

# themelios

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## DESCRIPTION

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EDITORIAL

# Wisdom and Hope in Difficult Days: Reading Revelation in 2022

— Brian J. Tabb —

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“This calls for a mind with wisdom...” (Rev 17:9)

In these difficult days marked by deep divisions, deadly diseases, and societal decay, we need discerning wisdom and dogged hope. There is often more heat than light in our social media feeds and regular news cycles, which offer vast oceans of drama and worry but with tiny islands of wisdom and hope. As Jeffrey Bilbro writes, “We don’t just need the media to cast a more piercing light; ... we need to reevaluate the light we rely on to understand our times and discern how to respond.”<sup>1</sup> To that end, let’s reflect together on the Bible’s last word in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. My claim, as suggested in the title, is that Revelation offers God’s people wisdom and hope in difficult days. I’ll begin with some orientating comments about reading this magnificent yet mysterious book, then reflect on the need to hear and heed Revelation’s offer of true wisdom and lasting happiness, and finally conclude with several pastoral appeals for wise, hopeful living.

## *1. How to Read Revelation*

For many Christians, Revelation is a fascinating yet frustrating puzzle.<sup>2</sup> Interpreters have proposed different keys to unlock this enigmatic book. Many popular authors and speakers commend reading Revelation in the light of current world events. One recent book discusses “the countdown to the End of the Age.”<sup>3</sup> Another elucidates “ten prophetic issues as current as the morning news,” explaining to readers “where we are, what it means, and where we go from here.”<sup>4</sup> Yet the confident analysis from so-called “prophecy experts” often misses the mark and seems far removed from Christ’s revelation to John and the seven churches. Alternatively, biblical scholars typically stress that it is important to

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Bilbro, *Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 1.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph adapts material from Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (London: Apollos, 2019), 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> John Hagee, *The End of the Age: The Countdown Has Begun* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021), 134.

<sup>4</sup> David Jeremiah, *Where Do We Go from Here? How Tomorrow’s Prophecies Foreshadow Today’s Problems* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021), vii.

understand the situation of Revelation's first readers in the late first century AD. So, "the beast" is not a future antichrist arising from the European Union or the UN but the Roman Empire with its idolatrous emperor worship and economic oppression. While rightly seeking to understand the historical-cultural context of the book, many scholarly treatments fail to read Revelation as the capstone of Christian Scripture for the enduring benefit of the church in each generation.

Revelation is unique among the NT Scriptures, and the book's opening verses signal that it is an apocalyptic prophecy packaged as a letter to be read in corporate worship.<sup>5</sup> "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) serves as a title or summary of the book while clueing readers in to its genre. In the NT, the term ἀποκάλυψις (the basis for "apocalypse" in English) consistently refers to divine revelation or disclosure of hidden or unseen realities.<sup>6</sup> Revelation resembles biblical and extrabiblical apocalyptic writings in at least three ways: (1) it discloses God's ultimate purposes in salvation and judgment, (2) it presents a transcendent, God-centered perspective on reality, and (3) it challenges the people of God to evaluate their troubles in light of God's present rule and future triumph. Revelation is also "a book of prophecy" to be heeded by God's people (1:3; 22:7). John receives this genuine prophecy "in the Spirit" and writes what he sees and hears about "what must soon take place" (22:6) in order to comfort struggling saints and warn those who are in spiritual danger. This apocalyptic prophecy comes in the form of an ancient letter addressed to seven churches with a greeting and benediction resembling many NT epistles. Douglas Webster aptly calls Revelation a "prison epistle," penned by a prophet, poet, pastor, and political prisoner who was immersed in the prophetic Scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

I argue that Revelation's canonical context—not current events or ancient history—is the most decisive for understanding its mysterious and magisterial visions. As Dennis Johnson states, "Revelation makes sense only in light of the Old Testament."<sup>8</sup> John stands in the line of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and other faithful prophets as he writes down the divine visions and messages he has received. But John also uniquely receives a "revelation from Jesus Christ" (1:1) and is commanded not to "seal up the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:10), reversing the command to Daniel to "seal up" his prophecy until the end of days (Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9). Thus, John is a true prophet writing at the culmination of redemptive history. This book reveals how Christ has begun to fulfill the prophetic hopes through his death, resurrection, and heavenly reign, and how he will soon return to consummate God's purposes to judge evil, save his people, and restore all things.

Revelation's remarkable and perplexing prophetic pictures of a diabolical dragon, a seven-headed sea monster, a seven-horned lamb, a sealed scroll, a lake of fire, and a happily-ever-after paradise stretch our minds and stir our hearts. These visions should make us hate what is evil and love what is true, good, and beautiful according to God's perfect standards, beckoning us to live counterculturally as faithful witnesses who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev 14:4).<sup>9</sup> While many seek to decode Revelation's riddles with the key of current events or ancient history, we must remember that God has given us this

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<sup>5</sup> Here I adapt material from Tabb, *All Things New*, 4–7.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Moisés Silva, "καλύπτω," NIDNTTE 2:615–16.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas D. Webster, *Follow the Lamb: A Pastoral Approach to The Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 22.

<sup>9</sup> This is adapted from Tabb, *All Things New*, 2.



book with its apocalyptic imagery in order to decode our reality, to capture our imaginations, and to guide our way in this world.

Revelation is written for embattled Christians who need endurance, wisdom, and hope.<sup>10</sup> The messages to the seven churches present various threats facing God's people. Christ calls believers in Smyrna to "be faithful unto death" (2:10), and he refers to the martyrdom of Antipas "where Satan dwells" (2:13).<sup>11</sup> There are also more subtle and insidious dangers: the Ephesian church loses her first love (2:4), false teaching exerts its seductive appeal in Pergamum and Thyatira (2:20), Sardis is spiritually sleep-walking (3:1–3), and Laodicea is proudly self-reliant (3:17). The risen Christ urges his church to remember, to repent, and to remain steadfast that we may receive all that he has promised. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7).

## 2. *Hear and Heed Wisdom*

Those who hear and heed the revelation of Jesus Christ are counted truly happy. The book contains seven beatitudes or macarisms, statements featuring the Greek term μακάριος usually translated "blessed," "happy," or "favored."<sup>12</sup> These sayings summon us to wise living and lasting joy. The beatitude in Revelation 1:3 sets the tone for the whole book:

*Blessed* [μακάριος] is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and *blessed* are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

A similar saying in Revelation 22:7 calls believers to obey God's revealed message:

*Blessed* [μακάριος] is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

These foundational beatitudes offer timely wisdom and call for obedient action motivated by confident hope. Revelation calls us to seek true wisdom and happiness, to keep Christ's words, and to read the time correctly.

### 2.1. Seeking True Wisdom and Lasting Happiness

In my title, "Wisdom and Hope in Difficult Days," the stress on hope may seem obvious since Revelation has much to say about the return of Christ and the restoration of all things. But you may wonder what the apocalyptic visions of this book have to do with *wisdom*. What is wisdom? According to Scripture, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7). More than book smarts, wisdom is true understanding that enables us to navigate life in this world.<sup>13</sup>

Before examining explicit references to "wisdom" (σοφία) in Revelation, let's first consider how the book's beatitudes hold out true wisdom and happiness. The book opens by ascribing divine favor or

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 334.

<sup>11</sup> Satan's throne may refer specifically to the prominent practice of emperor worship in Pergamum—considered the keeper of Caesar's temple—or more generally to increased Roman opposition to believers in that city. For discussion, see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 95–99.

<sup>12</sup> The uses of μακάριος in Revelation fall under the second definition in BDAG 611: "**pert[aining] to being esp[ecially] favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged**, fr[om] a transcendent perspective."

<sup>13</sup> Similarly Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 15.

blessing to “the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy” and “those who hear, and who keep what is written in it,” much like the first two psalms introduce the whole Psalter:<sup>14</sup>

*Blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] is the man  
     who walks not in the counsel of the wicked ...  
 but his delight is in the law of the LORD. (Ps 1:1–2)

*Blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] are all who take refuge in him [the Son]. (2:12)

Commentators rightly classify Psalm 1 as a Torah psalm and Psalm 2 as a royal psalm. But the beatitudes “blessed is the man...” and “blessed are all...” are proverbial expressions of true wisdom and happiness, contrasted with the folly and ruin of wickedness.<sup>15</sup> In other words, those who experience God’s favor rightly respond to God’s word and his Son, while the wicked fail to heed God’s law or serve his King. The beatitudes in Psalms 1–2 “serve as a paradigm” for the Psalter’s two dozen other uses of the Hebrew term אַשְׁרֵי (“blessed” or “happy”).<sup>16</sup> The stakes could not be higher in this contrast between wisdom and folly:

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
     but the way of the wicked will perish. (1:6)

Kiss the Son,  
     lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
     for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (2:12)

The OT Poetic Books include many beatitudes using the same terminology, אַשְׁרֵי in Hebrew and μακάριος in Greek translation. Consider, for example, Proverbs 3:13, 18:

*Blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] is the one who finds wisdom,  
     and the one who gets understanding....  
 She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
     those who hold her fast are called *blessed* [מְאַשְׁרֵי].

Other psalms and proverbs ascribe blessedness to those who fear, trust, seek, and hope in the Lord, who delight in God’s instruction, who experience forgiveness of sins, and who walk according to God’s ways.<sup>17</sup> These macarisms are invitations to learn true wisdom and thus experience true life with God.

<sup>14</sup> On Psalms 1–2 as the introduction to the collection of Psalms, see Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 13; James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Psalms*, 2 vols., Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 1:3, 89–90.

<sup>15</sup> “Beatitudes occur in a variety of literary contexts, and amidst diverse genres, but their home lies in wisdom discourse.” Greg Carey, “Finding Happiness in Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness: What the Old and New Testaments Teach Us about the Good Life*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 209.

<sup>16</sup> Michael L. Brown, “אַשְׁרֵי,” *NIDOTTE* 1:564.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Pss 32:1–2; 40:4; 84:12; 112:1; 119:2; 128:1; 146:5; Prov 16:20; 28:14.

There are also a few beatitudes in the OT Prophetic Books. Consider three examples:<sup>18</sup>

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,  
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For the LORD is a God of justice;  
*blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] are all those who wait for him. (Isa 30:18)

Thus says the Lord:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,  
for soon my salvation will come,  
and my righteousness be revealed.

*Blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] is the man who does this,  
and the son of man who holds it fast....” (Isa 56:1–2)

*Blessed* [אַשְׁרֵי] is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. (Dan 12:12)

These prophetic sayings are noteworthy parallels with the beatitudes in Revelation because they commend *wisdom* and *waiting* for the Lord’s promises to be realized. Said another way, these expressions of present happiness have an eschatological emphasis.

The most well-known biblical beatitudes are found in the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ presents the poor in spirit, mourners, the meek, those who long for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted and reviled as truly “happy” (μακάριοι). As in the first two psalms and the prophetic blessing statements, Jesus’s Beatitudes have an eschatological thrust, ascribing present blessedness to disciples based on their coming reward and reversal of circumstances. Consider one example:

*Blessed* are those who mourn,  
for they shall be comforted. (Matt 5:4)

It seems paradoxical to present mourners as “blessed” or “happy.” Yet this counter-intuitive claim is based on the sure hope that God will one day comfort his sad, suffering servants (cf. Isa 60:20; 61:2–3). This is the very hope vividly expressed in Revelation:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (21:4; cf. 7:17; Isa 25:8).

The beatitudes in Revelation point to comprehensive eschatological blessing, “to a joy that overflows and satisfies,”<sup>19</sup> which contrasts sharply with the ruin of Christ’s adversaries who align with the beast and share its fate. This eschatological expectation fosters wise living and patient endurance in the present.

Consider Revelation 14:8–13, which begins with the angelic announcement, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great” (v. 8). Another angel warns of the eternal consequences of worshipping the beast and receiving its mark (vv. 9–11). Then the prophet writes, “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (v. 12). This sober appeal is followed

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<sup>18</sup> The well-known statement in Jeremiah 17:7—“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD”—has the Hebrew term בָּרוּךְ (“blessed”) rather than אַשְׁרֵי.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 48.

by a word from heaven in v. 13: “Write this: Blessed [μακάριοι] are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, for their deeds follow them.” I’ll say more about Babylon and the beast a bit later. For now, note that as Psalm 1 contrasts the ways of the righteous and the wicked, so Revelation 14 presents the sure demise of Babylon, the beast and its devotees alongside the joyful bliss of those “who die in the Lord.” The deceased saints are happy “because [γάρ] their works [ἔργα] follow them.” Jesus asserts earlier, “I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works” (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν, Rev 2:23; cf. 20:12–13; 22:12). Christ will judge or reward people in accordance with their deeds, which demonstrate the true nature of their faith.<sup>20</sup> This is why the saints must persevere with wisdom and hope, no matter the cost.

Let’s turn now to the four explicit references to “wisdom” (σοφία) in the book of Revelation. In 5:12, the heavenly multitude exclaims that the Lamb is worthy to receive power, wealth, *wisdom*, might, honor, glory, and blessing. Then in 7:12, the angels, elders, and living creatures worship God saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and *wisdom* and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” Wisdom fittingly appears among seven divine attributes ascribed to the Lamb and the Almighty, since according to Daniel 2:20–21 God is praiseworthy because “wisdom and might” belong to him and because he “gives wisdom to the wise.” The wisdom of God and his servant Daniel contrast with the king and sages of Babylon, who cannot comprehend the king’s revelatory dream. In Revelation, the power, honor, and wisdom of Jesus the slain Lamb and God on his throne are at odds with worldly expressions of power, glory-seeking, and pseudo-wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

Later John makes explicit readers’ need for “wisdom” (σοφία) and “understanding” (νοῦν) to grasp important spiritual truths about “the beast” who wars against God’s people (13:18; 17:9). The point of the first call for wisdom is not only to decode the beast’s symbolic number (666) or the meaning of its seven heads but also to show the way for the saints to conquer the dragon and the beast in the end: “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12:11; 15:2).

The next summons for “a mind having wisdom” (17:9) comes after John receives a shocking vision of the harlot Babylon seated on the seven-headed beast. When John marvels at this woman, the angel responds, “Why do you marvel?” (17:6–7). John’s initial response of marveling is misguided,<sup>22</sup> as when he twice falls down before a revealing angel but is told to worship God alone (19:10; 22:8–9). Even if the whole earth marvels at the beast and its signs (13:3; 17:8), those with God-given wisdom grasp that Babylon the great is “fallen” and that the beast goes to destruction” (14:8; 17:8). Daniel similarly stresses the saints’ need for spiritual insight in difficult days, lest they be led astray:<sup>23</sup>

*Those who are wise will instruct many*, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. (Dan 11:33 NIV)

Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but *those who are wise will understand*. (Dan 12:10 NIV)

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 768.

<sup>21</sup> Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “The Book of Revelation as a Disclosure of Wisdom,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought*, ed. Benjamin Reynolds and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 349–50.

<sup>22</sup> Stuckenbruck, “The Book of Revelation as a Disclosure of Wisdom,” 358.

<sup>23</sup> On this Danielic background, see Beale, *Revelation*, 725. Cf. 2 Esdras 12:38: “you shall teach them to *the wise* among your people, whose hearts you know are able to *comprehend* and keep these secrets.”



God's people need the wisdom that God and the Lamb reveal, that we might rightly understand our situation and faithfully follow our Savior to the end.

## 2.2. Keeping Christ's Words

Second, rightly "hearing" the revelation of Jesus Christ entails obedient action, not mere audition. If a father instructs his children to come to dinner and they say, "I hear you," yet continue playing as before, their response shows that they have not really heard in the way that their father expects. In the language of speech act theory, the father's words (the locution) reflect an intention (an illocution) to produce a particular response (a perlocution). "Wash up for dinner" is not just a suggestion for those with no other plans; it is a summons to action: "Stop what you're doing and come to the table right away." Likewise, Kevin Vanhoozer explains that every biblical text "contains not merely information but an implicit call, 'Follow me.'"<sup>24</sup> Or as John Frame says, "God's word is *authoritative*" in that "the speech of an absolute authority [the Lord] creates *absolute obligation*."<sup>25</sup>

Returning to Revelation 1:3, it is noteworthy that one Greek article governs "those who hear" and "those who keep" (οἱ ἀκούοντες ... καὶ τηροῦντες),<sup>26</sup> signaling that there is only one group of people in view: *hearers who heed*. Said another way, to "keep" (ESV) or "take to heart" (NIV) or "heed" (NASB) what is written is the proof of true listening and the path of life-giving wisdom. Deuteronomy 4:6 summons Israel to "keep" the Lord's commandments "for that will be your *wisdom* and your understanding in the sight of the peoples." Similarly in Revelation, keeping God's commands is an essential characteristic of Christ's followers. In 12:17, the dragon furiously wars against "those who *keep* the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus," and 14:12 calls for endurance for the saints "who *keep* the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." While this book reveals "the things that must soon take place" (1:1), true favor is promised not to those who crack its code but to hearers who heed (1:3). Revelation thus has "has an ultimate ethical aim,"<sup>27</sup> summoning the saints to respond wisely to the trustworthy words of God.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" is a repeated refrain in Revelation (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; cf. 13:9). This echoes Christ's call in the Gospels: "He who has ears, let him hear" (ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω; Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43). Jesus speaks in parables to the crowds, "because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (13:13). But Jesus also says to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (13:16). Isaiah and other OT prophets similarly speak God's word to a people without seeing eyes, hearing ears, or tender hearts. These probing metaphors express their spiritual inability to respond properly to the

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<sup>24</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>25</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 5, emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 283; David Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 184; cf. David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 10–11.

prophetic word and reflect the biblical principle that we resemble what we revere (cf. Ps 115:8).<sup>28</sup> Those who cling to idols that cannot see, hear, or save will become themselves spiritually dull and lifeless.<sup>29</sup> Jesus addresses the seven churches in Revelation with words of confrontation and consolation. To the conceited, complacent, and compromising, Christ says: “remember” (Rev 2:5; 3:3), “repent” (2:5, 16; 3:3, 19), “wake up” (3:2). To suffering, struggling saints he says, “Do not fear” (2:10); “I have loved you ... I will keep you ... hold fast” (3:9–11). Thus, “If anyone has an ear, let him hear” functions as “a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:9–10). Revelation’s hearing formula summons all Christians to see our true spiritual situation, to recognize the supreme danger of false worship and worldly compromise, and to take to heart the trustworthy word of God, that we may lay hold of God’s enduring blessing.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.3. Reading the Time

Third, we heed the revelation of Jesus Christ because of what time it is. There is a consistent eschatological orientation to this book’s blessing statements. In 1:3, “for the time is near” (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς) explains why those who obediently hear this prophecy are blessed. This same rationale—the time is near—supports the later command, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:10). Daniel’s prophecy was “shut up and sealed until the time of the end” such that he could not understand when or how God’s words would be realized in the distant future (Dan 12:8–9; cf. 12:4), but John’s prophecy is not a sealed book since “the time is near.”<sup>31</sup> This claim parallels Jesus’s message in the Gospels: “*The time* [ὁ καιρὸς] is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God *has come near* [ἤγγικεν]” (Mark 1:15 CSB).<sup>32</sup> Revelation goes further because it discloses “the things that must soon take place” (1:1), revealing what was previously concealed. The earlier prophecies of Daniel and others have begun to be fulfilled, the end times have already begun with Christ’s triumphant resurrection and ascension, and Revelation unveils the glorious future awaiting God’s people. “The time” to which John refers is the time of Christ’s coming—the central hope for God’s people that will usher in lasting justice, comfort, and joy. Later in the book, the link between eschatological blessing and Christ’s return is explicit:

Behold, I am coming like a thief! *Blessed* [μακάριος] is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed! (Rev 16:15)

And behold, I am coming soon. *Blessed* [μακάριος] is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. (22:6–7)

Thus, our Lord promises consummate happiness for those who heed his words and are ready for his return.

<sup>28</sup> For a book-length treatment of this biblical theme, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> See Isa 6:9–10; Deut 29:4; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2.

<sup>30</sup> See further Tabb, *All Things New*, 80–82.

<sup>31</sup> For further discussion see Tabb, *All Things New*, 213–15.

<sup>32</sup> This parallel with Mark 1:15 is also noted by Beale, *Revelation*, 185; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 31.

### 3. Appeals for Wisdom and Hope

So far, I've argued that we should read Revelation as the culmination of biblical prophecy, which stirs our hearts and shines much-needed light on our world so that we can live wise, faithful, hope-filled lives until Christ comes again. I now offer three specific appeals for wisdom and hope in difficult days: beware the beast, follow the Lamb, and long for home.

#### 3.1. Beware the Beast

Revelation calls for “wisdom” (σοφία) and “understanding” (νοῦν) regarding “the beast” battling against the saints (13:18; 17:9). “The beast” (τὸ θηρίον) makes a brief appearance in 11:7, rising from the abyss to fight against and slay Christ’s “two witnesses” (whom I take to represent the church).<sup>33</sup> Revelation 13:1–4 more fully describes this monstrous foe, which John sees “rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.” The diabolical dragon invests power and authority in this beast, and the world marvels, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” This beast breathes out blasphemies and even wars against and conquers the saints (v. 7; cf. Dan 7:21).<sup>34</sup> John exhorts the saints to show spiritual discernment and steadfastness in suffering:

If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

If anyone is to be taken captive,

to captivity he goes;

if anyone is to be slain with the sword,

with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. (vv. 9–10)

So what (or who) is this beast? Its seven heads, ten horns, and resemblance to a leopard, a bear, and a lion sound like a magical creature out of J. K. Rowling’s *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. The beast sits on the dragon’s throne (13:2), and Revelation elsewhere portrays the harlot Babylon riding on the red beast, whose seven heads signify Babylon’s “seven mountains” or “hills” as well as “seven kings” (17:7–10). Since Rome was widely known as “the city on seven hills,”<sup>35</sup> Craig Koester explains, “The dual imagery of mountains and kings underscores the beast embodying the power of both the city of Rome and its emperors.”<sup>36</sup> Many readers understand the “seven kings” to be Roman emperors, though there is debate about which seven.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Tabb, *All Things New*, 98–101.

<sup>34</sup> The passive construction ἐδόθη αὐτῷ (13:7) signals that God permits the beast’s assault on the saints. While God does not directly will evil, “evil exists within the circumference of God’s sovereign will,” according to Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 6.5; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 3.9, Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.782–85; *Georgica* 2.534–35.

<sup>36</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 677.

<sup>37</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC 18 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 246–47. The sixth king in 17:10 (“one is”) is identified as Nero by Bruce W. Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 289–96.

However, while Rome was certainly the dominant world power of the first century, not all readers are persuaded that “the beast” refers to Roman rule. For example, Robert Thomas understands the beast to be “the false Christ of the last times,” who leads the last world empire and deceives the earth, yet he acknowledges that “no historical situation can fully satisfy all the criteria regarding the beast.”<sup>38</sup> This exclusively futurist reading also fails to seriously address John’s urgent appeal for “the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:10), which was presumably relevant for Revelation’s first readers.

Alternatively, G. K. Beale stresses “the temporal transcendence of the oppressive beast,” claiming that the beast includes “world empires of the past and the present and potentially of the future.”<sup>39</sup> In this approach the beast’s “seven kings” (17:10) express the fullness of the beast’s power, rather than a precise list of rulers.

Thus, I take “the beast” to refer to political and military might that demands people’s complete allegiance and even worship, and I understand “Babylon the great” as the state’s cultural and economic system.<sup>40</sup> In John’s vision, Babylon rides the beast, suggesting that the state’s coercive power supports its seductive prosperity. Rome fits this beastly bill for Revelation’s first readers, who faced political and cultural pressures to show their devotion to the emperor.<sup>41</sup> The Roman people considered the Caesars to have authority derived from the gods,<sup>42</sup> and the emperor Domitian expected to be referred to as “our master and god.”<sup>43</sup> Some tyrants today make similar claims.<sup>44</sup>

Yet Rome does not exhaust the meaning of “Babylon” and “the beast.” Babylon is rich with biblical associations harkening back to the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and extending to the mighty, proud nation that sacked Jerusalem and sent the people of Judah into exile. Likewise, the vision of terrifying sea monsters in Daniel 7 suggests that first-century Rome is just the latest beastly power to coerce people into worshipping the state-sponsored image (cf. Dan 3:5). For a time, Babylon controls and cons the nations (17:15, 18; 18:3), but its authority is derivative (“given”) and subject to God’s sovereign will (cf. Dan 4:17).

Therefore, the saints must not be deceived by the beast’s sinister schemes. Dennis Johnson writes, “Followers of the Lamb, who will rule the nations with justice and his rod of iron, must not be duped into worshipping state power as though it holds the keys to salvation. Neither should we quake in terror before a godless state.”<sup>45</sup>

According to a 2017 Washington Post article, Communist officials in China warned villagers that they “should no longer rely on Jesus, but on the party for help.”<sup>46</sup> Officials have forcibly removed crosses

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<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 152–54.

<sup>39</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 685.

<sup>40</sup> For expanded discussion, see Tabb, *All Things New*, 124–27.

<sup>41</sup> On the Roman imperial cult, see Winter, *Divine Honours for the Caesars*, 286–306.

<sup>42</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 570. Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Epistle* 10.102; Horace, *Odes* 1.12.49–52.

<sup>43</sup> Suetonius, *Domitian* 13.2 (*dominus et deus noster*).

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Richardson, “North Korea’s Kim Dynasty: The Making of a Personality Cult,” 16 February 2015, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/16/north-korea-kim-jong-il-birthday>.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 337.

<sup>46</sup> Simon Denyer, “Jesus Won’t Save You — President Xi Jinping Will, Chinese Christians Told,” *The Washington Post*, 14 November 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/3smc9dfz>.

and destroyed church buildings and other religious sites.<sup>47</sup> Hundreds of Christian religious posters were replaced by images of President Xi Jinping, recalling the personality cult surrounding China's longtime chairman Mao Zedong. China's policies call for "belief" in the values, ethics, and goals of Marxism as interpreted by Xi Jinping.<sup>48</sup>

In December 2018, a prominent Reformed pastor in Chengdu, China was arrested along with his wife and other members of the church. A year later, Pastor Wang Yi was sentenced to nine years in prison on dubious charges including "inciting to subvert state power."<sup>49</sup> After his arrest, the church posted a public letter in which Wang Yi declared,

I accept and respect the fact that this Communist regime has been allowed by God to rule temporarily.... At the same time, I believe that this Communist regime's persecution against the church is a greatly wicked, unlawful action. As a pastor of a Christian church, I must denounce this wickedness openly and severely.... I firmly believe that Christ has called me to carry out this faithful disobedience through a life of service, under this regime that opposes the gospel and persecutes the church. This is the means by which I preach the gospel, and it is the mystery of the gospel which I preach.<sup>50</sup>

This persecuted pastor sees through the beastly intimidation and coercion of the state and embraces Revelation's "call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (13:10) even at significant personal cost. Christians in the West may not yet face such steep penalties for faithfulness to the gospel, but we must still exercise wisdom and remain vigilant lest we hope in the state for salvation or be captivated by its sweet-sounding siren songs. This calls for wisdom: beware the beast.

### 3.2. Follow the Lamb

The Apocalypse also urges us to *follow the Lamb*. "The Lamb" (ἀρνίον) is Revelation's favorite title for Christ (29x in the book). In ch. 5, John hears an angel announce that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered," then he sees "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." This vision of the slain Lamb (v. 6) recasts Israel's hopes of a powerful king descended from Judah and David: Jesus ironically conquers (νικάω) at his first coming, not by subjugating his foes, but through his sacrificial suffering.<sup>51</sup> The slain Lamb saves people by his shed blood and also shepherds them in the new creation (5:9; 7:14, 17).

Each of the seven messages to the churches concludes with a glorious promise to "the one who conquers" (ESV) or "to the one who is victorious" (NIV), translating the Greek verb νικάω.<sup>52</sup> In the Apocalypse, this "victory" motif powerfully expresses the tension between the earthly and heavenly

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<sup>47</sup> For example, see Russell Goldman, "Chinese Police Dynamite Christian Megachurch," *The New York Times*, 12 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/world/asia/china-church-dynamite.html>.

<sup>48</sup> William Nee, "In China, 'Xi Jinping Thought' Is the Only Accepted Religion," *The Diplomat*, 17 August 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/in-china-xi-jinping-thought-is-the-only-accepted-religion/>.

<sup>49</sup> "A Statement from Early Rain Covenant Church Regarding the Severe Sentencing of Pastor Wang Yi," 30 December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/2pk84jsn>.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Yi, "My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience," 12 December 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2f3zzu>.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Tabb, *All Things New*, 59; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>52</sup> The next two paragraphs adapt material in Tabb, *All Things New*, 108–9.

perspectives on the church's situation in the world. On the one hand, Jesus's followers face "tribulation" of various sorts (1:9), including exile (1:9), poverty and slander (2:9), incarceration (2:10), weakness (3:8), and even death "for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (6:9; cf. 2:10, 13; 20:4). Moreover, the beast is allowed to conquer (νικῆσαι) Christians for a time (13:7; cf. 11:7). On the other hand, the eschatological blessings of the new creation are reserved for Christ's victorious people. As the Almighty declares, "*The one who conquers* [ὁ νικῶν] will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (21:7).

Thus, God's people are, in a sense, *conquered conquerors*, achieving true victory through apparent defeat. Believers ultimately conquer the dragon and the beast "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11; 15:2). While Christians' sufferings may look like Satan's triumph in this age, they signal both his demise and our share in Christ's victory through the cross.<sup>53</sup> Our Lord has conquered *as* the slain Lamb, and he sets the course for his people, who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4). The book of Revelation redefines "victory" in terms of faithfulness to Christ, the slain and risen Lamb, who is seated on heaven's throne and promises his people a portion in his eschatological kingdom (3:21). The church should expect troubles in this life, yet God's word summons God's people to faithful endurance—no matter what—and resilient confidence in the Lamb's sure victory (17:14). This is a call for wisdom and hope: follow the Lamb.

### 3.3. Long for Home

This brings us to our final appeal for wisdom and hope in these difficult days. The daily news cycle reminds us that all is not right in our city, our country, and our world. The Lord Jesus warns, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:10–11). And when the Lamb opens the fourth seal in Revelation 6:7–8, John describes a pale horse with a rider named Death, followed by Hades. "And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth." Reading these words in 2022, we think of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine that has claimed many lives, forced millions of people to flee their homes, and caused shortages of food, water, and other supplies. We think of the nations gathering recently for the Winter Olympics in Beijing, even as China is accused of brutal atrocities against the Uyghur people.<sup>54</sup> We think of the wearying toll of the COVID-19 pandemic that, according to the World Health Organization, has led to over six million deaths worldwide—more than the total population of Minnesota.<sup>55</sup> The nations continue to rage. The plague continues to spread. The wicked prosper and the righteous languish. Day after day, we pray, "Lord, have mercy!" and "How long, Oh Lord?" But we also say with tears in our eyes and hope in our hearts, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

Revelation offers us a God-centered perspective on our situation. It reveals what is true, good, and valuable in a world full of falsehoods. It gives us needed spiritual discernment and steadfast hope

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 663.

<sup>54</sup> Joel Gunter, "China Committed Genocide against Uyghurs, Independent Tribunal Rules," *BBC News*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59595952>.

<sup>55</sup> Roughly 465 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 6,062,536 million deaths globally as of 18 March 2022, <https://covid19.who.int/>. According to 2020 census data, the population of Minnesota was approximately 5.7 million, just behind Wisconsin (5.9 million) and Colorado (5.8 million).



to stand firm in the evil day (Eph 6:13) as we resist the beast and follow the Lamb. These strange and wonderful apocalyptic visions also stir in us a deep longing for our eternal home.

Revelation presents an extended contrast between two cities: Babylon the great and the new Jerusalem. One is a harlot; the other, a bride (17:1; 21:9). One is infamous for iniquity; the other, arrayed with righteousness (18:4–6; 19:8). One is the great city of this world (17:18); the other, the holy city kept for the new world (21:2, 10). One poisons the nations with lies, the other heals the nations with the tree of life (18:23; 22:2). The wise should “come out” of Babylon and “enter” Jerusalem’s gates (18:4; 22:14).

Revelation’s “Babylon” is not a particular place on the map (though Google Maps could direct you to Babylon, New York). As mentioned earlier, it refers to the state’s cultural and commercial system, the city of man that stands opposed to God and his people. Babylon evokes strong biblical-theological associations from the ancient tower of ambition to Nebuchadnezzar’s beautiful yet brutal kingdom to the vast Roman empire in the first century. John sees the woman Babylon decked out in purple and scarlet, gold and jewelry, while also drunk on the martyrs’ blood (17:4, 6). Her name is a “mystery” (17:5)—a spiritual reality that is hidden until God chooses to reveal it (cf. Dan 2:29). Babylon’s bright lights may look marvelous, but she is really “the engine of economic oppression”<sup>56</sup> whose bill is coming due and whose destruction is sure.

Revelation challenges the church to see our location rightly. Christians may be *residents* of the great city of man, but we are *citizens* of God’s holy city. Peter calls the church in Rome, “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen,” which captures this dual reality well: Chosen in Christ, sojourning in Babylon (1 Pet 5:13; cf. 1:2). How then should we as residents of Babylon and citizens of heaven heed the call, “Come out of her, my people lest you take part in her sins” (18:4; cf. Isa 48:20; Jer 51:45)? To “come out” of Babylon does not require us to relocate to another town or withdraw from the world but to take refuge in Christ where we reside (cf. Ps 2:12).<sup>57</sup> Christians live *in* Babylon, but are not *of* Babylon. Revelation pictures the church as lampstands shining gospel light in a dark world (e.g., 1:20; 11:4). We seek the welfare of Babylon while remembering that we are sojourners awaiting a better city (Jer 29:7; Heb 11:16). “Come out” summons us to remain spiritually vigilant, refusing to share in Babylon’s folly so we may avoid her fate.

After Babylon’s judgment, Revelation unveils “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). The description of this city suggests that it represents God’s *people* (the bride of the Lamb) and the glorious *place* where God dwells with us forever. The contrasting visions of the repulsive harlot and the radiant bride motivate us to remain true to our betrothed as we long for our better home. From God’s perspective, Babylon’s booming economy and alluring affluence is nothing more than a fancy house of cards. Conversely, the humble “holy city,” whose light flickers at present, will someday shine like the sun with the radiant glory of God and the Lamb (21:23). The new Jerusalem offers “an alternative and greater attraction” over Babylon; though it “belongs to the future,” the city of God “exercises its attraction already.”<sup>58</sup> We cannot yet pass through its pearly gates (22:14) but we already belong to this city and eagerly await our full inheritance (3:12; 11:2). We have not yet experienced the full splendor of the wedding day but have been saved by sacrificial love and betrothed to the Lamb (1:5; 19:7), and the suffering, embattled church must

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<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Augustine, *The City of God* 18.18.

<sup>58</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 129.

earnestly “cultivate ... an aching longing for the Bridegroom to come to her, to take her in his arms ... and to be held there forever” (22:17).<sup>59</sup>

The saints may live in Babylon’s hostile territory, but we belong to the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. As Augustine wrote,

Who can measure the happiness of heaven ... where there will be no weariness to call for rest, no need to call for toil, no place for any energy but praise.... On that day we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise—for this is to be the end without the end of all our living, that Kingdom without end, the real goal of our present life.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The Revelation of Jesus Christ summons us to live with wisdom and hope in these difficult days as the nations rage, as wars are waged, as a pandemic persists, as we are reminded daily that all is not right in our city and our world. Revelation reminds us that God is on his throne even as society seems to be spiraling out of control. It reminds us that the Lamb has conquered through apparent defeat. It reminds us that the Spirit reveals a better future than this shallow world can offer. It reminds us that all tyrants will one day be toppled, that the kingdoms of this world cannot deliver lasting security and satisfaction, and that God is “making all things new” (Rev 21:5). We don’t read the news to decode Revelation’s mysteries. It’s the other way around: Revelation gives us profound resources to make sense of our world and live with wisdom and hope through difficult days. So beware the beast, follow the Lamb, and long for home. Come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>59</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, NSBT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 168.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan, *The Fathers of the Church* 24 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 22.30 (pp. 505, 510–11).

## STRANGE TIMES

# Caring Because You Don't

— Daniel Strange —

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“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us ... if it is to encourage, then give encouragement....” (Rom 12:6)

Throughout its history *Themelios* has always been clear in its intended audience: an international and interdenominational journal aimed at theological students and pastors, though scholars read it as well. The journal has also strived to have a disciplinary breadth as stated by its first editor Andrew Walls in its very first edition in 1962: ‘the scope of *Themelios* is the whole of Christian theology: the entire field of the Christian pastor and theologian.’<sup>1</sup>

Far from being over ambitious, with the danger of falling between stools and pleasing no-one, *Themelios*, its successive editors, and its various publishing ‘homes’ have unapologetically attempted to keep together, *because they belong together*, domains which still often operate in different ‘worlds’—the ‘world’ of theological education (with its own worlds within worlds), and the ‘world’ of church pastoral ministry.

If *Themelios* wished to undertake one of the those branding and marketing exercises to interrogate itself, a model ‘profile’ of what the journal is about, who the journal is for, and what, by God’s Holy Spirit, the kind of men and women the journal wishes to form, then one needs to look no further than Rev. Melvin Tinker, who died in November at the age of sixty-six. Melvin had a long association with *Themelios*, contributing at least nine articles over the years which covered a wide variety of subjects and which always managed to integrate doctrine, biblical exegesis, philosophy, ethics, public theology and pastoralia.<sup>2</sup> More than his written contributions however, Melvin was himself an exemplar. In the wake

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

<sup>2</sup> Tinker articles for the journal are as follows: ‘The Priority of Jesus: A Look at the Place of Jesus’ Teaching and Example in Christian Ethics’, *Themelios* 13.1 (1987); ‘Truth, Myth and Incarnation’, *Themelios* 14.1 (1988); ‘Purpose in Pain?—Teleology and the Problem of Evil’, *Themelios* 16.3 (1991); ‘Last Supper/Lord’s Supper: More than a Parable in Action?’, *Themelios* 26.2 (2001); ‘Evil, Evangelism and Ecclesiastes’, *Themelios* 28.2 (2003); ‘Living in a World Where Life Is Cheap: The Relevance of the Book of Deuteronomy and the Sixth Commandment for the Debate on the Sanctity of Human Life’, *Themelios* 29.1 (2003); ‘The Servant Solution: The Co-ordination of Evangelism and Social Action’, *Themelios* 32.2 (2007); ‘Friends: The One With Jesus, Martha, And Mary; An Answer To Kierkegaard’, *Themelios* 36.3 (2011); ‘Secularisation: Myth or Menace? An Assessment of Modern “Worldliness”’, *Themelios* 38.3 (2013).

of his death, Kevin Vanhoozer called him the ‘consummate pastor-theologian.’<sup>3</sup> I asked Phil Tinker, one of Melvin’s sons, for some personal reflections:

It would be a mistake to think that what made Dad a pastor-theologian was his writing of books, speaking at conferences, or writing scholarly articles. They were some of the ways he, in his particular way, fulfilled that vocation. Rather, if the task of the theologian is to lead the church in belief, action and worship faithful to the Scriptures in this day, this place, with all its challenges and questions, through the orthodox re-articulation of Scripture, then the good pastor is simply a theologian every time he steps into the pulpit. Writing books didn’t make Dad a pastor-theologian, being a pastor who knew the full extent of his job *as a pastor* did. He knew that his job in the pulpit and by the hospital bed was actually to give the God of the Bible to the people in front of him in a way that met them in their world, whether that be the world of secular Britain or the world of their immediate situation and pain. That is what true theology does—gives the God of the Bible clearly and coherently to the people of this time and place in a way that will change them.<sup>4</sup>

For Melvin, writing an article on secularisation for *Themelios* and preaching through Revelation to his church were not two separate tasks. Melvin thought deeply about secularisation because that is the world of his flock to whom he must proclaim the call of Revelation to stand firm. Not all pastors will write scholarly articles as Melvin did, but all pastors must be theologians in the truest sense of that term—speakers of reality-in-Christ to the church plagued by alternative realities: in that sense, Melvin ‘exemplified that a pastor-theologian isn’t some special kind of pastor, it simply is a pastor.’<sup>5</sup> I hope and pray *Themelios* will continue to promote and produce a virtuous circle of orthodoxy, academic excellence in theology, and a grounded ministry orientation.

There have been many heart-felt encomiums since Melvin died. See if you can spot any recurrent themes. Don Carson writes, ‘when Melvin Tinker comes to mind, I instinctively identify him with Valiant for Truth. Yet that says too little. Yes, he was a stalwart defender of confessional evangelicalism, but he was also a clear preacher of the gospel. Yes, he wrote several compelling popular-level books, but he was first and foremost a pastor who loved his flock.’<sup>6</sup> Paul Helm encountered Melvin as an Anglican vicar, noting ‘as he built a reputation as a communicator of the Gospel in Hull, two things stood about his character. One was his courage in the face of the media and erring critics, ecclesiastical and other. The other was his skill and gifts as vicar of St. John’s.’<sup>7</sup> Carl Trueman notes that ‘Melvin might be the single best example of ‘ordinary courage’ (which is actually most extraordinary) I know.’<sup>8</sup>

Peter Sanlon knew Melvin well:

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Sanlon, ‘Melvin Tinker (1955–2021): A Consummate Pastor-Theologian Who Was Valiant for Gospel Truth’, *Premier Christianity*, 23 November 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2p88myc5>.

<sup>4</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>5</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>6</sup> Tribute taken from Sanlon, ‘Melvin Tinker (1955–2021)’.

<sup>7</sup> Tribute taken from Sanlon, ‘Melvin Tinker (1955–2021)’.

<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence.

I first met Melvin when I was a teenager, becoming an evangelical by conviction. I heard him speaking and read some of his books. That was over 20 years ago. Melvin was obviously a busy minister—his growing church required oversight. His writing and speaking efforts were considerable. However, we stayed in touch over the years and became firm friends. He let me know that he prayed for me on Wednesdays. He urged me to do what he modelled—be passionate about people growing to love Jesus and seek to serve that goal by in-depth Word ministry and discerning engagement with the culture and secular learning. The power of Melvin's ministry clearly did not reside in social power dynamics or cultural fads—it was a spiritual power that arises when theological and pastoral concerns are fused in a prayerful life. Many theologians have warned us of anaemic or lopsided Christianity—e.g., Mark Noll, David Wells, Dallas Willard. Melvin listened, learned and—I am most thankful—he embodied a healthy ministry praxis that impacted me greatly. You knew when you spoke with him you were engaging not just popular evangelicalism but benefiting from critical engagement with the best of Church History refined by the rigours of local church ministry.<sup>9</sup>

I trust you've noted that the theme of 'courage' comes through loud and strong. Melvin was, and was perceived to be, a fighter: a fighter for truth within his own denomination against theological liberalism, within conservative evangelicalism against a 'classism' and hierarchical snobbery, and within the broader culture against the ascendant secular and idolatrous worldviews in the West. He had a reputation. However, Melvin's iconoclasm is not what I want to focus on directly (particularly as when it comes to the machinations and politics within the Church of England, I don't, as a non-Anglican, feel qualified to comment.) Rather, I want to talk about Melvin as an *encourager* because this is how I knew him, and this is the particular characteristic for which I am thankful to God.

And here's the thing: *I didn't really know Melvin at all*, at least not in a personal capacity. I wasn't part of his congregation in Hull. I met him a few times in person but we never hung out for extended periods. We didn't even have solidarity as fellow Anglicans (I'm a Baptist). However, while I've been working within theological education, I can trawl back through twenty years of email correspondence (I'm not a great deleter!), and find unprompted notes from Melvin Tinker that popped into my inbox, both when I was in theological student ministry (and managing editor of the pre-TGC *Themelios*), and throughout my time teaching and leading in seminary. These booster injections of encouragement providentially always came at the right time. Such notes did not have as their purpose mutual back-slapping. This was not flattery, the massaging of egos designed to puffing up reputations, which, as we have all witnessed recently, are ruinous.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, these were not long, small-talk chit-chats. Rather they were short, to the point, but genuine heartfelt 'one-anothering' encouragements which strengthened my resolve on the importance of theological education, and of the importance of the pattern of sound teaching within theological education. And all from someone I didn't really know. These practices of 'verbal care'<sup>11</sup> have meant a lot to me, acting as energy gel pouches I've taken on board to keep me keeping on in my own race.

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<sup>9</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Proverbs 26:28; 29:5.

<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 327.

