicitly deconstructs the notion of "no creed but the Bible." By emphasizing the church's creeds and councils, he helps readers appreciate their value and significance for maintaining right beliefs about God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

This is a short book, but it is deep and rich. There is little to fault in Cole's analysis. Some readers may wish for a more explicit defense of Protestant confessions (for example, no Reformed confessions are mentioned). Others may have wanted more intramural discussion of the academic *discipline* of systematic theology, especially since the volume is part of the series Short Studies in Systematic Theology. However, such worries are likely straining at gnats; keeping the content accessible and adopting a broadly orthodox and evangelical approach are strategic moves that make good sense for this type of introductory volume.

In just over one hundred pages, readers will grasp the basics of Christian dogmatics, its methodology, and its practical dimensions. Cole's primer serves admirably as the lead volume in the "Short" Studies in Systematic Theology, setting the stage for the later volumes in the series. The book would be perfect for an introductory seminary course or a college upper elective, aiding all who seek to faithfully respond to the self-revelation of God. May all who read this book guard the good deposit of the faith entrusted to them!

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Adonis Vidu. *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 352 pp. £40.99/\$50.00.

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What does it mean for God to act? This simple question taps into one of the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith. In this volume, Adonis Vidu gives a comprehensive account of God's triune action that draws on biblical language, the great tradition, and careful theological formulation.

Vidu's primary aim is to define and defend the facet of classical theism which affirms that the works of the triune God outside of himself are indivisible (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*). For Vidu, this affirmation functions not as an isolated proposition but as "a dogmatic rule" that normalizes and qualifies other theological formulations and systematic descriptions (p. xiv). This theological formulation was initially established and consistently affirmed because of the conviction that "scripture ascribes the selfsame actions to the Son as much as to the Father and the Holy Spirit" (p. xiv). Recognizing the confessional dimension of this assertion about God's inner being and action, Vidu summarizes, "In faith we confess that since God is triune—something we have learned not from observing separate effects, but having been taught propositionally to ascribe the same effects to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we have to describe every divine action in inseparable-Trinitarian terms" (p. 322).



Vidu lays the foundation for his study in the opening three chapters. First, he examines the biblical-theological basis for the doctrine of inseparable operations by articulating the claims of Jewish monotheism and reckoning with the way the New Testament writers speak of Christ and the Spirit as included in both divine acts and thus within the divine identity. Second, he surveys the “rise and decline” of inseparable operations in the history of interpretation, emphasizing the patristic era and its development and “debugging” in Augustine and Aquinas before the critiques and modifications of the doctrine in the modern period. Third, Vidu gives a systematic account of the language of triune causality and briefly engages a critique of social trinitarianism.

A distinction that is critical for Vidu and his project throughout the book is between what he calls “soft” and “hard” inseparability (see pp. xiii–xiv, 91–125). Vidu’s contention is that much modern theological treatment of the Trinity affirms a *soft inseparability* that views the works of God in the divine economy as carefully coordinated but not necessarily undivided. In some versions of this model, these coordinated works (with which God accomplishes his will in the world) are the means by which we might distinguish between the persons of the Trinity. By contrast, a *hard inseparability* understands every action of God outside of himself to be an undivided act of the entire Trinity. There is an order (*taxis*) to this action whereby we might recognize through revelation that a work of God is *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Spirit. However, the external works of God are not a means of individuating the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit.

In making these clarifications, Vidu is seeking to reckon with the fact that “during the past century the rule has gone from being part of the very foundation of Trinitarian dogma to being dodged as one of its greatest vulnerabilities” (p. xvi). An important key to the distance between hard and soft inseparability is the divergent ways the creator/creation distinction is understood and related to language about God and his action in the world (see pp. 126–29).

In the remaining six chapters, Vidu tests his thesis as he works through the theological loci most germane to his account of triune action. Central here is a Trinitarian account of creation and the incarnation (chapters 4 and 5). A full account of God’s triune act of creation is strategically significant for Vidu because it is the singular act that can be characterized as divine without remainder. The incarnation, too, is the most theologically loaded challenge to the notion of inseparable operations (that the Son alone becomes incarnate). Examining the logic of Christ’s incarnational action, Vidu next pursues the meaning of Christ’s two natures for his personal actions and his work of atonement (chs. 6–7). To extend the scope of his study, Vidu reflects on the ascension of Christ and the coming of the Spirit in terms of the divine missions (ch. 8). He concludes his theological study by considering the indwelling of the Holy Spirit among believers and developing a trinitarian account of God’s love (ch. 9).

There are many angles from which one might examine the significance of Vidu’s work. His extended analysis of the way that inseparable operations inform or problematize various doctrines opens up several avenues for further reflection. His confidence that Aquinas anticipates and/or has the resources necessary to answer the challenges of modern theological critiques of the inseparability rule is also an area rife for engagement. Here I will focus on two salient features of this study’s method: the strategic significance of the biblical idiom and the theological humility required to the study the doctrine of the Trinity.

One of the clear strengths of Vidu’s project is the biblical-theological foundation he lays for his affirmation and analysis of inseparable operations (see pp. 1–51). While it is possible to arrive at the inseparability rule by tracing the theo-logic of God’s being in the doctrine of God (God is a simple

divine being whose acts can thus not be divided), Vidu stresses throughout that the rule was initially articulated and developed from an inductive reflection on biblical texts. Drawing on the work of scholars like Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, Vidu argues that in his incarnation, Jesus as the Son of God did things only Yahweh could do. The New Testament writers are then bold to articulate just this implication. They identify the actions of Jesus with the actions of the only true God of Israel. Here Vidu highlights Paul's use of the *Shema* in 1 Corinthians 6:8 and the unique relationship between the works of the Father and the Son in John's Gospel.

The force of this two-testament biblical idiom, then, prompts the inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity and the affirmation that Father and Son act not only in unison but without division. Thus, from Vidu's perspective, the inseparability rule is not only a philosophical postulate logically coherent with theology proper but more profoundly a theological judgment made by the biblical authors themselves. "Trinitarian theology," he insists, is "best understood as mining the semantic depth of the Scriptures" (p. 62). Accordingly, "the primary reason for the confession of the doctrine of inseparable operations is that it is a datum of revelation" (p. 91). Recognizing this theological judgment in biblical texts then prompts an "exploration of its conceptual coherence" (p. 91). For Vidu, this process of reflection is "initiated in Scripture and continued in pro-Nicene theology" (p. 91).

Another striking feature of Vidu's account is his disposition and argument about the nature of "God-talk." For Vidu, because of the reality of the creator/creation divide, theologians should maintain an epistemic humility when contemplating God's being and divine activity. This disposition is also necessary given the nature of divine revelation. The doctrine of the Trinity in general and inseparable operations in particular *requires* both the revelation of God in the missions of the Son and Spirit and also the accompanying verbal revelation of Scripture. This mediated theological reality should temper our theological language about both God's economy and divine nature. We can learn genuine knowledge about God from his acts in human history (creation and redemption) but only because we have received by faith divine revelation that displays and interprets these actions (see pp. 319–26).

Theological humility is required both by the grandeur of the subject (the inner being of the transcendent God) and also the shape of the doctrine itself (ordered knowledge received by faith). In this sense, Vidu argues that we cannot *comprehend* God but rather *witness* to the reality of God's revelation. Rather than an explication of the divine essence, this work is "a modest exercise in theological grammar" (xiv). Vidu reflects further that "the apophatic character of Trinitarian doctrine is quite appropriate, given the reality it fearfully contemplates" (p. 95). Regarding his focus in this book, too, Vidu notes that "while the doctrine of inseparable operations must not be surrendered, it is not the final word on triune agency" (p. 14). Thus while Vidu's work is the only current full-length monograph on inseparable operations, he maintains a disposition of theological humility, recognizes the modesty of his specific claims, and strives to locate his project within the great tradition of theologians and biblical interpreters.

Because it delves into issues of God's internal being within himself and external action in relation to creation, this volume is dense and at times very technical. The unfolding of Vidu's argument, though, is clearly structured and carefully articulated. Vidu shows that the affirmation of inseparable operations guides and governs several related dogmatic claims and is also formulated on the basis of patterns and

concepts found in biblical texts. The disciplined reader will thus greatly benefit from this comprehensive and instructive volume.

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## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Robert Bashford. *Focus on Jesus: A Guide to the Message of Handel's Messiah*. Latimer Studies 88. London: The Latimer Trust, 2020. 175 pp. £8.50/\$10.00.

COVID has been difficult for choirs worldwide. During the past 20 months, my own choir—the oldest in Australia—has only come together as a whole for just six weeks. However, that short window of resumption, earlier in 2021, coincided with Easter, and with it our annual performance of Handel's *Messiah*. 2020's performance had been canceled just two weeks prior to Easter, so this *Messiah* was eagerly anticipated by choir, orchestra and audience alike.

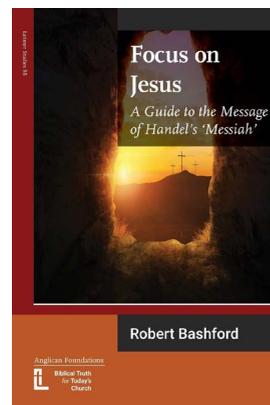
However, the choristers all seemed to have forgotten it, or had never sung it before, so teaching *Messiah's* choruses in the space of a month to seventeen boys brought home again to me the extraordinary fusion of biblical text to music that is *Messiah's* genius. For once heard, even by those for whom it is new, those scriptural passages can't be read again without hearing Handel's music. *Messiah* makes the text come alive (even for 9-year-old children!) and lodges it in the heart forever.

For those wishing to better understand this phenomenon, retired English clergyman and musical enthusiast, Robert Bashford, has written a delightful book: *Focus on Jesus: A Guide to the Message of Handel's Messiah*, contributing a valuable addition to the literature on this masterpiece of sacred music.

In his introduction, Bashford helpfully outlines the aims of the book: to comment on the libretto's biblical text in order to explain its meaning within *Messiah*, and also (here a departure from predecessors in the literature) within its original biblical context. He does this most thoroughly, line-by-line, in good expository fashion in the manner of a sermon—complete with illustrations (mainly from C. S. Lewis) and often application. Handel's music is discussed separately in a brief, conversational way at the end of each section.

Bashford's style is warm and homely: one can hear his pastoral teaching tone coming out as he explains the nuances of the text to us, his expectant congregation. In this sermon-style, Bashford is in esteemed company, as John Newton delivered fifty sermons based on the *Messiah* Scriptures, inspired by the Handel centenary in Westminster Abbey in 1784. Newton declared that listening to *Messiah* was "one of the highest and noblest gratifications this life is capable of."

Although Handel is the name associated with the oratorio, the text selection is in fact entirely the work of Charles Jennens, Handel's librettist, and it is to him that we owe the entire subject matter. Bashford rightly gives him the respect he deserves.



Having previously selected the libretto for two of Handel's oratorios, *Israel in Egypt* and *Saul*, Jennens, at his own instigation and gratis, Jennens presented Handel with the new libretto, prefaced with a quotation from Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, "Majora Canamus": "Let us sing of greater things." And of what greater things could there be than the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? "I hope he will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other Subject," wrote Jennens to his friend, Holdsworth.

Charles Jennens was a man of some considerable wealth and no little scholarship. He was a devout Anglican, a supporter of the SPCK, actively anti-Deist and, despite being a Nonjuror (and therefore unable to graduate from Oxford), became a noted Shakespearian scholar later in life. A loner, he remained single and was prone to depression, later inheriting his father's large country estate, "Gospall," where he entertained Handel. His contribution to *Messiah* cannot be overestimated: Handel himself wrote to him referring to "your oratorio *Messiah*."

As a librettist choosing texts for the subject of the Messiah, it is at first glance odd that the biblical material is taken almost entirely from the Old Testament. There is no real narrative, apart from the brief Nativity scene when Jennens takes a short excursion to Luke's Gospel. There is no account, for example, of the crucifixion or resurrection, which, considering their centrality to Christian belief, is still surprising. And although Jennens does address the death of Jesus through Isaiah 53:8, when set by Handel on most of the modern recordings, this lasts a cursory fifteen seconds at most!

Handel scholar Donald Burrows once remarked that Jennens's oblique way of pointing to Jesus was "incomprehensible to an audience without a prior knowledge of the subject: the listener must be, if not necessarily a believer, at least well-versed in the scriptural accounts of events between Maundy Thursday and Whit Sunday, and know something of their conventional theological interpretation" (*Handel: Messiah* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 58). The early music scholar Clifford Bartlett went even further, finding the selection of prophetic texts was actually advantageous to the "non-believing performer and listener [who] may find it easier to ignore the Christian message than when encountering Bach's Passions, for example" ("Introduction," in *Messiah: Full Score*, ed. C. Bartlett [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], v).