The relationship between Melvin's courage and his encouraging is interesting, and it is something I asked Phil Tinker about:

I was wondering what the link between Dad as pastor-theologian and encourager might be. I was reading a favourite book of Dad's, the letters of John Berridge, an Anglican who rocked the boat by doing irregular ministry in the 18th c. and offended fellow Evangelicals with his not playing by the rules and speaking in a way they wouldn't. So here is a man courageously standing against the establishment, as well as fellow Evangelicals telling him he's too radical and should toe the line more, and who is also a prolific letter writer, encouraging others. Of course! To encourage one must already be a person of courage. A person who has conviction and who sees others putting it on the line too will want to encourage them, perhaps to give the encouragement that they never received. And I see that in Dad. He was very keen to encourage those he saw as fighting the good fight, labouring at a worthy ministry without much wider support and who were fellow outsiders of the evangelical establishment. Courageous people encourage others. The encouragement of people who are all talk sounds hollow to us after a while. But a friend who has been burned for their courage and hung out to dry by their friends will be quick to draw alongside fellow fighters and outliers to spur them on and their counsel and comfort will come as a real grace to us.<sup>12</sup>

Courageous encouragement and encouraging courage. There's a sense in which Melvin cared because he didn't care. He was care-ful because he couldn't care-less, and I thank God for this quality which I seek to emulate.

If this column is being read now by its target audience, then you might know fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are feeling disheartened, discouraged and under pressure, perhaps in their theological studies, perhaps in their own church contexts. Given the model of Melvin, why don't you finish reading, pray, and then go and be an encouragement to someone. Send that quick email, write that short note, make that quick phone call, knock on that door, arrange that coffee. Little gestures which will mean a lot.

I finish with Carl Trueman and what he called a 'classic' anecdote about Melvin:

In August 2016 I was in Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, ... when I suddenly heard my name called out. Turning round, I find myself face to face with Melvin and another young man. It turned out this man was Melvin's curate and he was flying with him to South Africa to have him ordained by an Anglican bishop who actually believed the gospel. It was classic Melvin—he'd rather fly half way around the world at great personal expense than bow the knee to the local episcopal charlatan. I commented at the time that it would be both cheaper and more time-efficient for him simply to be a Presbyterian. Of course, he laughed, never one to take himself too seriously. So we chatted for a bit and then parted. I had no idea then that it would be the last time we ever met on this earth. Shalom, Melvin, shalom.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>13</sup> Personal correspondence. I do need to note a lovely little biographical detail given to me by Phil Tinker. 'Dad recently began to enjoy the work of John Webster (his sermons being a source of comfort and hope in his last weeks). Webster and Dad were born in the same hospital in Mansfield, exactly one week apart! As you will



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know, Mansfield [a little town in the UK], perhaps like Nazareth, is hardly known for producing the great and notable! And yet God had these two baby boys born there, a week apart, whom he would raise to serve his church in their own ways. Both gone to be with God in their 60s, earlier than we would have hoped, but leaving a legacy of humble, courageous service. These two men from a small English mining town never met on this earth, but now they worship together in the presence of God.

# Helpful Distinction or Quarrel over Words? The Conquest as “Genocide” in Evangelical Apologetics

— Caleb Miller —

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**Abstract:** The language of “genocide” as applied to the conquest of Canaan puts pastors, scholars, and apologists in a bind. Employing the term leads to exaggerated claims, but disputing it often leads to equally unhelpful semantic exercises. After surveying four approaches (sober acknowledgement, unqualified affirmation, active resistance, and careful avoidance), I advocate for careful avoidance of the term, starting with considering the specific hermeneutical, historiographical, theological, or ethical concern of a questioner or critic, rather than starting with questions of accuracy or precision.

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“Wisdom is recognizing the significant within the factual.” (Bonhoeffer)<sup>1</sup>

The biblical language associated with the conquest of Canaan is vivid and well-known: “show no mercy” and “save alive nothing” (Deut 7), “devote them to complete destruction” (Deut 20), with the later mention of killing “men and women, young and old,” and “all that breathes” with “the edge of the sword” (Josh 6 and 11). Phrases like this have given most contemporary readers an immediate impression of *genocide*: a word with a rhetorical charge and a gravitational pull. In the current political context of liberal western democracies, the notion of a divine command to take possession of land and drive out an indigenous population threatens to overwhelm all other considerations. Genocidal language puts it over the top. To say it is controversial does not go far enough.

Most resources from an evangelical perspective approach this daunting reality as a matter of accuracy or precision: either the conquest was genocidal by the Bible’s own admission,<sup>2</sup> or there are

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Charles West (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Rannfred Thelle, “The Biblical Conquest Account and Its Modern Hermeneutical Challenges,” *ST* 61 (2007): 61. Cf. Shawn Kelly, “Genocide, the Bible, and Biblical Scholarship,” *Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* 1.3 (2016): 1–17.

clues in the text to suggest something less severe or more complex was going on.<sup>3</sup> This essay explores the practical implications of the latter. In a more perfect world, perhaps, the tenuous association between the biblical conquest and modern genocide would be seen for what it is and avoided as largely irrelevant by all concerned parties.<sup>4</sup> Nuances do not always traverse languages well, and newer words are rarely adequate to replace older concepts as cultural mores develop and technicalities change.

In the meantime, when it comes to the term genocide itself in interpreting the conquest narratives, there are still gaping issues of significance, methodology, and pastoral wisdom. Why does the term genocide seem to matter so much to one author and hardly at all to another? What is at stake? What term could replace it?<sup>5</sup> Are the older characterizations like “indiscriminate slaughter” (Calvin),<sup>6</sup> “unprovoked, merciless aggression” (Kline),<sup>7</sup> “total war” (Younger),<sup>8</sup> or “divinely ordered massacres” (Kidner)<sup>9</sup> any more advisable? What is to be gained by engaging in debates over the technicalities of what is or is not genocide? Most specifically: is the appropriateness of the genocidal characterization inextricably linked to a particular historical, ethical<sup>10</sup> or theological problem? Would problems exist regardless of precise terminology?

Questions of this sort have placed well-meaning pastors, teachers, apologists and theologians in somewhat of a bind, whether they fully realize it or not. We are caught between the potential harm done by an explosive word that is overly suggestive and leads to exaggerations, and the potential harm done with the correction by adding more confusion, offering unnecessary offense, or focusing on trivialities.

On the one hand, Christians are to seek helpful distinctions to do full justice (without any hints of selectivity or apologetic dodging) to all features of the biblical text, even those that cause discomfort or create uncertainty. This is not only part of what it means for the text to be authoritative for the believer, but it is also how the critic demonstrates good faith. To apply a genocidal characterization, especially when done uncritically and haphazardly, leads to a caricature that is either anachronistic or disingenuous.<sup>11</sup> It might also give the impression that the Bible oscillates wildly between contradictory

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the language of “driving out” in Exod 23:28; Lev 18:24; Num 33:52; Deut 6:19; 7:1; 9:4; 18:12; Josh 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39; 11:11, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Markus Zehnder, “The Annihilation of the Canaanites: Reassessing the Brutality of the Biblical Witness,” in *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, ed. Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 263–91.

<sup>5</sup> Many have been proposed: aggression, hostility, severity, force, violence, brutality, expulsion, infiltration, invasion, conquest, holy war, *herem*, religious extremism, slaughter, massacre, total war, atrocity, crimes against humanity, elimination, extermination, annihilation, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Joshua*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 163.

<sup>8</sup> Total war is further clarified to be “the destruction of the population as well as the military.” K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Historical Writing*, JSOT-Sup 98 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 235.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Kidner, “Old Testament Perspectives on War,” *EvQ* 57 (1985): 102.

<sup>10</sup> Though scholars continue to contrast “ethics” and “morality” in various ways, I use these terms interchangeably throughout this essay, both in a general sense to mean the basis and standards of notions of right and wrong.

<sup>11</sup> To summarize, observations offered against a genocidal characterization include: (a) that the conquest was not ethnically motivated (even as there was an “us” versus “them” mentality), instead the warfare aimed at idola-

extremes (about the extent of the campaign in Canaan, or God's grace, or the proper treatment of enemies), or amplify a theme beyond its contextual limits. Genocide carries such a rhetorical force it threatens to concede too much, offend unnecessarily, and obscure the truth.

On the other hand, there is also the opposite danger of getting too "in the weeds" with semantics, even where qualifications may technically be correct. Any term, with enough attention, can be scrutinized *ad nauseum*. "Violence," for instance, can also be interrogated as it applies to the conquest narratives<sup>12</sup>—but as Nimni eloquently spells out<sup>13</sup> and even the most conservative commentators intuitively realize, it is utterly counterproductive to expect everyone to define violence in a standardized way. Violence is a malleable word. Something similar can be done with the word conquest, but little is gained with the exercise.<sup>14</sup> Christians in their eagerness to affirm the basic authority, coherency, reliability, inerrancy or infallibility of the Scriptures might inadvertently descend into a "quarrel over words" in their rebuttals of a genocidal interpretation. The result is too often something equally unhelpful: a meandering list of clarifications, a dry recital of facts or all-too-familiar buzzwords, a profoundly callous or cruel comparison, or a story that is just a little too cleaned up in the retelling. Nuances have a way of turning on those that suggested them in the first place; one false step threatens the whole project. In this essay I will recommend cautiously avoiding the term "genocide" whenever possible with a problem-based approach exemplified by (but to my knowledge nowhere explicitly explained by) Christopher Wright. First, I will outline the approaches in current evangelical scholarship. Second, I will consider how these approaches fare when considering the conquest from various angles: hermeneutics, historiography, theodicy, and ethics. I will conclude with a summary of the approach.

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trous practices, (b) that there was likely hyperbole in the accounts of casualties, (c) that there is frequent use of the language of "driving out" alongside what appears to be annihilation, (d) that the biblical examples of Rahab (or later Nineveh or the Syrophenician woman) show repentance was possible, and (e) that Jericho, Ai, Hazor were military strongholds and not population centers.

<sup>12</sup> If used in its legal sense, implying not only physical aggression or harm but a measurable violation of some right or the unlawful exercise of force, then this comes into direct conflict with the notion of God's righteousness, that he "acts as a relationship morally requires or allows" and "gives every creature his due." Graham Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*, NSBT 25 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>13</sup> "There is a pronounced tendency on the right to blur the distinction between 'property destruction' and 'violence.' This flows logically from certain strands of libertarian philosophy, which view a person's property as an extension of the self, and therefore see acts of aggression against property as being indistinguishable from acts of aggression against persons. (This also conveniently justifies using physical force to defend one's property, rather than just defending one's body.) ... On the left, many things other than direct bodily harm are often labeled a form of violence. In fact, it can be hard to know what isn't violence. Gentrification is violence. Cultural appropriation is violence. Even charter schools have been labeled a form of violence." Oren Nimni, "Defining Violence: The Counterproductive Consequences of Calling Every Bad Thing 'Violence,'" *Current Affairs*, 17 September 2017, <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2017/09/defining-violence>.

<sup>14</sup> Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 243–44: "The terms 'conquer' and 'conquest' can have a number of nuances which are not always present in every context in which they are used. When, for example, one speaks of 'the conquest of France' during World War II, or says that 'Germany conquered France,' the meaning is something like 'the German army defeated the French army in battle and occupied France.' But it did not subjugate the French people, nor did it bring about the colonization of France by Germany." Yet Younger still employs the term; characterizing Israel's campaign in Canaan as a conquest is practically unavoidable if the biblical portrayal is adequately accounted for. How else can the allotment of territory, the killing of kings, and the burning of key cities be described?

While generally recommending a careful avoidance of the term genocide, and in that sense agreeing with the current swing in evangelical scholarship away from a genocidal characterization, I will outline a few instances in which pushing back against genocidal language is genuinely helpful in hermeneutics or historiography. At the same time, I will maintain that in theological or ethical treatments the results are either mixed or simply counterproductive when the word genocide becomes a focal point of the discussion. It is hoped that these cases will help clarify for evangelical pastors, teachers, apologists, and theologians—perhaps even for critics—when and how to engage in this delicate and complex conversation. Even if my recommendation is rejected, however, at the very least I want to direct attention to the difficulties attending this specific word. If this essay causes anyone to pause before unnecessarily employing the word or engaging in a dispute over its usage elsewhere, it will have achieved its desired effect. The question of the suitability of a term like genocide for the conquest narratives is more than a question of accuracy; a look at the dynamics of the hotly contested controversies involving the conquest is necessary.

### *1. Surveying Current Approaches*

When taking a survey of the relevant literature, even when limited to a focused exploration of the evangelical perspective, two main challenges present themselves. The first is the relatively recent arrival of the notion of genocide, especially when compared to the age of the biblical texts and their subsequent interpretation. Exactly how theologians or commentators writing before 1944 (when “genocide” was first coined) might have navigated the bind outlined above may never be fully known. They lived in a time when war and destruction on the scale of millions was rarely even conceivable, though severe and chilling acts of war on the scale of hundreds or many thousands have been a sad norm throughout fallen human history.

The second and perhaps greater challenge has to do with determining the available options. These are not clearly defined poles or corners in a debate. Instead, there are several overlapping considerations, and simultaneous conversations underway concerning the conquest (often unhelpfully lumped into one generalized “debate” for the reader to sort out). A great deal of unraveling is in order.

Evangelical scholars of the last few decades vary widely in their willingness to employ, resist, or simply avoid genocidal terminology when commenting on the Israelite campaigns in Canaan. As I survey the literature, I find four broad positions:

1. *Sober acknowledgment*: this group reluctantly employs the language of genocide and speak as though this characterization itself signals a theological or ethical problem.
2. *Unqualified affirmation*: these scholars emphatically affirm a genocidal characterization but would have a problem with any interpretation or application of the conquest that offers a justification of these acts of war even if another, less striking term were substituted in the place of genocide.
3. *Active resistance*: those in this group deny that the conquest was genocidal and assign this clarification great significance in making sense of theological or ethical implications of the conquest.
4. *Careful avoidance*: this final group offers little to no comment on whether it was genocide out of a desire to emphasize something else. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these authors suggest that genocide is not tied to the theological point of the conquest.

It can be seen even in these short descriptions that each of these approaches is connected to a perception of a problem the conquest might pose in the first place. Each of these deserves a more detailed treatment.

### 1.1. Sober Acknowledgement

Those who grant the language of genocide as a matter of sober acknowledgement refuse to pit one portion of Scripture against another or undermine the authority and relevance of the conquest narratives in any way. They do not see another way to characterize indiscriminate killing, and so concede that the conquest was genocidal. They also seem to suggest that this characterization should make a difference in the debates.

The texts of Joshua 6 or 1 Samuel 15, in this view, indicate annihilation of the Canaanites, and are thus unavoidably genocidal. Whether or not anyone can reconcile this with other aspects of Christian doctrine, biblical ethics, or theology proper is beside the point; there is to be no mincing of words or avoiding the hard truths. In this vein Merrill and Gard share the premise of a genocidal characterization, even as they seek to incorporate that difficult reality into biblical theology.<sup>15</sup> Pitkämen cites “genocide theology.”<sup>16</sup>

Those who soberly acknowledge genocide have decided the conquest’s primary problematic feature is its severity, and that it requires something like a theodicy to resolve it. Goldingay rehearses how the ban outlined in Deuteronomy required the Israelite armies to go outside of the conventional rules of war and our intuitions of justice, or because the election of Israel and condemnation of Canaan goes against our intuitions of fairness.<sup>17</sup> Just as the problem of evil and suffering pits the Bible’s teaching on God’s goodness against the reality of evil and suffering in the world, this line of thinking pits the Bible’s teaching about God’s mercy or care for the defenseless against God’s own command. How could God command such a thing?

### 1.2. Unqualified Affirmation

Others like Boyd, Seibert, and Cowles fall into a different camp, which we might call *unqualified affirmation*. They assert that the conquest was genocide, but this is just one aspect among many problematic aspects of the conquest and could easily be discarded. There is far more leeway in this approach to either criticizing portions of the biblical witness or dramatically reframing them in light of a more “enlightened” or “evolved” ethic. Examples might be Christ’s allegedly non-violent example in the New Testament, or some external moral principle about human rights, or a deeply spiritual-allegorical hermeneutic.

In this approach, a genocidal aspect of Yahweh’s warfare is presupposed rather than argued out in detail. It is treated as something self-evident and applied not only to the events themselves but to any pretext for future genocidal episodes throughout history. This is, at least on a surface level, completely understandable: “How else should reports of killing ‘all that breathes’ in a given city or

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<sup>15</sup> Eugene Merrill, “The Case for Moderate Discontinuity,” and Daniel Gard, “The Case for Eschatological Continuity,” in *Show them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 61–96; 111–44.

<sup>16</sup> Pekka Pitkämen, *Joshua*, ApOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 60, 88.

<sup>17</sup> John Goldingay, “Is Election Fair?,” in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium*, ed. Wonil Kim et al. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000), 169–87.



region be interpreted?” they may ask rhetorically. But this is akin to any argument involving a literalistic hermeneutic built mostly on assertions. To the extent that scholars want to interact with the best available evidence and lines of argument, it forces anyone who takes issue with the characterization to single-handedly conjure up the strongest cases for or against. To his credit, Boyd probably goes the farthest in seeking to refute any who would suggest otherwise,<sup>18</sup> and other such as Seibert, Creach, and Cowles generally agree.<sup>19</sup>

Opposition to the violence of the conquest (and much of the Old Testament) unites pacifist Christians, as well as outspoken critics of Christianity operating in a post-Holocaust<sup>20</sup> and post-9/11<sup>21</sup> world, liberal theologians,<sup>22</sup> and militant atheists.<sup>23</sup> All of these groups would affirm without so much as a second thought that Israel’s earliest wars were genocidal, and often denounce such passages as Deuteronomy 7 or 20 in the strongest possible terms. This is true even if they disagree about how that denunciation should impact other theological commitments.

Yet the core problematic feature of the conquest narratives is not its indicators of genocide *per se*, but the overall theme of violence in the Bible. Simply substituting another roughly equivalent word would not meaningfully alter their concern. Genocide only represents an extreme or perhaps embarrassing case of the greater problem of war in the Old Testament, if not also the apocalyptic language in the New Testament. Scale, rationale, intent, or the interaction between divine and human involvement are secondary considerations, at best.

For the Christians represented in this group, it is unimaginable and even blasphemous that God (as revealed in Christ) would ever command or participate in violence in any form for any reason, and this contradiction between the Testaments or conceptions of God must be somehow resolved. The conquest is no more problematic than the flood narratives, or the plagues, or the idea of eternal conscious torment in hell, except perhaps that in this case there were human actors. In this view, the lessons of a book like

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<sup>18</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 1:23, 140, 294, 300–302, 469.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012); Jerome Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013); C. S. Cowles, “The Case for Radical Discontinuity,” in *Show them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 11–46.

<sup>20</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 33–75; Menachem Kellner, “And Yet, the Texts Remain: The Problem of the Command to Destroy the Canaanites,” in *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought*, ed. Katell Berthelot, Joseph E. David, and Marc Hirschman (New York: Oxford, 2014), 153–79.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can’t Ignore the Bible’s Violent Verses* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> L. D. Hawk, *The Violence of the Biblical God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019). Cf. L. D. Hawk, “The Truth About Conquest: Joshua as History, Narrative, and Scripture,” *Int* 66 (2012): 129–40; C. J. Sharp, “Are You for Us, or for Our Adversaries? A Feminist and Postcolonial Interrogation of Joshua 2–12 for the Contemporary Church,” *Int* 66 (2012): 141–52.

<sup>23</sup> One popular characterization: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31.

Joshua must be extracted from their deadly and dangerous immediate context, and a prior commitment to non-violence overshadows the commitment to the inerrancy of any portrayal of God as an active warrior.

### 1.3. Active Resistance

Those actively resisting the term genocide lately seem to be defined by three actions: (a) to affirm a just war approach to war, (b) to argue decidedly against the genocidal characterization, and (c) to assign this denial great significance. The lengths to which authors will go to resist the term “genocide” vary, of course, as do the reasons offered. Zehnder bases his opposition to the term on exegetical observations, though he is careful to point out that it ultimately depends on definitions.<sup>24</sup> Hess does not belabor his resistance to the term either, but argues that the campaigns focused primarily on military objectives rather than civilian populations.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, he still in his earlier commentary speaks of “wholesale extermination of nations” in setting up the ethical question.<sup>26</sup>

The most outspoken recent commentators who fall into this category are Flannagan and Copan, who devote a book-length treatment to the question “did God really command genocide?” and answer emphatically and rigorously in the negative. They speak of the conquest not as sweeping destruction of everyone and everything in the land (this is dismissed as Sunday school distortion) but as a series of severe, disabling, localized raids.<sup>27</sup> Of all the authors I have so far encountered, Copan and Flannagan seem to assign the greatest significance to the distinction between “genocide” and something else.

Those who take this approach tend to see the problems associated with the conquest as a series of misconceptions—at worst a clash of sensibilities, or a body of data and cultural mores that has been lost to us. There is no required solution; one need only launch an investigation.

### 1.4. Careful Avoidance

The position closest to that advocated in this essay is careful avoidance. It neither embraces a genocidal characterization outright, nor goes out of its way to comment on or dispute its use unless the context specifically warrants it. It borrows and at times blends insights from those in other camps. This approach simply looks for better terminology with less baggage.

Different authors will, of course, have different motivations. Walton and Walton briefly caution that genocide is anachronistic, though this feeds into their larger point that readers throughout church history and particularly in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have expected Deuteronomy and Joshua to address ethical or theological questions that the original readers would have found utterly strange.<sup>28</sup> They do not seem interested in delving deep into the legal intricacies of the difference between

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<sup>24</sup> Zehnder, “The Annihilation of the Canaanites,” 288–90.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Hess, “War in the Hebrew Bible: An Overview,” in *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard Hess and Elmer Martens, BBRSup 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 29–30.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Hess, *Joshua*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 46–50.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Flannigan and Paul Copan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 53–125. They do acknowledge, however, that “even if the texts don’t envisage genocide, they still seem to suggest that a loving and just God did command killing the innocent on a particular occasion” (p. 142).

<sup>28</sup> John Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 257.

genocide on the one hand and, say, massacres or ethnic cleansing on the other. Though Heiser states that genocide or indiscriminate slaughter was “not the point of the conquest” and seems to heavily discourage that focus, he does not dispute that it occurred. He makes his own robust case for something functionally equivalent: “the urgency to eliminate the Nephilim [giant] bloodlines.”<sup>29</sup> In his advocacy for a more symbolic and less historically grounded reading of the book of Joshua, Earl nevertheless acknowledges the many allegations of genocide.<sup>30</sup>

Another subset of this “avoidance” group contains authors who seem to avoid or de-emphasize altogether. Longman, who is far more interested in the contemporary theological and ethical debates, neither disputes nor emphasizes genocide in his discussion of “holy war” and does not go out of his way to explain his rationale for doing so.<sup>31</sup> Similarly Kline cites “unprovoked, merciless aggression,”<sup>32</sup> held in tension with the principles of modern international law. The term is also notably absent from the discussions of Kidner,<sup>33</sup> Kitchen,<sup>34</sup> and Kaiser,<sup>35</sup> who each write of invasions, massacres, battles, raids and generalized destruction. Younger speaks (contra Hess) of the “destruction” or “elimination” of the populations of enemy cities, as well as “calculated frightfulness.”<sup>36</sup>

Wright seeks to offer some correction to the many caricatures that would unnecessarily portray God as bloodthirsty or Moses as a vengeful mass murderer, but at the same time he tacitly concedes that the distinction between genocide and something else often makes little difference. He gently resists the language of genocide due to popular associations with ethnic cleansing but otherwise shares a lot with the sober acknowledgment approach, admitting plainly that he often wonders why God would use such methods as conquest for his eternal purposes.<sup>37</sup> Taking a more holistic approach to the conquest, Wright is able to offer layers of nuance. His outlining of the potential problems tends to include rich elements of historiography, ethics, biblical theology, and historical theology. He sees many connection points between these fields and seeks not just a solution to a given problem set but more of a unified theory. He thus perceives a need to juggle multiple priorities at once and senses the need only on certain occasions to mention the disputes about genocide.

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Heiser, “The Giant Clans and the Conquest,” *The Naked Bible*, 18 January 2016, <https://drmsb.com/the-giant-clans-and-the-conquest/>. Cf. Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural World-view of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> “Joshua is a story set in the context of genocide, but it is not about genocide, either as a description of what happened in the past, or as something that is in any sense a model to be followed or gloried in.” Douglas Earl, *The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 123.

<sup>31</sup> Tremper Longman, “The Case for Spiritual Continuity,” in *Show them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 159–90.

<sup>32</sup> Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 163.

<sup>33</sup> Kidner, “Old Testament Perspectives,” 99–114.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 234–39.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Kaiser, *A History of Israel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 143–61.

<sup>36</sup> Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 233–34.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 78, 94.

## 2. Weighing Current Approaches

The various ways evangelical Christian scholars have approached the genocidal characterization in recent years are each tied to their dialogue partners' concerns and ultimately, the unique problems they are trying to solve. But more specificity is possible and needed. The main problems posed by the conquest involve history, biblical/systematic theology, and ethics, yet the word genocide has a different connotation in each—and these connotations have so far not lined up well with the four outlined approaches.

For the sake of focused coherency, I will briefly consider the Bible's account of the conquest through four lenses: historiography, hermeneutics, theodicy, and ethics. These subjects certainly overlap in many respects, even as they either lurk in the background or dominate the emphases of sermons, lessons, books, articles, and apologetic exercises. Drawing together observations from each of these lenses will be crucial, however, in comparing the merits of the four postures toward genocidal terminology outlined above. I will argue that a type of careful avoidance is most successful in doing justice to all four aspects without contradiction, redundancy, or a lack of pastoral sensitivity.

### 2.1. Hermeneutics

If the concern of a preacher, teacher, or apologist is to paint as accurate a picture as possible of the original Late Bronze Age context, it is wise to avoid the term genocide. If someone insists the conquest was tantamount to genocide, it is productive to dispute this characterization insofar as the word genocide has misleading connotations and is an anachronism. The distinction between genocide and something else may give us a clearer picture of the frame of reference in the original context. Resisting reading contemporary jargon into the ancient original sources helps us conceptualize better. Consider Beard's comments on the scale of war in early Rome:

Despite the style in which they are recounted, as if they were mini-versions of Rome against Hannibal, they were probably something closer, in our terms, to cattle raids.... In most early communities, it took a long time before the various forms of private violence, from rough justice and vendetta to guerrilla warfare, came fully under public control. Conflict of all sorts was regularly in the hands of individuals with their own following, the ancient equivalents of what we might call private warlords; and there was a blurry distinction between what was conducted on behalf of the "state" and what on behalf of some powerful leader.<sup>38</sup>

Or this is how Gabrieli describes the Battle of Badr, recounted in the Quran:

With hardly a dozen dead among the Muslims and a few dozen among the Meccans, among whom was Abu Jahl himself, in an encounter which in military terms was hardly more than a brawl.<sup>39</sup>

Complaining about stylized, exaggerated and distorted accounts of historical events in film or the popular imagination is common among historians. It is in this same spirit that Hess, in his analysis of Joshua's account, theorizes based on contemporaneous requests for reinforcements in the region that

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (New York: Liveright, 2015), 99.

<sup>39</sup> Francesco Gabrieli, *Mohammad and the Conquests of Islam*, trans. Virginia Luling and Rosamund Linell (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 69.

“it would not seem preposterous if the number of men defending Jericho was about 100 or fewer.”<sup>40</sup> Ai, according to a similar theory, was at most a village with nearby ruins partially explaining why the spies thought so few Israelites were required to take it (Josh 7:3).<sup>41</sup> Hazor was a larger settlement, given a place of prominence in the lists of conquered northern cities (11:10–11).<sup>42</sup> Of course, ancient acts of war were no less brutal by virtue of their smaller scale or remoteness in the past, but the numbers justifying a genocidal designation are absent. Thus, to soberly acknowledge or affirm genocide in some unqualified sense is misleading.

The issue plumbs deeper than a question of historical accuracy as opposed to anachronism, however. Connotations reach beyond the mere facts on the ground and affect our view of the character of God and his people. As Walton and Walton have noted, “when we hear words such as genocide we interpret them as ‘a thing that should never be done.’ But the text does not depict the conquest event in terms of a thing that should never be done.”<sup>43</sup> The earliest readers of Numbers, Joshua, or 1 Samuel, and those who presumably carried out the divine commands, were not thinking in the same categories we might today. The connotations that accompany the word genocide are an awkward fit in the ancient context. A contemporary example might be the cultural gap between a western individualism where sin and injustice are primarily found in private decision making, and an eastern communalism, where sin and injustice can be private but are also embedded in societies and structures as corruption takes its toll on a whole community. A biblical example indicating a similar cultural gap might be the plea of Abraham in Genesis 18:25. He is apparently less concerned with the deaths of women, children, the elderly, sick, or defenseless (as we might be in a society dominated by the categories of the Geneva Conventions, and as we might often imagine Abraham to be), and much more concerned that God would violate his justice by putting the “righteous” ones to death along with the wicked.<sup>44</sup>

Another prominent theme evident in the biblical witness (absent from modern analyses of genocide or reappropriations of conquest narratives) is the promise of Yahweh intervening by bringing judgment or fighting on behalf of his people (Gen 15:16; Exod 23:23).<sup>45</sup> It is possible, perhaps, to dismiss these as redactions, exaggerations, or expressions of nationalistic fervor. Even so, to take the Old Testament on its own terms is to acknowledge that it was not merely a human endeavor. The conquest involved human instruments acting on orders with a divine origin. God’s direct involvement is part of the Bible’s way of accounting for a lack of post-traumatic stress or moral injury on the behalf of the Israelite invaders.<sup>46</sup> The Bible does not lack elsewhere in this regard; yet the agonizing poetic and prophetic laments that accompany the events leading to the devastating siege of Samaria and Jerusalem and the exile simply have no parallel expression of regret in the accounts of the conquest beyond the remarkable admission that the conquest was incomplete (Judg 1–2). In neither Testament do we find any expression of remorse

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Hess, “The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*. ed. Richard Hess, Gerald Klingbeil, and Paul Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 42.

<sup>41</sup> Hess, *Joshua*, 158–59.

<sup>42</sup> Hess, *Joshua*, 212.

<sup>43</sup> Walton and Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest*, 257.

<sup>44</sup> This complaint is echoed throughout biblical history, for example Hab 1:3–14.

<sup>45</sup> I am indebted to Brian Tabb for this reminder in the review process for this publication.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Xi Li, “Post-traumatic Growth, Belief in a Just World, and Psalm 137:9,” *BTB* 51 (2021): 175–84.

or direct commentary on the conquest that would even hint that it could have been wrong. This should temper any evangelical approach to the text.

## 2.2. Historiography

If the concern of a preacher, teacher, or apologist is historiography of the conquest (the act of recording casualty counts, modelling the destruction, harmonizing victorious optimism with reports of setbacks), again it is wise to avoid the language of genocide. If someone insists that the Bible depicts genocide, it is productive to dispute this characterization. Where “total war,” “slaughter,” “aggression,” or “massacre” are more accurate designations, they are also more helpful in this historiographical context.

The distinction between genocide and something else is relevant, even crucial, in explaining the unusually large numbers in censuses or casualty counts and the apparent contradictions between victories and setbacks internal to Joshua and/or between Joshua and Judges.<sup>47</sup> If the references to “killing all that breathes” are hyperbolic, as Kitchen and Kidner argue,<sup>48</sup> and as Fouts echoes with regard to casualty counts (which would then be far lower than the “thousands” represented in hyperbolic language and English translations),<sup>49</sup> the likelihood of a contradiction in the narrative of Joshua or Judges is greatly lessened.

To affirm that the conquest was genocide as if it were a binary choice (whether soberly or in an unqualified way) misses these important distinctions and concedes too much. It is no secret that because of the scant extra-biblical textual evidence and conflicting archaeological evidence, the conquest is difficult to date, model, and chronicle. This has led to a host of questions about terminology to define or describe the biblical portrayal of Israel’s campaigns in and around the land of Canaan. But if indeed genocide is a misnomer, the need to explain the lack of archaeological evidence for widespread devastation in the Late Bronze Age is less pressing. If we conceive of the conquest more as a series of localized, disabling raids on military objectives, not a sweeping annihilation of everyone caught somewhere between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea, the notion of genocide on the scale of a regional conflict fades, and is replaced with something far more appropriate to the ancient Near Eastern context.

## 2.3. Theodicy

If the concern is a biblical or theological theme tied to genocide in the Bible, before deciding how or whether to push back on terminology, it is best to consider what distinguishes a given objection from other similar objections to the flood in Genesis or the reality of hell. Unless a specific tension tied to war is in view (and in most cases becomes a question of ethics or morals), the distinction

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<sup>47</sup> These are the key apparent contradictions cited in Nili Wazana, “‘Everything was Fulfilled’ vs. ‘The Land that Remains’: Contrasting Conceptions of the Fulfillment of the Promise in the Book of Joshua,” in *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought*, ed. Katell Berthelot, Joseph E. David, and Marc Hirschman (New York: Oxford, 2014), 14; 18–19.

<sup>48</sup> Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 243–46; Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 173–74. Both Younger and Kitchen argue that a careful reading of Joshua against its ancient Near Eastern background (in which hyperbole was employed to describe military success) shows that there is no great tension within Joshua or between Joshua and Judges.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel M. Fouts, “A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Numbers in the Old Testament,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 377–87.



between genocide and available substitutes probably does not matter. Whether posed in the form of a theodicy or variation on the Euthyphro Dilemma, or a more a straightforward approach of weighing God's wrath against his mercy, genocide becomes a stand in for "that which should not be done," and it can easily be switched out for other equivalents without any change in the logical structure of the argument.

There are of course instances in the Bible, in recorded history, and in our lives where God allows evil people to do horrendous things to other human beings. Yet from the vantage point of a believer, God's acts in Scripture stand as a unified whole, and God has the right to do what he will without satisfying human curiosity or removing pain. This was one of the clear lessons of Job's suffering, David's expressions of pain in the Psalms, Habakkuk's prophecy, or Paul's agony over the Jewish rejection of Jesus—all of which end with unanswered questions of "why?"

From the standpoint of biblical theology, God did not reveal himself to be particularly vengeful or severe on Canaan in a way that is alien to the rest of the biblical storyline, even if genocide is in view. This insight is perhaps why many evangelical commentators have soberly acknowledged the genocidal designation in the case of the conquest without much hesitation. Had God destroyed the Canaanites and their cities by any other means (plagues, fire from heaven, a flood, etc.), the conquest would not exactly be the firebrand it has become today. It would fade somewhat into the background of other issues. A cursory reading of either Testament reveals countless passages where God himself displays his wrath and kills people (Sodom and Gomorrah, or Ananias and Sapphira), or God commands or allows humans to kill other humans but not in an indiscriminate way (the death penalty or wars with far-off nations). There are plenty of occasions where God's commands are counter-intuitive and seem to require a suspension of what someone in a particular cultural context "knows" to be true (the binding of Isaac, or in another context, the declaration that all foods are clean).

### **2.4. Morality and Ethics**

The conquest was not merely a human endeavor, but it was nonetheless a human endeavor. This complicates the picture by involving even more than characterizations and biblical theology. For all that might be gained from the helpful distinctions rehearsed above, unfortunately there are other instances of counterproductive posturing. Sometimes going out of one's way to apply or resist a genocidal characterization does very little for the argument at hand.

If someone wants to dispute an ethical dilemma tied to the kind of warfare in reported in Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, or 1 Samuel, clarifying that this was not technically genocide is at best irrelevant, and at worst profoundly insensitive.

Through this lens, it makes little difference whether we call the conquest "genocide," "slaughter," "aggression," or "massacre," the moral or ethical dilemmas remain. This much is intuitive to any who have truly struggled with the dilemmas either as a combatant themselves or as someone who is contemplating the implications of being not only an object of God's wrath, but the vessel through which that wrath is poured on someone else. There need only be one example of killing a particularly innocent or defenseless person to cause concern—as evidenced by the controversies surrounding the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22, or the harrowing reference to the violent deaths of infants in Psalm 137. From the standpoint of the critic, whether of the New Atheist or neo-Anabaptist variety, their argument does not rest on such a characterization. Even Copan and Flannagan, who go the farthest of all the authors surveyed to argue against a genocidal characterization, acknowledge that strictly speaking most of the

ethical objections raised do not need a notion like genocide in order to function.<sup>50</sup> Texts such as Numbers 31 perplexed and greatly challenged Jewish and Christian exegetes<sup>51</sup> along moral or ethical lines long before genocide was a standardized term or even a conceivable reality. It did not seem to matter to Calvin that the genocidal characterization was downgraded to something localized and temporal; his writing still reveals a wrestling with the implications.<sup>52</sup>

It is worth noting that Kitchen and Younger, two of the most-cited authors in the evangelical scholarly world by those actively resisting the term genocide in this context, do not offer commentary on the term genocide or on the moral ethical implications of their approach in the works commonly cited. They steadfastly limit themselves to questions of historical investigation; they are trying to persuade readers not to dismiss the Old Testament accounts as groundless myth and to do this they appeal to parallels between the biblical historical narratives and their ancient Near Eastern counterparts. They nowhere suggest that this somehow removes the possibility that any of the women, children, elderly, sick or otherwise defenseless people in the land of Canaan were painfully killed by the edge of the sword, and in considerable numbers. To the contrary, Younger (in comparing Joshua's exploits to those of the ruthless Ashurnasirpal II) notes that "the concept of total war (i.e., the destruction of the population as well as the military) was a practice which one encounters on numerous occasions in the ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts."<sup>53</sup> At best we have shaken the common comparison to the Holocaust, only to be confronted with other unsettling comparisons like the bombing of Dresden (total war) or removal of Native Americans from what is now the United States (expulsion). The scale may be smaller, the context may be quite different, but these are hardly more comfortable parallels.

Nor does genocide necessarily indicate complete eradication; in most historical examples genocide is marked more by intent than result. Copan and Flannagan, for instance, conclude their lengthy case against a notion of genocide by citing an "abundance of survivors who could not be driven out" on the second-to-last page.<sup>54</sup> Setting aside that the reason for this abundance probably has more to do with Israel's failure to adequately drive the Canaanites from the land as instructed than it does with any merciful exception to the ban, and regardless of the fact that this is a largely unnecessary exercise, irrelevant to their original stated concern on the first page (the moral argument cited in the introduction makes no mention of the word or concept of genocide, and by their own admission functions perfectly well without it),<sup>55</sup> there is a deeper issue: the enduring presence of surviving Canaanites as a people group

<sup>50</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 130: "The accusation of 'genocide'—whether coming from Old Testament scholars like Eric Seibert or new Atheists like Richard Dawkins – carries a heavy rhetorical punch, which often calls forth echoes of Rwanda or the Holocaust. The more modest claim that *at one particular point in history God made an exception to a general rule against killing noncombatants* (while still raising moral questions) does not carry that same rhetorical baggage" (italics original).

<sup>51</sup> Katell Berthelot, "Philo of Alexandria and the Conquest of Canaan," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 39–56; Hans Boersma, "Joshua as Sacrament" *CRUX* 48.3 (2012): 23–44.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Joshua*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 235.

<sup>54</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 125–36.

<sup>55</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 17. Copan and Flannagan begin their book with a presentation and critique of an argument formulated by philosopher Raymond Bradley, but Bradley's "crucial moral principle" (the premise upon which his argument hinges) makes no mention of complete annihilation: "it is morally wrong to deliberately and mercilessly slaughter men, women, and children who are innocent of any serious wrongdoing."

does not in and of itself demonstrate Copan and Flannagan's case. It no more negates the possibility of genocidal acts during the conquest than the presence of surviving Jews, Armenians, and Tutsis in Rwanda negate their respective claims. Unless the premises can be set up in the correct order and with perfect accuracy, this line of argument backfires.

A review of the broader semantic range of genocide reveals just how thorny and potentially embarrassing this quarrel over words will become if the point is pressed. Even from a strictly legal or secular standpoint the term is not as straightforward as one might suppose. Curthoys and Docker, for instance, ask,

Are there forms of genocide which do not involve mass killing? What are the criteria for assessing intention in genocidal events and processes? Do genocides necessarily involve state action or leadership? Should mass killing based on political categories be called genocide? What is meant by cultural genocide? To what extent must historical examples conform to the legal definition?<sup>56</sup>

As the definition of the term expands or contracts, this complicates its application even to classic case studies in history (Myanmar, Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, Nazi Germany, the Crusades, etc.), let alone reading the term back into an ancient conquest account like the book of Joshua.

In fact, even Lemkin's original legal definition encapsulates far more than deliberate killing, and need not have a component of ethnic hostility. It includes "causing serious bodily or mental harm," "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group," "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."<sup>57</sup> Copan and Flannagan respond with an appeal to international court rulings involving the Kosovo crisis and how genocide is tied to physical destruction and a demonstrated intent to eradicate a people group from the planet.<sup>58</sup> Yet, even ignoring for the moment the incredibly uncomfortable position of attempting to clarify the conquest of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age through such a painful recent example, this fails to account for the range of potential meanings of genocide; not everyone has an intricate legal definition in mind.

Here the more measured language of Zehnder's conclusion is instructive:

Whether one finds "genocidal" traits in the pentateuchal (*sic*) passages dealing with the occupation of the promised land or the descriptions of the conquest in Joshua and Judges depends on the definition of the term "genocidal." Using a relatively narrow definition ... one can hardly speak of a genocide. It is, however, clear that lethal actions are prescribed in Deuteronomy and described in Joshua, related mainly to the concept of *herem*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ann Curthoys and John Docker, "Defining Genocide," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

<sup>57</sup> "Genocide," *United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect*, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

<sup>58</sup> Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 126–27.

<sup>59</sup> Zehnder, "The Annihilation of the Canaanites," 289.

### 3. Conclusions

Until critics can be persuaded to abandon the term, or apologists can work out a graceful way to reframe the debate, genocide will remain a word that is simultaneously to be avoided yet unavoidable when it comes to discussions of the conquest. As outlined above, the term genocide can lead to profound misunderstanding and pain. Yet despite the many disputes and distractions, it is for the most part not a crucial term for the arguments involving ethics or theology. To the extent that pastors, teachers, and theologians are persuaded by the arguments of Zehnder or Wright they would do well to avoid the term, if possible, but can also make preparations to articulate why they avoid it.

Of the four approaches that have gained traction either explicitly or implicitly in evangelical circles, I have made a case for careful avoidance. It is selective to soberly acknowledge God's severity in the conquest without also acknowledging his severity elsewhere in the Bible. It is redundant to protest the conquest in some unqualified way if the general principle of war or violence itself is the root cause of offense. It is usually counterproductive and awkward to delve into the technicalities of what is or is not genocide to evade an ethical or theological dilemma. Yet it is simply not feasible to avoid a notorious term like genocide in all situations, silently hoping no one listening to our sermons or engaging our apologetic efforts concerning the conquest will challenge that avoidance.

Hermeneutical and historiographical considerations get in the way of a consistent posture of sober acknowledgement or unqualified affirmation of genocide. Any attempt at a theodicy of the conquest does not ultimately depend on the term genocide; it can be substituted out with little to no effect. When it comes to disputes over morality and ethics, actively resisting the term genocide results in a quarrel over words.

A better approach, in my view, is to first work backward from a proposed hermeneutical, historical, theological or ethical problem, keeping in mind that genocide is itself not a fixed term and its importance will naturally vary depending on the issue at hand. Before making judgments about accuracy or precision, or determining whether it is worth a dispute, it is more productive to ask how the term genocide functions in the overall argument. Useful clarifications are tied not only to the veracity of a claim but to the point one is trying to make and the person one is trying to answer.

To summarize, I propose the following courses of action:

First, if the concern of a preacher, teacher or apologist is to paint as accurate a picture as possible of the original Late Bronze Age context, it is wise to avoid the term. If someone insists the conquest was tantamount to genocide, it is productive to dispute this characterization insofar as the word genocide has misleading connotations and is an anachronism. Second, if the concern of a preacher, teacher, or apologist is historiography of the conquest (the act of recording casualty counts, modelling the destruction, harmonizing victorious optimism with reports of setbacks), again it is wise to avoid the language of genocide. If someone insists that the Bible depicts genocide, it is productive to dispute this characterization. Where "total war," "slaughter," "aggression," or "massacre" are more accurate designations, they are also more helpful in this historiographical context. Third, if the concern is a biblical or theological theme tied to genocide in the Bible, before deciding how or whether to push back on terminology, it is best to consider what distinguishes a given objection from other similar objections to the flood in Genesis or the reality of hell. Unless a specific tension tied to war is in view (and in most cases becomes a question of ethics or morals), the distinction between genocide and available substitutes probably does not matter.