This explains why performing *Messiah*, as a form of gospel outreach, is not nearly so effective as might first be thought. At the very least, one has to work much harder to find the overarching message, particularly in a Scripturally-ignorant generation.

But this is why Bashford's book is so helpful and encouraging. For what he carefully and patiently shows is that the assembled text does have a plan to reveal the Messiah, prophecy by prophecy. There are several, very clear explanations of the foundational Christian doctrines, including a particularly good explanation of the various passages from Isaiah 53.

Some of Jennens's selection can be explained by his fondness for Bishop Richard Kidder's *Demonstration of the Messias, in which the Truth of the Christian Religion Is Proved*, 2nd ed. (1726). Jennens uses more than half of the verses cited by Kidder. This was also a key text in the anti-Deist movement. Some have even argued that Jennens wished to marshal Handel's oratorio in his battle against the anti-revelatory/mystery aspect of Deism, so prevalent in both men's milieu. This tome, and the then-popular *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon All of the Books of the New Testament* by Henry Hammond (1653) explain many of the idiosyncrasies in Jennens's text (e.g., his use of textual variants in the Authorised Version) and therefore answers some of Bashford's questions about his choices.

The musical analysis is the weakest part of Bashford's book. For example, even an amateur musician would raise an eyebrow at "How Beautiful Are the Feet" being described as "a particularly engaging item—one to be enjoyed for its lovely tune" (p. 120). This is a pity considering the excellence of his textural analysis and explanation. So much of *Messiah* is a musical exposition of the text, for instance the sheer contrapuntal happiness that Handel employs to depict the sweet folly of sin in "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned ev'ry one to his own way," leading inexorably to the tormented piling up of homophony in the words "but the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The contrast is intended to be painful.

These weaknesses notwithstanding, Robert Bashford has written a beautifully heart-warming and Christ-centred book, and—COVID permitting—when I raise the baton next year to conduct *Messiah* for the twentieth time, I will be able to do so much more aware of the wonderfully assembled texts which inspire singers, listeners, players and reader to kneel and worship the Lamb that was slain.

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Voddie T. Baucham Jr. *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*. Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021. 251 pp. £18.99/\$24.99.

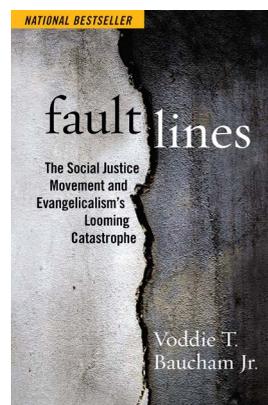
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There are not many books that have such an impact that they have made me change my mind. It turns out that *Faultlines* is one of them. Initially I approached the book with a degree of scepticism. After all I had heard on the evangelical grapevine that it was 'extremist', 'unbalanced', and that Baucham was guilty of 'plagiarism'. And I am an against racism and think it is a major problem in the US and the church. However, I am thankful that instead of just reading about the book, I read it myself. And I can only suggest you do the same.

Baucham's thesis is that the current culture wars in the US over racism and Critical Race Theory (CRT) are in danger of splitting the evangelical church and causing considerable harm. He believes that the acceptance of some of the language and premises of CRT by evangelical leaders is the acceptance of a Trojan horse. He argues that 'the United States is on the verge of a race war, if not a complete cultural meltdown' (p. 7).

*Fault Lines* is not a fundamentalist diatribe or political rant. It is a well-researched, well-written and well-argued clarion call from someone who has not only studied the issues in some depth but, as a black descendant of slaves, has lived them. *Fault Lines* is not a detailed academic textbook, although it should be required reading for all evangelical students. It is, as Baucham stated in an interview, "the view from 35,000 feet." If you are confused about what CRT is (and some evangelicals even deny that it exists), then this book is an excellent primer.

His personal story is powerful. He grew up poor without a father, was bussed to a white school and has battled against racism throughout his life. He has walked the walk. Maybe we should listen to his story rather than the white saviours like Robin DiAngelo who make their living out of telling white people they are racist by virtue of their skin colour? The notion that if you are white, then you are racist



is itself racist. For Christians we need to ask what has the priority: our skin colour, our culture or our identity in Christ?

Baucham is controversial—at times breathtakingly so. For example, he points out that he had never heard of a black pastor arguing for racial reconciliation or lamenting that their church was 99% black. He states the incontrovertible truth that Africans sold Africans into slavery—to Arabs and to Europeans. And the not so incontrovertible view that ‘America is one of the least racist countries in the world’ (p. 201).

One highlight is the exposure of the false narratives that play such a part in the impressions that many of us base our opinions upon. Some quotes stunned me: ‘We’re literally hunted EVERYDAY/EVERYTIME we step outside the comfort of our homes’ (NBA star LeBron James, p. 45). Or the oft cited and completely false claim from the National Academy of Sciences that ‘one in every 1,000 black men and boys can expect to be killed by police in this country’ (pp. 47–48). That would mean that 18,000 black men and boys would be killed by police. The facts are that, in 2014, 250 black men were killed, of whom only 19 were unarmed. In 2019, the figure was nine (p. 113). How we interpret facts is also crucial. What do you do with the fact that 96% of those killed by police are male? Is this de facto proof that the police are discriminatory against men?

Baucham’s strongest and most important insight is that in dealing with anti-racism, we are dealing with a new religion—complete with its own cosmology, law, priesthood and canon.

Evangelical leaders such as Matt Chandler, John Piper, David Platt and others are all gently taken to task for citing and taking on board aspects of CRT—such as using material like Peggy McIntosh’s now-famous 1989 paper, ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack’. Baucham’s concern (which in Platt’s case he unpacks in some detail), is that Bible teachers are proclaiming that they have had some ‘life altering revelation *that has not been derived from the Scriptures*’ (p. 126, emphasis original). He rightly sees this as an attack on the sufficiency of Scripture.

The only problem with this new religion is that it is a religion without salvation. As Douglas Murray points out in a short but insightful chapter in *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), there is no forgiveness in the modern progressive world. In CRT terms, if you are white, you are guilty—and there is no redemption. ‘Antiracism offers no salvation—only perpetual penance in an effort to battle an incurable disease. And all of it begins with pouring new meaning into well-known words’ (p. 67). I’m so thankful that a black brother is speaking out against this inverted racism, distorted language and despairing legalism.

Baucham uses the category of ‘ethnic Gnosticism’—i.e., ‘the idea that people have special knowledge based solely on their ethnicity’ (p. 94)—and point out the way in which many are misled by their reliance on narratives, rather than ‘things like facts, statistics, or the scientific method’ (p. 88). He writes, ‘I am weary of hearing testimony after testimony of white pastors who threw reason and Scripture out of the window because of narratives’ (p. 112). He not unreasonably asks: How many of these narratives were lies? How many exaggerations? ‘And how many were the genuine expression of fear and trauma that, though sincere, directly contradicted the facts? The answer is, we don’t know’ (p. 112).

In chapter 9, ‘Aftershock’, Baucham deals with another cultural issue which is dividing the US church—that of abortion and single-issue voting. It is an awkward one. But we need to ask the awkward question: While it may be wise and practical to ask if we should vote or not vote for a particular party based on one issue, how many church leaders would urge people not be single issue voters on the sin of abortion, but would then not apply the same standard to the sin of racism?

Baucham suggests that racial identity politics is not just eating apart the American church, but is affecting many mission organisations throughout the world. To dissent from the general narrative is, as he points out, to be condemned. As someone who has been cancelled by a Christian magazine in the UK because the editor eventually thought my published article could have been misconstrued as not sensitive enough to racial issues, I can only empathise!

It seems as though the American church, having taken a disastrous turn into (largely but not exclusively) right wing politics, is now in danger of overcompensating and repenting in a progressive, rather than a biblical, direction. *Fault Lines* exposes this and thus is largely a book about American cultural wars and American church politics. This is simultaneously a weakness and strength. It's a weakness because it is culturally bound, but a strength because what happens in America does not stay in America. In a globalised world with globalised Christian corporations run largely along American cultural lines, all of us are impacted. It would not be the first time that American culture wars were exported to the rest of the worldwide church—to our detriment.

*Fault Lines* is an important, insightful and inspiring book. I'm grateful to God for its prophetic message. But don't just take my word—read it for yourself. Here's a final taste:

This book is, among many things, a plea to the Church. I believe we are being duped by an ideology bent on our demise. This ideology has used our guilt and shame over America's past, our love for the brethren, and our good and godly desire for reconciliation and justice as a means through which to introduce destructive heresies. We cannot embrace, modify, baptize, or Christianize these ideologies. (p. 204)

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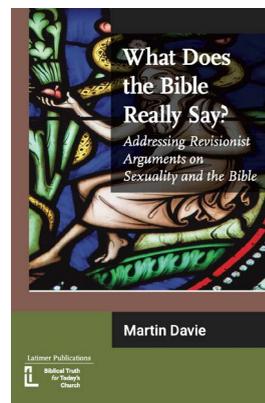
Martin Davie. *What Does the Bible Really Say? Addressing Revisionist Arguments on Sexuality and the Bible*. London: The Latimer Trust, 2020. 113 pp. £6.50/\$7.50.

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In 2019, ten Anglican writers took to the website ViaMedia.News and argued passionately that the Church has been misreading Scripture for the last 2000 years on the topic of marriage and sexuality. Are they right? Have we been wrongly applying Genesis 1 and 2? Have we completely misunderstood the teachings of Paul? Is there another way to read Scripture? In *What Does the Bible Really Say? Addressing Revisionist Arguments on Sexuality and the Bible*, Martin Davie provides answers to these and other questions.

As the ViaMedia.News writers offered ten arguments for why the Church has been misreading Scripture, Davie responds with ten chapters structured around these arguments:

1. Does the Bible really say... anything at all about homosexuality as we understand it today?
2. Does the Bible really say... that sex outside of marriage is wrong?
3. Does the Bible really... give us a clear definition of marriage?



4. Does the Bible really say... that same sex love is wrong?
5. Does the Bible really say... that Sodomites were sodomites?
6. Does the Bible really say... that St Paul 'hates gays'?
7. Does the Bible really say... that a family needs 'a mummy and a daddy'?
8. Does the Bible really... advocate the 'nuclear family'?
9. Does the Bible really say... that baptism should be withheld from some people?
10. Does the Bible really say... that creation is straight?

Each chapter begins with an overview of one of the revisionist arguments offered on the ViaMedia News site. Having read many of these articles, I thought Davie did a good job of giving a balanced and fair summary of what was said. After the overview Davie then offers a point-by-point rebuttal of the argument.

In chapter 1, for example, Davie summarizes Jonathan Tallon's argument that the ancient world did not have a term for, or even the understanding of, a 'loving and stable' homosexual relationship. All homosexual relationships were between a boy and a man, one passive and the other dominant. So, he concludes, the Bible does not actually condemn our modern understanding of gay relationships (pp. 6–8). Davie, then offers a threefold response. Firstly, there is plenty of evidence that there existed a huge variety of same-sex relationships in the ancient world, some of which were between two consenting adults. The pro-gay marriage church historian, John Boswell, confirms this (pp. 9–11). Secondly, when the New Testament condemns homosexual acts, it is not only referring to man-boy relationships but uses vocabulary that has a broader application (pp. 11–12). Thirdly, the New Testament takes a negative view of same-sex relationships because they go against the created order and are contrary to the teachings of the Ten Commandments and Leviticus (pp. 12–13).

Occasionally, the book's strength is also its weakness. To explain: the structure of the book, answering the ten objections raised in the ViaMedia.News articles, is one of the reasons why this book is so helpful. For when I speak to progressive ministers, rarely do they all have the same objections to the orthodox position on marriage and sexuality. Some think our whole way of viewing sex is wrong, while others disagree on our reading of Romans. Because this book is based around these objections, and deals with so many of them, it acts as an excellent resource for those who are seeking to defend what Scripture says and means. But this format also has downsides. Sometimes as Davie deals with different objections, his rebuttals become a little repetitive. For example, in chapter 8 (p. 69), he actually quotes what he said in chapter 7 (p. 61) to aid him in his current argument. Likewise, because the book circles around a number of key passages (like Gen 1 and 2), it tends to deal with them a little bit at a time in different chapters rather than thoroughly and conclusively in one.

Another combined strength and weakness is the length of the book—only 111 pages from introduction to conclusion. This is a strength because it makes the book pacy and very readable. Often books that deal with revisionist arguments on marriage and sexuality can be long and a little dry. The endless conversations about the Greek and the Hebrew can get a little tedious. Davie's book does not have that problem. This means that I'm very happy to recommend it to a variety of people and not just those in academic theology. I think it will be helpful for a busy Church leader, a mature Christian who is thinking through the arguments, and also a same-sex attracted Christian who needs grounding in the Biblical position.

However, there are times when the reader (or, at least, this reader) is left wanting more. As we have noted, Davie makes an excellent point about homosexual practice in the ancient world, rightly

concluding that “the forms of same-sex relationships that were known in the ancient world were fundamentally similar to those known today” (p. 10). This is crucial, as often revisionists dismiss the Biblical position on the grounds that same-sex relationships today are very different to what they were in New Testament times. The disappointment, however, is that Davie offers only one piece of actual historical evidence in support of his conclusion. Admittedly, he does provide good footnotes that direct readers to resources where additional evidence can be found. But this does mean that, at times, the book acts more like a guide to other literature than a conclusive argument itself.

As a same-sex attracted Christian man who has decided to live a single and celibate life for the glory of God, Davie was preaching to the choir. But this choir boy certainly found his arguments to be persuasive. He uses Scripture faithfully and extensively and, where appropriate, delves into the meaning behind the Greek and Hebrew words. He also uses other schools of knowledge to aid him in his task. He quotes historians and scientists, and even draws support for his arguments from pro-gay marriage theologians. The book is not exhaustive, but it is not trying to be. It is a good book, however: useful, insightful and readable from beginning to end. I highly recommend it.

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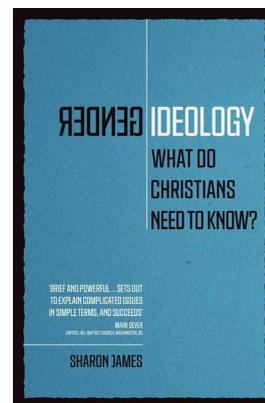
Sharon James. *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019. 131 pp. £7.99/\$9.99.

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With gender clinics in multiple countries reporting a several-thousand-percent increase in the number of young people presenting with gender identity issues, trainee doctors being taught that biological sex is a social construct, and more and more transwomen being allowed to enter women’s safe spaces and compete in women’s sports, many Christians are both confused and concerned. In *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?*, Sharon James (social policy analyst at The Christian Institute, UK) sets out “to explain in simple terms what is going on” (p. 16).

To this end, the first purpose of James’s book is to provide a critical analysis of contemporary gender ideology or, what the book elsewhere calls, *gender theory*. Beyond that, her hope is to help Christian readers not only “become more confident in the truth that we have been created male or female,” but to be “better equipped to protect the next generation from believing lies that lead to lasting physical and emotional harm” (p. 16).

To explain gender theory, James first turns to *The Yogyakarta Principles*, where “gender identity” is understood “to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth” (cited on p. 38). She illustrates this understanding with reference to the widely-known cartoon figure of “The Genderbread Person,” originally developed by the artist, author and activist, Sam Killermann (see his *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate’s Handbook*, 2nd ed. [Austin: Impetus, 2017], 70). In Killermann’s language, gender identity is “how you, in your head, experience and define your gender, based on how much you align (or don’t align) with what you understand the options for gender to be” (*A Guide to Gender*, 72). He distinguishes this from



“anatomical sex,” which “refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, chromosomes, and other anatomy you possess (or don’t possess),” and argues that the two are “interrelated but they are not interconnected” (*A Guide to Gender*, 74, 77–78). In short, according to gender theory, *gender identity is not determined by sex*. It is this claim that James sets out to challenge.

After initial chapters on “The Global Sexual Revolution” and “Can We Really Change Sex?” and Other FAQs,” chapter 3 (“What is ‘Gender Theory?’”), identifies and critiques four “false claims” entailed in gender theory: (1) “binary is bad”; (2) “gender is a spectrum”; (3) “boy/girl; man/woman are just social constructs”; and (4) “we all have a ‘gender identity’ which may be different from our biological sex” (p. 40). James follows with a series of examples of “misleading vocabulary,” all of which have been generated in order to bolster gender theory: (1) “‘Assigned’ at birth”; (2) “Transphobia”; (3) “Cisgender”; (4) “Gender”; and (5) “‘Gender Neutral Pronouns’ such as ‘ze’ or ‘hir’” (pp. 43–46). She concludes this chapter by highlighting a range of contradictions in gender theory (e.g., that gender identity is both fluid and immutable).

In chapter 4, the book takes a historical turn, providing readers with a succinct but illuminating answer to the question, “Where Did ‘Gender Theory’ Come From?” To do this, James begins by briefly outlining the contributions of “Eight Pioneers of Sexual Revolution”—Karl Ulrichs, Sigmund Freud, Magnus Hirschfeld, Alfred Kinsey, Harry Benjamin, Wilhelm Reich, John Money, and Robert Stoller—followed by two “Pioneers of Cultural Revolution”—Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse. She concludes the chapter by exploring “The Convergence of Identity Politics, Radical Feminism, and Queer Theory,” the way in which “the notion of gender fluidity has permeated our culture with astonishing speed” (p. 67), and the threat this poses to those who wish to teach the biblical truth, “male and female he created them” (p. 68).

Chapter 5 (“Male and Female—by Design”) heads in a more overtly biblical and theological direction. Its engagement with Scripture, however, is tantalizingly brief (pp. 72–79) and could easily have been developed further. Despite this, James succeeds in making note of the key texts and essential theological perspectives that inform biblical anthropology. For example, she argues that where there is “genuine gender confusion, just as where there are any other serious psychological or physical problems, it is a tragic outworking of living in a world ‘groaning’ because of the effects of sin (Rom. 8:19–22); although, as Jesus made clear, it is not to be regarded as a result of an individual’s specific sin (Luke 13:2)” (pp. 74–75). She is likewise emphatic that “our body, our mind, and our spirit or soul are not to be divided or played off against each other. God specifically designs and determines our body. It reflects His intent” (p. 78). She also follows through the implications of Jesus being raised bodily as a man and as the firstfruits (i.e., the one who guarantees our bodily resurrection): for instance, whenever “we disparage the physical body, we disparage Christ” (p. 75).

The book’s penultimate chapter, “The ‘Transgendering’ of Children,” includes a helpful discussion of both *child-onset gender dysphoria* and *rapid-onset gender dysphoria*. It also endeavors to answer the questions, “Why so much confusion?” and “What can parents do?” James’s answer to the first question is threefold: (1) the sexualization of culture; (2) family breakdown/instability; and (3) indoctrination into the idea that children can construct their own identities. Her answer to the second includes (1) teaching children God’s good design; (2) teaching them to treat everyone kindly; (3) avoiding exaggerated gender stereotypes; (4) finding out what they’re learning at school; (5) checking out what they’re reading and watching; (6) helping them to be critical of gender theory; and (7) not being fooled by false statistics about suicide.

The final chapter then contains a ten-fold call to respect, arguing that gender theory (contrary to popular belief) shows a profound disrespect for human dignity, the ecology of human nature, the Hippocratic commitment of medical professionals, the vulnerability of children, the rights of parents, the privacy and safety of women and girls, freedom of speech, those who de-transition, and, ultimately, God himself.

*Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* is a helpful introduction to what contemporary gender theory is, where it has come from, the challenges it presents to both church and society, and how Christians can begin to face these challenges. Because it is short and straight-talking, it could be faulted for sometimes lacking detail and nuance. But the book does not set out to be “a fully documented academic treatise” (p. 16). It is, rather, a cogent and accessible primer for ordinary Christians. As such, it is very helpful and much needed.

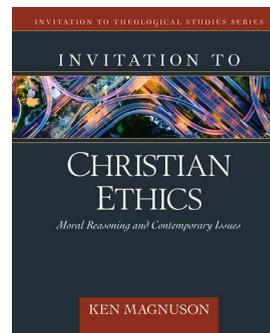
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Ken Magnuson. *Invitation to Christian Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020. 544 pp. £33.04/\$44.99.

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Ken Magnuson is the executive director of the Evangelical Theological Society and also serves on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has taught ethics for more than two decades. *Invitation to Christian Ethics* reflects the accumulated experience that comes from explaining topics to students in a way that is comprehensible, adaptable, and encourages retention. This is a book that balances both the foundational discussions of ethical methodology and a careful sifting of the data on contemporary issues. The result is a comprehensive introduction to ethics that is theologically oriented, Scripture-centric, and more comprehensive than many similar textbooks on the market.



The volume is divided into five parts. In part 1, Magnuson presents a case for ethics as a distinctly Christian enterprise, rather than as seeing it a variation on other forms of ethics with a veneer of biblical references to illustrate the moral reasoning. He also introduces and critiques the various approaches to moral reasoning, including consequentialism, deontology, etc. Here a basic framework for moral decision making consistent with the Christian tradition is outlined. The second part shifts to the biblical roots of Christian ethics. Magnuson is clear that the Bible is the supreme authority for Christian ethics and relevant even to contemporary questions that on the surface seem to exceed the technological vision of the biblical authors. He then addresses the application of the Old Testament to contemporary ethics, discussing the relationship between law and grace in some detail. This is followed by an exploration of the New Testament as a source of moral norms and the final foundation for ethical reasoning. This foundational material forms about a quarter of the content of the book, which seems appropriate given its significance.

Part 3 shifts to the practical application of ethics. Magnuson begins by tackling sexual ethics, which he does primarily by building a positive theology of sexuality, thereby demonstrating that

what falls outside of that is an offense to God. He then explores the foundations of marriage and its purposes, showing how an understanding of the marital relationship puts most cultural contortions of the relationship out of bounds. In the next chapter divorce and remarriage are the primary focus: Magnuson argues that divorce is permissible in certain circumstances and that remarriage is possible in the cases of adultery and desertion. To complete its survey of sexual ethics, the book wrestles with the ethics of homosexuality, sexual identity, and gender. Throughout the discussions of these complex topics, Magnuson carefully defines key terms and explains the historical Christian perspective with both biblical and theological support.

The sanctity of human life is the focus of the fourth part of the book, beginning with the moral status of the human embryo, which is a necessary foundation for understanding the ethics of assisted reproductive technologies and grappling with the question of abortion. Additionally, Magnuson explores the morality of euthanasia and suicide. The content of these moral arguments not only includes strong biblical argumentation, but also legal and technological information to help the reader better understand what is at stake.

In Part 5, Magnuson moves from human life to the social order, where he outlines a biblical perspective on capital punishment and traces through the moral reasoning involved in just war ethics and pacifism. He then deals with the culturally contentious issues of race relations and creation care.

Throughout the volume, Magnuson handles alternative perspectives in such a way that those who disagree with him are likely to recognize their position as he presents it. He is also fair to other viewpoints, showing their strengths and weaknesses and explaining why he arrives at his conclusions. The methodology Magnuson employs is likewise very helpful, which will make this book valuable for years to come. Instead of focusing on marginal cases to show why something is right or wrong, inundating the reader with data and statistics, *Invitation to Christian Ethics* employs careful theological reasoning based on Scripture in order to work out the issue. This way, when technology changes or a new study is released, the process of reasoning from theological principles to ethics will remain useful. At the same time, on many issues, Magnuson has done the work to explain the history, particularly in the US, so that court cases, laws, and other significant events can help inform the reader's understanding of the contemporary discourse.

This is a book that would serve well as a backbone text in a college or seminary ethics course. It would also fit well into the library of a church or on a pastor's shelf. Its language is appropriately technical, with explanations offered as needed, but also clear and accessible. It will likewise be helpful resource for counseling or for exegetical preachers as they seek to rightly divide God's word in light of contemporary ethical questions. Although it will rarely be exhaustive enough to answer every issue in detail, *Invitation to Christian Ethics* is a good starting place for real world questions. Magnuson has written a worthy introduction to Christian ethics.

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Stephen McAlpine. *Being the Bad Guys: How to Live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't*. London: The Good Book, 2021. 144 pp. £8.99/\$14.99

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There's a Mitchell and Webb comedy sketch about two Nazi SS officers on the eastern front. Perturbed at the realisation that their uniforms are decorated with skulls, Webb asks, 'Are we the baddies?' That same question is being asked by many Christians in our ever increasingly post-Christian western world. Sadly, the answer, in the eyes of many of our contemporaries, is 'yes, Christians are the bad guys!'

Since the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by the world, we should not be entirely surprised. It is the exception (not the rule) that western Christians have enjoyed such peace and prosperity for so long. In a world that has been turned upside down by sin and evil, we should not be surprised that we are seen to be 'on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of so many issues and conversations' (p. 11). Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, we need to reflect on the fact that 'we're not in [Christendom] any longer.'