Fourth, if someone wants to dispute an ethical dilemma tied to the kind of warfare in reported in Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, or 1 Samuel, clarifying that this was not technically genocide is at best irrelevant, and at worst profoundly insensitive.

In this way we avoid the twin dangers of either minimizing the severity and pain of the conquest or painting God and his representatives as exaggerated monsters on the other. If these observations hold true, in most cases substituting genocide for older characterizations like “indiscriminate slaughter” (emphasizing the act of killing), “unprovoked, merciless aggression” (highlighting the motive), “total war” (establishing the scope), or “divinely ordered massacres” (underlining the theological aspect) is advisable. These substitutions provide helpful distinctions to account for ancient Near Eastern conventions and the original context. They already preserve and better specify various aspects of what pacifists and other critics have identified as most problematic about the conquest, and so do not “whitewash” the text. They allow dialogue partners on all sides to maintain helpful distinctions while avoiding at least one treacherous quarrel over words.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The views expressed are the author’s own and do not reflect the official position of the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC), US Army Chaplain Corps, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

# The Spirit in Elisha's Life: A Preview of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant

— Gary L. Shultz Jr. —

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**Abstract:** In the book of Kings, Elisha is the Spirit-empowered man of God who walks with God, represents God, and shows the way to covenant faithfulness through word and deed. Elisha therefore serves as a preview of knowing God in the new covenant through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We will see this as we examine the Spirit's role in Elisha's life from Kings, particularly in the narrative of Elisha succeeding Elijah (2 Kings 2:1–18), and how Elisha's Spirit-empowered ministry points forward to the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus Christ, the inauguration of the new covenant, and what it means for Jesus's followers to live in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

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The primary theological truth the book of Kings communicates is that Israel's God is the one and only God, the only true God.<sup>1</sup> Because Israel's God is the only true God, the people of Israel, led by their king, must exclusively worship God and keep God's law as written in the Mosaic Covenant if they expect to experience his blessing. Lisa Wray-Beal states this about the message of Kings: "As king and people walk in the torah, they prove their identity as covenant people. But when they walk outside the deuteronomic norms of the covenant, they face discipline and ultimately exile from the land."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, as the book of Kings records, the kings of Israel, beginning with Solomon, do not worship God exclusively or keep his law, and instead of experiencing the blessings of the covenant the nation experiences its curses. Solomon commits idolatry near the end of his life and the kingdom is divided (1 Kgs 11:1–13). The subsequent kings of the divided northern and southern kingdoms follow

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<sup>1</sup> Iain W. Provan, "Kings," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 183. While 1 and 2 Kings are two separate books in our modern Bibles, they are two volumes of one book, and will be treated as one book, the book of Kings, throughout the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Lissa M. Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, ApOTC 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 47.

Solomon's example and, with few exceptions, continue to lead the people away from the one, true God.<sup>3</sup> Both the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17) and the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 25) ultimately experience exile for their sins. The repetitiveness of each king's sinful reign, leading the people further and further away from God, establishes that the exile of each kingdom, the present reality of the original audience of the book, is well-deserved.<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of this history of king after king leading the people away from God we find two prophets who demonstrate God's grace and covenant faithfulness despite the people's sin. The narrative space and the narrative placement of these two prophets highlight their importance to the narrative as a whole. The account of these two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, in 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13, is the center of the book of Kings, comprising roughly 40% of the narrative.<sup>5</sup> Elijah arrives on the scene at a decisive juncture in Israel's history, as Ahab and Jezebel are leading the people away from God and toward the false god Baal (1 Kgs 16:29–17:1), and Elisha's ministry effectively ends when Ahab's dynasty does (2 Kgs 9:1–3). The two prophets' miracles, ministry, and presence serve to call the people back to the one, true God and his covenant. Elijah and Elisha remind the people who God really is, especially when compared to the false gods the people are choosing to worship, and what it means to live before this God.<sup>6</sup>

One of the primary ways that the two prophets remind the people who God is and what it means to live before him is through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit's presence and power is particularly noted in the narrative of Elisha succeeding Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1–18), where Elisha receives a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs 2:9–10). While the Spirit's ministry and presence is implicit throughout Elijah's ministry (though explicitly mentioned in conjunction with Elijah's ministry in 1 Kgs 18:12), it is in and through Elisha, as Elijah's successor, that the Holy Spirit's presence and power is particularly emphasized. This emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Elisha helps us to understand his purpose in Kings and the whole of the biblical canon, and gives us more insight into the things concerning Jesus in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27).<sup>7</sup> In the context of Kings,

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<sup>3</sup> The only exceptions to this are Hezekiah and Josiah. Yet Hezekiah does not receive full approval from God because of his sin of welcoming Babylon and showing them his wealth (2 Kgs 20:16–18). Josiah receives full approval from God, but even his righteousness is not enough to overcome Manasseh's sin (2 Kgs 23:26).

<sup>4</sup> Due to the narrative ending with Judah's exile and the apologetic arguments throughout the book emphasizing the necessity and reality of exile, it is most likely that an exilic author/editor formulated the present text of Kings for an exilic audience. See Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 34–36.

<sup>5</sup> A chiasmic structure for the book, with 1 Kings 16:23–2 Kings 12 at the center, is noted by George Savran, "1 and 2 Kings," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 148; and Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Wu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 693, 704. This chiasmic structure assumes the unity of the book. However, critical scholars tend not to approach the book as a single literary unit. E.g., Suzanne Otto, "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 487–508; and William Schniedewind, "The Problem with Kings: Recent Study of the Deuteronomistic History," *RelSRev* 22 (1996): 22–27.

<sup>6</sup> K. R. R. Gros Louis, "Elijah and Elisha," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, edited by K. R. R. Gros Louis, J. S. Ackerman, and T. S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 179–84.

<sup>7</sup> Many critical scholars continue to ask why the Elisha narrative (2 Kgs 2–8), and sometimes even Elijah's narrative (beginning in 1 Kgs 17), is in Kings, failing to see any purpose or unity in Elisha's life and ministry. Suzanne Otto is representative when she states that no "convincing model for the process of the integration of the Elijah-Elisha stories has been achieved so far," and that almost none of the Elisha stories have any "particular purpose within the Deuteronomist's history and theology." Otto, "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories," 489, 494.

as so many in Israel have rejected God and his covenant, Elisha serves not only as a prophet calling the people to covenant faithfulness, but as the Spirit-empowered man of God who walks with God, represents God, and demonstrates the way to covenant faithfulness. As the Spirit-empowered man of God leading the people to covenant faithfulness, however, Elisha serves as more than an example of living before God under the old covenant; he also serves as a preview of what it will mean to walk with God in the new covenant in Jesus Christ, which is ultimately how God's people will know him and what it means to live for him.

This article demonstrates this truth by establishing the evidence and importance of the Holy Spirit's ministry in Elisha's life and then explaining how Elisha's Spirit-empowered ministry points forward to the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. I compare and contrast Elisha's experience of the Holy Spirit with Elijah's experience of the Holy Spirit, and then compare and contrast Elisha's experience with Jesus's experience, demonstrating how the Gospels explicitly draw an analogy between Elisha's ministry and Jesus's ministry. Elisha's life and ministry in the Holy Spirit ultimately preview what life with God could one day look like under the new covenant. Jesus then makes the preview a reality for all who come to him. To all facing exile from God and the kingdom for their sins, Elisha is an example of how, when we trust the one, true God, all of us can know and walk with him through the Holy Spirit because of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done.

### *1. The Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Elisha*

The center of the Elijah and Elisha narrative is 2 Kings 2, and the center of that chapter is verses 9–13, which narrate Elijah's ascension into heaven and Elisha's succession into the prophetic office vacated by Elijah.<sup>8</sup> Once Elijah and Elisha have crossed over the dry ground of the Jordan, Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him before he is taken from him (2:9a). Elisha requests a "double portion" of Elijah's Spirit (2:9b). Jewish tradition interpreted this request as Elisha asking for a "doubling" of Elijah's Spirit, or twice as much of the Spirit as Elijah possessed.<sup>9</sup> Elisha's request for a double portion, however, most likely refers to the customs of inheritance for the firstborn son (Deut 21:17). As Paul Watson notes, "Elisha is simply asking to be designated by Elijah as his true and legitimate successor. The *bene hannebi'im* present at the scene might be construed as other 'sons' of Elijah. Elisha wishes to be recognized as the firstborn of these 'sons,' with all the rights and privileges of the firstborn duly accorded to him."<sup>10</sup> Elijah responds to Elisha by telling him that his request is difficult (2 Kgs 2:10a), most likely because it is impossible for him to fulfill; only God can grant that request.<sup>11</sup> Elijah then tells Elisha

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For a survey of the functional problem of Elisha among critical scholars, see W. Brian Aucker, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah? Royal and Divine Characterization as Governing Images in the Portrayal of Elisha" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Baltimore, 20 November 2013), 1–5.

<sup>8</sup> T. Raymond Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose," *SR* 13 (1984): 331, and Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 301–2.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," *Perspective* 12 (1971): 87–88; and Nachman Levine, "Twice as Much of Your Spirit: Pattern, Parallel, and Paronomasia in the Miracles of Elijah and Elisha," *JSOT* 85 (1999): 25.

<sup>10</sup> Paul L. Watson, "A Note on the 'Double Portion' of Deuteronomy 21:17 and 2 Kings 2:9," *ResQ* 8 (1965): 74–75.

<sup>11</sup> Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1 and 2 Kings," in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, EBC 3, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 813.



that he would know if he was Elijah's Spirit-empowered successor if he saw him ascend into heaven (2:10b). As the two prophets walk and talk, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separate them, and Elijah is taken to heaven in a whirlwind (2:11). Elisha witnesses the entire event, indicating that God granted his request for the double portion of Elijah's Spirit (that this is indeed the case is confirmed by the sons of the prophets in 2:15), tears his clothes into two pieces as an act of mourning, and picks up Elijah's cloak (2:12–13). The transfer of Elijah's cloak to Elisha, the same cloak that Elijah threw upon Elisha when he first commissioned him (1 Kgs 19:19) and with which Elijah divided the waters of the Jordan (2 Kgs 2:8), also symbolizes that God has transferred Elijah's prophetic power to Elijah.<sup>12</sup>

As the bearer of the firstborn's portion of the prophetic Spirit of the Lord, Elisha succeeds Elijah and does similar, Spirit-empowered acts in his ministry, just as God promised Elijah he would (1 Kgs 19:16). For example, both prophets speak the word of the Lord (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:1; 2 Kgs 3:16–20), and both prophets call the people back to proper worship and conduct before the Lord (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:17–40; 2 Kgs 6:20–23).<sup>13</sup> The most prominent parallel Kings makes between the two prophets and their ministries, however, is in their miracles of healing, giving life, provision, controlling nature, and judgment. While Kings does not always explicitly mention the Holy Spirit's work in Elijah's and Elisha's miracles, the central importance of 2 Kings 2 in the narrative gives us ample reason to understand their miracles as works of the Spirit, and the New Testament's description of the Holy Spirit's work reinforces this understanding.<sup>14</sup>

Through the Holy Spirit, Elijah does the following:

1. causes a drought and famine to come to Israel while ravens feed him (1 Kgs 17:1–7);
2. feeds a widow and her son for many days on one jar of flour and one flask of oil (1 Kgs 17:8–16);
3. raises the widow's son from the dead (1 Kgs 17:17–24);
4. calls down fire from heaven to burn his sacrifice to the Lord (1 Kgs 18:36–38);
5. brings rain to end the drought and famine (1 Kgs 18:41–45);
6. runs ahead of King Ahab to Jezreel (1 Kgs 18:46);
7. calls down fire from heaven to destroy two groups of men sent by King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:9–12); and
8. divides the waters of the Jordan with his cloak (2 Kgs 2:8).

Through the Holy Spirit, Elisha performs these mighty works:

1. divides the waters of the Jordan with Elijah's cloak (2 Kgs 2:13–14);
2. heals the waters of Jericho by throwing salt into the spring (2 Kgs 2:19–22);
3. curses his harassers in Bethel, which results in two female bears mauling forty-two of them (2 Kgs 2:23–25);
4. provides water for the soldiers and animals of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 3:9–20);

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<sup>12</sup> Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 305; Gros Louis, "Elijah and Elisha," 183.

<sup>13</sup> On the importance of the ministry of the word for both Elijah and Elisha and the prophets' emphasis on authentic conduct and worship, see T. L. Brodie, *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 70–75.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the Holy Spirit empowers (Acts 1:8; 4:8, 31; 1 Cor 12:7–11), heals (Matt 12:28; Mark 5:30; Luke 4:18–19), imparts new life (Luke 1:35; John 3:6–7; John 6:63), and executes judgment (John 16:8–11; Acts 5:1–11; Heb 10:29).

5. multiplies the widow's oil (2 Kgs 4:1–7);
6. promises a son to a barren woman, whom she bears the next year (2 Kgs 4:13–17);
7. raises the woman's son from the dead (2 Kgs 4:18–37);
8. heals the deadly stew (2 Kgs 4:38–41);
9. feeds many from twenty loaves of bread and some grain (2 Kgs 4:42–44);
10. heals Naaman from his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:1–14);
11. curses Gehazi for his greed, resulting in leprosy for him (2 Kgs 5:26–27);
12. causes an iron ax-head to float (2 Kgs 6:1–7);
13. causes the servant to see horses and chariots of fire, causes the Syrians to be blind and then causes them to see (2 Kgs 6:18–20); and
14. ends a famine in Israel (2 Kgs 7:1–20).

Elijah and Elisha both end famines, resurrect a widow's son from the dead, feed people, bring judgment upon the Lord's enemies, and divide the waters of the Jordan. Gros Louis elaborates on this similarity:

Although some of the miracles differ in nature, they are basically the same in their execution and in the means employed.... We are aware that it is not Elijah who is the powerful one, since Elisha can do the same things—either Elijah and Elisha are equal in power and magic, or their skill comes from another source. And, of course, everything in Kings points to that other source being the Lord God of Israel.<sup>15</sup>

The same God who was at work in Elijah is now at work in his successor, Elisha. As later biblical revelation explains, the presence and power of the Lord God of Israel in human beings is the Holy Spirit of God.

But Elisha not only succeeds Elijah as the Spirit-empowered prophet, he exceeds him. In Kings, this sets apart Elisha in particular, even when compared to Elijah, as the example of the Spirit-empowered man. Kings indicates at least five ways that Elisha surpasses Elijah as the Spirit-empowered prophet.

First, Elisha performs almost twice as many miracles as Elijah, and several of these miracles are intensifications of Elijah's miracles. For example, Elijah feeds a widow and her son for many days on one jar of flour and one flask of oil (1 Kgs 17:8–16), whereas Elisha provides water for the soldiers and animals of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 3:9–20), multiplies the widow's oil (2 Kgs 4:1–7), heals deadly stew (2 Kgs 4:38–41), and feeds many from twenty loaves of bread and some grain (2 Kgs 4:42–44). Elijah raises the widow's son from the dead (1 Kgs 17:17–24), whereas Elisha promises a son to a barren woman, who then bears the son the next year (2 Kgs 4:13–17), and then later raises the widow's son from the dead (2 Kgs 4:18–37).<sup>16</sup>

Second, the presence of the "sons of the prophets" (2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1) in Elisha's ministry stands in contrast to Elijah's solitary ministry. While the sons of the prophets existed during Elijah's ministry, and Elisha would eventually accompany Elijah as his replacement, their presence is particularly emphasized in the Elisha narrative. The sons of the prophets accompanied Elisha from the

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<sup>15</sup> Gros Louis, "Elijah and Elisha," 182–83.

<sup>16</sup> As Raymond Brown notes, later works like Sirach (48:12–14) and Josephus also drew attention to how Elisha's miracles went beyond those of Elijah, indicating that Elisha was more closely associated with the miraculous than Elijah. Comparing the two prophets' miracles, Brown states, "Elisha emerges more clearly as a wonder worker: his miracles, narrated in profusion, run through his whole career and are the actions that constitute his relations to other men." Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," 89–90.

beginning, self-identifying as Elisha's servants (2 Kgs 2:15; 4:1), living with him in community (2 Kgs 6:1–6), and sharing and supporting his ministry (2 Kgs 9:6–10).<sup>17</sup> Drawing together disciples, creating community, and fostering unity are all works of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2; 1 Cor 12–14).

Third, Elisha completes the ministry of Elijah by anointing Hazael as King of Aram (2 Kgs 8:7–15) and Jehu as King of Israel (2 Kgs 9:1–13), in fulfillment of the Lord's word in 1 Kings 19:15–16. Elisha does not just demonstrate the power and certainty of the Lord's prophetic word, however, he also takes part in the Lord's work of purification and judgment against sin among his people, which are works of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:18).<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, even Elisha's death is presented as life-giving, further evidence of the Spirit's power upon him.<sup>19</sup> Some time after Elisha dies and is buried, a burial procession is taking place when an invading group of Moabite raiders appears. The dead man is quickly thrown into Elisha's grave, and when the dead man touches Elisha's bones he comes back to life (2 Kgs 2:20–21). As Wray-Beal notes, "Elisha's ministry has brought life to many through healed water (2:19–22), provision of food (4:1–7, 38–41, 42–44) and resurrection (4:32–35). Even though he is dead, Elisha's power remains."<sup>20</sup>

The fifth and most decisive way that Kings presents Elisha as exceeding Elijah is the succession narrative itself (2 Kgs 2:1–18). This succession is unique; it is the only example of a prophet succeeding another prophet in the Old Testament. As Brian Aucker states, the narrative treats Elisha much differently than a normal prophet, giving him "the royal treatment" normally reserved for a national leader and placing his succession between the death of King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:17–18) and the accession of King Jehoram (2 Kgs 3:1–3).<sup>21</sup> In a number of ways, the narrative deliberately echoes the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua.<sup>22</sup> Elijah and his ministry are analogous to Moses and his ministry

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<sup>17</sup> Although it should be noted that Elisha did sometimes follow the example of his mentor and work alone or with one assistant (e.g., 2 Kgs 4:8–37; 5:1–27).

<sup>18</sup> "The commissions [of Hazael and Jehu] are given in the context of Baal worship and point to its overthrow (1 Kgs 16:31–33; 19:18). Such worship was introduced by Ahab, and for these sins his dynasty is judged (1 Kgs 21:17–29). Judgment comes at the hand of Jehu, and in the context of war with Hazael (2 Kgs 9:1–10). Thus in the unfolding history the commission given to Elijah (1 Kgs 19:15–18) is tied to the prophetic judgment against Ahab—the one facilitates the other." Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 364.

<sup>19</sup> This is in contrast to Elijah's passing. Unlike Elisha, Elijah doesn't die but instead ascends directly to heaven, bypassing death (2 Kgs 2:1–18). This is a miraculous work of God, attesting to Elijah's righteousness and uniqueness. As it pertains to the presence of the Spirit, however, Elijah's ascension and subsequent absence means that the Spirit is now preeminently upon Elisha. Elisha has no successor, and the Spirit continues to be upon him in death even as it was in life. As House states, "Elijah has gone to heaven without dying; Elisha has kept giving Israel life after he has died." Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, NAC 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 308.

<sup>20</sup> Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 411.

<sup>21</sup> Aucker, "Where is the LORD," 16. The use of the word אֲדָרֶת for Elijah's cloak, which Elisha takes up after Elijah's ascension (2 Kgs 2:13), also points in this direction. *HALOT* (17) glosses it as "robe of state" in Jonah 3:6 and "fur coat" in Genesis 25:25, which suggests a royal garment, or at least an unusually impressive and expensive one.

<sup>22</sup> Many scholars have noted the analogical connections between Elisha's succession of Elijah and Joshua's succession of Moses. E.g., Aucker, "Where Is the LORD," 16–18; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 413; R. P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *VT* 19 (1969): 400–15; Iain Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, NIBCOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 172–80; Philip E. Satterthwaite, "The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2–8," *TynBul* 49 (1998): 1–28; and Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 306–8.

throughout 1 Kings 17–19, and this analogy continues in the succession narrative of 2 Kings 2:1–18.<sup>23</sup> Like Moses, Elijah disappears east of the Jordan and appoints a Spirit-empowered successor to carry on his ministry after his death (Deut 34:9), and like Moses his disciples find no trace of him once he's gone (Deut 34:6).<sup>24</sup> Like Joshua, Elisha leaves his master and crosses the Jordan, evoking Joshua 3 when Joshua led the Israelites over the Jordan and into Canaan to conquer the land.<sup>25</sup> Even their names identify Joshua and Elisha with each other, as Joshua means “The Lord saves,” and Elisha means “God saves.”<sup>26</sup> These parallels, coupled with the royal nature of the succession narrative, raise an important question: will Elisha, as the second Joshua, do what Israel's kings have refused to do and lead the people in a second conquest of the land, a conquest in which the people turn back to the Lord, thereby completing the ministry that Elijah began?<sup>27</sup> Elisha's mission explains the need for the Holy Spirit in his life, and the emphasis that the narrative places on his endowment with the Holy Spirit. As we see confirmed in Jesus Christ, only through the Holy Spirit's presence and power in Elisha's life is such a conquest even a possibility.

Elisha's role as a second Joshua and his need for the Holy Spirit to lead the people back to the one, true God are both confirmed in the subsequent narratives of 2 Kings 2:19–25. After Elijah's ascension into heaven we find Elisha in Jericho, and the men of the city come to Elisha with a problem: their water is bad and their land is a land of death, not of life.<sup>28</sup> Elisha then throws salt into the water and heals it, making the land life-giving instead of death-producing. Joshua's first act of conquest in Canaan is to subjugate and curse Jericho (Josh 6:26; cf. 1 Kgs 16:34), and Elisha's first act of conquest as the Lord's Spirit-empowered prophet is to bring blessing to a land that was cursed.<sup>29</sup> This blessing comes upon the people because they show faith in God, accepting his prophet Elisha, and therefore experience the blessing of the Spirit. Immediately following this miracle of blessing in Jericho, however, Elisha goes up to Bethel—a center of false worship in Israel (1 Kgs 12:25–13:34)—and experiences the opposite reception from the people there. Young men come out of the city and mock Elisha, rejecting him as a God's Spirit-empowered prophet.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Elisha curses them in the name of the Lord, and two female bears come out of the woods and maul forty-two of the young men. Whereas the people of Jericho respond to Elisha in faith and receive God's blessing, the people of Bethel respond in unbelief, rejecting Elisha and God's Spirit upon him, and receive God's judgment. These two episodes serve as a

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed explanation and defense of these analogies see Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 227–58.

<sup>24</sup> Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 306.

<sup>25</sup> Satterthwaite, “The Elisha Narratives,” 8.

<sup>26</sup> Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Satterthwaite, “The Elisha Narratives,” 8–9.

<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew participle מְשַׁבֵּלֶת in vv. 19 and 21 is causative, and is glossed in both *HALOT* (1492) and *BDB* (1013) as “to cause an abortion.” The land is causing death instead of producing life as a blessed land should.

<sup>29</sup> Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, 174–75.

<sup>30</sup> We have two descriptions of the group that mocks Elisha, נְעָרִים קְטָנִים (2 Kgs 2:23), and יְלָדִים (v. 24). English versions of the Bible normally translate these terms as referring to small children, but Wray-Beal notes “While both terms can refer to small boys, young men of unmarried age can also be indicated,” and cites 1 Kings 3:7; 11:17; 12:8; Ruth 1:5; and Daniel 1:4 in support. She also notes that the darker intent of the insult suggests that the mockers are not merely children. Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 305–6.

paradigm for the rest of Elisha's ministry: those who receive him receive the blessings of God, and those who reject him receive the judgment of God.<sup>31</sup>

These two episodes also demonstrate at the beginning of Elisha's ministry how Elisha not only lives and ministers in the Spirit, but actually represents the presence of the Lord, which is why to accept Elisha is to accept the Lord and be blessed (2 Kgs 2:19–22), and to reject Elisha is to reject the Lord and be cursed (2:23–25). After Elijah ascends to heaven and Elisha tears his clothes in mourning, 2 Kings 2:13–14 states, “He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, ‘Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?’ And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over.” These verses are not describing two separate incidents of Elisha picking up Elijah's cloak or two separate incidents of Elisha striking the Jordan; rather, the repetition brings the focus upon Elisha's crisis moment, when he asks, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?”<sup>32</sup> The answer given by 2 Kings 2:19–25 is that the Lord is present with and through Elisha. Elisha now represents the presence of God. As Brian Aucker notes,

At its core, the answer to Elisha's question, “Where is the LORD?” is Elisha. If the actions of Elisha are being equated with the actions of YHWH then we should not be surprised if his own actions bring about life and death.... Verses like 2 Kgs 2:19–25 are programmatic, acting as a summation for the kinds of activities associated with Elisha in the ensuing tales and an answer to his question, “Where is YHWH?” which preceded. The LORD is present in this prophet in a dramatic fashion.<sup>33</sup>

Elisha has the Holy Spirit, exceeding even his predecessor Elijah, so that as a second Joshua he can walk with God, represent God, and call the people back to covenant faithfulness.

Unfortunately, Elisha doesn't affect a new conquest in which the people turn back to God. Elisha's actions are successful: his Spirit-empowered miracles help people, he leads a faithful remnant in the sons of the prophets, he brings blessing and judgment according to God's ways, and he represents God to a nation that has forgotten who God is. During Elisha's life and ministry Aram is defeated (2 Kgs 13:23–25), Baal worship is eradicated (2 Kgs 10:28), and the Omride dynasty is overthrown (2 Kgs 10:30). Yet the people do not turn back to the one, true God and his covenant with them. The sins of Jeroboam are not set aside (2 Kgs 10:29), the cult of Asherah remains (2 Kgs 13:6), and eventually Baal

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<sup>31</sup> Satterthwaite emphasizes the contrast between faith and unbelief in these two episodes and its importance for the whole of Elisha's ministry: “The two incidents which immediately follow Elisha's (second) crossing of the Jordan suggest the form this ‘conquest’ will take: those who accept him as YHWH's prophet (that is implied by the respectful request to him in v. 19) will experience YHWH's blessing, in the form of life and material prosperity of the land (here symbolized by wholesome water, vv. 21–22); those who reject him will suffer death (v. 24). The parallel between Elisha and Joshua in 2 Ki. 2–8 is thus a striking way of raising the possibility that in Elisha's day the people will, in Deuteronomic terms, ‘choose life’ (Dt. 30:15–20, esp. v. 19), sweeping away Baal worship in a reversal as complete as the conquest under Joshua.” Satterthwaite, “The Elisha Narratives,” 10 n. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Aucker, “Where is the LORD,” 21.

<sup>33</sup> Aucker, “Where is the LORD,” 23–24. In addition to 2 Kings 2, Aucker provides two other lines of evidence for this conclusion (pp. 15–17). First, while the Lord's name is present throughout 2 Kings 2–8, the Lord does not directly speak or command anyone in these chapters. “The word of the Lord” comes to Elijah several times (1 Kgs 18:1; 19:9; 21:7, 28) but never to Elisha. We always read of his delivery of the Lord's Word as “thus says the Lord” (2 Kgs 2:21; 3:16, 17; 4:43; 7:1). Second, the sons of the prophets show a level of respect only given to royalty, gods, or the Lord, by bowing before him (2 Kgs 2:15; 4:37).

worship returns (Hos 2:8).<sup>34</sup> Despite Elisha's life and ministry in and through the Holy Spirit, both the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17) and the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 25) experience exile for their sins. Even Elisha, like each imperfect king, points forward to someone who can actually lead the people back to God. In pointing forward, Elisha serves as a preview of a better covenant, one that is entered through the Holy Spirit (Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27), the one that comes about through Jesus Christ.

## 2. Elisha, Jesus Christ, and the New Covenant

Just as Kings draws an analogy between Joshua and Elisha, so to do the Gospels draw an analogy between Elisha and Jesus Christ. This analogy is most prominent in the similarities of their respective anointings of the Holy Spirit. Elisha's ministry begins after he received a double portion of Elijah's Spirit on the other side of the Jordan River, and Jesus's public ministry begins when John baptizes him in the Jordan River. After Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus while he hears a voice from heaven identifying him as God's beloved Son (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:28–34). Both Elisha and Jesus receive the Holy Spirit in the same Jordan area.<sup>35</sup> Both also receive the Holy Spirit through the ministry of their predecessor, Elijah for Elisha and John the Baptist for Jesus. Making this analogy even more explicit is the connection Jesus draws between Elijah and John the Baptist, describing him as the "Elijah who was to come" (Matt 11:14; cf. Matt 17:12), the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that claimed Elijah would come again before the Day of the Lord (Mal 4:5–6). The angel Gabriel also tells John's father Zechariah that John would minister "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), thereby fulfilling Malachi's prophecy.<sup>36</sup> Just as Elisha succeeds and exceeds Elijah as a Spirit-empowered prophet, so too does Jesus succeed and exceed John the Baptist as the Spirit-empowered Son of God.

The Holy Spirit plays a similar role in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and Elisha, empowering both to accomplish their respective divine missions. Jesus's baptism and subsequent anointing with the Holy Spirit was his commission as the Messiah of God, the point in his life when he was equipped with authority and power to carry out his God-ordained work.<sup>37</sup> Jesus makes this clear when he returns to his hometown of Nazareth after his baptism, his Spirit-led temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1), and Spirit-empowered ministry in Galilee (4:15). He stands up in the synagogue, reads Isaiah 61:1–2a ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."), and then states that this Scripture was

<sup>34</sup> Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 308.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," 88.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to being involved in the anointing of their successors with the Holy Spirit, other parallels between Elijah and John the Baptist include their unusual dress (2 Kgs 1:7–8; Matt 3:4), their ministries of announcing judgment and calling Israel to repentance (1 Kgs 18:36–46; Matt 3:1–3), the unbelieving kings they confront (Ahab and Herod), and the hostile queens who seek their lives (Jezebel and Herodias). Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah and Elisha* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 9–11; and Bruce K. Waltke, "Meditating on Scripture," *Tabletalk Magazine* (September 2009), <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/meditating-scripture/>.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 132. Hawthorne also notes the parallel between the anointings of Jesus and Elisha.

fulfilled in him (Luke 4:16–21). The point of Jesus's sermon is that he is the Spirit-empowered prophet who will save his people and bring them back to God. We know this because when the people who had known Jesus from his childhood reject him and his message (Mark 6:1–6; Luke 4:22), Jesus compares his ministry to Elijah and Elisha, explicitly calling only Elisha a prophet after he has referred to himself as a prophet (Luke 4:24–27).<sup>38</sup> Jesus's ministry will be like Elijah's in some ways, but Elisha is the Spirit-empowered prophet whose ministry most particularly points toward Jesus. This point is strengthened when one realizes not only that Luke 4:27 is the only reference to Elisha in the entire New Testament, but also the lengths Jesus goes to make it clear to his disciples that, despite the crowds' opinions, he is not Elijah (Mark 6:15; 8:28; Matt 16:14; Luke 9:8, 19).<sup>39</sup>

Jesus's ministry after his sermon in Nazareth confirms that he is the Spirit-empowered prophet to whom Elisha's life and ministry pointed. Like Elisha, Jesus gathers faithful followers (Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:14–19; Luke 6:12–16; cf. 2 Kgs 2:15), feeding them miraculously (Mark 6:35–44; 8:1–10; cf. 2 Kgs 4:38–44). Like Elisha, Jesus is an itinerant miracle worker bringing life, blessing, and judgment through the power of the Holy Spirit to a people who had forgotten God.<sup>40</sup> As Bruce Waltke summarizes,

Both ... cleanse lepers (2 Kings 5; Mark 1:40–45); heal the sick (2 Kings 4:34–35; Mark 8:22–25; defy gravity (2 Kings 6:6; Matt 14:22–33); reverse death by raising sons and restoring them to their mothers (2 Kings 4:1–7; Luke 7:11–17); help widows in desperate circumstances; are kinsman redeemers to save from slavery (2 Kings 4:1–7; Luke 4:19); feed the hungry (2 Kings 4:1–7; Mark 8:1–12); minister to the Gentiles (2 Kings 5:1–16); prepare (2 Kings 6:20–23) and sit at table with sinners (Luke 5:29); lead captives (2 Kings 6:18–20; Eph 4:7–8); have a covetous disciple (Gehazi and Judas); end their lives in a life-giving-tomb from which people flee (2 Kings 13:20–21; Mark 16:1–8).<sup>41</sup>

Elisha's miracles testify to the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in his life in a way that is unique in Scripture until the coming of Jesus Christ, when God testifies to the ministry of his only-begotten Son through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit upon him, seen especially in Jesus's miracles (Heb 2:3–4).<sup>42</sup> Jesus is the Second Elisha just as Elisha was the Second Joshua, the one who finally lives up to the name “God saves” (Matt 1:21).<sup>43</sup> Whereas Joshua and Elisha's missions were never completed, Jesus succeeds in his conquest.

Elisha is the Old Testament prophet who most fully demonstrates the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, even representing the presence of the Lord, but when he passes away his ministry is over, and the people of Israel continue their march toward exile. Yet Elisha represents hope to the

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<sup>38</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 164.

<sup>39</sup> Brodie, *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative*, 80–81.

<sup>40</sup> “Performing miracles constitutes a substantial part of the career of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels, and it is in respect to miracles that we find the closest similarities between Jesus and Elisha,” according to Brown, “Jesus and Elisha,” 89. Brown goes on to argue that Elisha's miracles influence the very formation of the Gospel narratives (see pp. 89–104). Brodie also demonstrates the dependence of Luke-Acts and Mark upon the Elijah-Elisha narrative. Brodie, *The Elijah-Elisha Narrative*, 79–97. See also Wolfgang M. W. Roth, “The Secret of the Kingdom,” *ChrCent* 110 (1983): 179–82.

<sup>41</sup> Waltke, “Meditating on Scripture.”

<sup>42</sup> Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, 11–12.

<sup>43</sup> Wray-Beal, *1 & 2 Kings*, 308.

original exilic audience reading Kings, that life with God through his Spirit was possible. Prophets such as Jeremiah (Jer 31:31–34) and Ezekiel (Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27) had prophesied about a new covenant God would make with his people, a covenant unlike the old covenant that had been broken by Israel's sin.<sup>44</sup> Under this new covenant God would write his law upon each person's heart so that they would know him intimately, something that would be possible because God would put his Holy Spirit within each person under this covenant.<sup>45</sup> Elisha calls Israel back to covenant faithfulness, but the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in his life also point forward to a time when this kind of relationship with God would be a reality for everyone who follows him. Old covenant believers were regenerated by the Holy Spirit but did not experience the Holy Spirit in the same way that new covenant believers do, which is why the emphasis on the Holy Spirit's power and presence in Elisha's life is so extraordinary, particularly in light of the new covenant prophecies.<sup>46</sup> Jesus as the second Elisha is the fulfillment of this hope, the hope of the fullness of the Spirit and new covenant. Jesus is the last and greatest of the prophets, the prophet *par excellence*.<sup>47</sup> He not only ministers in the power of the Holy Spirit, but he pours out the Holy Spirit upon others (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 2:4). He not only represents the presence of God, but he *is* the presence of God in the flesh (John 1:14, 18). He is the "firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), the one with the ultimate "double portion" of the Spirit, who by bestowing the Spirit upon his followers makes them children of God, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

Like Elisha, Jesus's death brings life; unlike Elisha, Jesus's death brings eternal life because it inaugurates the long-awaited new covenant. Jesus clarifies this at the institution of the Lord's Supper, which is a perpetual reminder for the church that life in the new covenant is only possible because of

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<sup>44</sup> Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were likely written before Kings, making these prophecies available to the exiles. Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 425–27, 440–43.

<sup>45</sup> "Jeremiah promises a new medium on which the law will be written; Ezekiel promises a rebuilt temple and a return of God's Spirit. These passages present the indwelling or 'pouring out' of the Holy Spirit as an eschatological blessing for each believer." James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 26.

<sup>46</sup> Cole explains, "With the OT language of 'circumcised hearts,' 'hearts of flesh,' replacing 'hearts of stone,' and 'a new spirit,' we are moving in the same conceptual field as the NT ideas of regeneration and new birth. However, our Lord does make it plain that the indwelling of the Spirit was contingent upon his own return to the Father (John 16:7). This is a permanent blessing for all God's new covenant people, not a temporary filling or a temporary coming of the Spirit upon a few as in the case of OT believers. According to this view, OT saints were regenerated but not indwelt by the Spirit. So there are elements of continuity between the Testaments (regeneration) and elements of discontinuity (indwelling). Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 145. See also Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 1–204, who defends this view at length; and Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 121.

<sup>47</sup> Klink demonstrates how this is the point of John 2:1–11. He concludes, "Since the fourth evangelist has already made implicit the connection between Elisha and Jesus, and has already shown that Jesus' mission is a prophetic mission similar to the prophets of old, the chief steward's comment [2:10] is to differentiate between the work of previous prophets and Jesus' prophetic mission. The new wine that is better than the old is Jesus himself who is the last of a long line of 'prophets' and the greatest of them all." Edward W. Klink, III, "What Concern Is That to You and Me? John 2:1–11 and the Elisha Narratives," *Neot* 39 (2005): 282.



Christ's broken body and shed blood (Matt 26:26–30; Mark 14:22–26; Luke 22:14–20)<sup>48</sup> As Leon Morris states,

When Jesus spoke of his blood as blood “of the covenant” he was surely claiming that, at the cost of his death, he was about to inaugurate the new covenant of which the prophet [Jeremiah] had spoken. This was a big claim. Jesus was saying that his death would be central to the relationship between God and the people of God. It would be the means of cleansing from past sins and consecrating to a new life of service to God. It would be the establishing of the covenant that was based not on people's keeping it (Exod 24:3, 7), but on God's forgiveness (Jer 31:34).<sup>49</sup>

Not only does Jesus make it clear that his death on the cross inaugurates the new covenant, he also indicates that life under the new covenant is an entirely new kind of life with God, life lived in and through the Holy Spirit. After explaining the connection between his death and the new covenant, Jesus states that he will not drink the fruit of the vine until he drinks it new with his disciples in his Father's Kingdom (Matt 26:29). Jesus is soon to go to the cross, which means that he will no longer physically be with his disciples until the kingdom, but they will still live in God's presence, because before Jesus goes he will send the Holy Spirit, who will be another *paraclete* who will be with them forever (John 14:6). Jesus states that he must go in order for the Holy Spirit to come (16:7), and that it is to the disciples' advantage that he goes and the Spirit comes, because the Spirit will abide with them and be in them eternally (14:16–17; 16:7; cf. 7:37–39). Jesus's death inaugurates the new covenant because he doesn't stay dead but rises from the grave in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:3–4; 8:11), and then pours out the Holy Spirit upon the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).

Jesus not only has the Spirit but also gives the Spirit to all who believe in him, allowing all believers in Christ to experience the blessings of the new covenant.<sup>50</sup> Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16–21) indicates that the Spirit of prophecy has come for all people, as Joel 2:28–32 foretold.<sup>51</sup> As Graham Cole states, “If God is going to live with his people, then they will need new life, intimacy with him restored, and what was the privilege of only some in Israel needs to be extended to all. The Spirit's outpouring is a necessary condition for any of this to take place.”<sup>52</sup> Elisha's life and ministry in the Holy Spirit served as a preview of what life with God could look like under the new covenant, and Jesus makes the preview a reality for all who turn from their sin and turn toward God.

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<sup>48</sup> While the new covenant is only mentioned explicitly on this occasion in the Gospels, the entire New Testament presents Jesus as the one who inaugurates the Old Testament's covenant promises. This theology is most fully developed in Hebrews, which emphasizes the superiority of the new covenant over the old and underlines the role of the Spirit in the new covenant (Heb 7:22; 8:6–10:31; 12:18–24; 13:20). See P. R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 427–29.

<sup>49</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 660.

<sup>50</sup> This is the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), which each New Testament believer experiences at the moment of faith (1 Cor 12:13), making it clear that life in the church is life in the Spirit. See John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 43–45.

<sup>52</sup> Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, 140.

### ***3. Conclusion***

During his ministry Elisha works to help Israel turn from their false gods and return to the one, true God and the blessings of his covenant. God empowered Elisha with his Holy Spirit so that Elisha could accomplish this mission. More so than any previous prophet, even his predecessor Elijah, Elisha demonstrated the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life and ministry, bringing life, blessing, and judgment through his miracles and his presence. Elisha's experience of the Holy Spirit also brought hope to a people soon to experience exile for their sin, that life with God was possible, and that God would make it possible through a new covenant. Elisha's ministry deliberately recalled Joshua's, and although he didn't lead his people to blessing in the Promised Land, he helped to pave the way for the one who would. Exile is not God's final word. Jesus Christ came as the Second Elisha, the ultimate Spirit-empowered prophet, and he succeeded in his conquest, making it possible for anyone who believed to experience new life through the Holy Spirit under the new covenant. Elisha's life anticipated the life of Christ, and in doing so it also anticipates the Spirit-filled life all Christ-followers are able to have. Elisha helps us understand that through the Holy Spirit we can know God, bring life and healing in a culture of death, represent the presence of God, and do even greater works than our Master (John 14:12).

# Targums As Guides to Hebrew Syntax

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**Abstract:** The Targums were not translations for the Aramaic-speaking masses who were ignorant of Hebrew. Rather, they were translations/commentaries for bilingual (Hebrew-Aramaic) audiences. The Targums preserved an older understanding of the Hebrew text and guarded against innovations now attested in sources such as the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In their written form, the Targums provided a guide to the reading of the Hebrew Bible in the period between the making of its purely consonantal text and the later written systems of vocalization and accentuation in the Masoretic Text. The present article offers demonstrable examples of such guidance.

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The Masoretic Text (MT) includes three features designed to ensure transmission of an authoritative tradition of reading the grammar and syntax of the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible: (1) a written system of vocalization or vowel pointing, (2) a written system of accentuation, and (3) *Masora*—abbreviated notes in the side margins (*Masora parva*), full notes in the upper and lower margins (*Masora magna*), and final *Masora*.<sup>1</sup> With the loss of biblical Hebrew as a living language spoken by native speakers, the need for such features only increased with the passage of time, as oral tradition from one generation to the next could only do so much. The introduction of these features in the second half of the first millennium CE raises the question of how the traditional understanding of the Hebrew text might have been preserved apart from oral tradition in the centuries after biblical Hebrew became a dead language and prior to the paratextual features of the MT.

Translations of the Hebrew Bible into other languages such as Greek and Syriac certainly aided in this to some degree, but the purpose of such translations was not primarily to guide readers of the Hebrew text in their understanding of the grammar and syntax. Rather, it was to render the content of the Hebrew Bible into the language of the target audience, even if the translation technique in many cases suggests more of an effort to bring the audience to the Hebrew text rather than to bring the Hebrew text to the audience.<sup>2</sup> Synagogue readings and expositions of the Hebrew Bible, as well as early

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<sup>1</sup> See Martin Jan Mulder, “The Transmission of the Biblical Text,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling, reprint ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 104–13.

<sup>2</sup> “The aim of the LXX translators was to bring the reader close to the Hebrew original rather than to bring the Hebrew original to the Greek speaking reader. According to NETS the relation of the Greek to the Hebrew

rabbinic commentary in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Midrashim, also functioned to preserve a way of reading the biblical Hebrew text, but such preservation was done only indirectly since the goal of this reading and exegesis was homiletical, halakhic, and haggadic.

The Aramaic Targums may fill a gap here in a way that has not hitherto been fully appreciated. The formerly accepted narrative for the origin of the Targums was that they began in the synagogues as extemporaneous oral renderings designed to translate readings from the Hebrew Bible for Aramaic-speaking Jewish communities that no longer understood biblical Hebrew well enough to comprehend the readings.<sup>3</sup> These renderings became standardized over time and subsequently received their written form. Despite the emergence of Aramaic as a common language, however, Hebrew did persist in Jewish communities as a living language, albeit not in the form of biblical Hebrew but as Mishnaic Hebrew and Qumran Hebrew. The evidence suggests that this was not merely a survival of the language in literary form but a continued existence of the spoken language at a later stage of development. Chaim Rabin has offered an alternative explanation of the Targums that better accounts for this evidence.<sup>4</sup> Rabin notes that the extant written Targums often presuppose knowledge of Hebrew on the part of their readers.<sup>5</sup> This would seem to suggest that the primary purpose of the Targums was not to translate the Hebrew Bible for Aramaic speakers but to comment on the Bible for a bilingual audience in a way that would keep the commentary distinct from the biblical text itself.<sup>6</sup> The Targum is thus a “guide to the correct

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text has to play a prominent role. In consequence the practical aim of the NETS project is to serve the study of the Hebrew original” (Wolfgang Kraus, “Contemporary Translations of the Septuagint: Problems and Perspectives,” in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden, SCS 53 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005], 69).