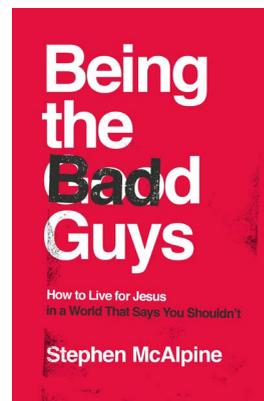
*Being the Bad Guys* can help us do just that—whether we're church leaders, church planters, congregation members, Christian parents. Its author, Australian pastor-evangelist Stephen McAlpine, explains his thesis in the following way:

I'm not going to tell you how to stop being one of the bad guys, because the only way to stop being a bad guy in the eyes of the world is to become what the world says is a good guy. And right now, that means compromising in all kinds of areas where the world beckons one way and the Bible points another. So this book isn't about how to stop being the bad guys ... it's about how to be the best bad guy you can be. (p. 11)

In part 1, McAlpine traces the culture shift that has resulted in Christians being painted as the bad guys in the popular imagination. There are many excellent books of cultural analysis which tell the same story. However, it's likely that very few people in our churches will read the demanding work of Charles Taylor (*A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007]), Philip Rieff (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006]) or Alistair MacIntyre (*After Virtue* [London: Bloomsbury, 2007]). Some may read the more accessible work of Tom Holland (*Dominion* [London: Little, Brown, 2019]), Douglas Murray (*The Madness of the Crowds* [London: Bloomsbury, 2019]), Joseph Henrich (*The Weirdest People in the World* [London: Penguin, 2020]) or Carl Trueman (*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020]). However, everyone can and should read this excellent book—that's why I recommended it to our church as summer holiday reading!

In part 2, McAlpine explores why biblical Christianity is counter-culturally problematic. He focuses on three of the contentious issues of our age: gender and sexuality (ch. 3), power and identity politics (ch. 4), self-authenticity and cancel culture (ch. 5). In each case, he helps us understand that our secular society has embraced 'another gospel': 'A rival narrative that seeks first to expose the Christian gospel as bad news, and then to replace it with much-needed good news' (p. 18).

One of his most important insights (summarising Philip Rieff's difficult work *My Life Among the Deathworks* [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006]) is that missiologists were mistaken to predict a return to the pre-Christendom era, when the gospel would be welcomed by the unreached pagans in a neutral public square or secular marketplace of ideas. Instead, we have moved into an



uncomfortable post-Christendom era which is hostile to the gospel: ‘We’ve done such a good job at “christianising” our culture, giving it rich and fulfilling categories, that the new religion can say: “Thanks very much, we’ll take it from here”’ (p. 28).

Nevertheless, there is hope. For example, God is raising up prophets from outside the church—the so called ‘Christian Atheists’ (like Douglas Murray and Tom Holland) recognise that without the biblical roots our society will lose the fruit of Christianity. Thus, Christians can be confident that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the better story that subversively fulfils our longings for human flourishing and a better world. However, we not only must *out-think* the world with the better story of the gospel; we must also *out-live* the world in the power of the gospel.

So in part 3, McAlpine helps us to think through how we should now live. He suggests practical strategies for faithful Christian living in the church (ch. 6), in the modern workplace with its hostile equality and diversity policies (ch. 7), and out in a world that confidently asserts that we are on the wrong side of history (ch. 8). He draws wise contemporary applications from the biblical story of Daniel exiled in Babylon, Haggai rebuilding in the day of small things, and the church living in the sin city of Corinth. In each case, McAlpine suggests there is a better alternative than compromising cultural assimilation, despairing cultural withdrawal, or angry culture warring. Instead he calls us to ‘go forward together to engage with the world bravely and courageously and with love and concern: to continue to be all that Jesus has called us to be even when all the world sees is a black hat coming in its direction, and humbly but resolutely to hold out a different story and a better way and a happier ending’ (p. 142).

One of the things that all church leaders need to hear is that an essential part of our ministry today is counter-discipleship (see also the work of James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016]). McAlpine explains,

All of us are immersed in a highly effective discipleship program offered by our culture Monday through Saturday. In everything, from our phones to Netflix to advertising and news items, we are being offered a discipleship program that invites us to a completely different way of life, mediated to us through a dazzling array of images, sounds, stories and suggestions. In response, our church gatherings on Sundays must offer discipleship programs that are deeper, richer and more compelling than those offered by the culture. As God’s people we are tasked with laundering one discipleship program *out* of ourselves first, before we can even begin to launder the gospel discipleship program *in*. (p. 29, emphasis original)

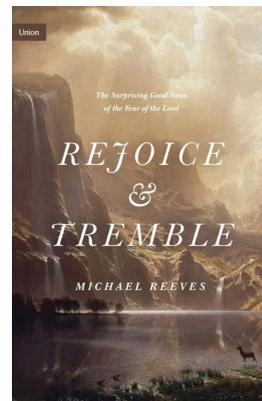
Speaking personally, McAlpine’s exhortation that preachers need to prepare the congregation for “the week *they* will be having, not the week *you* will be having” (p. 115, emphasis original), has made me work much harder on application in my sermons. His reminder that a ‘crucial task of the modern pastor is to prepare people for life in Babylon, Monday to Saturday (and increasingly Sunday!)’ (p. 115) is also particularly timely.

This is a book that can be picked up and read in a couple of hours, but it’s also one that will repay careful reading, marking and learning. Why not buy two copies—one for you and one for a friend, to discuss together as you seek to be the best bad guys and girls for Jesus?

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Michael Reeves. *Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord*. Union. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 179 pp. £15.99/\$19.99.

You can sum up *Rejoice and Tremble* in two words: *eye opening*. Whatever level of understanding one may have on *the fear of the Lord* prior to digging into this gold mine, the reader will be all the richer for quarrying with Michael Reeves. He is president and professor of theology at Union School of Theology and serves as an associate minister at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London. He is the author of many works, including the companion to this book, *What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021). The purpose of *Rejoice and Tremble* is so that “church leaders can read the full treatment ... and so delve into each topic while making the more accessible concise version widely available to their congregations” (p. 11).



Reeves asserts, “Fear is probably the strongest human emotion” (p. 13). Believers may scratch their heads in consternation trying to reconcile the divine mandates “do not be afraid” and “fear God.” They may wonder what exactly the *fear of God* is—Is it being afraid, reverent, respectful, or in awe? The author explains his aim:

I want you to rejoice in this strange paradox that the gospel both frees us from fear and gives us fear. It frees us from our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful, happy, and wonderful fear. And I want to clear up that often off-putting phrase “the fear of God,” to show through the Bible that for Christians it really does *not* mean being afraid of God. (p. 16)

This excellent book has in eight chapters. “Do Not Be Afraid!” (ch. 1) introduces a scriptural view of the *fear of the Lord* and reflects on the most persistent biblical imperative (p. 14). “Sinful Fear” and “Right Fear” (chs. 2–3) supply an overview of specific types of fears. *Sinful fear* “drives you away from God” (p. 31), while *right fear* “falls on its face before the Lord” (p. 53). “Overwhelmed by the Creator” and “Overwhelmed by the Father” (chs. 4–5) delve into the two specific types of *right fear*: the Creator overwhelms us with his transcendent splendor and majesty, while the Father overwhelms us with his love and redemption in Christ. “How to Grow in This Fear” and “The Awesome Church” (chs. 6–7) reveal the practicality of proper fear and exactly what that looks like lived out in the life of the believer. Finally, chapter 8 (“Eternal Ecstasy”) offers the reader a proper understanding of the *fear of the Lord* looking into eternity.

Of the book’s eight chapters, the last two warrant a closer look. In “The Awesome Church” Reeves asks, “What does it look like when a believer is filled with a right, healthy, filial fear of God?” (p. 131). He answers by stating that those who fear the Lord will (1) know his mercy, love, and compassion; (2) desire better, sweeter, and constant communion; (3) become holy, faithful, loving, and merciful; (4) adore God and loathe sin; (5) know the Spirit’s comfort and Christ’s own happiness and satisfaction in God; (6) have their rival fears eclipsed, consumed, and destroyed; and (7) have a humble strength imparted to them, making them more like Christ—simultaneously lamblike and lionlike (pp. 133–46).

In “Eternal Ecstasy,” he contrasts the *fear of the Lord* for the believer and the unbeliever alike. At Christ’s coming “his people will fall down in fearsome wonder, delight, and praise,” while “the sinful fear of unbelievers will swell into a horrified dread (Rev. 6:15–17)” (p. 157). Hell is the horrible sump of all *sinful fear* while heaven is the bliss of unconstrained, joyous, *filial fear* (p. 158). All fear is a foretaste of

eternity—all *sinful fears* of unbelievers are but a precursor of hell; all *filial fears* of believers are but a precursor of heaven (p. 166).

Several strengths of the book are worth mentioning. First, Reeves helpfully highlights Jesus and his *fear of the Lord*, for as Isaiah reveals (11:1–3), even in his “sinless holiness and perfection, [the Messiah] has the fear of the Lord” (p. 17). Given that *the fear of the Lord* is his “delight” (Isa 11:3), proper *fear of the Lord* “cannot be a negative, gloomy duty” (p. 17), neither can it be sinful, nor can it be true that the Son was/is afraid of the Father. Proverbs 9:10 reveals that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Luke 2:52 makes clear that the boy Jesus “increased in wisdom and in stature.” Therefore, Reeves rightly reasons, “Jesus could not have grown in wisdom without the fear of the Lord” (p. 99).

Second, deeper understanding of *the fear of the Lord* can only serve to enhance our preaching. All true preaching fixes itself on Christ and his gospel for it is he who reveals God, not primarily as Creator but as Father (p. 92). If listeners are to ever fear God properly through our preaching, we must first be leaders who have that *right fear* and who model it in how we live and talk. We must then have the fear of God shape both the *content* and the *intent* of our preaching and teaching. As for *content*, the people need the Word of God if they are to grow in this fear. They need an expository, Scripture-rich diet expounding God as Creator, but also a cross-centered knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ (p. 125). Our *intent* must be that they may properly *fear the Lord* (Deut 6:1–2).

Third, it provokes us to be clearer in our teaching about right worship. While fearing God and responding to God’s love and grace may seem miles apart, in fact “true fear of God is true love for God defined: it is the right response to God’s full-orbed revelation of himself in all his grace and glory” (p. 53) and “those who do not know God as a merciful Redeemer and compassionate Father can never have the delight of a truly filial fear” (p. 102).

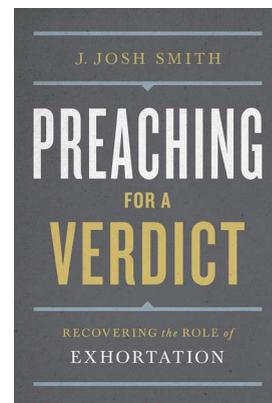
Finally, the book provides a timely reminder to us all that the Word of God is “the fear of the LORD” (Ps 19:9): “The word of God so perfectly manifests the glory of ‘the Fear’ that it is itself fearful” (p. 49). Reeves further states that “because we tend today to think of fear as a wholly negative thing, it jars us to think of fear remaining in heaven, or of fear being part of our eternal blessedness. But the fear of the Lord endures forever (Ps. 19:9)” (p. 162).

*Rejoice and Tremble* is a welcome addition to several other excellent resources that explore this theme: notably, Jerry Bridges, *The Joy of Fearing God: The Fear of the Lord is a Life-Giving Fountain* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 1998) and Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). I warmly commend it as a way of gaining a greater and deeper sense of the *fear of the Lord*. For to experience the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is to experience God: for he is “the Fear” (Gen 31:42, 53), the one in whose face all believers find deliverance (Gen 32:30).

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J. Josh Smith. *Preaching for a Verdict: Recovering the Role of Exhortation*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019. xii + 180 pp. £23.99/\$29.99.

When the evangelist Bailey Smith was asked what the difference was between preaching and teaching, he replied simply, “Preaching calls for a verdict” (p. 1). His son, J. Josh Smith asserts that a call for a verdict—exhortation—is missing from much preaching today. There are few today who exhort their hearers to respond to the Word of God proclaimed. While we should celebrate the recovery of biblical exposition, an important aspect of preaching has been increasingly neglected. Explaining, illustrating, and applying the text are important and necessary, but many preachers unintentionally leave their listeners without feeling the need or urgency to respond. Information about the biblical text is transferred from preacher to listener, but the message is not pressed upon the hearers. Given the current situation, it would be fruitful for preachers to answer an important question: Must a preacher exhort his listeners to respond to the Word preached in order to be faithful to God? Josh Smith answers with a resounding yes! After reading *Preaching for a Verdict: Recovering the Role of Exposition*, I have come to agree with him.



Josh Smith (DMin, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) has served as a missionary in central Europe, ministered to international students at Duke University, and has spent over fifteen years as a senior pastor, currently serving at Prince Avenue Baptist Church (Bogart, GA). Smith hopes his book will be “the beginning of a conversation about the distinct role of exhortation in preaching” (p. 2).