<sup>3</sup> Rashi states in his commentary to b. Megillah 21b that the Targum is for women and commoners who do not know Hebrew. Likewise, Aberbach and Grossfeld are confident that Targum Onkelos “was designated for the benefit of the Aramaic-speaking masses, not for scholars who were generally familiar with Hebrew and spoke it among themselves, at least in learned discussions” (*Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, vol. 1 [Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1982], 9).

<sup>4</sup> “In the synagogue, explanations had to be brief and clear, and closely linked to each verse; they also had to be complete, as no dialogue between teacher and taught was possible. A paraphrase into Hebrew was impossible, because the uninstructed could easily take the paraphrase as part of the sacred text. The difference between mixed language and pure biblical Hebrew was hardly such that it would assure the clear distinction, at speaking speed, between the two kinds of text. It was therefore an almost ideal way out of the difficulty to provide the explanations in a literary language, transitional Aramaic, which was no doubt widely understood, resembling both spoken mishnaic Hebrew and spoken Aramaic, but almost word for word clearly set off from its Hebrew equivalents” (Chaim Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century, Volume 2*, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern, CRINT [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976], 1030). The Targum was further distinguished from the Hebrew by the fact that it was given orally by a *meturgeman* (“translator”) who was separate from the reader of the written biblical text (see m. Megillah 4:4). On the other hand, Étan Levine believes that “there is no evidence that the extant targums originated in association with the liturgical reading of Scripture, or that, as a genre, targum derived from the synagogue and was originally oral” (“The Targums: Their Interpretive Character and Their Place in Jewish Text Tradition,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume 1*, ed. Magne Sæbø [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996], 324).

<sup>5</sup> Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic,” 1031–32.

<sup>6</sup> Note that the biblical books of Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah both presuppose a bilingual (Hebrew and Aramaic) readership.

understanding of a Hebrew text for those who already understood the words.”<sup>7</sup> This would certainly explain the distinctive character of the Targums as translations/commentaries as compared with other ancient versions of the Bible. What appears to be rather straightforward translation of the Hebrew text at one moment can suddenly transform into expansive paraphrase without warning.<sup>8</sup>

Abraham Tal has suggested that the Targums were not designed to make Scripture accessible to the masses but to protect Scripture from the masses.<sup>9</sup> According to Tal, the main concern of those who produced the Targums was to prevent modernization of the biblical text and any attempt to adapt it to current linguistic habits. Tal demonstrates that such modernization was a real threat. On the one hand, the Samaritan Pentateuch shows evidence of adaptation to the linguistic changes of Mishnaic Hebrew such that modernization apparently became the norm in the Samaritan community. On the other hand, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide ample evidence of updated Hebrew texts (e.g., 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) co-existing with more conservative texts. Such modernized texts did not survive and develop into lasting traditions primarily because the community (or communities) that preserved them did not survive.<sup>10</sup> Tal does not provide specific examples of the ways in which the Targums helped to resist change.

Once the Targums began to make the transition from their presumed oral beginnings to their presently known written form, there was also a shift in their design. No longer were they primarily or exclusively to be heard aurally by the masses in the synagogue for the purpose of protection from modernization, nor did those who produced the written Targums simply aim to record the oral tradition. Rather, the written Targums were made for a new audience—the scribal elite who could not only understand but also read both Hebrew and Aramaic and study the Targums for their insight into how the text of the Hebrew Bible should be read and interpreted (grammar, syntax, and semantics). The written Targums of the Pentateuch and the Prophets were produced during the first half of the first millennium CE at a time when such a guide was becoming increasingly necessary. Biblical Hebrew was a dead language, and the written aids of the later Masoretic Text were not yet available.<sup>11</sup> The Targums continued to serve this purpose in the medieval period as evidenced by their use in the rabbinic commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Redak among others.

Modern introductions to the Targums tend to focus on the concepts introduced into the biblical text from the time perspective of those who produced the Targums.<sup>12</sup> Such concepts are then aligned with other early biblical interpreters such as the New Testament authors or those responsible for the

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<sup>7</sup> Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic,” 1032. “There is clear evidence that the Rabbis viewed the targum as more than translation in any narrow sense: its purpose was to exegete and to interpret Scripture” (Philip S. Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling, reprint ed. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004], 239).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, this sort of thing also happens to some extent in other early versions such as the LXX and the Syriac, but it is the degree to which it occurs in the Targums that makes them unique. For a helpful taxonomy of different types of Targum renderings, see Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations,” 225–37.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham Tal, “Is There a Raison d’Être for an Aramaic Targum in a Hebrew-Speaking Society?,” *REJ* 160 (2001): 368.

<sup>10</sup> See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 179.

<sup>11</sup> It goes without saying that the written vocalization of the Targums was also not present at this time. The examples discussed in the present article do not depend upon the written vocalization for their validity.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

rabbinic literature.<sup>13</sup> This often gives the impression that the Targums are little more than products of their own time. They are considered valuable as indirect commentaries on the period(s) of Judaism from which they come and as witnesses to the history of interpretation that they represent but not as guides to the Bible itself. While there are certainly features of the Targums that might be dubbed anachronistic or fanciful, the Targums rarely do anything without at least the perception of exegetical warrant. Those who produced the Targums knew the biblical text quite well, and it would be a mistake to dismiss them entirely for their insight into very old traditions that they have preserved concerning how the biblical text should be read and understood, traditions that predate the Targums by a considerable period of time.

If Tal is correct that the Targums served to protect against modernization of the Hebrew text, then this would presumably have applied to preservation of certain kinds of syntactical constructions. According to James Barr, “For those who knew Hebrew, the Aramaic version functioned as a more or less authoritative interpretation, which both elucidated the linguistic obscurities of the original and smoothed out its religious difficulties.”<sup>14</sup> The present article is devoted to examples of such linguistic elucidation where the Targums appear to have maintained an older understanding of the Hebrew syntax,<sup>15</sup> one which was then preserved in many cases at a later time by the vocalization and accentuation of the Masoretic Text.

### 1. Genesis 1:2

Interpretation of **תהו ובהו** in Genesis 1:2 depends in part upon whether these words are two coordinated nouns with separate meanings or an example of hendiadys whereby one meaning is expressed through two words. The common modern English translation “formless and void” (e.g., NIV) assumes the former option. This translation has its origin in the ancient Greek translation of these words in Genesis 1:2 (see also Vulgate, Luther): ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος (‘unseen and unformed’).<sup>16</sup> Such a rendering does not have its basis in the meaning of the Hebrew text but in the Hellenistic philosophy that influenced the Greek translator’s view of creation. According to Plato’s *Timaeus*, the creation of the world is the product of order brought out of chaos.<sup>17</sup>

The noun **תהו** (“emptiness”) often occurs without **בהו** (BDB 1062). In fact, it is used alone in Isaiah 45:18 with reference to Genesis 1:2 to say that God did not create the land **תהו**. Rather, he fashioned it “to be inhabited” (**לשבת**). This strongly suggests that **תהו** is understood here to mean “uninhabited”

<sup>13</sup> See Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and Paul V. McCracken Flesher, “The Targumim in the Context of Rabbinic Literature,” in Jacob Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 611–29.

<sup>14</sup> James Barr, “Which Language Did Jesus Speak?—Some Remarks of a Semitist,” *BJRL* 53 (1970): 9–29.

<sup>15</sup> The term “syntax” is used here to mean the orderly arrangement of two or more words. Any exegetical rendering of the Targums that serves to disambiguate an otherwise ambiguous syntactical construction in the consonantal Hebrew text is considered a guide to its reading. Such exegesis reflects an understanding of the syntax whether or not the translator intended to address a purely syntactical issue.

<sup>16</sup> The Syriac version simply transliterates the Hebrew words.

<sup>17</sup> “As the Platonic influences on the translation of Gen 1–2 demonstrate, the translators of the Septuagint were familiar with Plato” (Siegfried Kreuzer, *The Bible in Greek: Translation, Transmission, and Theology of the Septuagint*, SCS 63 [Atlanta: SBL, 2015], 20).

or “uninhabitable” (i.e., a wilderness; see Deut 32:10). On the other hand, the noun **בהו** (“emptiness”) never occurs apart from **תהו** (see Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23). This hints at the possibility that the combination **תהו ובהו** may be a fixed expression with a single meaning that must be rendered more idiomatically. In other words, it does not mean “emptiness and emptiness” but “uninhabitable.” This is precisely the way the expression is used in Jeremiah 4:23 where the judgment of the land is depicted in terms of an un-creation, a return to the wilderness-like state of the land in Genesis 1:2 before its preparation as a place of blessing for humanity. Such a land is not chaos but a dark place in the real world, yet without people and without animal life (Jer 4:23, 25, 29). This is exactly how Targum Neofiti understands **תהו ובהו** in Genesis 1:2a (cf. Targum Onqelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan): “And the land was **תהיא ובהיא**, desolate of humanity and animals, and empty of all work of plants and of trees, and darkness was spread over the surface of the deep/ocean.”<sup>18</sup> The land was an uninhabitable place covered with water, and it was nighttime. Therefore, God called forth the morning sunrise (Gen 1:3) to begin his work of clearing and preparing the land for habitation. The word for the acceptable state of habitation in Genesis 1 is **טוב** (“good”), which is likely a play on the sound of **תהו ובהו**. God takes what is **תהו ובהו** (“uninhabitable”) and makes it **טוב** (“habitable”).

## 2. Genesis 1:14a

The third masculine singular jussive verb **יהי** at the beginning of YHWH’s discourse in Genesis 1:14a (MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, 4QGen<sup>b,k</sup>) is usually understood to be impersonal (“Let there be”) due to the fact that the following noun **מארת** (“lights”) is plural (see GKC §144b): “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse to divide between the day and the night.’” This translation gives the impression that the luminaries (sun, moon, and stars) were created on the fourth day despite the background information provided in Genesis 1:1, which says that God created the whole world (“the sky and the land”) in the beginning,<sup>19</sup> and despite the start of the narrative in Genesis 1:3: “And God said, ‘Let there be a morning sunrise [**אור**],’ and there was a morning sunrise” (see BDB, 21). Such difficulty with the above translation of Genesis 1:14a is typically resolved by an awkward appeal to the existence of some unknown light source prior to the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, or it is resolved by an appeal to the suggestion that these luminaries were obscured by the clouds before the fourth day.

The syntax of Genesis 1:14a, however, differs markedly from that of Genesis 1:6: “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, and let it divide [or, that it may divide] water from water.”<sup>20</sup> The text of Genesis 1:6 requires the reader to see a “making” of an expanse (i.e., the sky) with the separation of the water below from the water above. The lifting of the foggy mist from the water-covered land to become

<sup>18</sup> It is generally accepted that the early sixteenth-century Neofiti manuscript is a copy of a Targum whose origins go back over a millennium earlier. Most extant Targum manuscripts are substantially later than their ancestor copies from which they come. Furthermore, Targums typically preserve individual renderings that span from a very early period all the way to the time of their final form.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 1:1 is not a title or a heading, nor is it a dependent, temporal clause (cf. Gen 2:4b). The “x + *qatal*” clauses of 1:1–2 establish the background for the narrative, which begins in Genesis 1:3 with *wayyiqtol* (cf. Gen 3:1; 4:1; et al.; see GKC §11a). See also Alviero Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, JSOTSup 86 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 35–41. The creation of the whole world in the beginning sets the stage for the preparation of a particular land of blessing for humanity (see Gen 2:11–14; 15:18; see also Gen 2:3b; Isa 45:18). See John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> See Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 106.

clouds in the sky not only allows the expanse to appear but also assigns a function to it at the same time (Gen 1:6–8). On the other hand, the “making” of the lights in Genesis 1:14–19 seems to consist entirely of giving them their purpose. This is the way Targum Onqelos has translated Genesis 1:14a: “And the Lord said, ‘Let lights in the expanse of the sky be [יהו] for dividing between the day and the night’” (cf. Targum Neofiti, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan). Despite the lack of grammatical concord, the Targums of the Pentateuch interpret the “lights” (מארת) to be the subject of the singular verb יהי (see GKC §145o), and they indicate this by translating יהי with a plural verb in Aramaic (יהון), which agrees with the Aramaic noun for “lights” (נהורין). This understanding of Genesis 1:14a works well with the clauses in Genesis 1:14b–15a, which employ plural verbs with “lights” as the assumed grammatical subject and further explain the purpose of the lights: “and let them be [והיו] for signs and for appointed times and for days and years, and let them be [והיו] for lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the land.” Thus, the lights were created “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1), and a morning sunrise was summoned to begin day one of the week (1:3–5), but on the fourth day the purpose of the lights was assigned to them.

This particular understanding of the text of Genesis 1:14a found in the Targums is also preserved in the other early versions, which is not always the case with other examples found elsewhere. The LXX, Syriac, and Latin Vulgate all employ plural verbs to translate יהי. The accentuation system of the MT, which uses the *athnach* (אֲ) to divide a verse between topic and discussion, also preserves this ancient interpretation. Genesis 1:14a provides the topic, which is the general purpose of the lights; and Genesis 1:14b provides the discussion, which is about the specific purpose of the lights. The lights are designed to mark the “appointed times” (מועדים) found in Leviticus 23 (see Sir 43:6–7). The translation of יהי in Genesis 1:14a as “Let there be” only began with Luther’s German rendering (*Es werden*) and continued with Tyndale’s English translation, the KJV, and modern English translations.

### 3. Exodus 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29; 1 Chronicles 6:17

There is a combination of three words (משכן אהל מועד) that occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible:

1. And all (the) work of (the) משכן אהל מועד was finished. (Exod 39:32a)
2. On day one of the first month, you will raise up the משכן אהל מועד. (Exod 40:2)
3. And you will put the altar of burnt offering before (the) entrance of (the) משכן אהל מועד. (Exod 40:6)
4. And the altar of burnt offering he put [Samaritan Pentateuch adds: before] (the) entrance of (the) משכן אהל מועד. (Exod 40:29)
5. And they were serving before (the) משכן אהל מועד with song until Solomon built the house of YHWH in Jerusalem. (1 Chr 6:17a)

The exact syntactical relationship of these words in the MT’s consonantal text is not immediately evident. The noun משכן (“dwelling place”) is normally translated “tabernacle” and often has the definite article when it is by itself in the absolute state (see Exod 39:33a); and the construct phrase אהל מועד (“tent of meeting”), whose noun in the absolute state lacks definiteness, is nevertheless translated “the tent of meeting” as if the whole phrase constituted a proper noun.<sup>21</sup> One possibility for these words is that the entire combination should be treated as a single construct chain (משכן אהל מועד). The MT

<sup>21</sup> This tent is sometimes simply called האהל (“the tent”; see Exod 39:33a).



vocalizes the text this way in all five occurrences. If אהל מועד is a proper noun, then the entire chain is definite: “the tabernacle of the tent of meeting” (see ESV). This is important because the phrase in Exodus 40:2 has the definite direct object marker (את) in front of it. With the exception of a passage like Exodus 33:7–11 where אהל מועד appears to be a temporary tent outside the camp prior to the construction of the tabernacle, the terms משכן and אהל מועד seem to be used interchangeably for the tabernacle (see BDB 14). Thus, in the phrase משכן אהל מועד, the term אהל מועד is likely to be epexegetical (see GKC §128k, 130e): “the tabernacle, the tent of meeting” (or, “the tabernacle, that is, the tent of meeting”; see NET; cf. Exod 39:33a). It is worth noting that משכן in the first two examples (Exod 39:32a; 40:2) has a disjunctive accent in the MT, perhaps indicating the appositional relationship of the two terms. Words in the construct state normally have conjunctive accents (see Exod 40:6, 29a; 1 Chr 6:17).

The update of the proto-MT’s consonantal text found in the Samaritan Pentateuch has disambiguated the sense of the syntactical construction by placing an article on המשכן אהל: המשכן אהל מועד (“the tabernacle, the tent of meeting”). This occurs in all four examples in the Pentateuch. Despite the helpfulness of such a clarification, this updated Hebrew text was preserved only in the Samaritan community, not in the Jewish community. The early versions (LXX and Syriac) do little to aid the understanding of the text. The LXX renders the entire phrase as “the tent of testimony” (τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου and τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου) in Exodus 40:2, 6 (no equivalent in Exod 39:32). In Exodus 40:29, Rahlfs’s text simply has “the tent” (τῆς σκηνῆς); Ziegler’s is the same as Exodus 40:6. In 1 Chronicles 6:17, the LXX has “the tent of the house of the testimony” (τῆς σκηνῆς οἴκου μαρτυρίου). The Syriac has “the dwelling place [or, tabernacle] of time” (ܡܫܬܚܬܐ) in Exodus 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29. In 1 Chronicles 6:17, it has “the dwelling place [or, tabernacle] in the dwelling place [or, tabernacle] of time” (ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܕܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܕܡܫܬܚܬܐ).<sup>22</sup> With the exception of 1 Chronicles 6:17, these translations at least give the impression that a single referent is in view. Nevertheless, these versions were preserved primarily in Christian communities, even though they both had Jewish origins.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, neither the LXX nor the Syriac could have been the main source for understanding the consonantal text of the proto-MT during the first half of the first millennium CE prior to the MT’s introduction of written systems of vocalization and accentuation.

The Targums bridged the gap between the proto-MT and the MT and preserved for the Jewish community the understanding of משכן אהל מועד that the tabernacle is not something separable from the tent of meeting. Targum Onqelos (cf. Targum Neofiti, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) renders the phrase in Exodus 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29 as משכנא משכן זמנא (“the dwelling place” [or, “tabernacle”], “the dwelling place [or, tabernacle/tent] of time” [i.e., appointed time (or, meeting)]). Targum 1 Chronicles 6:17 follows suit. By placing the article on the first noun (cf. Samaritan Pentateuch), the Targums indicate that the proper understanding of משכן אהל מועד is “the tabernacle, the tent of meeting.”

#### 4. 1 Samuel 3:3

English translations typically ignore the Masoretic accentuation of 1 Samuel 3:3, specifically the placement of the major disjunctive accent *athnach* under the participle שכב (“lying down”): “and the

<sup>22</sup> The tabernacle or tent of time is the tent of appointed time or meeting.

<sup>23</sup> The revised Greek translations (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion) have “the tent of the covering of the testimony” in Exodus 40:2, 6 (see also Theodotion’s version of Exod 40:29).

lamp of God had not yet been extinguished. Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD as well; the ark of God was also there” (NET). Such a rendering of the syntax gives the rather odd circumstance of Samuel (and Eli [1 Sam 3:2]) sleeping overnight in the most holy place of the tabernacle where the ark of God was. One very important exception to this trend is the KJV: “And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God *was*, and Samuel was laid down *to sleep*; That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I” (1 Sam 3:3–4; see also Luther). This translation attempts to avoid the difficulty by moving the phrase “in the temple of the LORD” to an earlier place in the syntax, but this hardly produces an acceptable result. The ancient versions (LXX, Syriac, Vulgate) also give the impression that Samuel was lying down in the most holy place.

The Masoretic accentuation, however, suggests the following translation: “And the lamp of God was yet to be extinguished, and Samuel was lying down. In the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was, the LORD called to Samuel, and he said, ‘Here am I’” (1 Sam 3:3–4). According to this understanding, the place where Samuel was lying down is not stated, and it is not necessary to read the text as if it were indicating that Samuel was lying down in the most holy place of the tabernacle. Samuel was lying down prior to the extinguishing of the lamp, and the LORD called to Samuel from the tabernacle where the ark was (cf. Exod 25:22). Targum Jonathan is the only ancient version to preserve this interpretation of the syntax from the time of the proto-Masoretic text to the time of the written system of accentuation included within the MT: “And the lamp of the sanctuary of the Lord had not yet died out, and Samuel was sleeping in the court of the Levites, and a voice was heard from the temple of the Lord where the ark of the Lord was” (see Rashi’s commentary).<sup>24</sup>

Even a modern interpreter as careful and attentive to the details of the primary sources as S. R. Driver overlooks the witness of Targum Jonathan and the Masoretic accentuation: “Evidently Samuel was sleeping in close proximity to the ark—perhaps, in a chamber contiguous to the **היכל** in which it was, if not, as the Hebrew text taken strictly would imply, actually in the **היכל** itself.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. comments, “[The ark] was kept in an inner sanctuary at the back of the nave or temple proper, where Samuel slept. Why Samuel’s bed was here we are not told, but presumably he needed to be nearby in order to discharge some cultic responsibility.”<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that these commentators are not overtly disagreeing with Targum Jonathan or the Masoretic accentuation. Rather, they appear to be unaware of them.

## 5.2 Samuel 7:14

The Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 7:14b features an ambiguous construction (**אשר בהעותו**), which modern English translations render either as a temporal clause (“when he commits iniquity”) or as a conditional clause (“if he commits iniquity”). In context, this is part of the covenant with David and a

<sup>24</sup> “Samuel neither slept in the holy place by the side of the candlestick and table of shew-bread, nor in the most holy place in front of the ark of the covenant, but in the court, where cells were built for the priests and Levites to live in when serving at the sanctuary” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, trans. James Martin, Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament 2, reprint ed. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001], 394).

<sup>25</sup> S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), 42.

<sup>26</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 8, reprint ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 98.

description of the son of David who will build the temple and reign over an everlasting kingdom and whose relationship with YHWH will be like that of a son to a father (cf. Ps 2:7): “I will be his father, and he will be my son, whom, in his committing iniquity, I will correct with a rod of men and with blows of sons of men.” While it is true that the combination of the preposition **כ** and an infinitive construct often yields a temporal clause in translation, such a translation here would presuppose that this son of David with such a unique relationship to YHWH will commit iniquity. In actual fact, the image of correcting the son with a rod appears only to illustrate the closeness of the father-son relationship (cf. Prov 13:24), and it does not occur at all in the Chronicler’s account of the covenant with David (1 Chr 17:13).

The inner-biblical readings of 2 Samuel 7:14b interpret the text to be an if-then construction: “If **[כא]** his sons forsake my instruction and in my judgments they do not walk, if **[כא]** my statutes they profane and my commands they do not keep, (then) I will visit with a rod their transgression and with blows their iniquity” (Ps 89:31–33 MT [Eng., 89:30–32]). This text reapplies the words for the one son of David to the multiple sons of David who reign in the meantime.<sup>27</sup> For them, the terms of the covenant with David are conditional, and this is clearly marked by the conjunction **כא** (“if”) (see also 1 Kgs 2:4; 3:14; 6:12; 8:25; 9:4; 1 Chr 22:13). This is also the reading of Psalm 132:12: “If **[כא]** your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I teach them, (then) their sons too will sit on your throne forever.” These inner-biblical readings of 2 Samuel 7:14b must be taken seriously because they reveal native Hebrew understanding of the infinitive construction.<sup>28</sup>

The LXX translates 2 Samuel 7:14b as an if-then construction: καὶ ἐὰν ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀδικία αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλέγξω αὐτὸν ἐν ῥάβδῳ ἀνδρῶν καὶ ἐν ἀφαῖς υἱῶν ἀνθρώπων (“and if his injustice comes, then I will reprove him with a rod of men and with wounds of sons of men”; see also Vulgate, Luther). But despite the Jewish origins of this translation, it would not have served as the primary guide to the understanding of the Hebrew text during the first half of the first millennium CE in the wake of its adoption by the Christian community. This role would have fallen to the Targum, and it is the Targum that preserves the interpretation of 2 Samuel 7:14b as an if-then construction for readers of the Hebrew text:<sup>29</sup> “I will be to him like a father, and he will be before me like a son, whom, if **[כא]** he sins, I will punish him with chastisement of men and with discipline of sons of men” (Targum Jonathan 2 Sam 7:14). This translation ensures that future readings of 2 Samuel 7:14 will be consistent with inner-biblical readings.

## 6. Isaiah 66:21

In some cases, while the Targum preserves an older way of understanding the Hebrew text, the Masoretic vocalization represents an innovation. Thus, the Targum’s understanding of the text in these situations does not eventually surface in the later written system of vocalization. Jan Joosten points to the secondary vocalization of MT Isaiah 66:21 as an example of midrashic alteration: “And also from them [i.e., from the nations] will I take *for* the priests, *for* the Levites **[לְלֵוִיִּם לְלֵוִיִּם]**,<sup>30</sup> says YHWH.”

<sup>27</sup> See Michael B. Shepherd, *The Text in the Middle*, StBibLit 162 (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 122–29.

<sup>28</sup> If it is argued that the direction of dependence runs the opposite way, then the infinitive construction is a way to express the meaning of the conditional clauses.

<sup>29</sup> The Syriac version is just as ambiguous as the Hebrew text.

<sup>30</sup> A multitude of Masoretic manuscripts and the Syriac version coordinate these two phrases with a *waw* conjunction: “for the priests and for the Levites.” One manuscript of the LXX does not have the second phrase “for the Levites.”

He comments, “The Tiberian reading, with the article, is probably a midrashic alteration seeking to avoid the suggestion that God would, in the eschaton, choose priests from among the nations.”<sup>31</sup> Joosten suggests that the reading without the article, found in the LXX and the Targum, is more natural: “And also from them will I take *to be* priests, Levites [לְכֹהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם], says YHWH.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, YHWH will take people from the nations not to serve the needs of the priests, as the MT would have it. Rather, he will take them from the nations to serve as priests (see Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

## 7. Code Words

Failure to identify code words in the proto-MT led to significant disruption in the ability of early translators and interpreters to decipher the syntax of the Hebrew text. Two such code words or phrases—ששך (Jer 25:26b; 51:41a) and לב קמי (Jer 51:1)—appear in MT Jeremiah. The first of these, ששך, has no representation in LXX Jeremiah and was likely not in the translator’s *Vorlage*. It appears on the surface to be a place name (“Sheshach”), but no such place by this name is known. The Syriac translates it as “Arsacid” (a Parthian dynasty) in both occurrences (Jer 25:26b; 51:41a). The Latin Vulgate has the transliterated name as “Sesach” (see also Luther). Among the ancient versions, only the Targum, which renders ששך as בבל (“Babylon”) preserves the correct understanding of this code word. The Targum has interpreted ששך according to an early exegetical technique known as *atbash* whereby the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet can be substituted for one another (א and ת), the second and second to last (ב and ש), and so on. Thus, ששך (“Sheshach”) becomes בבל (“Babylon”). The second example, לב קמי (Jer 51:1) is identified as *atbash* for כשדים (“Chaldeans”) by both the LXX and the Targum. Other early versions did not fare so well. The Syriac interprets the phrase to mean “hard heart.” The Latin Vulgate translates it literally as “the heart of those who rise up against me” (cf. Luther). Neither of these versions recognizes the phrase as code. It may be asked why such code words or phrases might be used for Babylon or the Chaldeans in a book that otherwise openly refers to Babylon or the Chaldeans as the enemy. Richard Steiner suggests that while code words for Babylon or the Chaldeans likely began in popular usage out of fear of retaliation for any anti-Babylonian speech, they now appear in the book of Jeremiah alongside clear references to Babylon as a way of “flouting the taboo against anti-Babylonian agitation.”<sup>33</sup>

The place “Beth Aven” east of Bethel (Josh 7:2; 18:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 14:23) occurs several times in Hosea as a substitute for Bethel itself (Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5; see also Hos 10:8; Amos 5:5). Due to the prominence of the alternative worship there (1 Kgs 12:29), “Bethel” (“house of God”) has become known as “Beth Aven” (“house of trouble/idolatry”). Among the early versions, only the Targum preserves this understanding of “Beth Aven” in Hosea, clarifying for the reader that this is derogatory code for “Bethel.” The only exception is Hosea 5:8, where the Targum renders “Beth Aven” paraphrastically as “the house of my sanctuary,” which presupposes “house of God” (see Gen 28; 35). The LXX and Syriac have “house of On” for each occurrence of “Beth Aven” (cf. Gen 41:45, 50; 46:20; LXX Exod 1:11; Jer 43:13 [LXX 50:13]). The Latin Vulgate simply transliterates: “Bethaven” (cf. Luther).

<sup>31</sup> Jan Joosten, “The Tiberian Vocalization and the Edition of the Hebrew Bible Text,” in *Making the Biblical Text: Textual Studies in the Hebrew and Greek Bible*, ed. Innocent Himbaza (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2015), 26.

<sup>32</sup> It is unusual for a Targum and the LXX to agree against the MT, but it does happen (e.g., Jer 11:19; 15:17).

<sup>33</sup> Richard C. Steiner, “The Two Sons of Neriah and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in the Light of Two *Atbash* Code-Words for Babylon,” *VT* 46 (1996): 83.

The phrase עמק יהושפט (“the valley of Jehoshaphat”) in Joel 4:2, 12 MT (Eng., 3:2, 12) has given rise to several different interpretations.<sup>34</sup> This is the place where YHWH will enter into judgment with all the nations. One possibility is that this valley is the valley of berakhah or the valley of blessing where the people blessed YHWH for their victory over Moab, Ammon, and Edom in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:26). According to this view, a past victory over the nations prefigures a future one. Another possibility is that יהושפט is not a reference to King Jehoshaphat. Rather, it signifies “YHWH judges”: “the valley where YHWH judges.” Most of the early versions leave this phrase uninterpreted (LXX, Syriac, Vulgate), but the Targum renders it as “the valley of the decision of judgment,” which is the same phrase that it employs to translation “the valley of decision” in Joel 4:14 (Eng., 3:14). In other words, the Targum identifies the phrase “the valley of decision” in Joel 4:14 (Eng., 3:14) as the built-in interpretation of “the valley of Jehoshaphat” in Joel 4:2, 12 (Eng., 3:2, 12). Thus, the phrase “the valley of Jehoshaphat” is code for “the valley of decision.”<sup>35</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

The main purpose of the Targums was not to make the Hebrew Bible accessible to Aramaic speakers but to comment on the Bible for a bilingual audience and to provide guidance on the grammar and syntax of the Hebrew text. Those who produced the Targums wanted to preserve a way of reading the Hebrew and to prevent modernization of the biblical text and adaptation of it to current linguistic custom. The written Targums were made for the scribal elite who could not only understand but also read both Hebrew and Aramaic and study the Targums for their insight into how the text of the Hebrew Bible should be read and interpreted. The written Targums of the Pentateuch and the Prophets were produced during the first half of the first millennium CE at a time when biblical Hebrew was a dead language and the written aids of the Masoretic Text were still not available. The guidance found within the Targums often aligns with what later surfaced in the written vocalization and accentuation of the Masoretic Text. Such guidance is still valuable today for readers of the biblical Hebrew text.

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<sup>34</sup> See Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 137.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas Stuart has suggested that an original phrase עמקי משפט (“valleys of judgment”) may have been altered to עמק יהושפט (“the valley of Jehoshaphat”) (*Hosea–Jonah*, WBC 31 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 264).

# Does Acts 4:23–31 Support the Practice of Simultaneous Prayer?

— Scott D. MacDonald —

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**Abstract:** Simultaneous prayer—the corporate practice of praying different prayers at the same time—is a worldwide phenomenon. One text frequently raised in support of the practice is Acts 4:23–31. This article explores that passage, reflecting on the Jewish liturgical backdrop and evaluating exactly how the early church prayed “together.” Acts 4 does provide a model for prayer, but it does not explicitly support simultaneous prayer, since Luke only records a single prayer and the spontaneity of the prayer is married to the liturgical recitation of Psalm 2:1–2. While simultaneous prayer could possibly find support elsewhere in Scripture, Christian communities should aspire to reflect the apostolic example in Acts 4.

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In Zambia, the practice of simultaneous prayer is increasingly commonplace. In 2018, our seminary scheduled me to visit a Baptist church on the northside of Lusaka, the capital city with over 2.9 million people.<sup>1</sup> The roads were alive with well-dressed churchgoers hustling to their churches, with men in suits and women mostly dressed according to the color of their Christian denomination. Dusty streets surrounded the tin-roofed building with a cross-shaped floorplan, and the temperature increased significantly as I entered the hall filled with smiling faces, wooden benches, and purple cloth. As a guest representing the seminary, I was ushered to a chair behind the pulpit, next to the pastor.

From this vantage point, I experienced simultaneous prayer in Africa. In the local language of Chinyanja, the worship leader announced that it was time to pray—“Tipempele,” “Let us pray.” The entire congregation then began speaking, shouting, and crying out their various prayers at the same time. At least three languages were being used, and I strained to hear what I could. Some members were shouting for God to protect them from the spirits, while others sought healing or employment opportunities. To use the contemporary parlance, people were pleading for a “breakthrough.” When it was over, I was left with questions, especially as I was only a year old in the broader culture and a relative stranger to this church practice.

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<sup>1</sup> “Zambia,” *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zambia/>.

## *1. The Global Prevalence of Simultaneous Prayer*

The late Randy Arnett, an advocate for theological education in Africa, chronicled the prevalence of this prayer practice on the continent. In Arnett's description of Baptist worship practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, a worship leader prompts the congregation to begin praying. Then Arnett says, "In all cases, one prays in a loud voice, rather than in silence. The loudness of the prayer varies from church to church, ranging from murmurs to shouting."<sup>2</sup> On an average Sunday in Lusaka, mass prayer is an expectation, not the exception. Rodney Masona, the principal of the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zambia, speculates that most Catholic and Baptist churches in Lusaka observe a form of simultaneous prayer. Meanwhile, virtually all Pentecostal churches do.<sup>3</sup>

Some African church leaders are seeking to respond to the host of Neo-Pentecostal prayer issues. Emiola Nihinlola of Nigeria asserts, "Baptist pastors and members have a duty to reject prayer practices and excesses that contradict biblical injunctions no matter how popular, attractive, pragmatic, or seemingly beneficial to physical church growth."<sup>4</sup> But the Bible does not seem to have a clear text that succinctly rebukes simultaneous prayer, and thus it continues to spread in Africa with little opposition.

The practice of simultaneous prayer is not only an African matter! Trevin Wax retells some of his experiences from the church in South Korea: "Whenever a group of Koreans is praying, whether as part of a church service or spontaneously in small groups, someone takes the lead, guides the rest of the group in what to pray for, and then says, 'Let's pray.' At once, everyone prays out loud, according to the direction of the leader."<sup>5</sup> Diana Hynson from the United Methodists appreciates this Korean norm.

Prayer is a spiritual practice universal in its scope. The practice of simultaneous prayer in the Korean community may be new to some. Rather than praying silently or one at a time, the entire class or congregation prays aloud together, creating a kind of Pentecost atmosphere. This swell of prayer, which God understands all at once, creates a thrilling, even mysterious, sense of unity in the wholeness of God's community.<sup>6</sup>

The practice of simultaneous prayer even exists in some circles in North America.<sup>7</sup> In addition to "popcorn prayer," "unison prayer," and "call and response prayer," Timothy Cho mentions the popularity of simultaneous prayer as a fourth method.

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<sup>2</sup> Randy Arnett, *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (Eldon, MO: Randy Arnett, 2017), 73–74.

<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation, 19 March 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Emiola Nihinlola, "Biblical Responses to Neo-Pentecostal Prayer Practices," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Philip W. Barnes, et al. (Nairobi: AB316, 2021), 149.

<sup>5</sup> Trevin Wax, "2 Reminders from the Korean Church about Prayer," *TGC*, 17 November 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/2-reminders-from-the-korean-church-about-prayer/>.

<sup>6</sup> Diana L. Hynson, "Learning the Practice of Walking with Christ," *The United Methodist Church: Discipleship Ministries*, 25 January 2011, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/learning-the-practice-of-walking-with-christ>.

<sup>7</sup> Simultaneous practices are occasionally present in other ways. As an undergraduate student at Moody Bible Institute, I was invited by some friends to an open worship time with the Moody Gospel Choir. But instead of praying out loud at the same time, the choir leader gave us a note and then prompted us to simultaneously sing our own improvised songs in worship to God, in relative harmony to the note provided.

In several Christian traditions around the world, believers have practiced a fourth form of prayer for generations as a regular part of congregational life. This style of praying is most readily recognized as a “Korean” style of prayer, but has actually been practiced in African and Asian churches around the world, and even historically African-American churches in the United States. This prayer form, called *tongsung kido* in Korean, is the practice of praying one’s own prayer aloud at the same time as others.<sup>8</sup>

With Cho’s testimony concerning the presence of *tongsung kido*, “praying together in a loud voice,” around the world, the matter is not purely regional or cultural.

The matter of simultaneous prayer stirs debate in our Zambian seminary. When theological lecturers touch upon this practice and challenge students to provide biblical support for this form of prayer, the response is predictable: “Acts 4 says that the church prayed together, and we should do the same, lifting our voices together.” This defense refers to the early church prayer meeting recorded in Acts 4:23–31:

When [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed’

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (ESV)

This article questions whether this ancient corporate prayer provides a sufficient biblical foundation for the practice of simultaneous prayer. Considering the global reach of the practice, it requires greater biblical reflection, lest the church unwittingly wander from the biblical precepts for prayer. To this end, let us further explore the backdrop and events of that early church gathering.

## *2. An Overview of Acts 4:23–31*

Stemming from Peter and John’s public healing of the lame man in Acts 3:1–10 and their subsequent preaching ministry concerning the resurrection of Jesus in 3:11–26, the first opposition toward the

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy I. Cho, “How and Why to Pray the Korean-Style Prayer of Tongsung Kido,” *Faithfully*, n.d., <https://faithfullymagazine.com/how-to-pray-tongsung-kido/>.



fledgling group of Christians arose. The text specifically mentions the Sadducees, since they were sensitive to any claims concerning a resurrection. Bruce elaborates, “They objected on principle to the doctrine of resurrection in itself, considering it to be a Pharisaic innovation, and they were greatly annoyed because the two apostles, by their insistence on the fact of Jesus’ resurrection, were so publicly and cogently maintaining that doctrine.”<sup>9</sup> Yet the boldness of the apostles (v. 13) and the presence of the healed man (v. 14) quieted the attacks of the Jewish religious leaders. By local standards, they were untrained, but “the judges took cognizance of the fact that they had been companions of Jesus.”<sup>10</sup> With their threats thwarted, the leaders could do nothing but release Peter and John.

### 2.1. The Reunion

Peter and John return to the church fellowship and provide a report to the others. Some debate exists pertaining to the exact population of the room. While thousands of believers existed by the time, it seems straightforward that this was nucleus of the Christian community, including the remainder of apostles.<sup>11</sup> Or as Pervo mentions, “One possibility is to take ἰδίους to mean “the other apostles.”<sup>12</sup> But with the Acts 1:15 gathering in mind, a larger group is more likely.

Among this young community, the hostility of the Jewish leadership is a matter of some concern. Sustained opposition may stall the evangelistic fervor of some and foreshadow future friction between the Jewish followers of Jesus and the traditional leaders of Judaism. For a people familiar with the consequences of opposition and steeped in the prayer practices of Christ, the reunion’s transformation into a prayer meeting is natural. Joining together in prayer is their common desire.

### 2.2. The Remembrance

The prayer begins with a classic formula. This event is not informal, as the congregation consisted of Jewish believers who prayed according to the methods they had learned.<sup>13</sup> “They addressed God as Sovereign Lord [δέσποτα], the Creator of all, in time-honored liturgical language derived from Hebrew scripture.”<sup>14</sup> The recitation of a psalm is not out of place when it is predominant in the prayer.

This prayer of remembrance is inherently Christological. First, the church community recounts Psalm 2 as an ancient prophecy, interpreting it through the events surrounding the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus. “The Scripture is in the exact Septuagintal rendering of Ps 2:1–2 and is presented as a prophecy, spoken by God through David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>15</sup> The prayer not only indicts Gentile kings and rulers, but it groups unconverted Jewish people together with those who are against the Lord! From verses 24–28, the church remembers Christ’s sufferings, the opposition he faced, and the prevailing purposes of God amid such difficulties.

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<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 90.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 121.

<sup>13</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 149.

### 2.3. The Request

The bulk of the prayer recalls Christ and the opposition he faced, and this emphasis supports the brief request of verses 29–30. First, the early church does not pray for persecution to dissipate and for persecutors to disappear. “Instead of praying that God would destroy their enemies, as some people favor in the times of persecution, the believers simply left the matter of judgment to God and asked for strength to be bold in the face of the present danger.”<sup>16</sup> They would not plead for the end of persecution. The rage of the peoples against the Anointed One had only accomplished the purposes of the Father! The early church saw similar purposes in their own experience of opposition.

They did not pray for comfort or deliverance. They prayed for endurance, fully aware of God’s sovereign plan for redemption. “In the paradox of human freedom and divine sovereignty, despite all the raging of humanity, God’s purposes prevail. They did so in Christ. They did so with the apostles before the Sanhedrin.”<sup>17</sup> Like with Christ, the believers knew that God was continuing to perform miracles and signs, calling attention to the good news of salvation in the name of Jesus. Opposition would continue. The perseverance of the young community was the concern. And the community prays to that end, seeking to persevere in boldness, even as threats would inevitably turn into violence.

### 2.4. The Result

We do not know how long the actual prayer meeting lasted, as Luke’s recording is presumably selective rather than comprehensive, but the conclusion of the prayer is eventful. History was not repeating itself, but the Holy Spirit was dramatically demonstrating his commitment to empowering the church’s gospel ministry.

This was not a “second Pentecost.” They had already received the Spirit. The Spirit had helped Peter and John in a mighty way before the Sanhedrin. It was a fresh filling, a renewed awareness of the Spirit’s power and presence in their life and witness. This was not an ephemeral ecstatic manifestation but a fresh endowment of power for witness that would continue (cf. 4:33).<sup>18</sup>

A question arises in relation to the shaking of the room. While a metaphorical interpretation—“they were moved”—is not completely out of place, the shaking of the location is probably literal, considering the canonical precedent for such tremors (Exoda 19:18; Isa 6:4). In fact, the events of early Acts intend to evoke the Old Testament appearances of God. “When this shaking is combined with the cloud of Acts 1:9 and especially the sound, wind, and thunder of 2:2–3, Luke clearly recalls Old Testament theophanies here. Instead of a mere vision of God, however (cf. 7:55–56; 9:3–4), the community is again filled with God’s own Spirit (2:4; 4:31).”<sup>19</sup> The prayer meeting aftershock testifies to the early Christian community that they are participating in the continuing and advancing purposes of God. Therefore,

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<sup>16</sup> Clifton J. Allen, ed. *Acts-1 Corinthians*, Broadman Bible Commentary 10 (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 150.

<sup>19</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2: 3:1–14:28* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1174.

boldness is the result; as Chrysostom says, “The place was shaken,’ and that made them all the more unshaken.”<sup>20</sup>

### ***3. The Prayer Methods of Acts 4:23–31***

On first glance, Acts 4:23–31 is understandably considered a text that supports the practice of simultaneous prayer. Yet the text and context merit closer attention. What context undergirds and leads to this ancient prayer?

#### **3.1. Jewish Background**

The first point of context to consider is the Jewish composition of the early Christian community. As of yet, history does not mention any Gentiles as members of the church. Thus, the prayers of church followed Jewish tradition. “The author of the Acts of the Apostles hands down the wording of several important acts of praying in the young Christ-believing communities. To summarize: the earliest Christ-believing communities were very close to the practices of both public and private Jewish prayer.”<sup>21</sup> It should be no surprise that the prayer incorporates a Septuagint recitation of Psalm 2!

#### **3.2. Early Liturgy**

Did the early church pray in set liturgical patterns? While not excluding the obvious presence of spontaneous prayers in the Scriptures, Pelikan notes the use of the Greek article and the plural “the prayers” in Acts 2:42, arguing that this structure “seems to suggest habitual or designated prayers, perhaps even, at least inchoately, fixed formulas of prayer.... It seems at least possible that the term ‘the prayers’ refers to the Lord’s Prayer and possibly to other formulas such as the primitive eucharistic prayer reproduced in the *Didache*.”<sup>22</sup> Early rhythms of prayers were developing, drawing from the church’s experience with Christ and the Jewish worship of God.

The prayer of Acts 4 starts “like a liturgical prayer rather than a spontaneous expression.”<sup>23</sup> While it is tailored to the circumstances of Acts 3–4, the prayer operates within, not divorced from, liturgical and historical prayer patterns. Polhill connects Acts 4 with Isaiah 37.

More than that the whole form of the prayer has Old Testament precedents. Compare Hezekiah’s prayer in Isa 37:16–20, where the same elements appear: God was addressed as Lord and Creator, there followed a reference to the threat of Israel’s enemies, and the prayer concluded with a petition. It is in the petition that the major difference from the Christians’ prayer appears. Hezekiah prayed for deliverance. The Christians prayed for courage.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Martin and Evan Smith, eds. *Acts*, ACCSNT 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>21</sup> Oda Wischmeyer, “Prayer and Emotion in Mark 14:32–42 and Related Texts,” in *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions*, eds. Stefan C. Reif and Renate Egger-Wenzel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 336.

<sup>22</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 77.

<sup>23</sup> Pelikan, *Acts*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 148.

While some of the content is spontaneously provided, the overall framework of the Acts 4 prayer is historical and liturgical. God's people are praying in unity, even in harmony with prophets and kings of old.

Yet, the spontaneity of the prayer should not be overlooked. Yes, the beginning is more structured and formulaic, especially with the psalmic recitation. But none of the early congregants were convinced that the crisis had subsided, and the crisis sparked an immediate reaction in corporate prayer. The conclusion of the prayer reflects contextually specific information, as the Spirit led the early church into the spontaneity of prayer. Bloesch comments with Acts 2:42 in mind, "Prayer in the biblical perspective is spontaneous, though it may take structured forms.... True prayer, in the prophetic or biblical sense, bursts through all forms and techniques. This is because it has its basis in the Spirit of God, who cannot be encased in a sacramental box or a ritualistic formula."<sup>25</sup> Acts 4 portrays this balance: Prayer is both grounded in scriptural, historical patterns and "bursting" forth anew thanks to the Spirit's leadership in new challenges and contexts.

### 3.3. Togetherness

A striking feature of the Acts 4 prayer is the "togetherness" of its performance, originating from ὁμοθυμαδόν. In general, it is a flexible term. In Acts 2:1 and 2:46, location is at the forefront, as the believers were "all together in one place" and "attending the temple together." In Acts 8:6, togetherness of activity and disposition is in mind, as "the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip." In Acts 18:12, the word probably means united action with a leader, for while the "united attack" to Paul's ministry in Corinth was vast, it is unlikely that the opposition would not have an appointed leader for legal proceedings. Yet another text is especially relevant for our treatment of Acts 4.

One curious usage of ὁμοθυμαδόν is in Romans 15:6. Paul exhorts, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup> United and harmonious in Christ, the apostle envisions a Roman church worshipping God in unison—ἐν ἑνὶ στόματι, "with one mouth/voice." Correctly translating φρονεῖν as "to think," Moo says, "Paul prays specifically that God might give to the Roman Christians the ability 'to think the same thing,'" and this unity of thought leads to unity of action.<sup>27</sup> The meaning is evident: Speaking together in one voice is not to be taken literally, as if Paul envisioned the Roman church shouting the gospel message in unison throughout the imperial capital. Instead, it signifies that their union in Christ transcends their differences and gives them a united voice in glorifying God.

Considering the flexibility of ὁμοθυμαδόν, determining the exact connotation from Acts 4 is essential. Keener highlights the nuances of the prayer.

This passage reflects "free, spontaneous" prayer, as apparently often in early Christianity (cf. 1 Cor 14:26). Crying out with a single voice could refer to prayer in unison, in which case it would be inspired. This could resemble the common voice of the chorus in Greek

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<sup>25</sup> D. G. Bloesch, "Prayer," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 867.

<sup>26</sup> Emphasis supplied.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 871.

drama; such a chorus had to speak in unison to be intelligible.... One may think also of later synagogue liturgy, but it is unclear to what extent a liturgy existed in this period, and even less clear whether it was widely praying in unison. More problematic still, the prayer is too relevant to the events to be an earlier liturgical form simply recited together. Far more likely, it simply reflects the idiom for speaking in unanimity—that is, united in agreement (as implied ... elsewhere in Acts...)—rather than speech with identical words. (The assembly could have recited the psalm quotation together, however.)<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned, the possibility exists, though unlikely since Luke does not volunteer the information, that the Holy Spirit inspired the community to pray the same words in unison, but apart from such a dramatic option, it seems unlikely that the early church's liturgy was so developed that they had this prayer pre-prepared. The early church prayed together, but probably not in the literal sense of speaking simultaneously or in unison.<sup>29</sup>

Rather, the togetherness of Acts 4:24 means agreement. The use of ὁμοθυμαδὸν here conveys “shared passion or commitment.”<sup>30</sup> The word could also be rendered as a united “purpose/impulse.”<sup>31</sup> Keener rules out the option of the entire prayer being in unison.

Although choruses in Greek drama recited lines together, here “with one accord” (KJV, NASB) simply means “together, in unity” (the same word occurs in 1:14; 2:46; 5:12). This is not a unified liturgy as eventually became standard in synagogues; scholars do not even all agree that prayers were recited in unison in most Palestinian synagogues in this period. Instead, the text probably means simply that someone inspired by the Spirit led the prayer.<sup>32</sup>

Polhill adds, “Together they lifted their voices in praise to God. That they offered an occasional prayer of this nature in unison is unlikely. Luke was simply expressing that the whole community joined together in this prayer.”<sup>33</sup> Walton concurs, “It seems unlikely that Luke is portraying choral speech ... so we might paraphrase, ‘Those who heard lifted their voice in united concern to God.’”<sup>34</sup> What happened? Presumably, one person prayed. The people may have orally remembered Psalm 2 in unison. The leader interpreted the psalm in prayer and then presented the community's desire for perseverance in boldness. In this time of prayer, the community was of the same mind. And if “voices” was intended to be literal,

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<sup>28</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1166.

<sup>29</sup> Consider Exodus 19:8. The Septuagint reflects that the nation of Israel answered Moses “together” saying “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” The scene even ends with tremors in verse 18! Yet the format of the exchange is a covenant agreement, not exactly a prayer (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 261). While the tremors of Acts 4 remind us of Sinai, the discourses are specific to their location in redemptive history.

<sup>30</sup> Steve Walton, “Ὁμοθυμαδὸν in Acts: Co-location, Common Action or ‘Of One Heart and Mind’?” in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. Peter J. Williams, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 105.

<sup>31</sup> BDAG 706, s.v. “ὁμοθυμαδὸν.”

<sup>32</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 329.

<sup>33</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 148.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Walton, “Ὁμοθυμαδὸν in Acts,” 102.

it could refer to the recitation of Psalm 2. Jewish background, early liturgy, and togetherness all played a part in the Acts 4 prayer, and it led to a unique prayer that was orderly and psalmic yet tailored to the immediate circumstances.

#### *4. The Contrast Between Simultaneous Prayer and the Acts 4 Prayer*

The overlap between the practice of simultaneous prayer and the corporate prayer of the early church is straightforward. First, both cases express physical words to communicate with God, assuming upon his interest in human affairs and his attribute of omnipresence. Second, both practices require a corporate gathering of some kind. Third, intercessors in both situations share biblical language for prayer. But beyond those commonalities, little overlap persists.

The question remains concerning whether the Acts 4 prayer supports simultaneous prayer practices. While not amounting to an explicit repudiation of simultaneous prayer as a practice, it is difficult to overlook the glaring differences. Let us consider a few.

First, simultaneous prayer is often, though not always, deliverance and “breakthrough” oriented. Other passages of Scripture retell prayers of deliverance and demonstrate the validity of seeking God’s provision (e.g., Ps 91). But Acts 4 shares how the early church prayed for perseverance, seeking to remain bold in the face of persistent opposition. Content points us away from using Acts 4 as a support for simultaneous prayer.

Second, simultaneous prayer requires the voices of many believers praying different prayers at the same time. But while Acts 4:24 says that “they lifted their voices together,” this statement likely symbolizes their agreement in prayer or the possible recitation of Psalm 2:1–2 in unison. And in contrast to the offering of numerous prayers at the same time, Luke records only one prayer. Simultaneous prayer does not find an ally here.

Third, simultaneous prayer relies upon the individual’s personal prayer liturgy and vocabulary. While perhaps topically directed by a leader (e.g., “Everyone, pray for the poor”) every individual ultimately prays according to their historical practice and previous experiences. But in Acts 4, the church possesses a shared framework for a prayer liturgy, perhaps including the communal memorization of Psalm 2:1–2.

The contrast is stark. As it is practiced around the world today, simultaneous prayer does not follow the model in Acts 4. While the descriptions may seem similar, this prayer of the early church is distinct, having more in common with a planned time of leader-led corporate prayer.

#### *5. The Value of Retaining the Apostolic Example in Corporate Prayer*

Seeking to reform the use of prayer in the church congregation, Robert Williamson complains, “Many prayers heard in church are not public prayers at all. They are merely private prayers which are prayed in public.”<sup>35</sup> In many ways, simultaneous prayer exacerbates this malady. Instead of corporate prayer uniting the community and inculcating biblical prayer habits, the elevation of simultaneous prayer at the expense of corporate prayer can perpetuate poor prayer practices.

Yes, simultaneous prayer does encourage each member of the community to pray, an important concern in many places where church members exalt pastors as the “spiritual elite” with unique access

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<sup>35</sup> Robert L. Williamson, *Effective Public Prayer* (Nashville: Broadman, 1960), 18.

to God. But unless a believer regularly hears and participates in corporate prayer under godly leaders, the danger of drifting toward unhealthy habits persists. Consider the same argument applied to Corinth! Simultaneous prophesying could encourage prophecy in the church. Yet, in order that all may learn and participate together, taking turns leads to a peaceful service (1 Cor 14:26–33). “Let all things be done for building up.”

The apostolic example in Acts 4:24–30 is our path forward. First, let the church unite in prayer by remembering the Psalms together. Sadly, in many Christian communities, the wisdom of the Psalms is absent from worship services. When a neglect of the Psalms prevails, the church has effectively alienated herself from the prayers of the saints throughout the Old and New Testaments. Let the church militant raise her voice in unity with the church triumphant!

Second, let the church draw from the Old Testament patterns of prayer, exalting our “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” Corporate Christian prayer should be distinct from the informality and individuality of private prayer. The wealth of biblical prayer is an easy bridge to unite our times of corporate prayer, instead of dividing through overly personalized prayer practices.

Third, let the church embrace the sovereign purposes of God and pray with his will in mind. The early Christians carefully weighed the content of their corporate prayers. Instead of instinctively reacting to escape persecution, they understood difficulty and opposition’s role in God’s purposes. Our congregational prayer times are precisely when we should sensitively reflect upon God’s plans for the church and resubmit to furthering his glory among the nations, even through suffering.

Unless simultaneous prayer is highly regulated, it fails to rise to the example of corporate prayer in Acts 4:23–31. Psalms, Old Testament patterns, and an emphasis on the sovereign purposes of God may occasionally occur, but ultimately, simultaneous prayer does not reach the same quality of unity. While we cannot absolutely invalidate simultaneous prayer or how God has worked through it, let us pursue the apostolic example as we gather in prayer, that we may attain the fullness of unity.

# Two Types of Work: Work for the Lord and Work for the Kingdom of God

— Peter Orr —

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**Abstract:** This article explores Colossians, a letter in which Paul says a considerable amount about work. It suggests that Paul speaks about two different types of work—“work for the Lord” (3:23–24) and “work for the kingdom” (4:11)—and that this distinction provides a paradigm for thinking about the difference between “ministry” and “non-ministry” work. While Paul affirms the theological and eschatological value of all work that Christians do, he nevertheless can make a distinction between different types of work in their relationship to the kingdom of God.

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Evangelical theology has moved away from making value distinctions between “Christian” work (connected to the church and the proclamation of the gospel) and “secular” work (all other good but “non-spiritual” labor). There is a recognition that all work done by a Christian can and should be done for God’s glory. Whereas earlier generations of evangelicals lacked material go help them navigate life as a Christian at work, we are now well served by a number of very helpful books.<sup>1</sup>

My aim in this article is not to return to the unbiblical idea that only gospel related work has any eternal value. However, I want to examine one of Paul’s letters in which he says a surprising amount about work and in which he, I think, provides a paradigm for thinking about the distinction between two different types of work. In short, we will see that while Paul does affirm the theological *and* eschatological value of *all* work that Christians do, he nevertheless also distinguishes between two different types of work.

This distinction is not sacred/secular but general/specific. Paul affirms that all work has intrinsic theological value before God, but that not all work is the same in relation to the *kingdom* of God. We will see that all work done by a Christian can and should be done *to God*, only some work is done *for the kingdom of God*. This distinction helps us to be clear that there *is* a distinction between, for want of a better word, “ministry” and “non-ministry” work. That is, while all work done by a Christian is

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Plan for the World* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work: How the Gospel Gives New Purpose and Meaning to Our Jobs*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018); Daniel M. Doriani, *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019).



glorifying to God and has intrinsic value, and even, as we will see, intrinsic *eschatological* value, not all work is *kingdom* work. This latter category is a narrower, distinct type of work.

### 1. Work in Colossians: A Survey

The letter of Colossians contains a high frequency of words related to “work.” Following his greeting (1:1–2) and opening thanksgiving (1:3–8), Paul recounts his prayer for the Colossians. The goal of Paul’s prayer in 1:9–10 is that the Colossian Christians be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, that they might bear fruit “in every good work” (ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ).<sup>2</sup> His description of their pre-Christian state is that they were “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil works [ἔργοις]” (1:21).<sup>3</sup> An essential difference, then, between the Christian and the non-Christian is the character of the “works” they do (good or evil). Further, the faith of the Christian is directed to the God who has raised them to new life by his “powerful working [ἐνέργεια]” (2:12).<sup>4</sup> The whole of the Christian life is encapsulated when Paul says, “whatever you do, in word or work [ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ],”<sup>5</sup> all of it is to be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17).

Paul uses “work” language to refer to his own ministry of proclaiming Christ, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (1:28). This is the end for which he “toil[s] struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within” Paul (1:29). Although the language of “toil” (κοπιῶ) can refer to any kind of work,<sup>6</sup> it is frequently used by Paul, as here, to refer to the work of ministry.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Paul’s language of “struggling” (ἀγωνίζομαι) was originally used in an athletic context but came to mean “contend” or “fight” in a more general sense. As Moo suggests, the word combined here with “toil” “likely refers to the general work of ministry: preaching the gospel, admonishing converts, resisting false teachers.”<sup>8</sup> He notes that only here and

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV. The meaning of πᾶς here is probably “every kind of,” so Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 97.

<sup>3</sup> ESV adjusted. It is possible that the two dative expressions (τῇ διανοίᾳ and ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς) both express “means”—that is, they were at enmity with God “by means” of their mind and “by means” of their evil deeds. So G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 113; Moo, *Colossians*, 140.

<sup>4</sup> To be more specific, Beale suggests that we should understand that the resurrection came about by “faith in the working of God” understanding τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ as an objective genitive (the object of faith). He discusses the possibility that the genitive is subjective “faith by God’s working”—that is, God has produced their faith by his activity. However, the genitive case following πίστις in Paul’s writings “typically describes the object of faith and not its source,” according to Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 193.

<sup>5</sup> ESV adjusted. So Paul Foster, *Colossians*, BNTC (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 364; cf. Moo, *Colossians*, 291.

<sup>6</sup> Moo (*Colossians*, 162) references the following texts: Luke 5:5; 1 Cor 4:12; Eph 4:28; 2 Tim 2:6; cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 126.

<sup>7</sup> Moo (*Colossians*, 162) notes Rom 16:6, 12; 1 Cor 15:10; 16:16; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 5:17.

<sup>8</sup> Moo, *Colossians*, 162.

in 1 Timothy 4:10 are both words used together “to denote his apostolic ministry, and it is surely no coincidence that both contexts deal with false teaching.”<sup>9</sup>

The language of “toil” seems to be an expansion of the nature of Paul’s suffering in verse 24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”<sup>10</sup> However, Paul is very quick to emphasize<sup>11</sup> that his “struggle for his readers is not rooted in his own ability but in God’s power working through him.”<sup>12</sup> That is, he is “struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει; 1:29). Similarly, he describes Epaphras as always “struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (4:12). As such, Paul tells the Corinthians that Epaphras has “worked hard [ἔχει πόνον] for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis” (4:13). He uses the same language in the context of his instruction to slaves, telling them that “whatever they do they are to work [ἐργάζομαι] heartily” (3:23).

Work language then is applied to everything that a Christian might do—from the good “deeds” done because they are a Christian, to the labor they do because they live in the world through to specific ministry labor—whether done by Paul or others.

## 2. Work in Colossians: A Distinction

However, if we examine two verses more closely, we can see an important distinction emerge. In 3:23 when he tells the Colossians<sup>13</sup> that “whatever” they do, they are to “work heartily” (ἐκ ψυχῆς),<sup>14</sup> the rationale is that this is to be done “as for the Lord and not for men” (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις). As such, this verse is a “particular application” of 3:17: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”<sup>15</sup> We will examine the details of this verse below, but at this stage we can note that all work is to be done “for the Lord”—it has theological significance in other words. Further, it also has *eschatological* significance since, as Paul tells them, it is “from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (3:24).

In 4:10–11, Paul gives greetings to the Colossians from Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus (“who is called Justus”). He then identifies these as “the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:11). We will examine below what Paul means

<sup>9</sup> Moo, *Colossians*, 162.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 153.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek of 1:29 is “dense with synonym and repetition for emphasis,” according to Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 204 n. 564.

<sup>12</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 153, who notes the parallel with 1 Corinthians 15:10 to underline the fact that “Paul’s ministry is not performed by a synergistic activity involving his own independent contribution together with the help of God’s grace.”

<sup>13</sup> For a rationale for widening the applicability of this to believers more generally, see David Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 274.

<sup>14</sup> Soul here is a stylistic synonym for “heart” used in the previous verse—“both denote the correct inner attitude to be displayed by slaves” (Foster, *Colossians*, 388).

<sup>15</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 323.

by his restriction “the only men of the circumcision,” but at this stage it is enough to note the distinction between work “for the Lord” (3:23) and “work for the kingdom of God” (4:11).

Here, then, is a basic distinction we can make. *All* work is “for the Lord.” Whatever you are doing, you are “serving the Lord Christ” (3:23–24). And *all* work has eschatological significance since work carried out faithfully like this will lead to receiving and inheritance as a reward (3:24). However, only *some* work is work “for the kingdom of God” (4:11).

The rest of this article examines this distinction in more detail and draws some practical implications.

### 3. Work for the Lord

What we have in Colossians 3 is Paul’s clear teaching that *all* work has theological significance if it is done “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17). Such work, even the work of a slave, can be done with the knowledge that “from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” since one is “serving the Lord Christ” (3:24).

What does Paul mean when he says in 3:24 that work is to be done “as for the Lord and not for men” (ὥς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις)? What is the nature of the “as” (ὥς) here? Does he mean they are to think of themselves “as if they were working for the Lord” (even though they are not—they are working for an earthly master)? Or does he mean that they are to work in a way that reflects the reality that they are, ultimately, working “for the Lord”? Either sense is within the scope of meaning of the particle ὥς.

The use of ὥς in this verse is described in BDAG entry 3: “marker introducing the perspective from which a pers[on], thing, or activity is viewed or understood as to character, function, or role, *as*.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, ὥς explains the perspective through which they are to view their work—“to the Lord.” However, the particle can express a real or unreal perspective. A few examples illustrate this. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:1, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ [ὥς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ] and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Here the Corinthians are to regard Paul and his colleagues in a particular way: “as servants of Christ,” which they really are. Similarly, in Colossians 3:12, Paul commands the believers, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones [ὥς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ], holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” They are to clothe themselves in light of their *true* identity—“God’s chosen ones.” However, sometimes the comparison is “unreal.” So, in 2 Corinthians 6:8 Paul laments that he and his colleagues “are treated as impostors [ὥς πλάνοι], and yet are true.” They are being treated *as if* they are impostors, which they are not. Similarly, in Colossians 2:20 he tells them: “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world [ὥς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ], do you submit to regulations.” Spiritually the Colossians are dead to the elemental forces of the world, but they are living *as if* they are alive to them (which they are not).

We see the same variety in the precise construction that we have here in Colossians 3:23: an imperative qualified by a phrase introduced by ὥς. In 1 Timothy 5:1 Paul tells Timothy “not to rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father” (ὥς πατέρα)—that is, as if he were a father. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Paul tells the church to not associate with the congregation member who ignores what Paul says so that they might feel ashamed. In the next verse he qualifies this by telling them not to regard this recalcitrant brother “as an enemy” (ὥς ἐχθρόν). Again, the idea is that they are not to regard him *as if* he were an enemy (which he is not). However, Paul immediately adds that they are to “warn him as a brother” (ὥς ἀδελφόν). Here we see the qualification reflecting reality—this man *is* a brother

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<sup>16</sup> BDAG 1104.

(in Christ) and so he is to be warned *as* a brother. Similarly, James tells his readers that they are to “speak and so act as [ὥς] those who are to be judged under the law of liberty” (Jas 2:12). They *are* going to be judged by the law of liberty, and so they are to act in line with that reality.

So, what is the sense of ὥς in Colossians 3:23? Does Paul mean, “the right way to work for your earthly master is *as if* you were working for the Lord”; or is he saying, “work for your earthly master understanding the reality that you are, in fact, working for the Lord”? Either is possible. However, given the statement in 3:24 where Paul tells the slaves that they are enslaved to Christ (τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε),<sup>17</sup> when he tells them to work ὥς τῷ κυρίῳ, it would seem that this reflects reality. Though they are working for a human master, even in doing so they are *actually* working for the Lord.

Paul continues in the following verse to the effect that the motivation for their working for the Lord is that they know<sup>18</sup> that they “will receive the inheritance [κληρονομία] as your reward.” In the first century world into which Paul was writing, slaves did not receive inheritances (cf. Gal 4:7; Rom 8:15–17). Although the inheritance in view here is the *spiritual reward*<sup>19</sup> for their faithful labor for Christ, this language continues to give dignity to the labor of the Christian slave.

What inheritance does Paul have in mind? He has already used the language of inheritance (using the related Greek word κληρος) in 1:12 when he gave thanks to the Father who had “qualified” the Colossians “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” The nature of this inheritance is expanded in the next verse when Paul describes how God has “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13). Reading the two verses together, the inheritance is participation in the kingdom. This connection between inheritance and kingdom is seen elsewhere in Paul’s letters (e.g., 1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Eph 5:5). Understanding the inheritance as the kingdom means that the slaves who work faithfully (for the Lord), will inherit the kingdom as a reward for their labor. This is not “salvation by works,” but a dignifying of their labor. Done in faithfulness it ends in the kingdom of God even if, on earth, slaves would have no inheritance.

Paul finishes 3:24 with what most English translations render as a statement: “You are serving the Lord Christ” (ESV; cf. NIV; CSB; RSV; NASB; KJV; NKJV). However, the NET Bible agrees with some commentators<sup>20</sup> that the verb δουλεύετε should be understood as an imperative: “Serve the Lord Christ.” In either case, the work that the slave does work for an earthly master which would receive no earthly inheritance or reward, is faithfully rewarded by the Lord whom they are serving—they will inherit the kingdom.

Any work, even work done by a first century slave, is work of deep significance. It has *theological* value. It is work done “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17) and it is done “for the Lord” (3:23) with the worker “serving the Lord Christ” (3:24). It has *eschatological* value since the one who works faithfully this way will receive an inheritance from the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> It may be that this is an imperative, an interpretation I consider below.

<sup>18</sup> Understanding the εἰδότες as a causal participle with Paul, *Colossians*, 274.

<sup>19</sup> That the inheritance is the reward (i.e., understanding the genitive to be epexegetical with Moo, *Colossians*, 313, and Pao, *Colossians*, 274).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Pao, *Colossians*, 275–76. McKnight (*Colossians*, 363) is unsure, while Beale (*Colossians*, 332) argues that an indicative is to be understood.

#### 4. Work for the Kingdom of God

Turning to 4:10–11, Paul tells the Colossians that Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus (called Justus) “are the only men of the circumcision among [Paul’s] fellow workers for [εἰς] the kingdom of God” (4:11). In this section we will examine a number of aspects in this verse.

##### 4.1. For the Kingdom or in the Kingdom?

Most modern commentators render the phrase εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ as “for the kingdom of God” indicating that Paul’s co-workers are laboring with him to advance or “bring about” the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, McKnight understands Paul to be commending his co-workers for working to “to spread the redemptive reign of God in Christ by forming churches throughout the Roman Empire.”<sup>22</sup> However, recently Paul Foster has suggested a different understanding of the preposition εἰς in 4:11: these co-workers are “in” the kingdom of God. He argues that given Paul’s description of the kingdom in 1:13 where believers are described as having been transferred into (εἰς) “the kingdom of his beloved son,” a “spatial” meaning is more likely in 4:11. As such, Foster suggests, the verse is stating that “the co-workers, like Paul, are those who now ultimately exist in the sphere of God’s rule.”<sup>23</sup>

Although to an extent true of any word in any language, the particular meaning of a preposition in Greek is especially determined by its context. The phrase εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν is common in the Gospels and it is usually preceded by a verb of motion, particularly “to enter” (εἰσερχομαι).<sup>24</sup> However, a brief survey of the NT’s use of εἰς in the context of “work” language (ἐργάζομαι and cognates; κοπιᾶω) shows that εἰς is used to connect the work to the goal or end of the work. So, for example, in Colossians 1:28 Paul describes his ministry as proclaiming Christ and “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” He then adds “for [εἰς] this I toil [κοπιῶ], struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (1:29). The preposition εἰς indicates the goal of his labor. This is consistent across the NT. In Romans 8:28, Paul states that “for those who love God all things work together for [εἰς] good.” In Romans 16:6, Paul asks the believers to “Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you” (ἐκοπίασεν εἰς ὑμᾶς). In Galatians 4:11, Paul expresses his fear that he “may have labored over you [κεκοπίᾳ εἰς ὑμᾶς] in vain.” In 2 Corinthians 5:4, Paul reflects on the future bodily resurrection. He continues in the next verse that “he who has prepared [κατεργασάμενος] us for [εἰς] this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (5:5). Three chapters later he describes Titus as his “partner and fellow worker [συνεργός] for [εἰς] your benefit” (8:23). In Ephesians 4:11–12, Paul reflects on how God gave “apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers” to equip God’s people “for [εἰς] the work of ministry, for [εἰς] building up the body of Christ.” In 1 Timothy 4 Paul reflects on the value of godliness which “is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (4:8). This shapes his ministry as he states “to this end [εἰς τοῦτο] we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (4:10). John, as he writes to Gaius commends him that “it is a

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<sup>21</sup> So, for example, Moo, *Colossians*, 343; Dunn, *Colossians*, 279.

<sup>22</sup> McKnight, *Colossians*, 391.

<sup>23</sup> Foster, *Colossians*, 427.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 5:20, 7:21, 18:3, 19:23, 19:24; Mark 9:47, 10:23, 10:24, 10:25; Luke 18:25; John 3:5; Acts 14:22. Cf. εἰσπορεύομαι (Luke 18:24); ἔρχομαι (Luke 23:42); προάγω (Matthew 21:31).

faithful thing you do in all your efforts [ὃ ἐν ἐργασίᾳ] for [εἰς] these brothers, strangers as they are” (3 John 5).

The pattern across the NT then is that εἰς is used with “work” language to indicate the goal or the purpose of the work. We will examine more fully what Paul means by working “for the kingdom” below, but before doing we will examine the reference to his co-workers.

#### 4.2. Co-workers

This understanding of εἰς is confirmed when we examine the use of the term “co-worker” or “fellow worker” (συνεργός). Paul does not use the word συνεργός very frequently. However, in Romans 16 he asks the church at Rome to greet “Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in [ἐν] Christ Jesus” and “Urbanus, our fellow worker in [ἐν] Christ” (16:3, 9). In 2 Corinthians 1:24 Paul describes himself and his colleagues as “co-workers ... for your joy,”<sup>25</sup> the latter phrase expressed with the genitive (τῆς χαρᾶς ὑμῶν). In 2 Corinthians 8:23 he speaks of Titus as his partner and co-worker “for your benefit” (εἰς ὑμᾶς). In 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Paul describes Timothy as “our brother and God’s co-worker in [ἐν] the gospel of Christ.” Admittedly, we are not dealing with a large number of texts but the tendency seems to be to use ἐν when he wishes to speak of the position of his co-workers “in Christ” and to use the genitive or εἰς when he wishes to express the purpose to which the co-workers labor. Again, this confirms the idea that Paul is describing his co-workers as people who are working with him to somehow further the kingdom of God.

#### 4.3. Paul’s Only Co-workers?

What is significant is that Paul views only a certain number of people as “workers for the kingdom” (οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοί) in Colossians 4:11. However, it is not altogether straightforward to identify what Paul means. Three interpretations are generally offered for οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς οὗτοι μόνοι συνεργοί. The first understands Paul to be contrasting his *Jewish* co-workers (Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus) with his *Gentile* co-workers, as in the ESV rendering: “These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers.” The second interpretation understands Paul to be contrasting his Jewish co-workers with other Jews, as reflected in the CSB: “These alone of the circumcision are my co-workers for the kingdom of God.” The third interpretation understands Paul to be saying: “these Jewish men, these are my only co-workers.”<sup>26</sup> The third option is sometimes qualified so that Paul is saying “these are the only co-workers *presently* with me.”<sup>27</sup> However, even with this qualification it is frequently ruled out because in the context, Paul “certainly seems to present Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (vv. 12–14) as three other co-workers who are with him (and he does so explicitly in Phlm. 24).”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> My translation.

<sup>26</sup> For more options, see Moo, *Colossians*, 341. A recent significant option has been expressed by Lionel Windsor. He suggests the possibility that Colossians 4:10–11 may reflect “the possibility that Israel’s special place in the apostolic mission is in the background here,” as Paul’s language echoes the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 60; 16:16). See Lionel Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 222. Whether or not this is correct this does not change the overall thrust of my argument that “work for the kingdom” is being used to refer to *specific* gospel related work.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, *Colossians*, 279.

<sup>28</sup> Moo, *Colossians*, 341.

Although the second interpretation is gaining popularity,<sup>29</sup> most commentators and English versions opt for the first interpretation implying that these men were the only Jews among Paul's co-workers for the kingdom.<sup>30</sup> In any case, Paul cannot be saying that these three men are not the only Jewish *Christians*. No, the restriction comes with respect to their work for the kingdom of God. In short, for Paul, not everyone can be described as a "co-worker" for the kingdom.

### 4.4. Working for the Kingdom

What does Paul mean that these are his co-workers for the kingdom of God (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ)? Paul has already spoken of God delivering people "from the domain of darkness" and transferring them to "the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13).<sup>31</sup> This is experienced in practice in terms of "redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:14).

Paul does not specify what working "for the kingdom" entails, but if we read 4:11 in light of 1:13–14 it would seem that it involves work that brings people into the kingdom—that is, work that is connected to the proclamation of the Gospel. Acts speaks about Paul *proclaiming* the kingdom (Acts 20:25; 28:31; cf. 19:8; 28:23). Paul can also speak about God *calling* people into his kingdom (1 Thess 2:12; cf. the appearance of the kingdom as a motivation for preaching the word in 2 Timothy 4:1).

These fellow-workers are involved in the work of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. This is not necessarily their only occupation any more than it was always Paul's own occupation (tent-making, according to Acts 18:3; cf. 1 Cor 4:12), but they engaged together in the labor of the proclamation of the gospel to an extent that they could be identified as co-workers with Paul "for the kingdom."

### 4.5. Workers for the Kingdom of God: All Christians?

When Paul identifies only these three men as his Jewish co-workers for the kingdom of God, does that mean that only these men were working for the kingdom of God?

To help answer this question, we first need to return to Paul's first reference to work in his prayer in Colossians 1:9–10. Paul describes his constant prayer that these believers "may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." G. K. Beale has helpfully shown that despite common consensus,<sup>32</sup> the letter to the Colossians draws deeply on the Old Testament. For 1:9–10, he observes the parallels with Exodus 31:3; 35:31–32 and 1 Kings 7:14.<sup>33</sup> He notes that these are the only OT texts which combine the language of "Spirit" and "filling" with the language of "wisdom and understanding" and "knowledge." In each case "the effect of the filling [is] that of doing God's will in 'every good work' (Exod. 31:3; 35:31–32; 1 Kings 7:14)."<sup>34</sup> The specific work mentioned is either the building of the tabernacle (Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus) or the temple

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<sup>29</sup> As shown by its adoption in the CSB.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. NIV: "These are the only Jews among my co-workers."

<sup>31</sup> On the interchangeability of kingdom of Son and kingdom of God, see Dunn, *Colossians*, 280.

<sup>32</sup> See G. K. Beale, "The Old Testament in Colossians: A Response to Paul Foster," *JSNT* 41 (2018): 1–14. See also the work of Beale's former student Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, reprint ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 55; Isaiah 11:2–3 is another possible parallel.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 55.

(Solomon in 1 Kings). Thus, the reference to “every good work” in Colossians 1:10 with its potential allusion to tabernacle/temple building suggests that Paul is praying that the Colossian believers might take their part in “building up the body of Christ,” “the new spiritual temple.”<sup>35</sup> Broadly understood, we can view this as a prayer that all of the Christians in Colossae do work that is equivalent to “work for the kingdom,” that which advances the cause of the gospel of the kingdom.

We see a similar dynamic in 1 Corinthians and the language of the “work of the Lord.” I have elsewhere sought to demonstrate that the “work of the Lord” is specific “gospel” related work.<sup>36</sup> In 15:58, Paul calls on every Christian to be “abounding in the work of the Lord.” Every Christian, then, is to give themselves (as they are able) to “gospel work.” However, in the very next chapter Paul identifies a group of Christians including “the household of Stephanas” who have “devoted themselves to the service of the saints” (16:15). This work and service, though, seems to be of a different order than that of every Christian envisioned in 1 Corinthians 15:58, since the Corinthians are told to “be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer” (16:16). In other words, every Christian is to do the “work of the Lord,” but there are some whose activity is more closely bound up with this work so that they can be identified as a “worker.” We can speak—perhaps somewhat anachronistically—of those in full-time ministry (some Christians) and those who do ministry (every Christian).

Returning to the language of Colossians, we can say that not every Christian is a “worker” for the kingdom of God (4:11). There were many Jewish Christians but only Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus were Paul’s Jewish “co-workers” for the kingdom. However, every Christian can do fruitful work for the kingdom of God (1:10). We can state it as follows: every Christian can do kingdom related work (1:9–10); some Christians’ activity is so dominated by this type of work that they can be described as “(co-) workers for the kingdom of God” (4:11); those Christians whose time is dominated by other activity, such as slaves who still work “for the Lord” (3:23) even though their service of their earthly masters is not “work for the kingdom” per se.

### 5. Conclusions and Implications

There is a lack of precision with regard to this distinction in popular writing on work. Often the distinction between work done “for the king” is collapsed into work done “for the kingdom.” For example, Ben Witherington states this about Christians working in general:

Certainly one of the most miserable things a human can experience is the feeling of not knowing what she ought to be *doing* with her life. To avoid this feeling, we must grasp that our God-given purpose has a goal, a *telos*, to use the Greek term, not merely a terminus, and it *most certainly involves us working, indeed working hard, for the Kingdom*.<sup>37</sup>

He expresses his point even more directly:

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<sup>35</sup> Beale, *Colossians*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Orr, “Abounding in the Work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58): Everything We Do as Christians or Specific Gospel Work?,” *Themelios* 38 (2013): 205–14.

<sup>37</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 9, emphasis original.



The truth is that even when work seems like drudgery, if it is done God's glory it is good in character, and if it is done for the edification of others it is at the very least divine drudgery, not mere toil, not mere activity. It has meaning, purpose, direction. It is Kingdom-bringing.<sup>38</sup>

As such, Witherington argues, "The sacred-versus-secular dichotomy doesn't work when it comes to defining Christian work. Any work that is good and godly, any work worth doing, can be done to the glory of God and for the help of humankind. And while we are at it, any such work is full-time ministry."<sup>39</sup>

This thinking is common. So, in his foreword to Daniel Doriani's book *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*, Brian Chapell suggests that work "is not merely about making a living while avoiding sin; it is about extending the kingdom rule of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, in an earlier work Miroslav Volf suggests that as Christians "do their mundane work, the Spirit enables them to cooperate with God in the kingdom of God that 'completes creation and renews heaven and earth.'"<sup>41</sup>

Ken Costa argues as follows:

The kingdom of God is "the sphere of God's goodness" in the world. We are called to advance that kingdom, sharing the "sphere of goodness" and extending it as we operate with God's values. Our actions at work have the potential to advance the kingdom of God and his "sphere of goodness," or to hinder it.<sup>42</sup>

When we declare truth even in small measures, the kingdom of God is advanced. This can be true when we draft documents, sell products or mark exams—indeed in any activity we do in our working day.<sup>43</sup>

Consider a final example from Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch: "We partner with God in the redemption of our world.... We do extend the kingdom of God in daily affairs and activities and actions done in the name of Jesus."<sup>44</sup>

The sentiments behind these quotations are entirely commendable. They reflect a right desire to remind Christians that their work has dignity, that it is not a waste of time. However, I think these writers are trying to find this dignity in the wrong place—namely the kingdom of God. Paul sees work for the kingdom of God as *specific* work.

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<sup>38</sup> Witherington, *Work*, 21. Witherington does acknowledge that "we need to be wise enough to see the difference between work of temporal and of enduring value" and that, for example, it would not be the best use of his time to mow his grass if it meant he neglected his "higher calling to write and teach and preach" (*Work*, 90).

<sup>39</sup> Witherington, *Work*, 126.

<sup>40</sup> Brian Chapell, foreword to Doriani, *Work*, xi. Doriani himself is more circumspect on this issue: "We show that Christ, the King, has come and that his kingdom has arrived, even in our work, in every realm of life" (*Work*, 186).

<sup>41</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115, citing Jürgen Moltmann, "The Right to Work," in *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Ken Costa, *God at Work: Living Every Day with Purpose* (London: Continuum, 2007), 28.

<sup>43</sup> Costa, *God at Work*, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 146.

What I hope this study has shown is that Paul can think about work in two ways: there is a general sense in which *all* work that a Christian does is done *to the Lord* and there is a more specific, narrow sense in which work can be done *for the kingdom of God*. All work that a Christian does has value—it is *theologically* significant (it is done *to the Lord*) and it is *eschatologically* significant (it results in an inheritance). However, this does not mean all work is *kingdom* work. This is a narrower range of activity which is expressly focused on the extension of the kingdom.

I think confusion has come when Christians who have rightly wanted to affirm the value of all work that Christians do have done so by attributing the *wrong* type of eschatological significance to work<sup>45</sup> or by suggesting that all work that Christians do is *kingdom* work. What we have seen in Colossians is that Paul affirms the *value* of all work but can still *distinguish* different types of work—not all work is *kingdom* work.

In this article I have argued that work “for the kingdom” is specific so that only certain Jewish men can be described as having the time to devote to it so that they can be designated “co- workers for the kingdom” (4:11). I have also argued that 1:9–10 hints that every Christian can be involved in this type of work. However, even their other activity which is not directly “work for the kingdom” is still of theological and eschatological value (3:23–24)—it is “for the Lord,” and it results in an inheritance.

The language of “sacred” and “secular” work is ultimately not helpful. Because a Christian is sanctified, all legitimate work they do is sacred. However, perhaps with Paul, we can and should distinguish work done “for the Lord” and work done “for the kingdom.”

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<sup>45</sup> As argued in Orr, “Abounding in the Work of the Lord,” 205–14.

# John Calvin's Eucharistic Theology: A Pentecostal Analysis

— Geoffrey Butler —

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**Abstract:** Within the Reformed tradition John Calvin has previously earned the label “Theologian of the Holy Spirit,” with the Lord’s Supper standing out as one aspect of his theology which places a particularly heavy emphasis on the Spirit’s activity. Despite his robust pneumatology, however, Pentecostal engagement with Calvin remains quite limited on this matter, despite the young movement’s insistent desire to highlight the Holy Spirit’s work. This paper, therefore, addresses this question by discussing the historical context in which Calvin lived and outlining his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. It discusses what makes Calvin’s position unique, and how his robustly pneumatological position may help Pentecostals recover the sacramental roots of their own movement and contribute to the development of a truly Spirit-filled theology of the Eucharist.

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Few doctrines have evoked more passionate debate than the Lord’s Supper; while virtually all Christian traditions have a theology of the Eucharist, intense debate persists over its meaning, nature, and proper administration. During Reformation era, one only need look at the polemical interactions of Martin Luther, not only with the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>1</sup> but even with other Protestants over the presence of Christ in the Supper to get a sense of this tension.<sup>2</sup> In his treatise against the Zwinglian position, he labels it a heresy concocted by Satan, claiming that its proponents had made a mockery of the sacrament and were therefore responsible for the ongoing division within Protestantism.<sup>3</sup> It was in this highly polarized environment that John Calvin articulated his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, which represented a mediating path between Luther and Zwingli.<sup>4</sup> For Calvin, the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church-Part I,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> See Amy Nelson Burnett, ed., “That These Words of Christ, ‘This Is My Body,’ etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527,” in *The Annotated Luther: Volume 3, Church and Sacraments*, ed. Paul W. Robinson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 163–274.

<sup>3</sup> Burnett, “That These Words of Christ,” 170–79.

<sup>4</sup> See Anthony N. S. Lane, “Was Calvin a Crypto-Zwinglian?” in *Adaptations of Calvinism in Reformation Europe: Essays in Honour of Brian G. Armstrong*, ed. Mack P. Holt, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History

Christ in the Supper is not physical, but is nevertheless true; his body remains in heaven, yet through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, his followers are united with him and partake of his body and blood.<sup>5</sup> As John Hesselink explains, the Spirit “unites that which is separated by time and space ... and in the action of the sacrament feeds the believer with the flesh and blood of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> He is really present, albeit in a spiritual sense, which Calvin declared a mystery beyond comprehension.

That Calvin describes Christ’s presence as beyond the understanding of humanity was not lost on many later Reformed theologians, some of whom flatly rejected Calvin’s position as overly mystical, incomprehensible even.<sup>7</sup> While this element of mystery has made some Reformed evangelicals skeptical, the emphasis Calvin places on the Spirit may prove relevant to a contemporary discussion in a different subset of evangelicalism,<sup>8</sup> the Supper in Pentecostal theology. Most classical Pentecostal bodies have historically held to a strictly memorial view of the Supper. Stanley Horton and William Menzies, both of the Assemblies of God USA, describe communion as “commemorative,” explicitly denying transubstantiation as well as Protestant views of real/true presence.<sup>9</sup> Yet, given the highly pneumatological emphasis that permeates Calvin’s understanding, a strong case can be made that he is solid resource to whom Pentecostals should look in further developing their theology of the Lord’s Supper. As Julie Canlis asserts, “The radical—even watershed—role that Calvin gave to the Spirit in the Lord’s Supper cannot be overstated,”<sup>10</sup> an assessment that would be true of Pentecostal theology more broadly. This paper will therefore outline Calvin’s theology of the sacrament, detailing the historical context in which his position developed. It will also detail the alternatives within the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions that Calvin rejected, and how his pneumatology played a key role. Finally, it will analyze the ways in which his theology of communion holds the potential to contribute to the development of a more pneumatologically robust theology of the Lord’s Supper within the Pentecostal tradition. While Calvin has attracted little attention from Pentecostals as a dialogue partner thus far, common ground on this topic might encourage the movement toward sustained interaction with this “theologian of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup>

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(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 21–24.

<sup>5</sup> Henri A. G. Blocher, “Calvin on the Lord’s Supper: Revisiting an Intriguing Diversity, Part 2,” *WTJ* 76 (2014), 416–17.

<sup>6</sup> John I. Hesselink, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin’s Doctrine of the Sacraments,” *AcT* 3 (2002): 66.

<sup>7</sup> Blocher, “Calvin on the Lord’s Supper,” 415.

<sup>8</sup> Engaging Calvin on this point may remind Pentecostals and other evangelicals of their common roots; as Robert Menzies notes, “At its heart, the Pentecostal movement is not Spirit-centered, but rather Christ centered. The work of the Spirit, as Pentecostals understand it, centers on exalting and bearing witness to the Lordship of Christ.” This framework, wherein the Holy Spirit’s work is integral to the believer’s encounter with the living Christ, appears to be fertile ground for a pneumatological view of the Supper like Calvin’s. See Robert P. Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), xix.

<sup>9</sup> William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion, 2015), 116.

<sup>10</sup> See Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 239.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1956), 484–85.