In chapter 1, Smith asks what happened to exhortation? He defines exhortation as “persuading the listener to respond to the call of the text through proclaiming the point of the text, in the voice of the text” (p. 19). Historically, men like Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, François Fénelon, the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon encouraged exhortation in their preaching and writings about preaching. However, in a 2011 survey by Michael Dudit in *Preaching*, which highlighted 25 of the most influential preaching books of the past 25 years, the role of exhortation was overlooked in almost every book. Smith believes homiletical discussion about exhortation has been missing because exhortation has become synonymous with application (p. 7). Smith’s work of recovery is timely.

In chapter 2, Smith gives a theological foundation for exhortation. Smith reminds the preacher that God has spoken and the Bible is his spoken word. God’s word is inspired, authoritative, sufficient, and powerful. Furthermore, God speaks for a reason—to reveal himself, to establish a relationship with sinful humanity, to sanctify his people, and so that people made in his image would respond in worship. Therefore, the preacher speaks as a spokesman for the speaking God. He must preach not only to transfer information, but also to see transformation. Smith says, “The goal of preaching is to make much of God, and to plead with people to respond to the call of God” (p. 30).

In chapter 3, Smith moves from a theological to an exegetical foundation for exhortation. Smith focuses on the word often translated “exhort,” παρακαλέω. Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to exhort in 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 4:2, and Titus 2:15. Smith undertakes a study of these passages as well as Luke 3:18, Acts 2:40, and Acts 11:23. He strengthens his biblical foundation for exhortation by including some other words used for “persuading” (Acts 13:43; 18:4; 19:8; 19:26; 26:28; 28:23) and “making his appeal” (2 Cor 5:16–20).

In chapters 4 and 5, Smith gives examples of the centrality of exhortation drawn from the OT and NT. Smith says the preaching of Moses is paradigmatic for the rest of the OT, especially his sermons in Deuteronomy. In addition to Moses, Smith gives examples of exhortation from the ministries of Joshua, Ezra, Amos, and Ezekiel, as well as the wisdom and other prophetic books. Since the patriarchs and prophets significantly influenced Jesus and the apostles, it follows that exhortation was central to their preaching (p. 77). The sermons recorded in Acts as well as the exhortation of the book of Hebrews (Heb 13:22) are used to bolster Smith's argument about the necessity of exhortation.

In chapters 6–8, Smith moves from the biblical and theological to the practical. If the Bible demands that faithful preachers must exhort, how ought preachers do exhortation? In chapter 6 Smith suggests a number of convictions foundational to exhortation. Smith is an advocate of text-driven preaching: “The text drives everything in the sermon” (p. 94). Exhortation is to be found within and driven by the biblical text. Furthermore, exhortation is related to, but distinct from application. Here, Smith practically shows four steps for finding the exhortation of the sermon. In chapter 7, Smith gives seven examples of exhortation from seven genres of Scripture. Though not full sermons, the reader is assisted by learning how the author prepares sermons and illustrates his focus on discerning the exhortation of the text. Finally, chapter 8 gives three ingredients for effective exhortation: diligence in the study, empowerment by the Spirit, and delivery with authority.

Smith's book has four strengths that deserve mentioning. First, Smith is convincing in his argument about the need to recover and practice exhortation. He proves his case biblically and theologically and sticks to his clear thesis. Second, though this book is meant to be the beginning of a conversation about the necessity of exhortation, it is much more than a primer on the subject. Furthermore, he furthers the homiletical conversation by offering ideas for further study. Third, Smith's book is well-researched. He uses a variety of sources from the field of homiletics to bolster his argument. Fourth—and most importantly—there is a practical benefit to be gained from this book. Being convinced of his thesis has helped my preaching. Since reading the book, I have desired to earnestly press the people of God I serve to respond to his word. Reading this book will surely spur preachers on in their quest to be faithful to God and see people converted and built up in their faith.

Two weaknesses will be briefly noted. First, though well-researched, the average preacher could get overwhelmed by the academic feel of the book. I would not be surprised if this was his Doctor of Ministry project turned into a book, particularly as at one point he says, “Since that is not the primary point of this paper...” (p. 99). Second, chapter 7 was devoted to models of exhortation, but was not Christ-centered. Though this chapter is helpful to see how he discerns the point, voice, call, and exhortation of the text, the examples from OT texts did not point to Christ, except the clearly prophetic text of Isaiah 9:1–7. If exhortations to respond to the imperatives of the text are not grounded in the indicative of the gospel, pastoral harm could be done under the banner of a zeal to recover exhortation.

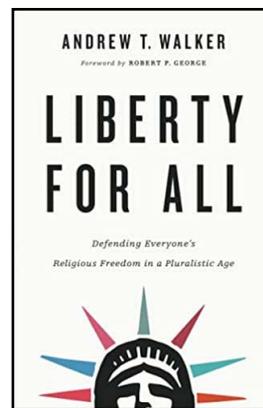
God has spoken and woven exhortation into the biblical text. If preachers are going to stand in God's place and preach his word as ambassadors, they must call their hearers to respond—they must preach for a verdict! Reading books like this, as well as Jim Shaddix's *Decisional Preaching* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer, 2019) and John Angell James's *An Earnest Ministry: The Want of the Times* (Edinburgh:

Banner of Truth, 1993) will help preachers preach better and stay faithful to their task and scholars of preaching further a conversation about a recently neglected, but crucial aspect of preaching.

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Andrew T. Walker. *Liberty For All: Defending Everyone's Freedom in a Pluralistic Age*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021. xiv + 258 pp. £14.96/\$19.99.

The premise of Andrew T. Walker's book is easy to state and the argument easy to follow: it is a Christian defense of a social ethic of religious liberty grounded in biblical theology. The theological case for religious liberty unfolds in three parts, focused on the themes of eschatology, anthropology, and mission. The structure is clear and helpful: each part contributes a key foundation for a Christian social ethic of religious liberty. The two chapters in each section proceed to establish the outlines of the doctrine, how it authorizes an ethic of religious liberty, and the shape that a theologically grounded ethic of religious liberty will give to our conceptualization and practice of political community. There is much to appreciate along the way: deft sketches of complex theological topics and a willingness to anticipate and engage with difficult questions raised in the course of the argument. At any number of points my "Yes, but..." questions were responded to in the following pages or chapters. For those of us who share Walker's theological convictions, this is an enlightening conversation about why those convictions should move us toward a particular set of practices.



A central concern of the book, and the point at which it provides its most astringent corrective to classical analyses, is Walker's desire to provide a genuinely theological basis for religious liberty. For Walker, religious liberty is not an accommodation developed by a society weary of religious wars and sectarian persecution. It flows from the truths of the gospel: the lordship of Christ over all creation, his coming judgement of all things, and the task of gospel proclamation entrusted to the church. Furthermore, he argues that an adequate theological account must also be a *biblical* theological account: one which is attentive to the canonical unfolding of God's dealings with humanity in creation, through the history of Israel, with its interpretive centre in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and its *telos* in the new creation.

The peculiar importance of a biblical theological frame for religious liberty lies in the question why religious liberty should be regarded as a good thing in our present situation while not being permitted by God in the eschaton. A pragmatic, non-theological account of religious liberty avoids the question. A theological account based purely on natural law cannot answer the question either. A biblical theological account, however, enables us to understand the different patterns of God's action in different periods in their relation to his ultimate goal of exalting Christ.

With this biblical theological framework in view, Walker sets out to provide a description of the time we live in (eschatology), the kind of creatures we are (anthropology), and the task we have been

given (mission), and to show how properly understanding these things authorizes a Christian social ethic of religious liberty.

We live in the time between the Son's resurrection and his return to judge. Christians confess that Jesus Christ has been declared the powerful Son of God through his resurrection from the dead. As this powerful Son, Jesus has been entrusted with the future judgement of the world and subjugation of all opposition to the rule of God. As Paul expounds this to the listeners on Mars Hill, God now commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). *Prima facie*, it's hard to square how a social ethic of religious liberty sits comfortably with this proclamation. For Walker, the answer lies in allowing a properly inaugurated eschatology to inform the role of the state and the mission of the church in this penultimate age. While religious liberty is not part of the ultimate future for humanity, prior to the final judgement God permits religious diversity to persist as the word of Christ's rule is shared with the nations. During this "secular" age, the biblical storyline teaches us to expect religious diversity and that the "promise of future judgment demands patience toward erring consciences" (p. 25). Knowing that religious diversity is to be expected, however, doesn't help us know how to respond to it. Thus, more significantly, Walker argues that God's permission for religious diversity as well as his response to it in the present age ought to shape our own response.

A fundamental principle for Walker's case is that God has reserved for himself the right to execute judgement over the consciences of individuals. Walker puts the point firmly and repeatedly throughout the book: "the state does not have the authority to declare what is or is not Christian" (p. 26) or, more expansively, "nowhere in Scripture is the state authorized to judge the conscience" (p. 28). Furthermore, God's response to false religion is normative for ours. And God's response in this penultimate age is *non-coercive*. As Walker eloquently puts it: "the Lord of the universe chose the meekness of human flesh and scorn of rejection, rather than military conquest or political power, to advance his kingdom" (p. 48). Human political institutions, therefore, must not arrogate to themselves the right to judge the fitness of another person's worship, and must not go further than God in coercing submission to his Son.

All this leads Walker to argue for "Christian secularism" as a vision of how the goods of the overlapping ages (the present-yet-passing-away age of the world and the inaugurated-but-not-yet-consummated age of Christ's rule) can be coordinated. In this vision, "contestability" is a central experience and preserving the contestability of different religions and ideologies is a crucial political task. Religious liberty is just this practice of preserving contestability which, for Christians, flows from an understanding of both the times and the forbearance of God.

The second section of the book sets out to ground religious liberty in the kind of creatures we are. The central theological concept is the *imago Dei*. Walker understands the *imago Dei* as primarily about divinely bestowed individual capacities that serve our created purpose to worship God. Importantly for his argument, this includes a capacity for moral agency exhibited in the gifts of reason, freedom, and conscience. In spite of our fall, these gifts remain vehicles through which God draws and enables our right worship, even while they are employed by sinful humans for idolatry. Religious liberty protects the exercise of these capacities.

At the heart of Walker's anthropology is a particular understanding of human moral agency that sees it as only genuine, meaningful, and authentic, if *free*. Voluntary assent to God's will is implied in our constitution as creatures with rationality and conscience. This becomes further emphasized by the logic of the gospel or, more precisely, an understanding of justification by faith that sees it as requiring an individual, personal, propositionally contentful assent to the saving Lordship of Christ. As Walker

explains, “At the ultimate level, the logic of the gospel—such as free/un-coerced response, voluntary/personal assent, acknowledgement of guilt, and faithfulness in obedience in how one lives out the obligations of the gospel—ought to necessarily lead to the reality of there being a penultimate, social, or legal doctrine of religious liberty” (p. 98). A society that maintains an ethic of religious liberty is thus one which pays respect to the fundamental design of our natures and preserves the potential for the right use of our capacities in repentance and faith toward God.

The final section of the book situates religious liberty in the context of the divine commission given to the church. Religious liberty fosters the conditions for Christian mission by enabling the proclamation of the gospel and ensuing the work of defending and commending it through the life and good works of God’s people. Walker reminds us of William Carey’s famous statement to one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society before departing for India: “I will go down, if you will hold the ropes.” Seeking and defending an ethic of religious liberty is a “rope holding” activity for the Church’s mission. It does this most directly at the interpersonal level through creating the “possibility of unhindered proclamation and the free response of humans” (p. 151) and at the social level through enabling the church to display its distinctiveness from the surrounding society.

Thus far the theological foundations Walker draws upon are relatively uncontroversial among evangelical Christians of various denominational stripes and at the broad level the implications he draws are welcome and warranted. Issues with the argument arise, however, in that many elements of Walker’s specific vision for an ethic of religious liberty appear to rest on a conception of moral agency that is underdeveloped in the text. I find statements like the following somewhat eye-brow raising: “Entry into God’s kingdom depends on the conscience being convicted of sin and persuaded by the gospel, which means rationally self-chosen without external coercion” (p. 45). Don’t get me wrong, I’m cheering along until we get to that exegetical clause. When I read “rationally self-chosen without external coercion,” however, my mind slips to the messy business of growing up into the faith in a Christian family. I’m sure that Walker would assure me that “rationally self-chosen” can encompass both a reformed doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation as well as the gritty outworking of this doctrine in relationships of influence, moments of trauma and triumph, personal capacities and external opportunities but I’d appreciate more detail on how this is the case. When I read the Bible with my young children or take them along to our church youth group, sometimes it involves external coercion (albeit benign) to pry them away from beguiling screens. Again, I can hear Walker assuring me that prohibited kind of external coercion is only that applied by the state, or of one morally competent adult over-riding the will of another. But again, this simply reveals the need for a much more thoroughly worked out discussion of freedom in its relation to our social and individual moral formation.