### *1. Pentecostalism: Recovering Real Presence?*

The Lord's Supper is a topic ripe for further dialogue within classical Pentecostalism; numerous scholars have expressed interest in furthering their tradition's theology of the Supper beyond the commemorative position, and see the Eucharist as a prime area for dialogue with other Christian traditions.<sup>12</sup> Chris Green, for example, has argued that "the earliest Pentecostals prominently celebrated the sacraments" and lauds the return "to the idea that Pentecostal theology is already inherently sacramental."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Daniel Tomberlin also appeals to early Pentecostalism's sacramental instincts:

It seems that early Pentecostal leaders intuitively knew that there is a "presence" inherent in the holy meal. Baptism in the Holy Spirit brought into their lives a real presence, an active presence, that anointed the sacred acts of worship. This understanding of real presence became associated with the Lord's Supper. It is evident that Pentecostals understood that at the Table, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present.<sup>14</sup>

Pentecostals scholars thus argue that their movement is already sacramental by its very nature, claiming that its founders held to a form of real presence via the Spirit's work.<sup>15</sup>

This raises a crucial point. Much has been made of the fact Pentecostal theological method places a high premium on the believer's experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Amos Yong, in his work on theological hermeneutics, asserts, "Christian theological reflection in a postmodern world starts with the experience of the Holy Spirit," and that, "it is time for the West to consciously resist the subordination" of the Spirit in its approach to theology.<sup>17</sup> It would appear, then, that if theological reflection within the Pentecostal tradition is thoroughly pneumatological, a distinctly Pentecostal theology of the Lord's Supper ought to be as well. It is on this point that John Calvin's eucharistic theology, with its unrelenting emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work, holds fascinating potential. This has been hinted at in the past; as Simon Chan

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<sup>12</sup> "I contend," says Johnathan Alvarado for example, "that the greatest opportunity for dialogue between Pentecostals and liturgical theologians of other traditions exists within the context of the Eucharist" (Johnathan E. Alvarado, "Pentecostal Epiclesis: A Model for Teaching and Learning," in *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*, ed. Chris E. W. Green [Leiden: Brill, 2016], 178).

<sup>13</sup> Chris E. W. Green, "Sacraments: Rites in the Spirit in the Spirit for the Presence of Christ," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 311.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar*, revised ed. (Cleveland: Chero-hala, 2015), 195.

<sup>15</sup> As will be discussed in depth at a later point, using the term "real presence" when describing Calvin's approach is potentially misleading. Joseph Tylenda contends that Calvin believed real presence "involves the following: Christ's body must leave heaven and be enclosed in the bread so that the bread is said to be the body of Christ; if Christ's body be so enclosed, it follows that it is corporeally present, and if the body is present, it is locally present" (Joseph N. Tylenda, "Calvin and Christ's Presence in the Supper—True or Real?" *SJT* 27 [1974]: 71). Thus, if one uses the term "real presence" to refer to Calvin's view, it must be noted that he did not believe in a physical or corporeal presence in the Roman Catholic or Lutheran sense as detailed above.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Mark. J. Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theological Method and Intercultural Theology," in *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, ed. Mark. J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM, 2011), 62–74. Scholars within the tradition, Cartledge asserts, "have argued for a method of doing theology that works with a triad of sources: the text of Scripture, the community of the Church and the person of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>17</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 18.

proposes, “The fact that in the eucharist we celebrate, as Calvin believed, the ‘spiritual presence’ of Christ is itself a reminder that salvation history and world history have not yet converged.”<sup>18</sup> Although the conversation with Calvin has advanced little further as of yet, the potential seems clear. To help facilitate this conversation, it will be necessary to first explain the reformer’s position, including the medieval context which gave rise to Reformation controversies surrounding the Eucharist.

## *2. Calvin in Context: The Historical Background*

Of central importance in Roman Catholicism, visible daily within the local church, the Mass quickly came under fire from the Reformers as a distortion of the Lord’s Supper to be adamantly rejected. To some observers their relentless attack on the Catholic sacramental system might seem like a strange obsession. However, as Alister McGrath notes, “the sacraments represented the publicly visible face of the church. For most laypersons the main point of contact with the church, as well as the wider world, was through church services on Sundays.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, to reform the sacramental system meant nothing less than to reform the church in the eyes of the laity. This not only meant reducing the number of sacraments from seven to two—baptism and communion—but offering an alternative understanding of them. It also meant wading into a debate fraught with serious pastoral implications;<sup>20</sup> if the meaning of the Lord’s Supper were reimagined, the salvation it represented would also have to be reconsidered. Calvin was keenly aware of this; rejecting the Catholic position that participating in the Mass is vital for the forgiveness of one’s sins, he inquires:

Who can think he has been redeemed by the death of Christ if he sees a new redemption in the Mass? Who can feel confident that his sins have been remitted when he sees a new remission? It will not do to say that the only ground on which we obtain the forgiveness of sins is in the Mass is, because we have already been purchased by the death of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, one cannot hold that believers are saved by Christ’s once for all sacrifice while simultaneously affirming the salvific efficacy of the Mass; nor can one be assured of the forgiveness of their sins if they place their hope of remission in the sacrament, which must be administered to them repeatedly. Further detailing his position in his nearly 200-page treatise on the Supper and baptism, he declared that, contra the medieval Roman Catholic position, the “bread and wine are signs, which represent unto us the invisible food which we receive of the flesh and blood of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> For a pastor like Calvin, who was responsible for administering the Supper, the theological implications of such a

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<sup>18</sup> Simon Chan, “Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” in *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*, ed. Chris E. W. Green (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 164.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief overview of Calvin’s vocation as a pastor, all too often overlooked in favor of his accomplishments as a theologian, see Victor A. Shepherd, *A Ministry Dearer Than Life: The Pastoral Legacy of John Calvin* (Toronto: Clements, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Henry Beveridge, reprint ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 4.18.6.

<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, *A Treatise on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1837), 108.

statement are many—as are the questions that could arise from the congregation. How exactly do the elements function as a sign? How often should they be administered? And when they are, who should participate?

One of the first Protestant polemics against the Roman Catholic Mass was Martin Luther's 1520 work, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in which he attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation, the understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice, and withholding the cup from members of the congregation.<sup>23</sup> Yet, due to his claim that the elements contained the body and blood of Christ “in, with, and under” them, some Protestants did not believe that he sufficiently distanced himself from transubstantiation. Just five years later Huldrych Zwingli penned his *Commentary on True and False Religion* in which he claimed that the Lord's Table did not entail the actual consumption of his body and blood, but that to feed on Christ simply meant to exercise faith.<sup>24</sup> In Zwingli's estimation, the notion Christ's body and blood could be orally consumed in any sense, “smacked of cannibalism on the one hand and of the pagan mystery religions on the other.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Luther's tendency to connect salvation with participation in the Supper caused Zwingli to fear his position implicitly endangered justification by faith alone.

Born in 1509, a generation later than Luther and Zwingli, Calvin was not a part of this first-generation Protestant controversy. His own view, in fact, was formed as a mediating position in response to earlier division,<sup>26</sup> and was later adopted by various Reformed confessions such as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>27</sup> His statements concerning the real presence<sup>28</sup> make clear he was no Zwinglian; Calvin, again according to Hesselink, “had a high view of the sacraments, as high in most respects as Luther's.”<sup>29</sup> In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11, he charges that the Christian should “not doubt that the Lord accomplishes what his words intimate—that the body, which thou dost not at all behold, is given to thee, as a spiritual repast. It seems incredible, that we should be nourished by Christ's flesh, which is at so great a distance from us.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, as previously discussed, he also took great pains to distance himself from Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions; in the very same commentary, addressing the same text, Calvin explicitly denies transubstantiation. On such a view, he charges, there is “no correspondence between the visible sign and the spiritual reality,” and thus the notion of the Supper being a sign becomes meaningless—a deception, even.<sup>31</sup> Having briefly demonstrated the major alternatives to Calvin's position, and given his historical context, we turn our attention to what made Calvin's view of the Supper unique, and how he distinguished his position from his contemporaries.

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<sup>23</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. “Eucharist.”

<sup>24</sup> Hillerbrand, s.v. “Eucharist.”

<sup>25</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, revised ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 156.

<sup>26</sup> Wim Janse, “Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper,” *Perichoresis* 10 (2012): 139.

<sup>27</sup> John I. Hesselink, “Reformed View: The Real Presence of Christ,” in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. Paul Armstrong and Paul Engle, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 59.

<sup>28</sup> “As Calvin stated repeatedly,” Keith Mathison notes, “his argument with the Roman Catholics and the Lutheran's was over the mode of Christ's presence, not the fact of that presence” (Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002], 27).

<sup>29</sup> Hesselink, “Reformed View,” 60.

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 380.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, 378.

### 3. Calvin in Contrast: Objections to Roman Catholic and Protestant Alternatives

Not one to shy away from controversy, Calvin's differences with both the Roman Catholic Church of his day, in addition to various strands of Protestantism, are well documented. In Catholicism, so entrenched was the belief that the elements of bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ during the Mass that the 16th century Council of Trent declared,

If anyone denies that in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore the whole Christ are really, truly, and substantially contained, but says that he only as in a sign or figure or by his power, let him be anathema.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas Baima, explaining the Council's response to Protestant theologies of the Supper, notes the delegates were attempting to correct three major errors, each characteristic of a major Protestant position. The Zwinglian error was that Christ is present in the Eucharist "only as a sign or figure"; the Lutheran error that his presence in the Eucharist was limited simply to the sacrament itself with no continued presence after participants had partaken; and Calvin's error that the "Lord was present only by his power."<sup>33</sup> Yet, while Calvin may have vehemently denied transubstantiation, it seems that the claim that Christ is present "only by his power" is misleading in light of his statements strongly affirming that believers truly feed on Christ in the sacrament and, even more importantly, that the mediating presence of the Holy Spirit allows the Christian to be nourished by his flesh and blood.<sup>34</sup> Calvin wrote that he was "not satisfied with those who, while acknowledging that we have some kind of communion with Christ, only make us partakers of the Spirit, omitting all mention of flesh and blood."<sup>35</sup> The distance between the people of God and Christ's physical body, located in heaven, was of little consequence in light of the ministry of the Holy Spirit; his activity in the Eucharist transforms it from the mere consumption of bread and wine into one where Christ "transfuses his life into us."<sup>36</sup> Understanding the connection between Calvin's pneumatology and sacramentality is key; he had no problem with the idea of Christ's presence in the Supper *per se*, but rather the Catholic interpretation of it. The key link in Calvin's theology of the Supper—the presence of the Holy Spirit—is a theme virtually absent from the medieval Catholic conception of the Mass. There was no need; why leave room for the mystery of the Spirit's work if the elements are miraculously changed into the body and blood prior to being consumed? For Calvin, the presence of Christ in the Supper was a "great mystery" that he was "unable to comprehend with [his] mind."<sup>37</sup> This is no small admission for an intellect of Calvin's stature; but perhaps this, too, points to the wonder of the sacrament itself.

While in some ways his position on the Supper may appear similar to that of Luther, the Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes* strongly challenged Luther's understanding, with some sensing he was

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas A. Baima, "Roman Catholic View: Christ's Real, True, and Substantial Presence," in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. Paul Armstrong and Paul Engle, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 126.

<sup>33</sup> Baima, "Roman Catholic View," 127.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.7.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.7.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.10.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.7.



more favourable toward Zwingli's.<sup>38</sup> Whether or not this was due to a fear Luther had not made a clean enough break with the Catholic Church, from Calvin's earliest editions of his *Institutes* and his treatises on the Supper, he often makes statements that appear critical of both Lutheran and Zwinglian positions.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Calvin's 1541 treatise on the Supper, intended to mediate between their positions, was so well received by Luther that he claimed had Zwingli wrote in the same manner as Calvin much of the intense dispute over the sacrament could have been averted.<sup>40</sup> Again, however, the Genevan did not hesitate to criticize Luther. Of particular concern was Luther's view that the elements ought to be worshipped when elevated during the Supper; after all, he argued, if Christ were physically present within them, how could this be an inappropriate response?<sup>41</sup> For Calvin, however, this was another grave error which stemmed from the faulty doctrine of corporeal presence. The disagreement with Luther and his followers thus was not the reality of Christ's presence, but the nature of it. The former insisted, as their Catholic counterparts, that Christ was present in a corporeal sense. Calvin insisted his presence was spiritual; no less real, but also not physical.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, from a Roman Catholic or Lutheran perspective, it may be tempting to equate Calvin with Zwingli. Yet, while some have tried to find a place in the latter's Eucharistic theology for Christ's presence in the meal, his own statements—such as his adamance that the elements were signs and the Supper a memorial—make his and Calvin's position irreconcilable.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Calvin's rejection of transubstantiation and consubstantiation should not be taken as an endorsement of Zwingli.

In short, Calvin's position on Christ's presence in the Supper asserts that Christ is truly present in the sacrament, yet not in the sense that the elements either become his physical body and blood nor contain the body and blood "in, with, and under" the elements. If this seems somewhat mystical, this is because it does, in fact, intentionally leave room for mystery. One must recall Calvin's admission that the matter was too great for human comprehension. Thus, to adopt Calvin's view is to live with a degree of unresolved tension regarding Christ's presence—and to allow for a thoroughly pneumatological conception of the sacrament, in which the secret operation of the Spirit remains a primary focus. In his own words,

Hence, the bread is Christ's body, because it assuredly testifies, that the body which it represents is held forth to us, or because the Lord, by holding out to us that symbol, gives us at the same time his own body; for Christ is not a deceiver, to mock us with empty representations.... We do not less truly become participants in Christ's body in respect of spiritual efficacy, than we partake of the bread.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Larry Daniel Siekawitch, "Calvin, Spirit, Communion and the Supper," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 29.2 (2009): 17.

<sup>39</sup> Siekawitch, "Calvin, Spirit, Communion and the Supper," 17.

<sup>40</sup> John I. Hesselink, "A Reformed Response," in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. Paul Armstrong and Paul Engle, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 106.

<sup>41</sup> Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church, and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 66.

<sup>42</sup> Hesselink, "A Reformed Response," 106–7.

<sup>43</sup> Siekawitch, "Calvin, Spirit, Communion and the Supper," 16–17.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, 378.

For Calvin, that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ need not entail an actual transformation of the elements, but simply that the partaker of the sacrament be nourished by the body through this “spiritual efficacy”; this, he asserts, can be true only by the work of the Holy Spirit, who allows the believer to receive the benefits of such an action through faith.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, the distinctiveness of Calvin’s position extends beyond Christ’s presence; also significant are his statements regarding who ought to partake of the Supper, and how this is intrinsically linked to the way it is made effective. The exclusivity of the medieval Mass is highlighted in the fact that the liturgy was performed in Latin—a language incomprehensible to the vast majority of the laity.<sup>46</sup> While the congregation may have been present during the event, the chances of them comprehending it were virtually non-existent. It is for this reason that Calvin’s contemporary Zwingli, for example, would either write on the subject in German or have his works quickly translated from Latin.<sup>47</sup> Calvin, for his part, substituted the traditional words of the Latin Mass with prayers in the vernacular French, a practice that would later influence Reformed churches across Europe who followed suit in their languages.<sup>48</sup> In Calvin’s view, the Supper is intended to strengthen the faith of those that the medieval church often overlooked. The knowledge of one’s sin and need of salvation is highlighted by the preaching of the gospel; receiving the body and blood of Christ, therefore, reminds the recipient of their hope in Jesus.<sup>49</sup> For Calvin, the Supper should bring “knowledge and assurance to those who have been justified by God’s Word.”<sup>50</sup> His 1541 *Short Treatise* lists three major reasons why the Lord instituted the Supper. The first, to serve as a “sign and seal” to remind believers of the promises of Christ; the second, to encourage believers to recognize the goodness of God so they worship him wholeheartedly; and, finally, to “exhort” believers toward unity, charity, and holiness.<sup>51</sup> Such purposes are obscured in the Mass, he claimed, which is not a reaffirmation of the promises of God to the believer, but a sacrifice offered to God by the people. Moreover, the purposes of the Supper—all related to growth in Christ—as outlined by Calvin explain his conviction that only those professing faith in Christ should partake. Again, in his 1541 *Short Treatise* he notes,

For whoever approaches this holy sacrament with contempt or indifference, not caring much about following where our Lord calls him, perversely misuses it and thus contaminates it. Now to pollute and contaminate what God has so sanctified is intolerable sacrilege. It is, then, not without reason that Paul passes such grave condemnation on those who take it unworthily. For if there is nothing in heaven or earth of greater value and dignity than the body and blood of our Lord, it is no small

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<sup>45</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 187.

<sup>46</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 164.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther: Volume 3, Church and Sacraments*, ed. Paul W Robinson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 165–68.

<sup>48</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 53.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 166. In his 1543 edition of the *Institutes*, Gordon writes, Calvin “wrote more fully on the relationship between Word and sacrament. Both are forms of God’s accommodation to humanity, but the Lord’s Supper appeals to the human need for visible, sensible symbols.... The Eucharist brings knowledge and assurance to those who have been justified by God’s Word.”

<sup>50</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 149.

fault to take it inconsiderately and without being well prepared. Therefore he exhorts us to examine ourselves well, in order to use it properly. When we understand what kind of examination this should be, we shall know the use for which we seek.<sup>52</sup>

Calvin is not demanding perfection of those who partake of the sacrament; the very fact that he speaks of the sacrament's design to strengthen the believer in faith and help the grow in holiness assumes a degree of weakness. He goes so far as to declare that a knowledge of one's flaws should only encourage them to desire the Lord's Supper, as it reminds God's people how he helps them in their weakness.<sup>53</sup> While maintaining that all believers must examine themselves prior to receiving the elements, and that in so doing one "cannot be too diligent," he also blasts "sophistical doctors" who trouble the consciences of individuals so that they fear receiving the sacrament, lest they inadvertently take it in an unworthy manner. For Calvin, herein lies the heart of the matter: Do you possess repentance and faith? Do you trust in the promises of Christ? Are you willing to forsake your sins and exercise faith in him alone for salvation? If so, the Supper is for you. All who come "must renounce all that is our own,"<sup>54</sup> and while no believer possesses a perfect repentance, this basic disposition is a prerequisite without which no one ought to partake of Christ's body and blood. In short, perhaps it is best to let Calvin summarize in his own words:

If we would worthily communicate in the Lord's Supper, we must with firm heart-felt reliance regard the Lord Jesus as our only righteousness, life, and salvation, receiving and accepting the promises which are given us by him as sure and certain, and renouncing all other confidence, so that distrusting ourselves and all creatures, we may rest fully in him, and be contented with his grace alone.<sup>55</sup>

It is also worth noting that, unlike in some other Christian traditions—and again, owing a great deal to his pneumatology—the benefits of the sacrament may only be apprehended through faith, in Calvin's view. Thus, in common with Zwingli and in opposition to proponents of the Lutheran and Catholic positions, Calvin held that unbelievers who partake of the Supper do not "feed" on Christ at all, because in order for one to be nourished by his body and blood, it must be received in faith.<sup>56</sup> Herein lies a crucial distinction between affirming the true presence and the physical presence; to insist on the latter means that, if an unbeliever takes the sacrament, they have consumed in vain the flesh and blood of the Lord. For Calvin, the benefits of the Supper are procured through faith and the work of the Spirit; thus, it is impossible for unbelievers to truly partake of the body and blood of Christ. Indeed, the importance of faith in making the sacrament effective is one primary reason for Calvin's adamance that only believers ought to participate. In his chapter on the Supper in his *Institutes*, Calvin explains that what are "separated by space"—the body and blood of Christ in heaven and his church on earth—are nevertheless united by the Spirit, encouraging his readers to grasp this truth by faith if they cannot do so by reason.<sup>57</sup> The sacrament, according to Calvin, is a "mystical blessing," and thus we should not be taken

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<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 518.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 522.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 519.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 519.

<sup>56</sup> McDonnell, *John Calvin*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.10.

aback if Spirit's work therein may seem incomprehensible at times.<sup>58</sup> Faith, then, is key to this position. It is impossible to receive the benefits of the sacrament without it, and it is essential when human explanation fails to grasp the complexities of it. Calvin himself provides a succinct summary of the relationship between the body, blood, and work of the Spirit at the end of his *Short Treatise*, explaining his view of Christ's presence and in doing so concludes,

Be this as it may, on the one hand, in order to exclude all carnal fancies, we must raise our hearts upwards to heaven, not thinking that our Lord Jesus is so debased as to be enclosed under some corruptible elements; and, on the other hand, not to impair the efficacy of this holy ordinance, we must hold that it is made effectual by the secret and miraculous power of God, and that the Spirit of God is the bond of participation, this being the reason why it is called spiritual.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, if there is a way Calvin and his Roman Catholic contemporaries could have reached common ground relatively quickly, it is on the frequency of celebration. In Calvin's view, the Supper should be celebrated often; it is indeed noteworthy that in his strongly worded rebuke of the Council of Trent, particularly its conclusions regarding the Mass, he does not disagree with its claim that the Supper should be celebrated weekly.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, had it not been for the resistance he faced from the Geneva City Council, he would have served his congregation the Supper every Sunday.<sup>61</sup> His proposition rejected by the council, Calvin eventually agreed to the compromise of once per month. It is clear, however, that had Calvin gotten his way, the Supper would have been given such a place of prominence in the local church that each time the people of God assembled they would have participated. Indeed, a number of later Reformed theologians lament this compromise in light of the sound argument that Calvin offered in favor of its weekly practice, and suggest that more congregations ought to follow his original directive.<sup>62</sup> While this may sound excessive to believers today, it underscores the fact that evangelical convictions and a commitment to biblical preaching as the centre of church life are not at all incompatible with a high view of the sacraments—a reality with far reaching implications for the most rapidly growing segment of the evangelical church in the modern era, the Pentecostal movement.

#### *4. Calvin in Conversation: Pentecostalism and the Supper*

Though little support for a high sacramental theology remains in many classical Pentecostal circles, Green has repeatedly demonstrated that in the early stages of the movement a sacramental view of the

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 153–54.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 541.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin: Selections*, 143. See also Leonard Vander Zee, "The Loss and Renewal of Calvin's Eucharistic Theology in Reformed Churches," *CTJ* 55 (2020): 77: "Returning to Calvin, he consistently advocated for weekly communion. This desire was not merely to imitate the practice of the Early Church, but from his own sense of the complementary relationship of Word and sacrament."

<sup>61</sup> Hesselink, "Reformed View," 67–68. See also Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy*, 53, as he notes, "Calvin was not able to persuade the Council of Geneva to celebrate Holy Communion more than four times a year," despite this desire for much greater frequency.

<sup>62</sup> Hesselink, "Reformed View," 68.

Eucharist—including a belief in the real presence—was not unheard of.<sup>63</sup> The widespread popularity of bare memorialism in contemporary Pentecostalism hardly represents the unanimous, historical consensus. This bears asking: if early Pentecostalism included among its adherents those with deeply sacramental convictions, could there not be a place for such a view of the Supper to be retrieved within contemporary Pentecostal theology? And if so, would not a theology of the Supper which places such a high premium on the work of the Holy Spirit, as does Calvin's, be a natural fit in such a pneumatologically driven movement? Larry Siekawitch points this out in his 2009 article "Calvin, Spirit, Communion and the Supper":

Calvin could not be considered a Pentecostal, but his experiential doctrine of the Supper should be seen as a resource for further encounter with the Spirit. Pentecostal churches have excelled in highlighting the work of the Spirit in experiential encounter with Christ in the worship service, especially during the singing of praises and practice of the spiritual gifts. Promoting another avenue for intimate communion with Christ as experienced in the Lord's Supper would seem to be a natural fit for the Pentecostal movement.<sup>64</sup>

If the worship service and practice of gifts are expected to serve as powerful experiences with Christ via the power of the Spirit, why not the Supper as well? Though Pentecostalism may not primarily lie in the vein of the continental Reformation that Calvin shaped so profoundly, his theology of the Lord's Supper may be much more at home within the context of a Pentecostal systematic than either the Reformed or Pentecostal traditions may have previously imagined.

The most obvious reason Calvin's position holds the potential for further conversation with Pentecostalism has already been noted in detail: his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. The section in his *Institutes* devoted to the Lord's Supper makes this clear:

The sacraments duly perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit, the internal Master, whose energy alone penetrates the heart, stirs up the affections, and procures access for the sacraments into our souls. If he is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining on the eyeballs of the blind, of sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike some other Christian traditions, Pentecostalism has never shied away from accepting that doing theology requires learning to live with a degree of tension; whether or not believers will have to be satisfied with a measure of mystery concerning the things of God is not so much a question as a foregone conclusion for a movement that so cherishes the power of experience. For example, in an article calling for a deeper Pentecostal reflection on the Supper, Green notes that the fact Jesus is not physically present with the church on earth during the Supper should not lead believers to jump to the conclusion

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<sup>63</sup> Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2012). See especially Green's analysis of primary sources in chapter 3, "(Re)Discovering the Sacramentality of Early Pentecostalism: An Exploration of the Early Periodical Literature," which argues convincingly that not all of the early Pentecostals articulated a strictly commemorative view of the Supper.

<sup>64</sup> Siekawitch, "Calvin, Spirit, Communion and the Supper," 35.

<sup>65</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.8.

that he is absent from the event.<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, just as Christ appeared to his disciples in a different form after his resurrection than he did prior, so he appears to us differently after the ascension than he did prior—including in the Supper. Green refers to this as “Christ’s sacramental presence” and, in true Pentecostal form, notes that the mystery or “strangeness” of this reality does not make it any less real. Here, Green sounds little different from Calvin in his discussion of Christ’s presence. The Spirit’s work is highlighted; the presence is no less real because it is not physical; and the sacrament, in a mysterious way, unites the Lord Jesus with his people. Indeed, apart from their respective denominations and historical contexts, there seems to be little separating them. Green also quotes Church of God scholar French Arrington as an example of a Pentecostal whose perspective seems to leave room for some view of the real presence: according to Arrington, Christ is “present to give us the spiritual blessings signified by the bread and cup.”<sup>67</sup> Calvin would not employ the term “ordinance” as Arrington does to describe the Supper, yet Green repeatedly demonstrates that the seeds for a Pentecostal conversation on the matter beyond the memorial view have been planted long ago.

Also of interest are the eschatological implications inherent in the link Calvin draws between the Supper and the presence of Christ. Pentecostalism has been an eschatologically driven movement from its inception.<sup>68</sup> If pneumatology has been its defining characteristic, eschatology must be considered a close second, as since the days of the Azusa Street Revival Pentecostals have interpreted their experience in light of Joel 2:28—the last days in which the Lord promised to pour out his Spirit on his people.<sup>69</sup> While overall classical Pentecostalism, particularly in North America, has closely aligned itself with a dispensational eschatology for the better part of its history, an emerging generation of Pentecostal scholars has demonstrated a willingness to move beyond traditional debates such as the timing of the rapture or the nature of the millennium and into a broader eschatological conversation that dialogues with other aspects of theology as well—including sacramentality.<sup>70</sup> At this point, Calvin’s position on the true presence may serve to induce a fascinating dialogue. In response to the problem of how Christ can be present with his people during the Supper while his physical body remains in heaven, Calvin posits that in the Eucharist the people of God are, by the power of the Spirit, “lifted up to heaven with our eyes and minds, to seek Christ there in the glory of his Kingdom.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, every time the Supper is served, the second coming is foreshadowed as the people of God are gathered to him. Christ communes with them as they share a meal in his presence, and believers, by faith, behold the glorious kingdom which has been promised. Given its nature as an eschatologically driven movement, Pentecostals would appear well positioned to further highlight this in their own theology of the Supper—perhaps drawing on Calvin’s views in so doing.

The emphasis Calvin places on the Holy Spirit, coupled with the eschatological vision inherent in his view of the Supper, also appears to be a natural fit within the communal ethos of Pentecostal

<sup>66</sup> Chris E. W. Green, “Then Their Eyes Were Opened: Pentecostal Reflections on the Church’s Scripture and the Lord’s Supper,” *Pneuma* 35 (2013): 233.

<sup>67</sup> Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> Glenn Balfour, “Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 31 (2011): 127–28.

<sup>69</sup> Balfour, “Pentecostal Eschatology Revisited,” 129.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell, eds., *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Hesselink, “Reformed View,” 66.

spirituality.<sup>72</sup> Particularly in the West, where consumerism and individualism run rampant in society—and, all too often, the church—an approach to the Lord's Supper that emphasizes the corporate unity of believers would not only be faithful to Scripture but would also serve as a timely antidote to this individualistic sentiment. Pentecostal scholar Daniela Augustine, lamenting the Western church's often uncritical support of the neoliberal economic system, asserts,

[The Eucharist] instructs us toward disciplining our desires in prioritization of the well-being of others and points us to the practice of liturgical asceticism of reverent consumption (1 Cor 11:27–34). Indeed, the Eucharist detoxifies us from the dehumanizing poisons of unrestrained consumerism and helps us build immunity toward its seductive lure. It cultivates the community of faith as a dissident force of resistance against the commodification of market logic and forms it as an incarnated critique of the utilitarian objectification of God's creation.<sup>73</sup>

If the aim is a eucharistic theology which emphasizes the unity of believers, one would struggle to find a view more robust than Calvin's. His position is resistant to individualism due to his sustained emphasis on the believer's union with Christ; a full section of his *Institutes* is given to this subject, including how the sacraments of baptism and the Supper are an expression of this union.<sup>74</sup> "The concept of union with Christ," Keith Mathison says, "is crucial to Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Unless the connection is understood, very little of what he says about the Supper will make sense."<sup>75</sup> Just as baptism signifies the believer's ingrafting into Christ's body, the Supper signifies continued communion with him. Calvin himself explains,

But as this mystery of the secret union with Christ with believers is incomprehensible by nature, he exhibits its figure and image in visible signs adapted to our capacity, nay, by giving, as it were, earnest and badges, he makes it certain to us as if it were seen by the eye.... The body which was once offered for our salvation we are enjoined to take and eat, that, while we see ourselves made partakers of it, we may safely conclude that the virtue of that death will be efficacious in us.<sup>76</sup>

Recall, once again, Calvin's assertion that as it partakes of the Supper, the church of Christ is lifted up into heaven for the purpose of communion with him. It seems that a movement such as Pentecostalism, whose spirituality is not only eschatological but communal, would be a natural home for such a view; it "cultivates the community of faith" to borrow Augustine's description, and is quite resistant to the individualism that characterizes far too many contemporary churches.

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<sup>72</sup> Yong's work is once again helpful on this point as he stresses, "The Church is not just the collective expression of individuals around a common purpose or vision. Rather, the Church is constituted by the new birth of the Spirit which re-establishes the body of Christ precisely as communal mutuality of its members" (Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 111).

<sup>73</sup> Daniela Christova Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 147.

<sup>74</sup> See Todd J. Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ*, *Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69–70.

<sup>75</sup> Mathison, *Given for You*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.1.

Remarkably, Calvin's theology of the Supper, if taken to its logical conclusion, may even hold the potential to inject fresh insight into the cherished Pentecostal distinctive of divine healing.<sup>77</sup> Rubén Arjona, a Presbyterian pastor and theologian, has documented how he believes Calvin's theology of the Supper could hold significant potential to "contribute to the healing of traumatized persons."<sup>78</sup> Claiming the Reformer's position provides "an adequate theological and pastoral framework" for this end, he asserts that the emphasis Calvin placed on the nourishing power of the Supper, and the ministry of the Spirit therein, provides a means by which those struggling with past traumatic experiences may find restoration. The Supper, after all, reminds believers not only of the suffering of Christ on their behalf, but their responsibility to care for fellow believers.<sup>79</sup> Given the place of prominence Pentecostals have granted to divine healing since its earliest days, it seems they, of all people, would be open to dialogue on this point,<sup>80</sup> particularly given its pastoral implications.

### 5. Conclusion

It is indeed ironic that Calvin's mystical view on the Supper, which has been flatly rejected by many adherents of his own tradition, might hold great potential for dialogue with those who, on the surface, would seem to hold relatively little in common with him. When one reads those portions of the *Institutes* in which Calvin considers the work of the Spirit in the Supper and the nourishment believers receive as they remember the sacrifice made on their behalf at Calvary, one can almost imagine him as a modern Pentecostal speaking of his own dynamic spiritual life. When the eschatological implications of his doctrine of the Eucharist are brought to light, there is no question many Pentecostals could offer a hearty "amen" to his statements. And, when he appeals to mystery and admits to the limitations of his own intellect, Calvin is simply offering a frank admission as many Pentecostals are quick to do when discussing their own encounter with the living God. Therefore, the Pentecostal movement, in constructing their own theology of the Supper, would do well to draw on the wisdom of this ancient voice to strengthen its own.

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<sup>77</sup> Rubén Arjona, "John Calvin on the Lord's Supper: Food, Rest, and Healing for Shivering Souls," *Pastoral Psychology* 66.2 (2017): 179.

<sup>78</sup> Arjona, "John Calvin on the Lord's Supper," 180.

<sup>79</sup> Arjona, "John Calvin on the Lord's Supper," 182.

<sup>80</sup> This is especially true given Chris Green's observation that certain 20th century Pentecostal figures such as C. E. Bowen, in fact, made an explicit connection between participation in the Supper and divine healing (see Green, *Toward a Pentecostal*, 8–9).



# Samuel Miller on the “Sanctified Judgment” of the Enlarged, Elevated, and Strengthened Mind: Piety, Learning, and the Right Kind of Bias

— Paul Kjoss Helseth —

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**Abstract:** This essay explores Samuel Miller’s understanding of the epistemological capacity of the mind that has been regenerated by God’s Spirit and sanctified by God’s Word. In response to those who would argue that Miller—as an early advocate of the Princeton Theology—accommodated an epistemological paradigm that was compromised by the naïve realism of the Scottish Enlightenment, this essay analyzes the works of Miller that are stored in the archives of Princeton Seminary and establishes that despite what the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe, he in fact stood squarely in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed wing of the Augustinian tradition. In so doing this essay offers a fresh perspective not just on Miller’s understanding of the relationship between piety and learning, but also on the understanding of enlightened education that likely animated the founding of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812.

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## 1. Introduction: Old Princeton and “The Ahlstrom Thesis”

In his “ground-breaking”<sup>1</sup> analysis of the impact that the Scottish Enlightenment had on American theology from the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Sydney Ahlstrom argues that John Witherspoon—who emigrated from Scotland in 1768 to become the sixth president of the College of New Jersey—was “the first real ambassador” of the “Scottish Philosophy” in the developing Republic even though his “Evangelical bias blinded him to the real genius” of the Scottish intellectual tradition.<sup>2</sup> According to Ahlstrom, shortly after Witherspoon arrived on the shores of the emerging nation he accommodated the most mature articulations of the Scottish Philosophy in order “to defend orthodox theology” against the rising tide of religious skepticism, and in so doing he introduced “the anthropocentrism” of the Scottish Enlightenment—including its endorsement of a form of naïve realism that was grounded in its rejection of the noetic effects of sin—not just into the mainstream of American culture more generally, but more specifically “into the nerve-center of American Presbyterianism”—the College of New Jersey.<sup>3</sup> When Witherspoon’s accommodation of the Scottish Philosophy was eventually appropriated not just by his associates at the college but also by those who taught at Princeton Seminary from the time of its founding in 1812 to the time of its reorganization in 1929, Ahlstrom contends that the formative center of what he calls “the Witherspoon tradition” was established.<sup>4</sup> He argues that rather than reclaiming “the fervent theocentricity” that was essential to the enduring essence of the Reformed tradition, those who founded and taught at the seminary throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries instead followed Witherspoon and embraced “the [moral, religious, and epistemological] optimism of the Scottish Renaissance,” and as a consequence “their theology lost its Reformation bearings, ‘the Augustinian strain of [their] piety’ suffered,” their belief “that Christianity had a proclamation to declare lost its vitality,” and for them “doctrine became less a living language of piety than a complex burden to be borne.”<sup>5</sup> “As a result of Witherspoon’s powerful influence,” Ahlstrom concludes, the anthropocentrism of the Scottish Enlightenment “*did* supplant” the more orthodox commitments of more consistently God-centered thinkers at Princeton, and due to the “powerful advocacy” of those who taught at the seminary throughout most of the long nineteenth century, “the Scottish Philosophy was carried by Princeton graduates to academies, colleges, seminaries, and churches all over the country.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 201.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History* 24 (1955): 261.

<sup>3</sup> Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 262, 266–67. It is important to note that while the College of New Jersey was, “like many other church-related institutions established before the Revolutionary War, ... technically a nondenominational college,” nevertheless from the time of its founding “many looked upon ... [it] as a de facto Presbyterian school devoted to meeting the educational needs and upholding the intellectual ideas of Presbyterians and the larger Protestant community” (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: Pickwick, 2013], 38).

<sup>4</sup> Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 267, 266.

<sup>5</sup> Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 268, 266, 268.

<sup>6</sup> Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 262. Just a few of the many works that in some fashion are indebted to Ahlstrom’s thesis and therefore are susceptible to the critique that is being advanced in the

In recent years, Ahlstrom’s assessment of Witherspoon’s relationship to the Scottish intellectual tradition and to the theologians who taught at what is now known as Old Princeton Seminary has been subjected to both direct and indirect criticism by a number of thoughtful interpreters.<sup>7</sup> While “the Ahlstrom thesis” would have us believe that the Old Princetonians accommodated a kind of rationalism that was grounded in the naïve realism of the Scottish Enlightenment, more recent scholarship has established that they in fact embraced a form of “chastened realism,” and they did so not just because they stood in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed wing of the Augustinian tradition, but

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substance of this analysis include: Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Andrew T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007); Stephen B. Sherman, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 83 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008); Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011); Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). It is important to note that while more progressive as well as more conservative critics of “the Witherspoon tradition” ground their criticisms of the tradition in an endorsement of the same basic interpretive paradigm, there is a sense in which the more progressive appropriation of that paradigm is more compelling than that of more conservative scholars even though the paradigm itself—which reduces Witherspoon, the Old Princeton theologians, and their theological descendants to naïve realists of one sort or another—is fundamentally flawed. Indeed, whereas more conservative interpreters wrongly insist that Scottish Realism undermined—or at least seriously compromised—the religious—and especially the classically Reformed—*bona fides* of the Old Princeton theologians, more progressive interpreters rightly conclude that for the Old Princetonians, the basic realism of the Scottish intellectual tradition reinforced the basic realism of historic Christian orthodoxy, and in so doing it played at least an ancillary or supporting role in their reluctance to abandon their religious orthodoxy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Please note that in this context, I am suggesting that a commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy is grounded in an endorsement of some form of realism simply because historic Christian orthodoxy presupposes that which is a necessary entailment of the Creator-creature distinction, namely a commitment to a source of religious authority that is finally outside of or objective to the religious experience not just of the professing believer, but of the believing community as well. Gary Dorrien notes, “Before the modern period, all Christian theologies were constructed within a house of authority. All premodern Christian theologies made claims to authority-based orthodoxy. Even the mystical and mythopoetic theologies produced by premodern Christianity took for granted the view of scripture as an infallible revelation and the view of theology as an explication of propositional revelation” (Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], xv). If Dorrien is correct, then we may say that for more progressive interpreters, the basic realism of the Scottish intellectual tradition had a consequential impact upon Witherspoon and the Old Princeton theologians more generally because it played at least a supporting role in preventing them from becoming progressives or theological liberals themselves. In other words, it helped to prevent them from accommodating the theological paradigm that committed liberals themselves had accommodated, for it helped to prevent them from embracing a theological paradigm that is formed and shaped by the idea that is essential to the enduring essence of the liberal tradition, namely “the idea of a genuine Christianity *not* based on external authority” (Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, xxiii, emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> For the most recent and most direct challenges, see Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon’s American Revolution* (Williamsburg, VA: The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2017); and Kevin DeYoung, *The Religious Formation of John Witherspoon: Calvinism, Evangelicalism, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, Routledge Studies in Evangelicalism (London: Routledge, 2020).

also because they were fundamentally opposed to what Mark Noll has called the sin-denying “hubris of Enlightenment rationality.”<sup>8</sup> Substantial justification for this revisionist reading of the Old Princeton theologians can be found throughout their published and unpublished writings, including in an overlooked essay that was published by Samuel Miller (1769–1850) in 1796, approximately a decade before he helped to found a seminary for the training of ministers that was distinct from the College of New Jersey, an institution that he and the other founders of the seminary insisted was foundering due to the influence that Scottish Realism was having on Witherspoon’s successor as president of the college, Samuel Stanhope Smith.<sup>9</sup> In a two-part essay entitled “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion,” which he published seventeen years before he became the second professor at Princeton Seminary—the seminary that he helped to found in 1812—Miller offers six critical responses to the then “fashionable” eagerness to “exalt” human reason “to the rank of an infallible guide, and [to] make her the only proper standard of right and wrong” not just in matters of science, but in moral and especially in religious matters as well.<sup>10</sup> In so doing he articulates convictions

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<sup>8</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 84. Examples of historical and theological analyses that have challenged matters relating to “the Ahlstrom thesis” include: James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching: Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005); Paul Kjos Helseth, “Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010); Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); Fred G. Zaspel, *Warfield on the Christian Life: Living in Light of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); David P. Smith, *B. B. Warfield’s Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); W. Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011); Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bradley J. Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Gary Steward, *Princeton Seminary (1812–1929): Its Leaders’ Lives and Works* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014); Glen Sadlier, “Triangulating the Princeton Paradigm: B. B. Warfield’s Theology of Human Knowledge and the Task of Pastoral Ministry” (PhD thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2017); Jeffrey A. Stivason, *From Inscrutability to Concursus: Benjamin B. Warfield’s Theological Construction of Revelation’s Mode from 1880–1915*, Reformed Academic Dissertations, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017); and Alan D. Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*, Reformed Academic Dissertations (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017). See also important contributions to this revisionist historiography from the not so recent past, including: W. Andrew Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1981); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994–1996); and Peter Hicks, *The Philosophy of Charles Hodge: A Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Approach to Reason, Knowledge and Truth* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997). Note that in his recent doctoral dissertation, Allen Stanton argues convincingly that despite Ahlstrom’s assertions to the contrary, Samuel Miller was simply not guilty of accommodating the moral, religious, and epistemological optimism of the Scottish Enlightenment. See Allen M. Stanton, “Samuel Miller (1769–1850): Reformed Orthodoxy, Jonathan Edwards, and Old Princeton” (PhD thesis, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Witherspoon and the founders of Princeton Seminary, see Paul Kjos Helseth, “The Legacy of John Witherspoon and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary: Samuel Stanhope Smith, Ashbel Green, and the Contested Meaning of Enlightened Education,” in *A New Divinity: Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Mark Jones and Michael A. G. Haykin (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 233–59.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” *The United States Christian Magazine* 1.1 (1796): 45, 46. Note that while Miller’s name does not appear on either part

that are difficult to reconcile with the prevailing consensus not just on how the founders of the seminary conceived of their relationship to the moral, religious, and epistemological optimism of the Scottish Enlightenment, but also on how they conceived of their calling to unite piety and learning.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Miller on the Role of Reason in Moral and Religious Matters*

Miller begins his response to the mistakes “into which those fall, who contend that human reason [and not revelation] should be our supreme standard in matters of [morality and] religion” by endeavoring to clarify “the real grounds of the dispute ... between believers in revelation and others, concerning reason.”<sup>12</sup> The real dispute, he contends, “is not whether men are to use their own reason, any more than whether they are to see with their own eyes, or hear with their own ears; but the question is, whether every man’s reason is to be his *sole* guide, upon which he is in *all cases* and *implicitly* to depend?”<sup>13</sup> While “modern unbelievers” would have Christians believe “that receiving Christianity, or taking the light of the gospel for our guide, is equivalent to an entire renunciation of the rational character; and that the man who looks up to the Great Source of knowledge for instruction, *ipso facto* gives up the right of thinking and judging for himself in any sense or degree,” in fact, Miller argues, “Christians do not oppose unbelievers because they *reason*, but because, in their apprehension, they reason *ill*.”<sup>14</sup> In short, Miller insists that despite what unbelievers who champion “the dignity and power of *human reason*” contend,

[Christians] do not embrace revelation in order to suppress or destroy the light of their own minds, but to improve and assist it—not to take away their right of judging for themselves, but to secure them from erroneous judgments. Far from being disposed to extinguish rationality, they wish every Christian to be a rational one, and to be able

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of the published version of this essay, evidence that he claimed to be the author of the essay can be found in a letter in the Princeton Seminary archives in which he is addressing the “insufficiency of natural Religion.” In this letter, Miller encourages readers to “see my own remarks on the nature and Province of human reason in matters of religion, in the U.S. Christian Magazine, etc” (Samuel Miller, “Six Letters Concerning Contemporary Issues,” circa 1812, Box 19, File 37:21, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library).

<sup>11</sup> Scholars who endorse “the Ahlstrom thesis” typically insist that Witherspoon and his most faithful descendants in “the Witherspoon tradition” conceived of the relationship between piety and learning in transparently modernist or Enlightenment terms. For this reason, these scholars typically insist that the members of the tradition were persuaded that authentically enlightened education does not have to do with seeing and assessing the world in a sacramental or God-centered fashion, but with simply adding the results of biblical/theological reflection to what are already presumed to be the “objective” conclusions of impartial empirical analysis. For substantive—though I would argue problematic—articulations of this contention, see George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 122–52; and George M. Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelism*, ed. D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 221–66. For a different perspective, see Paul Kjos Helseth, “‘Congeniality’ of Mind at Old Princeton Seminary: Warfieldians and Kuyperians Reconsidered,” *WTJ* 77 (2015): 1–14.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 46–47.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 47.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 47.

to give a reason of the hope that is in him. Nay, they embrace Christianity because, in their opinion, it is most conformable to reason so to do; and because they suppose that all who reject it oppose reason, and discard evidence so rational and abundant, that in every other case they would be ashamed of such a decision.<sup>15</sup>

Having established that Christians do not in fact reject but endorse the right use of reason in moral and religious matters, Miller then challenges the “supposition” that he believes has been embraced by those who presumptuously contend “for the sufficiency of human reason as our supreme standard” in moral and religious considerations.<sup>16</sup> According to Miller, “the advocates and votaries of reason” overestimate the dispositive authority of the human mind precisely because they have forgotten “that man is a *fallen creature*.”<sup>17</sup> Man, they mistakenly contend, “is now as he was originally created by God [to be],” and for this reason the human mind is not just “sufficient”<sup>18</sup> but perfectly disposed to judging rightly in all matters, including those that have to do with morality and religion. In response to this supposition, Miller challenges “the presumptive claims of reason” by insisting, much like Jeremiah before him, that “the crown is fallen from our head.”<sup>19</sup> We are simply “not what God originally made us [to be]” and “none of our faculties can be considered as perfect,” he contends, because the fall has “in some degree, either directly or remotely” affected the entirety of our nature, including “our rational powers.”<sup>20</sup> Since this is “the case” and there is justification for concluding that “human reason” is “now *defective*” as a consequence of the fall, Miller argues that not only are there good reasons for supposing that our rational powers “are not such trusty guides as it is desirable to have,”<sup>21</sup> but also that there are sufficient grounds for abandoning what is now commonly referred to as the Enlightenment myth of the neutral, disinterested knower. “When ... we hear men talk of *unbiased* and *unprejudiced* reason; a reason not in the least degree tinctured with partiality in favour of falsehood and error; a reason disposed with perfect candor to apprehend and receive truth wherever it may be had; they talk of what never did nor will exist in any mere man after Adam, in the garden of innocence.”<sup>22</sup>

Finally, after pointing out that “the most strenuous contenders for the supremacy of reason have always been the most bitter opposers of the humbling doctrine of human depravity,”<sup>23</sup> Miller concludes the first part of his essay by anticipating a critique of Enlightenment rationality that continues to be advanced by committed postmodernists in our day. According to Miller, “those who contend for the sufficiency of reason to guide us in all cases whatsoever, seem to make another mistake, in talking of something as an *universal* and *uniform* standard, which really is not so, but is almost infinitely variable

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 45, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 47.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 47.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 48.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 49, 48. Cf Lamentations 5:16.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 48.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 48.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 48. In addition to the discussion that follows, see also the discussions that are associated with note 57 below, as well as with the contents of notes 27, 38, 61, 73, 81, 94, and 104 below.

<sup>23</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 49.

in its nature, being found in a different measure in different persons, and delivering opposite precepts with regard to the same things.”<sup>24</sup> The Enlightenment assumption that dispositive guidance in matters of morality and religion can be discovered by appealing to the light of nature alone is simply misguided, Miller argues, because “the dictates of reason” are, in fact, “as variable as the fashion of the country in which we live.”<sup>25</sup> Since, then, it just is the case that “the advocates for the sufficiency and perfection of human reason” overestimate the ability of reason to serve as a standard that is adequate to the “guidance and regulation of [all men],” Miller concludes the first part of his essay by insisting that the light of nature can never be “a perfect guide” “without the assistance of divine revelation.”<sup>26</sup> “When ... I contemplate a guide of this kind,” Miller contends,

—a guide thus variable, accommodating, and having no regular mode of operation; when I see the very men who profess, above all others, to have enlisted under her banners, differing among themselves, and either suspended in uncertainty, or else wandering into the most dangerous and hurtful paths;—when I see this, I am constrained to suspect her of insufficiency, and to say of her, as our Lord once said of teachers not wholly unlike her, “when the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch.”<sup>27</sup>

In the second, considerably shorter part of his essay, Miller continues his analysis by quickly dispatching with three more of what he believes are the most significant mistakes into which “the advocates for the supreme and unlimited guidance of human reason are apt to fall.”<sup>28</sup> The first of these has to do with what he maintains is the rationalist’s failure to distinguish properly “between the *light of nature*, or *the powers of reason*, strictly so called, and *the light of revelation*.”<sup>29</sup> According to Miller, modern “infidels” erroneously contend “that all those principles which we now arrange as parts of the system of natural religion, are the dictates of *unassisted* reason. But do they not here assume,” he asks, “more than can be justly granted? Do they not ascribe to the light of nature much of that information

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<sup>24</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 49.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 50.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 50.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 51. Note that while Miller anticipated a critique of Enlightenment rationality that is being advanced by committed postmodernists in our day—a fact, by the way, that will likely come as a surprise to those whose understanding of Old Princeton’s religious epistemology is grounded in an uncritical endorsement of “the Ahlstrom thesis”—he would have refused to stand shoulder to shoulder with contemporary postmodernists on a host of significant issues. For example, unlike contemporary postmodernists, Miller insists that objective knowledge of the world in which we live in fact *is* possible, and it is possible in the fullest sense of the term *only*—as the rest of this essay will argue—for those whose minds have been renewed, enlarged, elevated, and strengthened by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit of God. In short, Miller argues that Christians *alone* can see the vast expanse of reality more or less for what it objectively is because Christians *alone* can have not just a speculative, but a spiritual understanding not just of what God has revealed in his Word, but also of the truth that is being revealed throughout the entirety of the world that he has made and that he is providentially sustaining and governing from one moment to the next. For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussion that is associated with note 22 above, as well as the contents of notes 38, 61, 73, 81, 94, and 104 below.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” in *The United States Christian Magazine* 2.1 (1796): 122.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 123.

concerning God and his will, which revelation only has given?”<sup>30</sup> He insists that they do and maintains instead that “the best ideas which pagan nations have of religion, are derived not from the unaided efforts of their own minds, but from *tradition*.”<sup>31</sup> “The knowledge first communicated to Adam, in his original state of innocence, concerning divine things,” he argues, “has probably been transmitted through him to all his descendants, and preserved, by tradition, in a greater or smaller degree, until this day.”<sup>32</sup> If there is merit to this line of reasoning—which, if nothing else, points to Miller’s unambiguous commitment to the priority of revelation over reason when assessing the natural order—then it follows that for Miller, “much, if not the whole of that feeble light and knowledge which many in the heathen world possess of God and his will, is not to be considered the offspring of reason, but may fairly be traced to the first of all God’s revelations to man.”<sup>33</sup>

Miller then turns his attention to what many interpreters will contend is a more consequential and certainly less speculative mistake into which he believes the votaries of reason “continually fall,” namely their failure to remember that improvements in “reason and [in] *religion*—[in] *scientific knowledge*, and [in] *holiness*,” are secured through different means.<sup>34</sup> According to Miller, “Were we to admit the entire sufficiency of reason as our guide to perfection and happiness”—which he insists is precisely the point that the votaries of reason would have the faithful concede—“it would necessarily follow, that he whose reason is [the] most cultivated, would also be the most holy, or the best man,” for it would necessarily follow that “the greatest advances in intellectual improvement, and in speculative knowledge [would always be] ... accompanied with a proportionable eminence in moral worth.”<sup>35</sup> But the facts of history and of our everyday experience make it plain, he argues, that such a state of affairs is not now, nor has it ever been, “the case.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, just as “we daily meet with men whose intellectual acquirements, [when] taken alone, would raise them to the highest rank in society, degraded to the lowest [rank], and rendered completely infamous by their want of moral principle,” so too we often encounter those who, “though totally unacquainted with the arts of reasoning, exhibit a life and conversation of the most amiable and exemplary kind.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason, Miller challenges his “opponents” to remember that “improvement[s] in reason, and [improvements] in religion” belong “to entirely different spheres; that, *for the most part*, ... employ different powers of the human mind; and that ... rest upon ... essentially different foundation[s].”<sup>38</sup> While all men have the rational wherewithal to improve themselves intellectually even

<sup>30</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 123.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 123.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124–25.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 124, 125, emphasis added. Note that what Miller affirms in this section of his essay does not require us to conclude that he endorsed a more Scottish understanding of the faculty psychology, for it does not require us to acknowledge that he conceived of the faculties or powers of the whole soul or mind as discrete substances. (For more on the faculty psychology, see Helseth, “The Legacy of John Witherspoon and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary,” 233–59.) While he no doubt acknowledges that the soul or mind in fact has a range of faculties or powers, it is altogether clear—as the forthcoming discussion will establish—that in his “philosophy of mind,” those faculties



though many of them are, “with regard to all moral considerations, ... mere devils in human form,” still “there must be something besides [mere intellectual discernment] to cleanse the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart; to curb an irregular appetite; and to restrain the impetuosity of passion” if improvements in morality and in religion are to be obtained.<sup>39</sup> What, then, does Miller believe that this “something besides” must be? Miller ends his discussion of the fifth mistake into which he contends the votaries of reason continually fall by claiming that since reason alone is not sufficient to serve as “our guide to perfection and happiness,” “some such provision must be made as we find in the Christian system for the energy of divine operations, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, to purify the soul, and, through this medium, to regulate the outward conduct.”<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Miller concludes his analysis of the mistakes into which his opponents continually fall by addressing the baseless conceit that he insists is at the heart of all of the previous mistakes that he has

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or powers are themselves the exercises of a single soul or a unitary mind that is governed in all of its exercises according to the underlying disposition or inclination or character or nature of the heart. In the quotation above, the justification for this contention can be found, I believe, in the qualifying phrase, “for the most part,” which I have italicized to highlight its significance. Throughout his published and unpublished writings, Miller toggles between two ways of thinking about the heart that are intimately related to one another. On the one hand, he refers to the heart in a narrower sense, i.e., in terms of those feelings or passions that actuate the soul or mind and that must be brought more and more into subjection to the gospel through the cultivation of virtuous habits and the prayerful pursuit of godliness. In this regard, see, for example, Samuel Miller, “Man Is an Active Being” (Matt 6:24), undated, Box 18, File 22, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection; Samuel Miller, “Prayer for the Increase of Faith” (Luke 27:5), July 1792, Box 9, File 17, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection; Samuel Miller, “The Government of the Heart” (Prov 4:25), August 1795, Box 9, File 21, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection; and Samuel Miller, “Coming Out and Separating Ourselves from the World” (2 Cor 6:17–18), November 1810, Box 14, File 20, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection. On the other hand, Miller also refers to the heart in a broader and more basic sense, i.e., as that which has to do with “the moral temper of man—or, that system of principles and dispositions, which form the moral character and which excite to action” (Samuel Miller, “Hardness of Heart” [Prov 28:4], April 1808, Box 13, File 3:1, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection). Note that in this broader and more basic sense, the heart “is the seat of all the love and hatred—the choice and aversion—the joys and sorrows which enter so largely into the char[acter] and exercises of the mind, and which urge to moral activity—[In other words,] The heart [in this broader and more basic sense] is the seat of depravity—and it is also the seat of regeneration—and religion” (Miller, “Hardness of Heart,” 1–2). For more on the heart, see the quotation associated with note 58 below. Finally, note that for Miller, the new nature or the new disposition or “the gracious principle” that “is implanted in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost” in regeneration “is not of a partial nature. It does not affect one faculty alone, without extending to any of the rest. It does not enlighten the understanding without renewing and transforming the will, but it pervades and rectifies every faculty, regulates their operations, and directs them to those pursuits and exercises which are agreeable to the divine will. It is a principle, in short, which reaches to all the moral powers of the soul, and maintains an influence over them that is permanent and universal” (Samuel Miller, “Faith Shown by Works” [Jas 2:18], October 1792, Box 9, File 18:7, 6, 7, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection). In light of the last sentence of this quotation, we may reasonably conclude that for Miller, while improvements in reason alone will never generate genuine improvements either in holiness or in true religion, genuine improvements in holiness or in true religion—which, as we shall see, are always and everywhere grounded in the mediate and immediate operations of God’s Spirit on the heart—will always generate genuine improvements in reason, for it is genuine improvements in holiness or in true religion alone that enable the regenerate to see reality more and more for what objectively is, namely the theater of God’s glory. For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussions that are associated with notes 22 and 27 above, as well as the contents of notes 61, 73, 81, 94, and 104 below.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 125.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 125.

challenged, namely the conceit that leads “infidels” to imagine that they are justified “in considering and treating as *contrary* to reason, every thing that [in fact] is [just] *above* it.”<sup>41</sup> While Miller acknowledges that it is “extremely difficult to draw a distinct and definite line” between those things which in fact are contrary reason and those things which in fact are just above or beyond its present reach, nevertheless he insists that “it is unphilosophical ... to pronounce, that every thing which *we* cannot comprehend is absurd; or that every thing [which is] beyond *our* circle of vision, is deformed and unworthy of regard.”<sup>42</sup> This is especially the case, he maintains, “with moral truth, and the various grand subjects of which revelation treats.”<sup>43</sup> “We may hastily pronounce certain doctrines incompatible with the divine character, and opposite to the reason and nature of things; when a more enlarged acquaintance with the divine character, and with the different relations of things, would satisfy us of their reasonableness and reality.”<sup>44</sup> If, then, it just is the case that some things are not in fact contrary to reason but simply “[surpass] the limits of [our present] understanding, and [baffle our] most painful research,”<sup>45</sup> then how should we proceed in our efforts to use our minds in the pursuit of truth, especially in moral and religious matters? In short, Miller brings the second part of his essay to a conclusion by making explicit what has been implicit throughout the entirety of his analysis, namely that we reason best not only when our reasoning is formed, shaped, and enlarged by the substance of what God has revealed in his Word, but also when we avoid making judgements “precipitately.”<sup>46</sup> It just is the case, he concludes, that we all “may entertain prejudices against particular truths, when, did we know all, it would be found, that these prejudices spring from the most narrow and illiberal views; that their apparent opposition to reason arises only from our not knowing what true reason is; and that our whole mistake is founded on *ignorance*.”<sup>47</sup>

### *3. The Work of the Spirit and the Life of the Mind*

The forgoing summary of Samuel Miller’s essay on the extent and province of reason in moral and religious matters has established that Miller was not a naïve but a chastened realist, for while he affirmed that there is an objective moral and religious order that can be known by moral agents with more or less certainty, nevertheless he was self-consciously opposed to a number of the assumptions that were essential to what he regarded as the presumptuous epistemological “cant” of his day.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, he appealed to revelation not to destroy reason but to improve and correct it; he was persuaded that reason by itself cannot supply a standard that is adequate to the guidance and regulation of all men because it is fallen and inclined to bias; he insisted that not only can the light of nature not account for that system of moral and religious truth that is typically associated with natural religion but he

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<sup>41</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 125.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 125, emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 126.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 126.

<sup>45</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 125–26.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 126.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. II,” 126.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 46.

also maintained that reason alone cannot purify the soul so that it can pursue the wisdom that human flourishing requires; and finally he refused to grant that reason alone is sufficient to judge between those things which in fact are contrary to reason and those things which in fact are just above it. If this is the case, then how might Miller’s clear insistence upon the “intrinsic insufficiency”<sup>49</sup> of reason to judge rightly in matters of morality and religion without the forming, shaping, and enlarging guidance of divine revelation be related to his understanding of what is now commonly referred to as the life of the mind? Is there a relationship between his understanding of the life of the mind and his clear insistence upon the “intrinsic insufficiency” of reason to judge rightly in matters of morality and religion, and if there is, then what is the nature of that relationship and how are we to account for it? In the remainder of this essay I will argue that just as Miller was persuaded that reason alone is not sufficient “to guide [men] in safety” to what he called “the realms of eternal blessedness,”<sup>50</sup> so too he was convinced that learning which is not “sanctified” or “consecrated by [piety or] real religion” will never lead an individual to a true understanding of the world as it objectively is,<sup>51</sup> for he recognized that there is an essential relationship between the disposition or inclination of the heart and all of the organic operations of the whole soul or mind, including those operations that have to do with the judgements that stand at the very center of every aspect of the life of the mind.

The justification for this contention can be found throughout Miller’s published and unpublished writings, particularly in those sermons that expound the doctrinal convictions that give form and substance to the “philosophy of mind”<sup>52</sup> that lies at the foundation of his insistence that though “intellect is power, and ... knowledge is power,” the learning that is the essential means to both will never enable moral agents to see the world for what it objectively is until it has been brought “under the sanctified guidance of genuine piety.”<sup>53</sup> In these sermons—which disclose that Miller stood squarely and self-consciously in the Reformed wing of the Augustinian tradition—Miller argues that when Adam was created, “the primitive state of man, with respect to his intellectual, moral, and social character, was the highest that he has ever enjoyed, or ever will enjoy, on this side of heaven.”<sup>54</sup> Adam, he contends, was created in the moral image of God, and for this reason all of the faculties or powers of his soul were governed by “knowledge, righteousness[,] and true holiness.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, “His understanding was enlightened by divine and immediate inspiration;—His will was perfectly conformed to the divine law;—his affections [were] placed on their proper objects;—and every desire of his heart [was] pure and holy.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 50.

<sup>50</sup> Miller, “Remarks on the Extent and Province of Human Reason in Matters of Religion, No. I,” 49.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Work of Evangelists and Missionaries” (Isa 61:4), September 12, 1822, in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry: A Collection of Addresses and Articles by Faculty and Friends of Princeton Theological Seminary*, 2 vols., ed. James M. Garretson (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 1:435.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, “Man Is an Active Being,” 10.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Importance of Mature Preparatory Study for the Ministry,” July 3, 1829, in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, 1:530.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, “The Work of Evangelists and Missionaries,” 1:424.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Excellent and Precious Nature of the Soul” (Matt 16:26), April 1792, Box 9, File 16:6, in *The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection*.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, “The Excellent and Precious Nature of the Soul,” 6.

However, when Adam sinned in “the garden of innocence,”<sup>57</sup> Miller contends that he lost that moral image “which was the most invaluable treasure, and [the] true ornament of his nature,” and as a consequence his heart—or “the fountain head, from which every part of the human conduct and character takes its rise”<sup>58</sup>—became “entirely depraved”<sup>59</sup> and all of “the faculties [or powers] of [his] soul” were subjected to “the power and dominion of sin.”<sup>60</sup> While Miller acknowledges that the children of Adam retain the rational wherewithal to “unfold and improve” upon “the various departments of science ... and the numerous arts of life,”<sup>61</sup> nevertheless he insists that they—like Adam—are by nature neither “impartial inquirer[s] after truth,”<sup>62</sup> nor do they have the intellectual ability to discern “the [true] character of those things which are presented to [their] view,”<sup>63</sup> for they are—as a consequence of their

<sup>57</sup> See the discussion that is associated with note 22 above.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, “The Government of the Heart,” 3. For more on the heart, see the discussion in note 38 above.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things” (Jer 17:9), December 7, 1823, Box 17, File 9:4, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, “The Government of the Heart,” 4.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, “The Excellent and Precious Nature of the Soul,” 7. In the Preface to the first volume of his wide-ranging survey of the life of the mind in the eighteenth century, Miller notes that, “A man who is a bad Christian may be a very excellent mathematician, astronomer, or chemist; and one who denies or blasphemes the Saviour may write profoundly and instructively on some branches of science highly interesting to mankind. It is proper to commiserate the mistakes of such persons, to abhor their blasphemy, and to warn men against their fatal delusions; but it is surely difficult to see either the justice or utility of withholding from them that praise of genius or of learning to which they are fairly entitled” (Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century. Part the First; in Three Volumes: Containing a Sketch of the Revolutions and Improvements in Science, Arts, and Literature, During that Period* [London: J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Churchyard, 1805], 1:viii). Note that hovering in the background of Miller’s willingness to celebrate the scholarly achievements of unbelieving academics is a philosophy of mind that makes it possible for him to affirm that truth claims that are truly true can be known or laid hold of in different senses, or with more or less competence or rightness. For Miller, a prime example of this reality can be found in the differing ways that the truth claims of the gospel are laid hold of by devils and by Christians. According to Miller, “The faith of Devils is a speculative conviction of the understanding and conscience, which, tho’ it fills them with anxiety and terror, is accompanied with no salutary impression on their temper or practice! While the faith of Christians, is an enlightened, cordial embracing of the Gospel, as a practical system!—It is receiving the record which God has given of his Son, in the love of it.—It is a reception in which the heart and affections accompany the exercise of the understanding leading to humble trust;—affectionate reliance;—and habitual, childlike obedience! In short, [while] the language of the faith of Devils is—We know thee who thou art, ... The language of Christian faith, is My Lord and my God!” (Samuel Miller, “Christian Faith Distinguished from the Faith of Devils” [Jas 2:19], December 1810, Box 15, File 1:19, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection). This citation is relevant to the discussion in the body of this essay because it suggests that for Miller, just as it is possible for devils to have a true—even if only a speculative—understanding of a number of the truth claims that are grounded in and associated with the good news of the gospel, so too it is possible for unbelievers to have a measure—maybe even a large measure—of speculative competence with respect to truth claims that are truly true, even if they do not have the moral wherewithal to see those truth claims for what they objectively or rightly are, namely truth claims that testify in some true sense to the wisdom, glory, and beauty of the God who created and is providentially sustaining and governing the world that we inhabit from one moment to the next. This idea will be developed further in the discussion that follows. For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussion that is associated with note 22 above, as well as the contents of note 38 above, and notes 73, 81, 94, and 104 below.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Good Old Way” (Jer 6:16), February 1813, Box 16, File 6:6, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, “The Excellent and Precious Nature of the Soul,” 2.

covenantal union with Adam—“entirely destitute of all spiritual discernment” and “all cordial taste and relish” for “the real excellence and glory of Divine things,”<sup>64</sup> no matter where those divine things are being revealed. In short, Miller contends that the children of Adam are born “dead in trespasses [and sins]”<sup>65</sup> and have “carnal” minds that are by nature “enmity against God”<sup>66</sup> because they are under “the dominion” of that unsanctified disposition “which [they] bring with them into the world”<sup>67</sup> as a consequence of Adam’s sin. For this reason, their minds are not just “clouded” by sin,<sup>68</sup> but they are “as blind as midnight” to the “real beauty and excellence” of God’s revelation of himself not just in his Word, but also—as we shall see in the discussion that follows—in his world as well.<sup>69</sup>

If this is the case and it is therefore true that moral agents who are in bondage to “the degrading thralldom of nature’s depravity”<sup>70</sup> are—in a truly comprehensive sense—“as insensible to spiritual beauty and glory, as the blind man is to the beauty of colours; as a deaf man is to the charm of music;—or as the sick man is to the relish of the most savory food,”<sup>71</sup> then where does Miller believe that a remedy for the sinner’s natural aversion to the moral excellence and beauty of “every thing which brings [God’s] real character and glory distinctly before [his] mind”<sup>72</sup> is to be found? Again, like believers standing in the mainstream of the Reformed wing of the Augustinian tradition before him, Miller argues that the natural bondage of the depraved sinner is always and everywhere moral and not structural or constitutional. It has to do, in other words, neither with an intrinsic deficiency in the composition of the sinner’s soul, nor, he adds, with a form of bondage to an “external power” of some sort, but with the sinner’s “voluntary submission to the dictates of sin and folly, which arises from having a heart and affections enlisted in their favour.”<sup>73</sup> For this reason, Miller insists that those who are “sold under the government of

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<sup>64</sup> Samuel Miller, “Wonderful Things in the Bible” (Ps 119:18), January 18, 1824, Box 17, File 9:10, 9, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection. See also Samuel Miller, “The Hearts of All Men Alike” (Prov 27:19), May 1809, Box 13, File 18:11, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>65</sup> Samuel Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth” (John 6:63), January 4, 1836, Box 18, File 2:8, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Carnal Mind Is Enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), August 1818, Box 16, File 20:5, 6, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual” (2 Cor 10:4), October 13, 1826, in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, 1:467.

<sup>68</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Evil of Sin Considered and Improved” (Jer 2:10), June 1808, Box 13, File 6:12, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, “Wonderful Things in the Bible,” 10, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Servitude of Sin” (John 8:34), December 1798, Box 10, File 1:19, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 8. Note that Miller uses similar imagery elsewhere: The person who is dead in sin, he argues, is “like the blind man, who has learned the language pertaining to the science of light and colours ... but has never yet seen colours with his own eyes, and knows nothing experimentally of those feelings which they excite” (Miller, “Wonderful Things in the Bible,” 12).

<sup>72</sup> Miller, “The Carnal Mind Is Enmity against God,” 5–6.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, “The Servitude of Sin,” 4. Elsewhere Miller insists that “anterior to the renewal of their minds by the Holy Spirit,” the unregenerate are “in love with the world;—in love with sin;—having their affections set on things below, not on things above;—having no desire to do the will of God, or to enjoy communion with him; in short, having no relish for his service;—no appetite for Zion’s provision;—no well founded (sic) hope toward God;—and no preparation for the holy joys of his presence” (Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 9–10). But why does

sin”<sup>74</sup> and who are therefore entirely “destitute of all taste for God and his service”<sup>75</sup> can be liberated from their “spiritual slavery”<sup>76</sup> only through a work of the Spirit that restores the susceptibility of their souls to the moral excellence and beauty of spiritual things. According to Miller, it is the Spirit who grants the fallen sinner the “capacity to enjoy [God’s] holy kingdom forever”<sup>77</sup> not by “impart[ing] to him any new faculty, or [by] creat[ing] in his soul any new substance,”<sup>78</sup> but by restoring his soul to “the [moral] image of God,”<sup>79</sup> thereby giving “a new impulse and direction”<sup>80</sup>—“a new bias”<sup>81</sup>—to his faculties and “attuning” his soul “to the perception and relish of the Divine excellence,” wherever that excellence is being revealed.<sup>82</sup> In short, Miller maintains that the remedy for the sinner’s natural aversion to the moral excellence and beauty of spiritual things can be found only in that work of the Spirit which restores the

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Miller believe that those who remain “dead in trespasses [and sins]” continually “[seek] their happiness any where but in God and religion”? (Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 8, 10). Miller’s answer to this question reveals his clear endorsement of the notion that the inability of the unregenerated moral agent is always and everywhere moral and not structural or constitutional. According to Miller, the indifference of the unregenerate to the moral excellence and beauty of the things of God does not find its genesis in an intrinsic deficiency in the makeup or composition of their souls, but in the sinful disposition or inclination of their hearts. The unregenerate do not seek their happiness in the God of the Bible, he contends, not because “they are destitute of those faculties which the Creator requires to be spent in his service! No, they cannot urge any such excuse as this for turning away from God to the world! They have understandings capable of learning what is right;—wills capable of being turned to what is right;—and affections capable of being fixed upon what is right! But, alas! They have no heart—no relish—no taste for spiritual things! They are in this respect dead;—dead to God;—dead to the joys and glories of his kingdom here; and dead to all the treasures and attractions of his presence hereafter! And utterly unable to help themselves, or to effect their own deliverance from this guilt and misery!” (Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 10–11). For unambiguous evidence that Miller endorses the notion of moral and not natural inability, a distinction that he argues is “deeply founded both in reason and in Scripture,” see Samuel Miller, “Sinners Their Own Destroyers” (Hos 13:9), September 1802, Box 10, File 11:20–22, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection. For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussion that is associated with note 22 above, as well as the contents of notes 38 and 61 above, and notes 81, 94, and 104 below.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, “The Servitude of Sin,” 3.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, “The Carnal Mind Is Enmity against God,” 5.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, “The Servitude of Sin,” 3.

<sup>77</sup> Samuel Miller, “Meetness for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light” (Col 1:12), September 21, 1817, Box 16, File 12, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>78</sup> Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 18.

<sup>79</sup> Miller, “Meetness for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light,” Box 16, File 12.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 18.

<sup>81</sup> Miller, “The Carnal Mind Is Enmity against God,” 6. Note that for Miller, in order for a moral agent to see and therefore know truth for what it objectively is, the soul or mind of that moral agent must be biased in the right way. In other words, there must be a kind of moral correspondence or likeness—or, to put it differently, a kind of moral cordiality or congeniality—between the knower and the thing being known. What this suggests, among other things, is that Miller rejects the myth of neutrality, for he rejects the idea that objective knowledge is possible only when the object that is being known can be laid hold of objectively, i.e., completely without any kind of moral bias whatsoever. For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussion that is associated with note 22 above, as well as the contents of notes 38, 61, and 73 above, and notes 94 and 104 below.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Secret of the Lord with Them that Fear Him” (Ps 25:14), September 1807, Box 12, File 11:6, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

moral image of God to the sinful soul not by working on that soul in a structural or constitutional, but in a moral or spiritual fashion, i.e., by

enlighten[ing],—elevat[ing],—purify[ing],—and turn[ing] to new objects those intellectual and moral faculties which the sinner already possesses! That understanding which was before alienated from the life of God, is now so wrought upon as to be turned to Him with intelligence and with pleasure! That will which was lately opposed to the will and service of God, is now brought into cordial subjection to Him! And those affections which were once supremely fixed on earthly things, are now raised, and supremely placed on things divine and heavenly! In a word, the quicken[ing] [that is the “workmanship” of the Spirit] ... consists not merely in presenting truth to the mind, but in restoring all the powers of the soul to their right use and action,—in rescu[ing] them from the torpor,—the disease and the perversion under which they had before laboured, and preparing them for those holy and elevated exercises which constitute their true happiness and glory!<sup>83</sup>

But what, in a fuller and therefore more precise sense, does Miller believe that the work of the Spirit entails, and how does it provide a remedy for the comprehensive blindness of the depraved sinner, particularly if it is true that the kingdom of God is “a kingdom of means,” as he claims it is?<sup>84</sup> According to Miller, in addition to immediately creating a “holy taste for holy objects”<sup>85</sup> in the heart of the chosen moral agent, the Spirit also cultivates true religion—the “essence” of which is found, he argues, “in our having right apprehensions of spiritual objects,—right affections toward them,—and right practice flowing from those views and affections”<sup>86</sup>—by “enlarg[ing] and elevat[ing] the mind” of that agent through the means and according to the truth of God’s Word.<sup>87</sup> When the Word of God is applied to the mind of the chosen moral agent by the sanctifying power of the Spirit of God, Miller argues that it gives “a just and pure direction to the various faculties of [that agent’s] mind,”<sup>88</sup> for “It enlightens [his] understanding,—it awakens [his] conscience,—it softens [his] heart,—it inspires [his] hope, ... It furnishes [him with] the strongest motives for the attainment of holiness,” and it elicits all of these enlargements and elevations simply by setting “the most excellent and glorious objects” clearly before his regenerated mind.<sup>89</sup> What this suggests, then, is that for Miller, the Spirit enables the chosen moral agent “to see spiritual objects as they really are”<sup>90</sup> by working on his mind in both

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<sup>83</sup> Miller, “It is the Spirit that Quickeneth,” 18–20.

<sup>84</sup> Miller, “The Importance of Mature Preparatory Study for the Ministry,” 530. For a helpful sermon on the means that God uses to advance the kingdom of God in the lives of individual believers as well as in the world more generally, see Samuel Miller, “Seeking the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness First” (Matt 6:33), December 1810, Box 14, File 23, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ” (Phil 3:8), May 1807, Box 12, File 8:11, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Miller, “Sanctification by the Truth” (John 17:17), September 18, 1825, Box 17, File 17:21, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>87</sup> Miller, “The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ,” 19.

<sup>88</sup> Miller, “The Excellent and Precious Nature of the Soul,” 9.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, “Sanctification by the Truth,” 18.

<sup>90</sup> Miller, “Wonderful Things in the Bible,” 15.

mediate and immediate senses. Indeed, the Spirit does not just endow the chosen agent's mind with the moral capacity to discern the moral excellence and beauty of spiritual objects, but the Spirit also enables that agent to actually see the moral excellence and beauty of the objects that he is perceiving by enlarging and elevating his vision through the means and according to the truth of God's Word, i.e., by making it possible for him to see and assess those objects in light of "the Word of truth and grace [that is] contained in the Holy Scriptures," which Miller contends are the believer's "grand weapon ... for extending" not just the perception, but the reception of God's kingdom "into all the world."<sup>91</sup>

If this is in fact an accurate summary of what Miller contends the work of the Spirit entails, then to what kinds of objects does he believe that the "sanctified judgment"<sup>92</sup> of the enlarged and elevated mind extends? Does he believe that it extends *only* to those objects that are spiritual in the narrower, more limited, or distinctly modern sense of the term, and if so, does he therefore maintain that a moral agent can see the world for what it objectively is *apart* from the mediate and immediate operations of the Spirit of God? Or does he believe that the "sanctified judgment" of the enlarged and elevated mind in fact extends to *all* objects without exception—including those more mundane objects that we encounter throughout the world in which we live—and if so, does he therefore insist that a moral agent can see the world for what it objectively is *only* when his seeing is grounded in the renewing, forming, shaping, enlarging, and elevating work of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification? At various points throughout the second half of this essay I have intimated that for Miller the "sanctified judgment" of the enlarged and elevated mind in fact extends to the *whole* of the kingdom of God, which is just to say that it in fact extends even to the more mundane aspects of the world that we inhabit. That such an intimation is warranted, and that interpreters are right to conclude that for Miller objective knowledge of the world in which we live is possible *only* when it is grounded in the mediate and immediate operations of the Spirit of God, is established by Miller's endorsement of two ideas that have an essential—indeed, a kind of symbiotic—relationship to one another. The first has to do with Miller's contention that in a very real sense the kingdom of God—or the realm of God's dominion that *just is* declaring his glory in some sense—encompasses not just some, but "all the works of creation."<sup>93</sup> When the phrase "the kingdom of God" is taken "in its most extensive sense," Miller argues, it denotes "that universal dominion of God, which embraces all ranks of beings, and pervades all space. It is that unlimited government of Jehovah which takes in his enemies as well as his friends—which extends to all the works of nature and of Providence, and which comprehends heaven, earth[, and hell]."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Miller, "Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual," 1:474–75.

<sup>92</sup> Miller, "Meetness for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light," 1.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel Miller, *The Earth Filled with the Glory of the Lord: A Sermon Preached at Baltimore, September 9, 1835 before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at Their Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1835), 5–6.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Miller, "Thy Kingdom Come" (Matt 6:10), March 1807, Box 12, File 6:3, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection. In a sermon that he first preached in New York City in 1811 entitled "The Mystery of Providence," Miller makes it clear that in his estimation, not only is God's kingdom all-encompassing, but God's reign extends to the entirety of his all-encompassing kingdom, and it does so not just in a "general," but in a "particular" sense as well. "There are multitudes[,] my friends[,] who would shudder at the thought of denying the general providence of God who are very far from acknowledging his hand and his agency in every thing—however apparently small, that may occur! Nay, many even of the pious appear to have much atheism in their habits of feeling, and to be grievously defective as to this part of Christian faith!—They see and confess the hand of God in great matters and [in] the rise and fall of Empires, and in great national conflicts; but in reference to the minute details



The second idea is related organically to the first and has to do with Miller’s understanding of the central role that redemption must play in the ability of a moral agent to discern the objective, essentially sacramental or God-centered nature of the glory-displaying truth that is being revealed throughout the whole of the kingdom of God, which he again contends “embraces the whole creation of God.”<sup>95</sup> In a sermon that he first preached in 1804 entitled “The Wonderful Condescension of God in Regarding and Visiting Man,” Miller encourages the members of his congregation to remember that the people of God “are taught in Scripture to believe, that, in consequence of the work of redemption, the friends of holiness, in every part of the creation, see and understand more of God ... than they could otherwise have done!”<sup>96</sup> When we consider the idea that is addressed in the paragraph above in light of the idea that is being addressed in this paragraph—in other words, when Miller’s emphasis on the all-encompassing nature of the kingdom of God is understood in light of his clear insistence upon the epistemological advantages that are associated with the Spirit’s work of applying the saving work of Christ to the hearts and minds of chosen moral agents—we see that for Miller, the mediate and immediate operations of the Spirit of God have a renewing, forming, shaping, enlarging, and elevating impact upon every aspect of the life of the mind simply because it is the work of the Spirit in regeneration and in sanctification that attunes the minds of those who have been redeemed to the essentially sacramental or God-centered nature of the truth that is being revealed throughout the whole of the kingdom of God, thereby enabling them to see the vast expanse of the created order in a more objective and therefore more fully truthful fashion than they could otherwise have done. In short, since everything in the world “is God’s”<sup>97</sup> and everything that he has made *just is* declaring his glory in some sense, it follows that everything in the created order is seen and assessed in a qualitatively superior and therefore more objectively truthful fashion when it is laid hold of by a mind that has been regenerated by God’s Spirit and sanctified by God’s Word, for such a mind—and such a mind *alone*—has “a moral as well as an intellectual power of discerning between good and bad, and judging and acting accordingly,”<sup>98</sup> for it stands no longer in a

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of personal success and disappointment—the government of God is seldom practically realized—seldom devoutly adored!—Yet there is no point concerning which the Word of God is more perfectly explicit;—declaring that all events—even the smallest—... are all under the direction of that almighty Providence which never slumbers nor sleeps!—If there be a general providence it is plain there must be a particular one, for the greatest events are often connected with the smallest—nay are often dependent upon them! Let us, then, cleave to the doctrine of a particular Providence,—the doctrine of the holy and wise government of God in every thing,—not only as a pleasing theory,—but as the ... anchor of our daily and hourly consolations;—As the animating principle of prayer,—and as the life of Christian hope! ... Happy is that believer, then, who makes it his habitual study to walk with God, day by day, in the dealings of his Providence, as well as in the work of his Holy Spirit.—Who sees God in every thing, acknowledges him in every thing,—and enjoys Him in every thing! O, if there be any thing adapted to make a believer cheerful—to make him rejoice even in tribulation, it is the believing apprehension [that] God reigns ... !” (Samuel Miller, “The Mystery of God’s Providence” [John 13:7], July 1811, Box 15, File 10:17–19, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection). For discussions that are related to this point, see the discussion that is associated with note 22 above, as well as the contents of notes 38, 61, 73, and 81 above, and note 104 below.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, “Thy Kingdom Come,” 3.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Wonderful Condescension of God in Regarding and Visiting Man” (Ps 8:3–4), May 1804, Box 11, File 3:26–27, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Christian’s Relation to God” (Ps 140:6), May 1810, Box 14, File 9:22, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Miller, “The Choice and Prayer of Solomon” (1 Kgs 3:5–14), March 1, 1829, Box 17, File 24:14, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

hostile, but in a cordial relationship to the essentially sacramental or God-glorifying nature of the truth that is being revealed throughout the entirety of the reality-encompassing expanse that constitutes the kingdom of God.

#### *4. Conclusion: Piety, Sound Learning, and the Evangelistic Posture of the Believing Scholar*

If there is something to this reading of Miller's understanding of the relationship between the work of the Spirit and the life of the mind, and if it is therefore true that for Miller, the God-given wisdom of the enlarged and elevated mind in fact "embraces moral and spiritual, as well as intellectual rectitude,"<sup>99</sup> then two concluding observations about his conception of the relationship between piety and learning are in order, particularly if it is the case that he and the other founders of Princeton Seminary conceived of the relationship between piety and learning in precisely the same fashion, as I think it is. The first has to do with Miller's insistence that since we live in a universe that *just is* imbued with sacramental significance, the "vital, practical piety" that is the workmanship of the Spirit is essential to education that is enlightened in the true sense of the term not just because it is the only means to turning "seminaries of learning" into "nurseries of genuine virtue," but also because it is "the ONE THING [that is] NEEDFUL" for transforming colleges and seminaries into "salubrious Fountains" of "sound learning."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, it is "THE SALT OF GENUINE PIETY" alone that can render a college or a seminary "a real blessing to society," Miller argues, not just because it inspires students "with wisdom; controlling their passions; purifying their hearts and lives; working in them the fear and the love of God; and disposing them, in their studies, and in all their intercourse, to make his will the sovereign guide of their conduct, and his glory the great end of their pursuits," but also because—as this essay has sought to establish—it "accomplishes much for [a] man ... as an INTELLECTUAL BEING."<sup>101</sup> In short, Miller insists that the piety "which is common to all ... sincere disciples of Christ" is the indispensable—in fact the *only*—means to transforming colleges and seminaries into fountains of "sound learning," and he does so precisely because he recognizes that wherever the piety that is the workmanship of the Spirit

exists in its purity and power, the mind of its possessor is more enlarged, more [strengthened,] vigorous, and better disciplined, than it could possibly have been, without this precious gift of God. And, if there be any truth in this assertion, then it is plain, that he who should propose to conduct a band of Youth through a course of liberal education, without the aid of religion, would neglect one of the most potent and precious auxiliaries to which he could resort, even putting entirely out of view its power as a principle of sanctification, and its essential connexion with everlasting happiness.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Miller, "The Choice and Prayer of Solomon," 15.

<sup>100</sup> Samuel Miller, *The Literary Fountains Healed, A Sermon, Preached in the Chapel of the College of New Jersey (March 9, 1823)* (Trenton: George Sherman, 1823), 37, 24, 30, 29, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Miller, *The Literary Fountains Healed*, 16, 24, 28.

<sup>102</sup> Miller, *The Literary Fountains Healed*, 37, 29. Note that the inclusion of the word "strengthened" in the quotation above is warranted by Miller's insistence, earlier in the same paragraph from which I am quoting, that piety or "real religion" "enlarges and strengthens the mind; imparts to it a new and benign impulse; fixes the thoughts; begets habits of close attention, and sober reflection; leads the individual who is under its influence to turn his

The second concluding observation is related closely to the first and has to do with Miller’s understanding of the evangelistic stance or posture that should characterize the more scholarly pursuits of those whose minds have been enlarged, elevated, and strengthened by the Spirit of God. According to Miller, the Christian religion not only “has a tendency to produce an astonishing greatness of soul,” but it also “creates and cherishes a divine ambition”<sup>103</sup> for the advancement of the kingdom of God through various means, including those that have to do with the life of the mind. Just as he contends that “perverted” or “unsanctified” learning “has been the means of turning millions away from the kingdom of Christ, rather than bringing them into it,” so too he insists that “Genuine ... and even profound learning,” when united with the kind of piety that is generated by the mediate and immediate operations of the Spirit of God, “is an instrument in the propagation of religion, of inestimable value.”<sup>104</sup> For this reason, Miller exhorts the faithful to advance the kingdom of God by engaging the life of the mind in a holistic and self-consciously Christian fashion. On the one hand, he encourages believers to take a forceful stand against the “presumptuous criticism” of those enemies of the faith who would subvert the advancement of the kingdom and the extension of genuine piety by appealing to learning that is finally accursed, or, grounded in a commitment to what he refers to as the “proud reasonings” of “corrupted reason.”<sup>105</sup> “Accursed be all that learning,” he exclaims like John Witherspoon before him, “which sets itself in opposition to vital piety! Accursed be all that learning which disguises, or is ashamed of vital piety! Accursed be all that learning, which attempts to fill the place, or to supersede the honours, of vital piety! Nay, accursed be all that learning, which is not made subservient to the promotion and the glory of vital piety.”<sup>106</sup>

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views inward; to converse with himself; to examine his own exercises, and, in short, to subject to a more regular discipline than before, all his mental powers” (Miller, *The Literary Fountains Healed*, 28–29).

<sup>103</sup> Miller, “Meetness for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light,” 1.