I would argue, and I think Walker would agree, that our capacity for moral agency, while divinely granted, is arrived at intersubjectively. We learn what to will, and even how to will, in relationships of care and esteem, in moments of disrespect and violation, and in countless encounters of mutual recognition. The lack of attention to this in Walker’s argument often leaves one with an unsatisfying impression that this is a sophisticated theological argument bolted together with a naive moral and social psychology. And unfortunately, I think this ends up diminishing the force of Walker’s most concrete conclusions about the social ethic of religious liberty. The bottom line is that it is possible to agree with him on the theological fundamentals of his argument while not reaching the same conclusions about normative pluralism or the separation of church and state.

This disjunction in the progress of the argument is likely more evident to those of us who come from outside Walker's own theological tradition. I might be flashing my Anglican petticoats, but the more one listens to Walker's vision for an ethic of religious liberty, the more one detects a distinctly Baptist and American theological accent. (Walker speaks to this directly in his fascinating appendix: "Why Religious Liberty Made Me a Baptist.") It is particularly evident in passages such as the following:

The prospect of a voluntary church consisting only of those with expressed faith in Jesus Christ makes possible the critical division necessary to identify the church as something distinct from the world and to identify the church's mission to the world. A flourishing church is a church that understands its distinctiveness and its calling to be an outpost of the kingdom of God. A free church operating in a free state may pursue its mission of evangelization and disciple-making most freely. (p. 171)

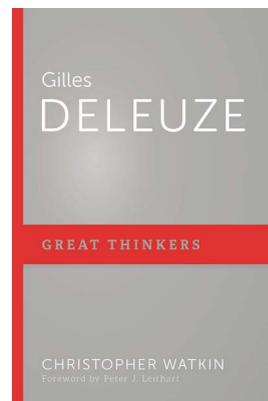
It is, of course, no criticism of an argument that it arises from a specific theological tradition and formative national experience, but it does invite the question: Why did other Christians get it wrong? Unfortunately, Walker provides too little engagement with the broader historical Christian tradition and particularly that of the magisterial Reformation. The reality is that thinkers like Luther, Calvin, and Cranmer shared virtually all of Walker's theological presuppositions but saw a more active role for the political sovereign in the exercise of judgements upholding the law of Christ. They certainly didn't embrace normative pluralism. We might find Calvin's support for the execution of Servetus troubling, but it wasn't because he was unaware of the implications of Christian eschatology, anthropology, and mission for the social ethics of Geneva. The reality is that he had another conception of how moral agency is formed and exercised and that made all the difference in his movement from theological principle to political policy. This is not to say that Calvin or Luther or Cranmer got it right. Walker's picture of a social ethic of religious liberty is attractive. It might even be that we *should* embrace a Baptist liberty for all. My point is that without a more sophisticated and realistic account of moral agency and a deeper conversation with alternative church traditions of thinking about political authority this argument lacks the normative force that Walker intends.

Walker has given us a stirring and stimulating defense of religious liberty. His connection of biblical theological foundations with this specific Christian social ethic enables us to take religious liberty as a diagnostic for how any given society (and its rulers) understands itself in relation to God's rule. With this in mind, we should continue to pray for the extension of religious liberty more deeply and more expansively through the societies of our world, hopeful that such an extension is both an indicator and enabler of the progress of the gospel in human hearts.

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Christopher Watkin. *Gilles Deleuze*. Great Thinkers. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. xxxi + 167 pp. £12.99/\$15.99.

Even the most conscientious of thinking Christians might be tempted to pass on an engagement with French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). For a start, Deleuze’s writing style is among the most impenetrable of the post-structuralists—no small feat in a highly competitive field. The challenge is compounded if a lack of facility in French consigns you (as it does me) to English translations, and with them the associated haunting feeling that perhaps you’ve missed something that was clearer in the original. Furthermore, when one does manage to grasp what Deleuze is saying, what he says appears decidedly unfriendly to Christian truth. Finally, other post-structuralists, such as Foucault and Derrida, are more widely read than Deleuze, and therefore arguably more influential. Perhaps in a world where you can’t do everything, the difficulty of reading Deleuze can be safely put to one side.



Christopher Watkin, however, believes Deleuze is worth the trouble. Having previously written *Jacques Derrida* (2017) and *Michel Foucault* (2018) for P&R’s Great Thinkers series, in his most recent contribution, Watkin provides us with a generous, critical, and absorbing account of Deleuze’s thought, brought into vital contact with reformed theology and the voice of Scripture. For Watkin, Deleuze is a compelling interlocutor for Christians concerned to understand the direction in which western culture is heading:

If Derrida and Foucault help us to understand how our society got to where it is today, then perhaps Deleuze best of all can help us understand where it may be heading tomorrow. (p. xxiii)

Developing his thought through the 1960s to the 1980s, Deleuze produced a vision of ontologically flat relationships, of human lives freed from teleological constraints, and of an infinite variety of sexual and gender identities. From the vantage point of the 2020s, it was a prescient vision.

Deleuze’s thought is also strangely resonant with theological concerns. He engages in metaphysical questions to a degree uncharacteristic of his generation (p. xxix). His agenda (in the words of Peter Leithart’s foreword) was “to erase from philosophy the last faint trace of theology” (p. xiv). Ironically, this self-conscious rejection of God and theology makes Deleuze’s thought fruitful for theologians. It represents “a very sophisticated account of what happens to truth and ethics in a system of thought that does not rely on God” (p. xxvi).

Christopher Watkin occupies a rare piece of real estate in the Venn-diagram of Christian cultural critics. As Associate Professor in French studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, Watkin works in a secular research and teaching context. He does not write merely as a Christian cultural warrior, sent on night-raids from a camp of *les Anglo Saxons*, only to return to the safety of the seminary before sunrise. Nor does he treat Deleuze as a ruse for his own theological and apologetic agendas. He writes rather as a critical but generous resident of a world in which he has made for himself an intellectual home.

At the same time, Watkin is a rigorous reformed thinker in the Schaefferian tradition. He cheerfully and confidently brings the Bible’s voice to the table, convinced that God’s written word will not only

tell the truth about God but will also divide bone and marrow, exposing the presuppositions and false dichotomies of the interlocutor.

In part 1 of the book, Watkin sets himself the patient task of *Audi alteram partem*, “listening to the other side,” and does so as carefully and faithfully as possible. Instead of just explaining Deleuze to Deleuzians and the Bible to Christians, Watkin says,

But how much greater the challenge, how much more tantalizing and, perhaps, worthwhile it is to seek to explain Deleuze to a readership largely unfamiliar with, and in large part suspicious of, his thought, and to seek to explain aspects of the Bible in terms of a philosopher who in the main is predisposed to reject it and impute to it all manner of hypocritical motivations and evil implications. (p. xxxi)

Watkin’s exposition of Deleuze is lucid and illuminating. (The opening section also doubles as the explanation of Plato’s thought you wish you’d been given twenty years ago.) Through his inversion of Plato’s Forms, Watkin explains, Deleuze builds a philosophical world without judgement (p. 26). Difference is everything, for no authoritative Form holds that which is different to account. All is difference, all the way down. Or, better, all the way across.

“Across” because Deleuze wants to establish a radically flat ontology, a non-hierarchical “plane of immanence.” His famous assertion that “God is a lobster” fits here. God, for Deleuze, “is part of what is, with just as much reality as anything else, including a lobster” (p. 33). His aim is not merely to reject transcendence but to “set out a plane of immanence in which the very question of belief in God is no longer relevant” (p. 49).

Deleuze’s thought undergirds a minoritarian politics. As Watkin explains, this is more than simply a politics concerned to give a voice to minorities. Majorities for Deleuze are hierarchically norm-setting. They establish the yardstick against which all others are measured and found wanting. When minorities are “given a voice” they are granted access to power by the powerful, and only to the extent that they play by the rules those in power have set (p. 72). The white heterosexual male, for example, sets the constant against which others are judged and granted their access. Deleuze’s vision, rather, is for a destabilized, fluid world, liberated from the restrictive binary categories of *male* and *female*, a world of “a thousand tiny sexes” (p. 73). If this sounds unremarkable, recall that Deleuze was offering this vision more than forty years ago. It is a good example of Watkin’s contention that Deleuze is a guide to our culture’s future.

After a careful unpacking of Deleuze, in part 2 of the book Watkin turns to the Bible. Instead of nominating a major biblical motif or a controlling doctrine from systematics, Watkin proceeds by pairing a series of biblical motifs with Deleuze’s concerns, creating a space in which Scripture often confounds and subverts, more than simply contradicts, Deleuze.

It is an extremely fertile approach. Watkin’s use of Scripture is an advance on much so-called “worldview thinking,” which tends to distill biblical ideas into concepts abstracted from the Bible’s own language, form, and story. Watkin pays Scripture the same compliment he pays Deleuze—taking not only its ideas, but its expression, seriously. We are kept tethered to what Barth called “the strange new world of the Bible.” It is rich material and repays re-reading.

Quibbles, if sought, could no doubt be found. Readers who do not share Watkin’s conservative view of Scripture might balk at the idea of “the Bible” as a single voice. More conservative readers in culture-warrior mode might find Watkin’s refusal to adopt a fight or flight posture in the face of “an enemy” discombobulating.

For a book that is simultaneously a clear introduction to a difficult but consequential thinker, and a model of principled Christian engagement, I've read few better. More of this, please. Highly recommended.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

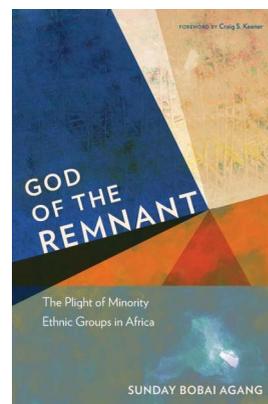
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Sunday Bobai Agang. *God of the Remnant: The Plight of Minority Ethnic Groups in Africa*. Bukuru, Nigeria: HippoBooks, 2021. 72 pp. £8.99/\$12.99.

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Is there a unique significance for minority ethnic groups in the biblical theme of God's preservation of a remnant? Sunday Bobai Agang, a Nigerian theology professor, explores this question in his concise book, *God of the Remnant: The Plight of Minority Ethnic Groups in Africa*. Agang argues that God, because of his character and covenants, preserved and used remnants in the past, and therefore can and will use remnants—minority African ethnic groups—today.

Agang's pastoral tone communicates empathy for African minority groups who may feel ignored by God and uncared for by the world. The audience, appeal, and application go well beyond minority groups to encompass majority groups and the global church as Agang implores them to consider the implications of remnant theology in their lives.



Chapters 1–3 provide a basic background to remnant theology with select examples focusing on the Old Testament. While the book does not attempt an exhaustive analysis of remnant theology, the point is adequately made that God is sovereign in the preservation of his people, that God is gracious to save some from judgment, and that God is kind to provide hope of future renewal. Remnants in the Bible were small, vulnerable communities simply fighting for survival in harsh contexts. Agang serves his reader by showing the relevance and significance of biblical remnants to his contemporary context instead of trying to be comprehensive or academic in his analysis of remnant theology.

By applying the principles of the remnant to present day minorities, chapter 3 links the biblical category to contemporary peoples. Agang broadens the definition of those who may identify as a remnant by including sufferers of physical and emotional abuse (p. 18). General principles about the remnant of Israel are applied to minority groups today in order to provide encouragement and hope to oppressed peoples. Agang's identification of survivors of personal trauma, life challenges, or minority groups with the title of remnant extends beyond the normative biblical usage of the term. Instead of a direct exegetical argument, he takes as a presupposition that "God does not ignore a remnant. And if he cares for remnants, he will undoubtedly also care for minorities" (p. 69). This book prefers to describe such minority groups using the language of remnant instead of employing other biblical terms such as sojourner, pilgrim, alien, or stranger that may better clarify the experiences of many Christians in a broken world. Agang humbly acknowledges some of these same questions in several

chapter introductions while leading his readers to accept the broad application of biblical principles in the context of minorities (pp. 25–26).

Section 2 of the book (chs. 4–5) explains the relationship and implications of God’s character and covenants to remnants, thereby bolstering the overall theological argument. God has consistently chosen particular, minority people in order to preserve his people to be agents of universal blessing (Abraham, Israel, David). Agang acknowledges the undeserving, sinful nature of all peoples (including ethnic minorities), but points to the covenantal love and faithfulness of the Creator God who protects and preserves his people for his purposes.

God’s actions of preserving and blessing a remnant serves as a basis of hope to persecuted, suffering survivors and minorities. Agang reminds brothers and sisters in Christ that God sees, remembers, and loves them so they do not need to accept hardship as evidence of abandonment by God. Instead, he admonishes them to find hope in the fact that God consistently uses the outcast, weak, and lowly for his glory and name’s sake.

In chapter 6, Agang offers an honest assessment of the hardship and obstacles that minorities face. Suffering is caused by both personal disobedience that has brought God’s judgment as well as the willful sin brought on by others. Readers may be justified in viewing the seventh chapter’s discussion of general assumptions as tangential to Agang’s overall argument in that the chapter did not clearly connect to remnant or covenant theology.

The final chapters offer modest, practical advice for both majority and minority groups to self-assess their hearts and actions with the goal of personal, societal, and church transformation. Agang concludes with affirmations and challenges that offer hope in Christlikeness and not quick, easy fixes. Like the remnant of Israel, the desire of this book is to see minority remnants offer hope, light, and a future as they look to and point others to their sovereign covenant-keeping God. Readers who expect a comprehensive biblical theology of the theme of remnant may not be fully satisfied, while pastors seeking to minister to those who feel forgotten will find meaningful encouragement amply supplied.

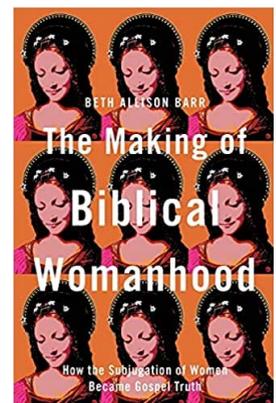
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Beth Allison Barr. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021. x + 245 pp. £14.99/\$19.99.

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Beth Allison Barr’s *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* is less an account of how the subjugation of women became gospel truth than it is an argument against patriarchy. Barr, an associate professor of history at Baylor University, presents the evidence that led her to disavow complementarianism. She hopes her readers will do the same because, in Barr’s estimation, complementarianism is not only wrong but also dangerous. Barr writes of “the ugliness and trauma inflicted by complementarian systems” (p. 9), claims that “patriarchy walks with structural racism and systemic oppression” (p. 33), and alleges that “there is a link between complementarianism and abuse” (p. 206).



Barr argues that patriarchy is not rooted in creation, but is a result of the fall into sin (Gen 3:16). Pauline texts do not teach biblical womanhood. Rather, when read in the context of Roman history, they provide a “Jesus remix” of Roman patriarchy meant to set women free. Church history provides numerous examples of women preaching and teaching. Throughout church history, women have been ordained as deaconesses and abbesses. In the medieval church at least one woman was ordained a bishop. Medieval Bible translations and sermons reveal a long history of gender-inclusive language.

It was not until the Reformation—which should have set women free, but did not—that being a wife and mother became the ideological touchstone for holiness for women. In the nineteenth-century this became the “cult of domesticity” (pp. 165–67), of which biblical womanhood is simply a twentieth-century version. Only recently, with the championing of inerrancy, which privileged literalist readings of Pauline passages, and the revival of Arianism—the eternal subordination of the Son—has patriarchy become gospel truth. (pp. 191–97) Today, the heretics are “me and my husband, as we dared ask permission for a woman to teach a high school Sunday school class.... No wonder we were fired” (p. 200).

Barr acknowledges that the story of her husband being fired for questioning complementarian teaching “frames how I think about complementarianism today” (p. 204). It does not account for her rejection of complementarian teaching, but it may account for the polemical tone of her book.

Barr recognizes three definitions of patriarchy: (1) male-only church leadership, (2) male headship in marriage and family, and (3) the subjugation of women to men (p. 13). She claims to focus on the third, which encompasses the first and second. It is not clear, however, that the first and/or second necessarily lead to the third. The example of the Roman Catholic church, which has a male-only priesthood, but does not teach male headship in marriage and family, suggests that they do not (p. 44). Indeed, many complementarians who hold to the first and/or second definitions of patriarchy reject the third. But one would not know this from reading Barr’s book. She presents all three as if they are inseparable and inevitable consequences of one another.

Strong on polemic, Barr is notably weak of nuance. This is especially evident in Barr’s accusation that complementarianism relies on heresy. Anyone who teaches the eternal subordination of the Son espouses Arianism. Barr’s book says nothing about the distinction between functional and ontological subordination. Only the latter is obviously Arian. None of the passages Barr cites from complementarian theologians explicitly teach ontological subordination; all can be read to refer to functional subordination.

Barr admits that she is a historian, not a theologian. Her discussion of church history, especially medieval church history, is a strength of the book. Barr is right: Too many evangelicals know too little about church history, and women have too often been written out of the little history that evangelicals do know. Yet Barr often assumes more than her evidence allows. For example, though women preached and taught in the medieval church, they did not occupy the official preaching space (p. 116). The ordination of a woman as a bishop was accidental (p. 89).

Barr’s lack of biblical training is a significant weakness in the book. She misunderstands Vern Poythress’s objection to the TNIV’s translation of Genesis 1:27 (p. 140). Poythress objects to the plural “human beings” translating a singular Hebrew noun, *adam*. One expects that the NRSV’s “humankind” would satisfy both Poythress, because it is singular, and Barr, because it is gender-inclusive. Barr acknowledges the range of possible meanings, including “wife,” for the Hebrew word אִשָּׁה, but then claims that the word “wife” (one of the possible meanings of אִשָּׁה!) is not found in Genesis 2:24. (p. 150)

She cites examples where the ESV opts for a complementarian translation of difficult passages, but does not acknowledge how her own egalitarian agenda determines her preferred translation of those passages. Barr says nothing about the 2011 NIV produced by the Committee for Bible Translation that included both complementarian and egalitarian members. Perhaps because she is not interested in rapprochement between complementarians and egalitarians.

Egalitarians will find Barr's book confirming. Egalitarians in complementarian churches may find it encouraging. But complementarians are likely to find its activist tone and lack of nuance off-putting. Barr presents important evidence that the subjugation of women is neither biblical nor Christian. Such patriarchy may indeed be linked to racism, systemic oppression, and abuse. But, as many complementarians argue, that is not Christian patriarchy. Rather than encourage complementarians to be self-reflective about their own potential contribution to the subjugation of women (and racism, oppression, and abuse), Barr's tone will likely only engender defensiveness and polarization, neither of which serves the church or its Lord well.

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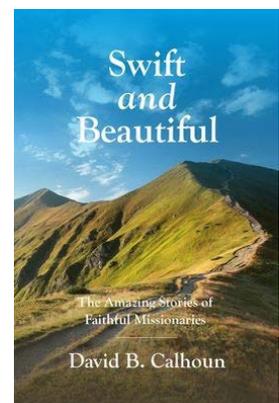
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David B. Calhoun. *Swift and Beautiful: The Amazing Stories of Faithful Missionaries*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2020. 225 pp. £8.81/\$12.00.

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In ten short chapters, David B. Calhoun tells the stories of twelve men and women who devoted their lives to make Christ known. Calhoun's expertise in church history and more than six decades of ministry in the Presbyterian church inform his selection of subjects from the early 1600s to the mid-1900s. Drawing from the personal diaries, correspondence, and biographical works of the selected missionaries, Calhoun's biographical sketches focus on the personal piety and convictions that led each one to labor for the sake of Christ. While Calhoun mentions some of the strategies and approaches that proved fruitful on the field, his primary concern is to explore how the Christian missionary impulse expressed itself in the lives of these individuals.

Calhoun chooses an eclectic mix of well-known and lesser-known missionaries from America and Scotland. Their commonality is expressed by their pioneering spirit and their Presbyterian connections, not necessarily because they crossed cultural or geographic boundaries. The chapter-length summaries provide only a bare outline of each missionary's life and ministry, touching on significant highs and lows in each person's story. Still, in this short space, Calhoun packs each story with thought-provoking nuggets. For example, Calhoun's narrative counters—or at least adds nuance to—the assumption that early missionaries were Imperialists and Colonialists. Modern consensus on various social issues, such as slavery, women's rights, and the rights of indigenous people to self-government, might obscure the moral courage and insight required for these men and women to work to respect the cultures and peoples among whom they labored for the gospel. However, Calhoun affords the reader the opportunity to see that these positions stood against the tide of public opinion in their time. Of all the missionaries in the book, David Livingstone (1813–1873) exhibited the most imperialistic tendencies, explicitly stating that his strategy was to bring “civilization, commerce, and



Christianity” to Africa (p. 71). Calhoun points out, however, that Livingstone’s attitude toward the African people was quite progressive compared to the prevailing disposition of British people toward Africa at that time.

Calhoun honors the missionaries in his book, but he avoids hagiography by refusing to paint them as impeccable. One chapter in particular, chapter 7, takes an unexpected turn, but it is perhaps the most instructive in the whole book. In this chapter, Calhoun recounts the story of William Henry Sheppard (1865–1927) and his wife, Lucy Gantt Sheppard (1867–1940). Sheppard, a native of Virginia and son of a former slave, accepted a commission from the Southern Presbyterian Church, alongside Samuel Novell Lapsley (1866–1892), son of a former slave owner, to establish a mission station in the Congo. For two years, these two men worked side-by-side as brothers in Christ until Lapsley succumbed to malaria. After Lapsley’s death, Sheppard returned to America and married Lucy Gantt, who was herself the daughter of a former slave. Together, William and Lucy returned to the Congo Mission. Despite the loss of their first child and many setbacks, their work progressed to the point that they were regularly preaching to thousands of people, training preachers, establishing schools, and planting churches. Scholars at Stanford University called their ministry “one of the most important centres of Christianity and civilization in Central Africa” (p. 118).

Then a grim plot twist occurs within this account of ministry success. The Sheppards returned to America because William committed adultery with a Congolese woman. William admitted his affair to his wife and the missions committee. Calhoun recounts that the missions committee responded with tears and a desire to bring restoration, and so they suspended him for a year. At the end of that year, William confessed to affairs with three other women, one of whom had given birth to a son. The committee extended his suspension and enacted disciplinary measures, but eventually examined him and restored him to ministry. Although he did not return to Africa, William served the African American community as a pastor in Louisville, Kentucky.

Stories of missionaries who fail morally are not usually included within missionary annals. Calhoun does not make editorial comments regarding the reinstatement, yet he includes it in his book of “Amazing Stories of Faithful Missionaries.” A thoughtful reader might wonder, on the one hand, if the missions committee took William’s sin seriously enough to prevent predatory abuses of power by those in spiritual authority? Did they take appropriate steps to care for the women and children affected by his actions? On the other hand, does Calhoun view the reinstatement of William Sheppard to ministry a restoration success story? Calhoun’s description lacks the details needed to render a considered opinion on such questions.

*Swift and Beautiful* is an inspiring book that reads like a devotional, not a textbook or a typical biography. The chapters are too short to provide more than a glimpse into the character, experiences, and practices of the missionaries, but they succeed in demonstrating the surpassing value of Christ and the importance of preaching his gospel. Calhoun’s little volume commends men and women who eschewed a life of worldly comfort and notoriety in favor of a life of eternal significance. Calhoun serves the church by reminding her of the joy and peace that comes—despite hardships—when one joins God in his global mission.

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Kenneth Nehrbass. *Advanced Missiology: How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021. 338 pp. £29.00/\$39.00.

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Nehrbass's *Advanced Missiology* is packed with information on how to pursue Great Commission faithfulness and make cross-cultural disciples. Using the metaphor of a river with tributaries and distributaries, Nehrbass builds a "meta-theoretical framework" of missiology (p. 12). In order to make this argument, the book is divided into two main parts with "The Tributaries of Missiology" and "The Distributaries of Missiology."

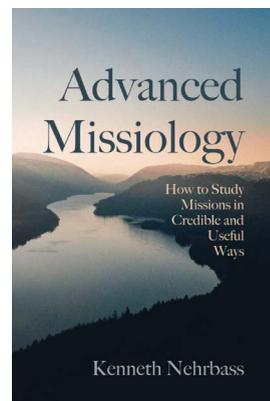
When defining and discussing the tributaries of missiology, Nehrbass explores the missiological value of the academic disciplines of theology, history, anthropology, intercultural studies, development theory, and education. He writes about how these *tributaries* pour into the fulfillment of the Great Commission and its primary task of making cross-cultural disciples (p. 14). While each of these tributaries is critical, Nehrbass contends that the most important discipline is theology conducted from a biblical perspective (p. 37–42).

In the second part of the book, Nehrbass defines what he refers to as the distributaries as he articulates his understanding of cross-cultural discipleship. In so doing, he differentiates between missiological *theories* and missiological *models* by noting that a theory is a "*descriptive* explanation of the ways the world works" whereas models are "*prescriptive* ways for doing things" (p. 5).

Following this distinction, Nehrbass discusses *theories* of cross-cultural discipleship, by highlighting the indigenizing and pilgrim principles, the C1–C6 spectrum, the concept of unreached people groups, the 10/40 window, the homogenous unit principle, the flaw of the excluded middle, and the idea of redemptive analogies. And then, discussing the *models* of cross-cultural discipleship, he focuses on the three-selves church model, the principle of contextualization, narrative-driven methods of multiplication, church planting movement methodologies, Bible translation, business as mission, and the growing short-term missions movement.

Overall, Nehrbass's analysis of missiological *theories* and *models* seems to be fair and balanced. For instance, when addressing contextualization, he affirms its role in the strategy, practice, and theology of missions. Still, he also recognizes that it can be misappropriated and abused by local Christians and missionaries. Beyond mere critical reflection, however, he offers a constructive approach that mitigates the dangers and capitalizes on the advantages as he argues for contextualization that is *ethno-theological*. For Nehrbass, such ethno-theological contextualization includes such things as "missions history, denominational influences, views of Scripture, plus the traditional culture and traditional religion" (p. 238).

For some, Nehrbass's approach of contextualization with "traditional culture and traditional religion" may appear unbiblical or ill-advised, but I would differ. If it does not compromise the *meaning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ and holds to the central teaching of the Great Commission, there is much freedom to integrate various local cultural forms. It is important to keep in mind that if contextualization is not done in this way, there is a good chance that the gospel will be misunderstood and misappropriated. During Paul's second missionary journey, he engaged in "ethno-theological" contextualization while sharing the gospel with unbelievers in Athens, as he referenced "the unknown god" and quoted from one of their "own poets" (Acts 17:22–34) as an entry way into gospel proclamation. Throughout church



history, unlike the Apostle Paul, Christian leaders have struggled to understand the difference of *meaning* and *form* and to practice good biblical contextualization.

In the final chapter Nehrbass addresses the issue of Finishing the Task and the 3 billion individuals who are classified as living among unreached and un-evangelized people groups (UUPGs). Nehrbass highlights Dana Roberts's observation that those in attendance at the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburg "complained" that only one-third of the world was Christ-followers, while today Christians "rejoice" that one-third of the world is Christ-followers (p. 292). Actually, it is not either/or, but both/and. God's people should *rejoice* upon hearing the reports of the many growing Christian populations today, especially those in Africa, Asia, and South America. But also, it is also appropriate to *mourn* because 3 billion people are still lost and have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Especially due to his focus on cross-cultural discipleship, Nehrbass's *Advanced Missiology* is to be applauded. As Christians concerned to faithfully respond to the Great Commission attempt to think critically and carefully about missions, this book offers a fine contribution to the contemporary discussion.

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Craig Ott. *Teaching and Learning Across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 338 pp. £24.99/\$32.99.

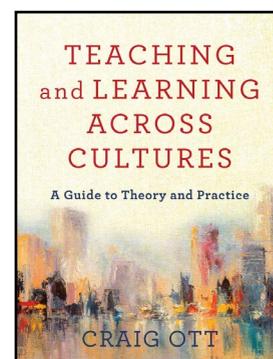
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In his book, *Teaching and Learning Across Cultures*, skilled academic and experienced cross-cultural teacher Craig Ott draws deeply from extensive social research and the experiences of other global colleagues. It is a fruitful confluence of theory and practice resulting in a reliable reference tool for those entering the teaching profession outside their own culture.

Ott considers five categories that, when taken as a whole, provide a current understanding of the contours of cross-cultural teaching: Cognition, Worldview, Social Relations, Media and Environment. In each of the sections the author follows a consistent pattern allowing the reader to follow easily. Starting with definitions of each category, he explains the major contributions from relevant literature, ending with implications for teaching. Practical examples and illustrations keep the reader grounded in real situations. With an eye to fairness and detail, especially in debatable topics (e.g., learning styles), Ott promotes an informed caution in assessing varying approaches to teaching and learning.

Perhaps the most important caution is the author's repeated insistence on pedagogical humility. Ott urges cross-cultural teachers to recognize that even as they are teaching, they must always retain the posture of learners. We do great diligence to learn a topic before we teach it. So it should be with culture.

The most prevalent disappointments among young cross-cultural teachers come from having unrealistic expectations. Unfulfilled expectations usually cause frustration which can undermine the joy and effectiveness of one's ministry. In each of the five sections noted above, the reader will find



healthy doses of realism to temper such unrealistic expectations. Thoughtful reading of Ott's book will cultivate realistic expectations and stimulate the cultural curiosity necessary for improving pedagogy and avoiding frustration. Those preparing for a ministry of cross-cultural teaching would do well to return to the lessons of this book time and again in an effort to expose and refine presuppositions carried in from home.

In attempting to help readers understand the cultural patterns in each of his five categories, one might be inclined to think that the Western ways are useless or rejected. Ott, however, argues for a discerning prophetic role (my term) for the outsider: "There can be distinct advantages to help learners develop new learning strategies and expand their cognitive abilities" (p. 89). Hence, we are simultaneously teaching and being taught as it ought to be in the body of Christ.

The author's sensitivity to the reader appears in his suggestion that readers may want to skip chapter 4 (a bit heavier on the research) to the more applied chapter 5. I would add that the less experienced reader might want to read selectively using the index guide as an aid for which sections seem most appropriate. The experienced cross-cultural teacher will want to devour this book because its insights cast new light on bewildering situations common to cross-cultural teaching.

Most teachers in a new culture aspire to helping people change their worldview. Ott recognizes the pitfalls and aptly warns us. "Cross-cultural teachers who seek to facilitate worldview change must begin with a spirit of humility" (p. 161). He adds, "Humility is required from all parties in this process" (p. 161). Then he tells us why: "We are quick to assume others are just wrong...No world view is perfect. We must have the humility to learn from others the distortions and imbalances in our own worldview" (pp. 161–62). Westerners, Americans in particular, readily succumb to judging worldview differences to be inferior to their own when there is an unfulfilled expectation. Such a negative assessment short-circuits an opportunity to learn by assuming one's own worldview to be right, virtuous, and moral while the other culture is wrong, defective, or lacking. We often do this unconsciously but it is a sure signal that pride maybe be operating (p. 188).

Chapters 11–13 provide rich teaching methods that consider the values and traditions of many collectivistic cultures. My wife, an international trainer, found much success in utilizing skits, role plays, simulations, songs and drama. (Note that much of this gets modified by online teaching, an emerging strategy likely to continue growing in practice and influence well beyond the pandemic.) Ott helps us here too.

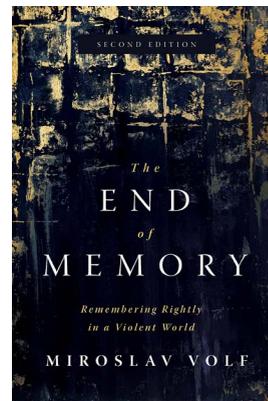
Were I to offer suggestions for how Ott's book could be improved, I would recommend future editions of this book include some treatment of the wealth of brain research (acknowledging the author's disclaimer to this point on p. xiii). For example, negative emotions tend to impede learning. While Ott's work is to be commended, it would be strengthened by including recent scholarship on the brain, emotions, and the effect on learning.

I urge cross-cultural teachers to read and reread this book. In heeding the pedagogical suggestions offered therein, we will learn to communicate more clearly the character of the God who loves and the Jesus who humbled himself for our salvation.

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Miroslav Volf. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. xi + 296 pp. £19.99/\$24.99.

One might be called an ecumenical theologian because they draw on a multiplicity of theological traditions. They also might receive the designation related to seeking the reconciliation between various alienated parties. Miroslav Volf is an ecumenical theologian in both senses and in the best possible way. The breadth of his scholarship is contrasted starkly by the specificity of his scope. In an era of constant specialization, Volf displays boldness in drawing upon not only a diversity of theological sources, but philosophical, psychological, sociological, literary, and historical ones as well. Yet his goal for *The End of Memory* is narrow enough to allow him penetrating depth in his analysis. Volf broaches the question of how memory should be approached to facilitate reconciliation in light of suffered injustice, a theme he introduced in *Exclusion and Embrace* and which culminates in the present text.



Part 1 of *The End of Memory*, “Remember” (pp. 1–35), delves into the significance of memory to life, Christian and otherwise. Commentary is interspersed between biographical vignettes wherein Volf details the constant and unwarranted interrogations he faced from his superiors as a member of the Yugoslavian army whose religious and American ties made him suspect. Reflecting on his questioning, Volf recognizes the importance and dangers of one’s remembrance of wrongs suffered. Not only can memory be a “shield” for the oppressed against future injustice, but it can also become a “sword” (pp. 19–35) when the offended remembers incorrectly so as to make the offender appear more evil. It is this latter use that often justifies one reacting in revenge.

The danger of misremembering necessitates part 2, entitled “How Should We Remember?” (pp. 37–128). For the wronged to be brought in loving community with the wrongdoer, memory must have the right character and must be regulated within the proper framework. As to the prior, Volf argues that memories must be truthful and in love must be remembered with grace towards the offender. Such remembrance allows one to be just, by making explicit the wrongdoing, while allowing love to “cover” sins as one seeks reconciliation (p. 64). Volf then goes on to argue that memories will typically be shaped and used within a framework of interpretation that provides a more expanded view of reality. Thus, he claims that Christians have and should use “sacred memories” (p. 96–102) of the exodus and the passion as “regulative meta-memories” (p. 94), which offers identity to the believer, unity to the Christian community, and an understanding of God’s desire for justice and forgiveness.

*The End of Memory* concludes by asking the question “How Long Should We Remember?” (pp. 121–214). Pushing back against the theory that eternal memory is central to salvation, Volf paints an eschatological picture whereby forgetting may, at times, be significant. Agreeing with Ricoeur that some disremembering is necessary for identity (p. 195) and building upon earlier argument that forgetting may be significant in forgiveness, the author attempts to show that a community of love in heaven will involve the “not coming to mind” (p. 148) of wrongs suffered. Some memories of “horrendous evils” will require a “driving out” (pp. 177–91), since they cannot be sensibly integrated into life’s narrative. Such an event can only occur as one’s singular focus is transfixed on Christ in glory (pp. 192–214). The context where judgment and the forgetting of wrongs can lead to the possibility of reconciliation between individuals is ultimately in the eschaton.

Volf has risen to prominence by deftly synthesizing difficult ideas and disparate theological positions, while presenting them in a way that is useful to the Christian community. Like those theologians who influenced him, Volf is theologically and philosophically rigorous, historically informed, and constructive. However, unlike most students who radicalize their teachers' works in order to make a name in an academic world that seeks novelty, Volf's usefulness to the evangelical community lies in his moderation and clarity. He recognizes the political implications of the cross, like Moltmann, but believes that Scripture focuses more on Christ's "substitute for offenders" (p. 115). Where his 20th century predecessors often moved into historically atypical views of God and truth when speaking of Christ's suffering, he claims to adhere to a "nearly classical notion of the divine being" and views post-modern understandings of truth as "incoherent" (p. 49–50). Furthermore, he refrains from the type of impenetrable prose often found in high academia, even incorporating biographical elements to illustrate his argumentation.

Not only is Volf's style refreshing, but his boldness is as well. Not only does he research widely, but he also makes claims that are difficult to voice in Western culture today. He is one of a shrinking number of Christian scholars who uses his platform to make statements that must be said, but that many would not want to hear. For example, he is willing to entertain the idea that even those who are wronged are sinners, which might be seen as victim-blaming. Furthermore, he holds that forgiveness and reconciliation are more important than remembrance and retribution.

There are three main difficulties with *The End of Memory*. First, Volf spends the bulk of his words attempting to explicate how the wronged should remember, but interacts less with the issue of how the wrongdoer should do so. Thus, his inclusion of "On Memories of Victims and Perpetrators" in the 2nd edition of the book is a welcome addition. Second, Volf refrains from taking a stand on the issue of universalism, which could call into question some of his conclusions from part 3. He believes it is sufficient that he knows that God's judgment "both exposes sin and transforms the sinner" (p. 180). Yet, this may be too thin to undergird his ideas of forgiveness which clearly tend towards universal reconciliation. Third, by subscribing to a "post-modern" view of the ambiguous "self" (197–98), the issue of the relationship between identity and memory becomes more complicated. Thus, how much a reader is convinced of his eschatological conclusions in part 3 will likely be correlated to their acceptance of a decentered self.

Short criticisms aside, *The End of Memory* is a worthy read, not only for the student and professor, but also for the pastor. Volf has done much to take the theme of memory that is biblically represented and set it forth in theological formulation and philosophical elucidation. Thus, his writing makes both memory and forgetting more recognizable as practically significant to the everyday life of the Christian and even to society at large.

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