<sup>104</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:471. Note that Miller is eager—and never reluctant—to embrace “Genuine and even profound learning,” even if that learning is the learning of an unbelieving scholar (Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:471). “To despise [genuine learning],” he argues, “is at once, to insult our reason, and the almighty Author of reason. To decry it, is one of those devices of Satan, by which he ensnares even good men into the service of his kingdom” (Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:471). For a discussion of how the epistemological capacities of unbelieving scholars are related to those of believing scholars, see note 61 above.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel Miller, “Departing from the Simplicity That Is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3), November 1804, Box 11, File 7:15, in The Samuel Miller Manuscript Collection.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel Miller, “*The Duty of the Church to Take Measures for Providing an Able and Faithful Ministry: A Sermon*,” *The Sermon, Delivered at the Inauguration of the Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D., as Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology, in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America, To Which are Added, the Professor’s Inaugural Address, and the Charge to the Professor and Students* (New York: Whiting and Watson, Theological and Classical Booksellers, 1812), 17–18. Note that Miller is here modifying a well-known quotation from Witherspoon in order to reinforce his conviction that learning in the fullest and best sense of the term—which for him *just is* sanctified learning, or learning that is grounded in the mediate and immediate operations of the Spirit of God—is always informed by “vital piety,” and it always serves to advance the interests of “vital piety,” whatever those interests happen to be in one context or another. The original Witherspoon quote reads as follows: “Accursed be all that learning which sets itself in opposition to the cross of Christ! Accursed be all that learning which disguises or is ashamed of the cross of Christ! Accursed be all that learning which fills the room that is due to the cross of Christ! And once more, Accursed be all that learning which is not made subservient to the honor and glory of the cross of Christ!” (John Witherspoon, “Glorying in the Cross” [Gal 6:14], in *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802], 1:393).

On the other hand, Miller encourages the faithful to remember that in addition to taking a forceful stand against the presumptuous claims of those who are “found perverting, torturing[,] and reasoning away” those “most precious truths” which are “the life and the hope of the Christian,”<sup>107</sup> believers must also endeavor not just to counter, but to conquer those claims by engaging in an “offensive”—and not merely a defensive—apologetic.<sup>108</sup> While Miller eagerly acknowledges that the “spiritual” weapons of the Christian’s warfare can be and often are useful “for the protection and defence” of the Christian faith, he insists that those weapons can and also should be used to serve a more “offensive” or aggressive end, namely the end of vindicating the truth claims of the Christian religion by “attacking and vanquishing the enemies of [the Christian’s] Master.”<sup>109</sup> When the weapons of the Christian’s warfare are used in such a fashion, he argues, they are properly used not “to injure, but to save; not to inflict violence on the persons of those to whom they are directed; but to enlighten, to convince, to sanctify, to comfort, and lead to perfect and eternal blessedness,” and they are properly used in this fashion because the “strong holds” which the faithful are called “to pull down ... are not those of physical, but of moral power.”<sup>110</sup> They are, in other words, “those of pride, unbelief, self-righteousness, love of the world, superstition, sensuality, and all that enmity to God, his truth, and his commandments, which every where characterize unsanctified men; together with all those vain pleas by which they are wont to excuse, if not justify themselves in their rebellious course.”<sup>111</sup> Since these are the strongholds in which “the children of this world are, as it were, entrenched,” Miller contends that the faithful should always endeavor not just to teach and preach the substance of God’s Word with boldness and integrity, but they should also commit themselves to “pulling down” the “unhallowed fortification[s]” of the children of this world, for such efforts, he maintains, are among the most effectual means not just to defending the truth claims of the Christian religion, but also to “constraining ... [the children of this world] to surrender themselves [as] willing captives to the blessed Redeemer.”<sup>112</sup>

With this emphasis upon the offensive or evangelistic dimension of the believer’s more scholarly pursuits in mind, I conclude by suggesting that although the quotation below is referring specifically to the stance or posture that should characterize the work of the minister who is endeavoring to be faithful to his ministerial calling, nevertheless it has a larger, more paradigmatic kind of relevance for all believers who in some sense are committed not just to “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God ... [but also to] bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>113</sup> According to Miller, it is not just faithful ministers of the gospel who should

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<sup>107</sup> Miller, “Departing from the Simplicity That Is in Christ,” 15.

<sup>108</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:474.

<sup>109</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:473, 474. Note that for Miller, the need to both stand against and refute the erroneous conclusions of unsanctified learning is particularly pronounced in large cities. In this regard, see Samuel Miller, “The Difficulties and Temptations Which Attend the Preaching of the Gospel in Great Cities” (Romans 1:15, 16), October 9, 1820, in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, 1:400–21. For an excellent discussion of both the content and the significance of this sermon, see James M. Garretson, *An Able and Faithful Ministry: Samuel Miller and the Pastoral Office* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 291–304.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:474, 478.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:478.

<sup>112</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:478.

<sup>113</sup> Miller, “Christian Weapons Not Carnal but Spiritual,” 1:478.

pursue their calling while at the same time acknowledging that they are living and moving and having their vocational being in God’s world, but all believers—including all believing scholars—should as well. For this reason, it is not just faithful pastors who should endeavor to afford the Bible the place of priority and privilege in their efforts to advance the kingdom of God in the context that they inhabit, but faithful scholars should too, and they should do so precisely because they should recognize—just like faithful ministers of the gospel should recognize—that the “sanctified judgment” of the enlarged, elevated, and strengthened mind—the kind of judgment that finds itself eagerly deferring to the final authority of Scripture in all matters of faith, learning, and living—extends not just to some things, but to all things without exception.

Surely that professed servant of Christ who suffers himself to wander into the regions of speculative philosophy; who subjects Christian doctrine to the torturing ordeal of unsanctified reason; who begins by deciding, upon philosophical principles, what truth ought to be, and must be, and then recurs to the Bible to see what it is; and who is more intent on the honour of being thought an “inventor” and an “original” in theology, than on simply ascertaining and proclaiming “what God the Lord hath spoken”; surely such a servant cannot be said to “follow Christ.” On the contrary, he may be said to have embraced, whether he be aware of it or not, the radical principle of the worst heresy, and, indeed, of all unbelief. The minister who truly follows Christ; regards his Word as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. He approaches the sacred volume with reverence; studies it with humble and devout diligence; and makes its simple declarations the test of truth. He faithfully employs his reason, indeed, in examining the Bible; but he employs it only to decide two questions—*Has God spoken in that Bible?* and, if he have [sic] spoken, *What has he said?* Having ascertained this, he humbly bows every power of his soul to the heavenly message, and is cordially willing, with meekness and docility, to make it “the man of his counsel,” and the sovereign guide of all his instruction. In short, he considers the great subjects of his ministry as made ready to his hand; and feels that his only business is to bear them faithfully, clearly, and without alteration, to a benighted world.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Samuel Miller, “Christ the Model of Gospel Ministers” (Matt 4:19), June 1, 1835, in *Princeton and the Work of the Christian Ministry*, 1:606. I would like to thank Robert Caldwell, Ardel Caneday, Kevin DeYoung, James Garretson, Hans Madueme, Walter Schultz, David Smith, Allen Stanton, and Brian Tabb for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

# Southern Yankees: Southern Baptist Clergy in the Antebellum North (1812–1861)

— Obbie Tyler Todd —

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**Abstract:** Baptists provide an excellent window into the American identity during the antebellum period. For this reason, no group illustrates the unity and disunity of the infant nation more than the Baptist ministers who left their homes in the South to fill pulpits in the North. The experiences of these “Southern Yankees” represent a denomination in turmoil and a nation on the verge of political, social, and theological crisis. This article will examine the variety of ways in which Southern Baptists transcended sectional divides in the antebellum period as well as the reasons that these pastorates either failed or were fraught with controversy due to slavery.

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For decades, scholars have analyzed the meteoric rise of Baptists into nineteenth-century American culture. From the growth of the denomination during the Second Great Awakening to the wealth and influence of businessman John D. Rockefeller, the Baptist story has become an essential piece in American religious and historical studies.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one could argue that the preservation of the nation itself owed much to the prosperity of Baptists during this period. Both Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln had Baptist fathers from Virginia whose Jeffersonian values laid the foundation for their sons’ careers. Thomas Lincoln, a Calvinistic Baptist, traveled west to Kentucky and then Indiana and then Illinois seeking to carve out a piece of the American frontier for his family. Decades later, Abraham recorded that his father left the South “partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of the difficulty of land titles in Kentucky.”<sup>2</sup>

Henry Clay, Lincoln’s political hero, was the son of a Baptist minister who farmed tobacco. John Clay of Hanover County, Virginia pastored Chickahominy Church and was “a plain, but sincere and

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<sup>1</sup> For the latest example of Baptists shaping the fate of America, see Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> In Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life, Volume 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 21.

devout man of God.”<sup>3</sup> However, as James C. Klotter has shown, the somewhat stereotypical image of Clay’s father as a lowly, indigent Baptist is not grounded in historical fact. Klotter explains,

In contrast to the image of Rev. John Clay as a poverty-stricken minister of the Old Dominion, in truth Henry’s father came from a distinguished family that had been in Virginia almost from the first English settlement. “Sir John,” as he was called by contemporaries, held sizable landholdings of over 450 acres and owned at least twenty slaves. Most of that estate went to his widow, leaving the family in a comfortable situation.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the lives of “The Great Compromiser” and “The Great Emancipator,” and thus the fate of the infant nation, were tied to the fortunes of Baptists.

Conversely, just as Baptists played a role in shaping the country, they also helped sever it. C. C. Goen has examined how the denominational fissures among Methodists and Baptists foreshadowed the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, the Baptist denomination became a reflection of the peaks and valleys of the American people in the 1800s. Baptists thus provide an excellent window into the national identity during the antebellum period. For this reason, no group illustrates the unity and disunity of the nation more than the ministers who left their homes in the South to fill pulpits in the North. By 1814, Baptists had become a truly national denomination with the birth of the Triennial Convention, and this, along with the optimism of the nation at large, produced a spirit of fellowship between Northern and Southern Baptists that brought many Northern churches to extend calls to Southern clergymen. However, the challenges faced by the men I call “Southern Yankees” represent a denomination in turmoil and a nation on the verge of political, social, and theological crisis.<sup>6</sup>

It is the aim of this article to examine the variety of ways in which Southern Baptists transcended sectional divides in the antebellum period as well as the different reasons that these pastorates either failed or were fraught with controversy due to the issue of slavery.<sup>7</sup> While historians have diagnosed the 1845 split of the Triennial Convention and the participation of Baptists in the War itself, less understood is the question of how Southern pastors in the Antebellum North transitioned into their new churches, and, in turn, how their churches responded to their Southern pastors. Their experiences not only prefigured the looming Civil War, but also demonstrate just how much Northern and Southern Baptists had *in common* during this period as well—including beliefs about race. E. Brooks Holifield has rightly cautioned historians, “To speak of the mindlessness of antebellum Southern religion is to repeat

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<sup>3</sup> H. A. Tupper, *The First Century of The First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia 1780–1880* (Richmond: Carlton McCarthy, 1880), 55–56.

<sup>4</sup> James C. Klotter, *Henry Clay: The Man Who Would Be President* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2–3.

<sup>5</sup> C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>7</sup> In this article, I do not use “Southern Baptist” to refer to a member of the Southern Baptist Convention in the post-1845 sense. Instead, it will simply denote a Baptist who is from the South or was raised in the South.

a cliché.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps nothing exposes the fallacy of this cliché more than the willingness of Northerners to call Southern theologians to their churches. By examining the pastors who left the confines of their Southern world in order to serve congregations in the lower North and Middle Atlantic states, Christians today will discover a group of sojourning ministers whose successes and failures can teach us a great deal about ministry in a divided nation.

### *1. Schism in Philadelphia (1812–1824)*

The foundation for Northern-Southern relations between Baptists was laid—and leveled—over missions. Long before Southern Baptists departed the Triennial Convention in 1845 over the rights of missionaries to own slaves, it was in fact a pro-slavery Baptist from the South who served as its inaugural president in 1814: Richard Furman.<sup>9</sup> Although a Northerner by birth, Furman was raised in the Carolina upcountry and pastored the Southern Baptist “mother church” in Charleston where he fit nicely into its genteel, Federalist culture. So revered was the pastor of First Baptist Church that William B. Johnson later invoked the “sainted Furman” both when he was voted the fourth president of the Triennial Convention in 1841 *and* after becoming the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention four years later.<sup>10</sup> The name of Richard Furman carried weight before and after his death. Therefore, quite naturally, when Baptists convened the very first nationwide assembly in their history, Furman was unanimously elected its President (both in 1814 and 1817) alongside Vice President Thomas Baldwin of Second Baptist Church of Boston. Just as George Washington had secured Southern interests in the executive branch in the nation’s capital decades earlier, Baptists in the South were well represented in 1814. And the location of the Triennial Convention, like the newly-constituted government in 1787, was likewise in Philadelphia, a city that came to symbolize both the unity of the nation and the Baptist denomination.

In Philadelphia, Baptists had long boasted a rich history and a willingness to cross geographical and cultural boundaries. For instance, Richard Furman’s predecessor at First Baptist Church, Oliver Hart, was licensed to preach by the Philadelphia Association in 1746. Three years later, after a pastoral request from Charleston, the Philadelphia Baptists sent Hart to South Carolina to fill the pulpit.<sup>11</sup> In 1772–1773,

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<sup>8</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture 1795–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 4.

<sup>9</sup> For some works that examine the 1845 split, see Robert G. Gardner, *A Decade of Debate and Division: Georgia Baptists and the Formation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995); William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845–1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954); H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 382–463; Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 17–19; Jesse H. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 43–72; Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 127–29, 131.

<sup>10</sup> In 1841, when William B. Johnson was welcomed to the floor after being voted the fourth president of the Triennial Convention, he began his acceptance speech by paying homage to “the sainted Furman,” the man he’d admired since childhood (Hortense C. Woodson, *Giant in the Land: The Life of William B. Johnson* [Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2005], 98).

<sup>11</sup> For a treatment of Oliver Hart, see Eric C. Smith, *Oliver Hart and the Rise of Baptist America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).



the Association sent David Jones westward in one of the earliest Baptist missionary endeavors to the Native Americans.<sup>12</sup> A friendly, albeit confessional, spirit had long indwelled the Baptists of Philadelphia. Although a Northern city, as attested by its favorite son, Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia was culturally and religiously distinct from the more Puritanical New England. As a result, it proved more receptive to Southern pastors in its Baptist churches.

The first two Baptists from the South to pastor large churches in large Northern cities immediately encountered trouble—with one another. After receiving a Doctor of Divinity from Princeton in 1801, the erudite William Staughton was called to First Baptist Church of Philadelphia in 1805. Staughton was hardly a Southerner, having been a founding member of the Baptist Missionary Society in Kettering, England with Andrew Fuller in 1792. But one year later, at the request of none other than Richard Furman, the Englishman had emigrated to South Carolina to pastor the church at Georgetown for approximately two years.<sup>13</sup> His successor at First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, on the other hand, carried an impressive list of Southern credentials. Born in Virginia, Henry Holcombe moved to South Carolina with his family as a small child and eventually pastored several churches in both South Carolina and Georgia. While pastoring Pipe Creek Baptist Church in May 1788, the former cavalryman during the Revolutionary War was one of seven members chosen to represent St. Peter's parish in the South Carolina ratifying convention. Like most of the low country delegates, and foreshadowing a political and religious tendency toward national unity, he voted in favor of ratification. From the beginning, it seems, Holcombe was a Southerner who looked beyond the South. As John B. Boles concludes, "Receptive to new ideas, broadly humanitarian, forward looking, Henry Holcombe represented a Baptist minister from the South who shared many of the reform impulses of the American Enlightenment.... In an age when most Southern ministers were completely other-worldly and concerned only with individual salvation, Holcombe stood out vividly. He thus earned for himself a pre-eminent position among Baptist reformers of the Age of Jefferson."<sup>14</sup>

Like most Southern pastors who took Northern pulpits, Holcombe dedicated himself to the so-called "benevolent empire" that had steadily arisen in the new republic along with various other moral and social causes.<sup>15</sup> For example, after founding the Savannah River Baptist Association in 1802, he helped reform the Georgia penal code and secured the construction of a new state penitentiary. Once in Philadelphia, Holcombe's wife filled an important position in the "Female Hospitable Society for the Relief and Employment of the Poor," and "the Baptist Education Society of the Middle States" was founded in the church.<sup>16</sup> As the wealthiest and most prestigious church in the United States, and in the nation's second largest city, First Baptist Church of Philadelphia presented an opportunity for ambitious Southern ministers to cast a wide net of influence that would have otherwise been impossible in the more rural South. The pastor from Savannah initially had great reluctance about moving his family north, also declining an offer from Boston. But he received a letter from Dr. William Rogers,

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<sup>12</sup> See David Jones, *A Journal of Two Visits Made to Some Nations of Indians on the West Side of the River Ohio, in the Years 1772, 1773* (Burlington, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1774).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel W. Lynd, *Memoir of the Rev. William Staughton, D. D.* (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands, & Co., 1834), 27.

<sup>14</sup> John B. Boles, "Henry Holcombe: A Southern Baptist Reformer in the Age of Jefferson," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54 (1970): 403.

<sup>15</sup> For an examination of evangelical reform in the antebellum period, see Leo P. Hirrel, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Boles, "Henry Holcombe," 396.

a Baptist professor at the University of Pennsylvania who was familiar with his published sermons, convincing him to at least visit Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup> After some deliberation, Holcombe resolved to make the two-week-long journey, but he decided that he would only accept an offer from the church if the call was unanimous. Nearing the age of fifty, Holcombe would only leave his beloved South with the full assurance of Baptist fellowship. He would receive it. After his first trial sermon on the last Sunday in September of 1811, Holcombe eventually received a unanimous vote. Holcombe also discovered a city teeming with Christian causes. When Holcombe arrived in Philadelphia, he was “agreeably surprised,” taking note of the various institutions in the city, including orphanages, hospitals, and a university.<sup>18</sup>

His introduction to William Staughton, however, had all the trappings of an old-fashioned Southern duel. Years later, in a series of published letters addressed to Staughton by an anonymous figure named “Plain Truth,” the author, suspected by many as Holcombe, accused Staughton of treating the newcomer as an enemy: “Assuming a lofty air, you addressed your astonished successor, as follows:—‘Are you come to Philadelphia, for peace or war?’ Before you gave him time to answer this inflammatory question, you proceeded in a tone and attitude of defiance, ‘If you are come for war, sir, I am ready for you.’” In the months leading up to the War of 1812, an English Baptist and an American Baptist were on a collision course in the city of brotherly love. According to “Plain Truth,” when Staughton insisted that the two exchange pulpits, Holcombe replied that he could not agree upon such an arrangement without first consulting his friends. This apparently did not satisfy his predecessor, who interpreted his response as a “declaration of war.”<sup>19</sup> While Holcombe denied that he was indeed the author known as “Plain Truth,” he also denied, quite disingenuously, that the assertions were “inconsistent” with the truth, suggesting that the information had come from Holcombe himself. The ensuing fracas between Staughton and Holcombe played itself out on the largest stage in American Baptist life: the Triennial Convention.

While the exact source of the conflict between Staughton and Holcombe, and between Holcombe and the Philadelphia Association, is nevertheless difficult to determine, the clash of these Baptist titans most likely stemmed from the one cause that both men promoted throughout their lives: missions. In 1814, when Dr. Staughton sought to ensure that the board of commissioners (of which Holcombe was Vice President) give funds to a widow named Mrs. White to serve as a missionary in India, Holcombe opposed these efforts. Holcombe also insisted that Luther Rice be sent *back* to India, something that was not appreciated by Rice or those in his circle, including Staughton.<sup>20</sup> Afterward, Holcombe was silently removed from the Vice Presidency of the Board, effectively beginning the public dispute between the two Baptist leaders. To make matters worse, the conflict entered the Philadelphia Association when Holcombe opposed the First African Baptist Church’s offering communion to a person who had been excluded from fellowship by other churches for moral failings. After Holcombe was not granted a formal protest by the Association, a faction within the Association tried to force First Baptist Church to accept a minister of the Association’s choice. Holcombe then criticized an unnamed Baptist minister for

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<sup>17</sup> One of these sermons was *A Sermon, Containing a Brief Illustration and Defence of the Doctrines Commonly Called Calvinistic* (Charleston: Markland & M’Iver, 1793).

<sup>18</sup> Boles, “Henry Holcombe,” 395.

<sup>19</sup> Plain Truth, “Letter II,” in Henry Holcombe, *The Whole Truth, Relative to the Controversy Betwixt the American Baptists* (Philadelphia: J. H. Cunningham, 1820), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Luther Rice established Columbian College in Washington DC in 1821 with the help of William Staughton, who served as its first president.

befriending the individual who was not barred from fellowship, presumably Dr. Staughton.<sup>21</sup> As a result of this Baptist imbroglio, Holcombe's church seceded from the Philadelphia Association.

When Holcombe published *The Whole Truth, Relative to the Controversy Betwixt the American Baptists* (1820) in order to justify his actions and to set the record straight on the controversy, he included an extract of an 1816 letter to "Thomas Gillison, Esquire, S.C," indicating that Holcombe's ties to South Carolina were still strong just a few years after arriving in Philadelphia. In the letter, he relayed his account of events involving White, Rice, and the Convention. As the "negro question" had already begun to divide the nation (albeit not with the intensity that it would by the 1830s), what is most revealing about the church's withdrawal—and Holcombe's own prejudices—is that FBC Philadelphia protested the actions of the First *African* Baptist Church of Philadelphia. In the 1818 statement by the church explaining its departure from the Association, the racist beliefs of its leaders became evident: "But our Association has condescended to notice a query from the society, which, in contradiction to the authority of the State, they call, 'The First African Baptist Church of Philadelphia.' Now, gentle reader, what query, think you, could these sons of Ham, in obscure darkness, propound to our learned Association?" Not only did Holcombe's church object to the name of the black congregation, whom they alleged were in "obscure darkness," but they also advocated a biblical interpretation of race that James P. Byrd has called "one of the most racist and most prominent defenses of slavery long before the Civil War."<sup>22</sup> By labeling blacks "sons of Ham," First Baptist Church of Philadelphia was advancing a paternalistic idea that Africans were the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah, who in Genesis 9 had been cursed by his father for seeing him naked, dooming Ham and his descendants to servitude.

In order to clarify these comments, a footnote was added at the bottom of the page: "The attentive reader will observe, that this query respects only one small society of Ham's sons—who, *as such*, are on equal grounds with those of Japheth. In many of their kindred, according to the flesh, we joyfully recognize the enlightened, and precious sons and daughters of Zion."<sup>23</sup> Whether this footnote did anything to reduce the suspicion of racism on the part of the white church is uncertain. If Holcombe had wished to avoid the impression that the fracas with the Association was racially motivated, why include the epithet "sons of Ham"? (All Baptists would have affirmed humanity's common descent from Adam.) Clearly, by the addition of the footnote, Holcombe's church was sensitive to the fact that the object of their complaint was a black church and that the appeal to Genesis 9 was somewhat controversial.<sup>24</sup> After all, by the 1790s, Philadelphia had become a capital of free black life and home to men such as Richard Allen, bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>25</sup> While in Savannah, Holcombe had worked to promote the growth of black churches and even participated in the ordination of two black preachers.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the ethnocentric language and logic of the comments suggest that, although the ultimate cause of the

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<sup>21</sup> Boles, "Henry Holcombe," 397.

<sup>22</sup> James P. Byrd, *A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 193.

<sup>23</sup> Plain Truth, "Letter VIII," 32–33.

<sup>24</sup> For an engagement with the historiography over the curse of Ham, see David Whitford, "A Calvinist Heritage to the 'Curse of Ham': Assessing the Accuracy of a Claim about Racial Subordination," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90 (2010): 25–45.

<sup>25</sup> Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 54, 180.

<sup>26</sup> Boles, "Henry Holcombe," 388.

exit from the Association had origins beyond the issue of race, Holcombe's beliefs about Africans were consonant with the views of his congregation and that these beliefs contributed to the break with the Association.<sup>27</sup> First Baptist Church of Philadelphia would ultimately stand by its controversial pastor. However, as slavery exacerbated the divide between North and South, the next pastor at First Baptist Church would not stand by his congregation.

## *2. A Southern Unionist in Philadelphia (1826–1837)*

If there were any doubts that First Baptist Church of Philadelphia held similar social views to their brethren to the South, they were laid to rest when the congregation called yet another Southern minister after Holcombe. After strife with local churches, turmoil with some disaffected deacons who eventually left the church, and an outspoken pacifism that did not always match the Jacksonian tastes of his congregation, Holcombe enjoyed a surprisingly amicable relationship with his congregation, or at least with those who intended to stay.<sup>28</sup> The trust between pastor and people was apparently so strong that when the ailing Holcombe recommended William Theophilus Brantly as his successor, the congregation listened. Holcombe knew Brantly well from his days as a pastor in Georgia. The two had briefly served in the Savannah River Association together and Holcombe had even participated in Brantly's ordination in 1809 in Augusta, Georgia, the future site of the first Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. Especially telling of Holcombe's Southern allegiances and his poor relations with other Baptists in the region is the fact that, after serving twelve years in the North, Holcombe recommended a pastor from the *South* as his replacement. Although Holcombe had generated many enemies during his time in Philadelphia, his pastoral connections in the South were still active.

Indeed, W. T. Brantly's network in the South was also active. Born in North Carolina, Brantly eventually pastored churches in both South Carolina and Georgia. Serving both as pastor of the Baptist church in Beaufort, South Carolina as well as president of Beaufort College for several years, Brantly exercised influence over a host of pastors who would become founders of the Southern Baptist Convention, including Basil Manly Sr. and Richard Fuller. Upon moving to Augusta in 1819, Brantly ran the local Richmond Academy, grew the Baptist church in size, and helped establish the Georgia Baptist Convention. In the early part of his life, Brantly encountered Northerners who ministered in the South, exposing him to an array of Baptists from various parts of the country. For example, at South Carolina College, Brantly studied under Jonathan Maxcy, a New Englander who had served as president of colleges in both Rhode Island and New York.<sup>29</sup> In Georgia, he came across Baptist pioneers like Adiel Sherwood,

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<sup>27</sup> This is not to suggest that First Baptist Church was the only congregation that exhibited racism. The city of Philadelphia had a contentious history between whites and blacks. For instance, after the yellow fever outbreak of 1793, Matthew Carey's best-selling pamphlet "A Short Account of the Yellow Fever" (1793) stigmatized blacks as untrustworthy, even blaming many blacks for exploiting whites during the catastrophe. Blacks were referred to as "persons," not citizens.

<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Snyder, *A Southern Unionist: The Ministry of William T. Brantly and the State of Evangelical Unity in the Triennial Convention* (Jonesville: Spring Branch Book House, 2013), 51. I have borrowed the phrase "Southern Unionist" from Snyder. In regard to Holcombe, in 1822 he published *Primitive Theology* which contained three sermons that espoused a form of pacifism. According to Boles, "The ideas they contained also signified a complete recasting of Holcombe's attitudes toward civil government, Christianity, and war" ("Henry Holcombe," 399). The result was more controversy.

<sup>29</sup> See Romeo Elton, ed., *The Literary Remains of the Rev. Jonathan Maxcy, D.D.* (New York: A. V. Blake, 1844).

who had been educated in Massachusetts at Andover Seminary, the nation's very first graduate school.<sup>30</sup> In some sense, the nation was getting larger and smaller at the very same time. At the national level, this was the era of "internal improvements," as Southern politicians like Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun sought to connect the growing country with roads, rails, and canals.<sup>31</sup> In the church, approximately the same time that Southerners were supplying Northern pulpits, many Northerners were moving to the South to educate and evangelize Southerners. Less than a year before Brantly arrived in Philadelphia, another Southerner, John L. Dagg, replaced William Staughton at nearby Fifth Street Baptist Church. Staughton had moved to the South once again to become the inaugural president of Columbian College in Washington D.C. In 1829, he accepted the presidency of Georgetown College in Kentucky but died on the westward journey. Baptists were crisscrossing the entire republic, it seemed.

Like Holcombe, Brantly maintained close relations with the Baptists of the Charleston Association, particularly with Richard Furman. Brantly even delivered a eulogy of Furman after his death in 1825, prior to Brantly's move to Philadelphia. "As an experimental Christian," Brantly boasted of his fallen hero, "Dr. Furman stood pre-eminent." In the sermon, Brantly recounted Furman's numerous achievements, including his pro-slavery treatise on behalf of the newly formed South Carolina Baptist Convention. In the wake of Denmark Vesey's failed slave revolt plot, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States in a Communication to the Governor of South-Carolina* (1823) was an attempt to suppress potential rebellion, restore public order, and promote white supremacy by defending the institution of slavery on biblical grounds.<sup>32</sup> Furman's logical arguments laid the groundwork for future Southern Baptists like Brantly who would defend slavery as more than a way of life, but as a matter of Christian principle. Signaling his own views on the subject, Brantly praised Furman's 1823 address to the Governor:

In a recent period of the history of this city, when a providential disclosure brought to light a plot, which in its execution would have exhibited one of the most sanguinary scenes in the annals of this country, Dr. Furman maintained the part of a Christian citizen. As the President of the Baptist Convention in this State, he prepared an address to be delivered to the Governor, soliciting the appointment of an early day to be observed in thanksgiving, for the wonderful preservation of the city from so horrid a conspiracy. This address is the obvious production of a mind not less influenced by the rational love of your municipal arrangements, than by the spirit of becoming gratitude to the Author of all mercies. And were it not foreign to our design, we should notice the uncommon success and ability with which he conducted the argument in favour of a Public Thanksgiving, which many respectable citizens had thought to be an imprudent measure.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Jarrett Burch, *Adiel Sherwood: Baptist Antebellum Pioneer in Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> For an overview of John C. Calhoun's advocacy of internal improvements, see Robert Elder, *Calhoun: American Heretic* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 125, 141–48, 221–22, 333–34.

<sup>32</sup> For some insight into the Denmark Vesey plot as it pertained to the Nat Turner slave revolt of 1831, see Patrick H. Breen, *The Land Shall Be Deluged with Blood: A New History of the Nat Turner Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 14, 26, 31, 43).

<sup>33</sup> William T. Brantly, "Extracts from Dr. W. T. Brantly's Sermon Delivered in 1825," in *The Life and Works of Dr. Richard Furman, D.D.*, ed. G. William Foster Jr. (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle Publications, 2004), 217.

By Brantly's estimation, Furman was not so much defending the right of whites to enslave blacks as he was celebrating an averted catastrophe and preventing future bloodshed. Furman was exercising Christian citizenship, not cruelty. What "many respectable citizens" saw as a defense of a barbaric practice, Brantly viewed as an admirable attempt to promote the general welfare. Unsurprisingly, after visiting Philadelphia in late 1824, Brantly received a unanimous vote from First Baptist Church to become its pastor. After changing his mind multiple times due to the fact that FBC was "not yet a united people," and after the church ostensibly resolved its diaconal dispute, he eventually accepted the call and began his charge in 1826.<sup>34</sup> Like his Southern predecessor, Brantly's doubts were likewise overcome by the prospect of an urban ministry and its "large sphere of usefulness."<sup>35</sup>

If Henry Holcombe's pastorate at FBC was defined by schism, W. T. Brantly's was characterized by generally irenic relations. John Dagg testified that Brantly was indeed a "peacemaker," convening monthly prayer meetings between ministers and promoting causes like Sunday School Unions that partnered Baptist churches.<sup>36</sup> Having witnessed the revivals of the Second Great Awakening in the South, Brantly sought to replicate these meetings in the North. He also assumed the editorship of *The Columbian Star* between 1827 and 1833 and quickly expanded the paper's coverage, including to the South. (He also changed its name to *Columbian Star and Christian Index*.) Brantly went so far as to describe the *Index* as a "southern paper," believing that a southern locus might increase circulation.<sup>37</sup> On January 1, 1831, in an article entitled "Objects of Attention," Brantly referred to the "great body of Baptist brethren" as "UNIONISTS," setting forth his vision of an undivided denomination despite the vicissitudes of the country.<sup>38</sup> However, later that year, Brantly reached out to Jesse Mercer about moving the periodical to Georgia, demonstrating that Brantly's Southern roots were still deep. By 1833, with rising national tensions over slavery, the paper was eventually moved out of Philadelphia to Washington, Georgia. Brantly was not far behind.

As early as 1828, due to the ongoing feud with the Association and an unsuccessful attempt to establish his own, Brantly had second thoughts about his post. And the South was calling. After he was offered a position as principal and chief instructor of Furman Academy and Theological Institution in Greenville, South Carolina, First Baptist Church was forced to plead for their pastor to stay. The ensuing letter from the church reveals the way that many Baptists in the North viewed the early nineteenth century South. In addition to highlighting Brantly's qualifications as a leader, the committee stressed the importance of the ministry in the city. Philadelphia presented a "much larger field" than South Carolina, appealing to Brantly's sense of duty and his desire for a wider scope of ministerial influence. In comparison to Baptists in the South, Pennsylvania also had the greater need. In Philadelphia, Brantly could be "most useful" in the "general interests of the Redeemer's kingdom."<sup>39</sup> With more urgency and greater potential in his current field, how could Brantly walk away from his Northern post? The

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<sup>34</sup> Snyder, *A Southern Unionist*, 53.

<sup>35</sup> Snyder, *A Southern Unionist*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Snyder, *A Southern Unionist*, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Lester, "History of the Christian Index," 25, as quoted in Jack U. Harwell, *An Old Friend with New Credentials: A History of the Christian Index* (Atlanta: Christian Index, 1972), 56.

<sup>38</sup> W. T. Brantly, "Objects of Attention," *The Christian Index*, 1 January 1831.

<sup>39</sup> First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to W. T. Brantly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ALS, c. 22 September 1828, The Archives of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, American Baptist Historical Society, Valley Forge, PA.

members of FBC were by no means the first Baptists to perceive a spiritual disparity between North and South in the early republic. In *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* (1791), Baptist John Leland, another Southern Yankee, acknowledged, “let me add that, in the southern states, where there has been the greatest freedom from religious oppression, where liberty of conscience is entirely enjoyed, there has been the greatest revival of religion; which is another proof that true religion can, and will prevail best, where it is left entirely to Christ.”<sup>40</sup> For the saints at First Baptist Church, the spiritual needs of Philadelphia over those of the South demanded that Brantly remain as pastor. He did so for another nine years, but not without an abiding sympathy for the South.

By late 1837, just before returning to the South to become the pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, Richard Furman’s former pulpit, it appeared that Brantly had already made up his mind on the seemingly immutable differences between Northerners and Southerners. Despite investing so much of his life and labors into the people of Philadelphia in the name of *one* Baptist church, he no longer had the same hope of a united republic that he did just a few years earlier. From Philadelphia, in a letter written on November 14, “To the Patrons of the Southern Watchman,” Brantly pronounced,

The Baptists of the South, though agreeing in fundamental principles with those of the North, are now in many important respects a distinct and separate people. On some very exciting questions they are becoming more and more distant from each other. And while I heartily deprecate all uncharitableness, or even rivalry among brethren, I cannot fail to perceive that independent action on the part of those who have their domestic institutions to protect and vindicate in conformity with the word of God, is the course of sound wisdom.<sup>41</sup>

As the nation divided over slavery, Brantly saw the writing on the Baptist wall. In one of the most prescient observations by a Baptist in the antebellum period, the “independent action” that Brantly predicted would prove to be the beginnings of denominational schism and eventual Civil War. After serving Pennsylvania Baptists for eleven years and editing a denominational newspaper for six, perhaps no other Baptist had a better vantage point of the looming crisis than Brantly, the Southerner who could no longer reconcile his pro-slavery views with his “Unionist” beliefs. He had arrived in the city as a hopeful peacemaker. But he was leaving with a little less optimism and a little more homesickness. John Dagg, who encountered his own trials at Fifth Baptist Church stemming from First Baptist’s split with the Association, eventually left Philadelphia in 1836 due to a failing voice. While Dagg’s tenure was not riddled with discord to the degree of Brantly, he too returned to the South, spending the next eight years in Tuscaloosa, Alabama as the president of the Alabama Female Athenaeum before attending the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845.<sup>42</sup> That Dagg’s church initially declined his resignation and that Brantly’s church crafted a very formal plea for him to remain in Philadelphia suggest that relations between Baptists in the North and the South in the late 1830s had not yet begun to descend into the

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<sup>40</sup> John Leland, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” in *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland* (New York: G. Wood, 1845), 192.

<sup>41</sup> W. T. Brantly, “To the Patrons of the Southern Watchman,” *The Southern Watchman*, 24 November 1837.

<sup>42</sup> For Dagg, the choice between North and South came literally in the same mail. On 1 December 1824, Richmond and Philadelphia requested a visit from him. A month later, within a few weeks of each other, Dagg received invitations to pastor churches in both Richmond and Philadelphia. See John L. Dagg, *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg* (Rome, GA: J. H. Shanklin, 1886), 27.

chasm of 1845. However, not surprisingly, the events in Augusta would have a dramatic effect upon the remaining Southern ministers in the North, including Brantly's son.

### 3. *"The Most Dangerous Rebel in Maryland" (1846–1861)*

As early as 1802, Baptist John Leland perceived an odd resemblance between the Northern and Southern people in the United States. "As personal slavery exists chiefly in the southern states," he averred, "so religious slavery abounds exclusively in three or four of the New England states."<sup>43</sup> According to Leland, each section of the country faced its own unique form of bondage. However, by 1833, when Massachusetts finally disestablished the Congregationalist church, Leland's parallel no longer described the American predicament. Even though Baptists had won their hard-fought religious liberty in the North, their black brothers and sisters were still in chains in the South. Although the Southern Baptist Convention forged a moral dividing line between pro-slavery and anti-slavery Baptists, it did not, strictly speaking, create a geographical boundary. Ironically enough, not every pastor in the *Southern* Baptist Convention resided in the South. While the issue of slavery had been definitively settled (at least in theory) between the two sides, the confusion had only begun for Southern Baptist pastors serving churches in the antebellum North. For ministers in Philadelphia and Baltimore, so-called "hot spots of black congregationalism," the tension between one's denomination and one's congregation was felt most poignantly.<sup>44</sup> They also experienced the national crisis in a way that perhaps no other group of people did in the years leading up to the war.

In 1837, William T. Brantly had left Philadelphia to return to the South. Nearly a quarter of a century later, his son, William T. Brantly Jr., did as well. However, by 1861, the nation was already on war footing. Therefore, his departure was not so much a professional decision as it was an exodus from the land of the enemy. Before leaving his pastorate at First Baptist Church of Philadelphia to accept a call from Atlanta's Second Baptist Church in the early months of the war, Brantly Jr. delivered a Thanksgiving sermon in 1860 entitled *Our National Troubles*. In the sermon, Brantly identified various sources of the conflict, including "national idolatry." Americans had worshipped the United States instead of the living God. "We have eulogized the Union until we have begun to think that it was some deity worthy of our homage," he warned. Brantly Jr. was no Unionist. In fact, his support for the Confederacy was inextricable with his own faith in God, and he was willing to sunder the Union itself in order to defend his beliefs about slavery. "May not God," he beseeched, "in this adversity be rebuking us just at that point where he has seen that we have been unduly proud and boastful?"<sup>45</sup> God was disciplining America for its sins. However, Brantly offered more than admonishment. As the nation approached the precipice of war, Brantly believed that, as a Southerner who ministered in the North, he could contribute a unique insight into the true problems of the nation. He recounted,

When residing in Athens, Georgia, I saw a statement in the northern papers, that a box containing copies of Uncle Tom's Cabin, destined for Alabama, had been seized while passing through Athens, and burned in the public streets. The story was a gross

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<sup>43</sup> John Leland, "Oration," in *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland* (New York: G. Wood, 1845), 268.

<sup>44</sup> Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 174.

<sup>45</sup> William T. Brantly, *Our National Troubles: A Thanksgiving Sermon* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1860), 16, 18, 19.



fabrication, but it was extensively circulated in the Northern states as an illustration of the barbarism of slavery. Those of you who are acquainted with the railroad communications of the country know that Athens is a terminus of a railroad, and that no goods intended for Alabama are ever sent through that place. At the very time when this burning was alleged to have occurred, the book was on sale in Athens, and was freely purchased and discussed by some of its citizens. They agreed that with some things that were true, it contained also much that was false. And now living at the North, I sometimes see in the Southern newspapers, reports in circulation of transactions here quite as fabulous as the story to which I have now referred. The result is just what might have been expected from such distortions and misrepresentations. How could it be otherwise?<sup>46</sup>

Although Brantly's allegiance lied with the South, his status as a Southern Yankee granted him access into both the Northern and Southern worlds. According to Brantly, there was plenty of blame to go around on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Misinformation and rumormongering had become normalized in American discourse. Nevertheless, while Brantly was able to detect "distortions and misrepresentations" in Southern newspapers, he still showed his Southern colors by insisting that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (a fictional work) contained "much that was false." As a defender of slavery, Brantly could not stomach Stowe's raw depiction of slave-owners and slave-owning.<sup>47</sup> Southern Yankees had a prime vantage point of the conflict, but they were still Southerners at heart. Brantly was not the only Baptist to leave Philadelphia for the South at the beginning of the war. Rev. A. T. Spalding, pastor of Berean Baptist Church, moved to a new congregation in Selma, Alabama.

Between 1845 and 1861, these Northern Southern Baptists bore the full cultural, political, and religious brunt of the nation's turmoil, and no Baptist experienced the agony and friction of the separation more than Baltimore pastor Richard Fuller. Less than a year after the inaugural Southern Baptist Convention in Augusta, in which he preached the Sunday sermon and chaired the committee that authored the preamble, Fuller then accepted a call to Seventh Baptist Church in a Northern city already plagued with racial tension. But Fuller did not shy away from the task before him. From the beginning, he expressed a desire to minister in a city where moral and social reform were possible. In a letter to the church on February 4, 1846, he wrote, "I love Baltimore: I love you. I confess, too, that, if I should move, it would be just into a latitude like yours, as I wish to look at slavery and other agitating topics with a calm and impartial judgment, and see what is our duty to our poor, distracted country. But I cannot come to Baltimore to do nothing."<sup>48</sup>

By the time Fuller began his ministry in Baltimore, he was fairly accomplished and well-known, at least among Southern Baptists. As a child growing up in the aristocratic society of Beaufort, South Carolina, he had been schooled by none other than William T. Brantly (although Fuller was raised Episcopalian). Fuller's father, Thomas, was wealthy enough to send his son to Harvard. Upon graduating in 1824, Richard came home to Beaufort where he practiced law, and after converting to the Baptist faith in the winter of 1831–1832, eventually became pastor at Beaufort. At First Baptist Church, he converted a young James P. Boyce, the inaugural president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (est.

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<sup>46</sup> Brantly, *Our National Troubles*, 25–26.

<sup>47</sup> For an exploration into Harriet Beecher Stowe's spirituality, see Nancy Koester, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> In J. H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1878), 163.

1859). On one hand, his sermon at the 1841 Triennial Convention, entitled *On the Cross*, earned him national recognition and attracted the attention of Seventh Baptist in Baltimore.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Fuller's literary debates with Baptist Francis Wayland over the issue of slavery in the 1840s, although one of the most civilized exchanges in American history on the subject, gained him a reputation as a pro-slavery theologian.<sup>50</sup> Due to Northern abolitionist criticism on one side and the accusation by many Southerners that he was "too moderate" on the other, Fuller was averse to further conflict on the slavery issue when he arrived in Baltimore.<sup>51</sup> But his troubles had just begun.

Pastoring in a state where different views about slavery were often found in the very same church, Fuller was hesitant to preach political sermons or to speak publicly on the slavery issue. As a result, he was initially critical of the war, envisioning border states like Maryland as mediators in the conflict.<sup>52</sup> As a Southern Baptist in a Northern state, Fuller saw himself as a peacemaker. However, when the Southern Baptist Convention issued the so-called "Savannah Resolutions" in 1861 declaring its support for the Confederacy, Fuller found himself stuck between a rock and a political hard place. Not only had Fuller, a citizen of Maryland, supported a treasonous measure which directly violated the union of states, but he was even a member of the committee which introduced the Resolutions! That Fuller was pledging his allegiance to the United States while apparently seeking to undermine the nation at the same time did not go unnoticed by the Maryland public. Was the Baltimore pastor a secessionist or a unionist? Fuller's efforts at peacemaking were interpreted by local Baltimore newspapers as nothing more than subterfuge. Due to his involvement in the "Savannah Resolutions," The New York Tribune even dubbed Fuller "the most dangerous rebel in Maryland."<sup>53</sup> While Fuller's authorship of the Resolutions was later disclaimed by fellow Southern Baptists, it did little to abate the immense public pressure that Fuller faced as a Southern Yankee during wartime. Ironically enough, anti-slavery Baptists like James M. Pendleton were fleeing the South to renounce the Confederacy while pro-slavery Baptists like Fuller remained in the North and supported it. In yet another ironic twist, Pendleton was denied a call in Lebanon, Ohio because of his opposition to slavery while Fuller was received into a Northern congregation despite his defense of slavery.<sup>54</sup> The local autonomy of Baptist churches made for a diverse denomination.

As Baptists often demonstrated, the social and political contours of the union in the antebellum period were not always defined by simple geographical boundaries. Like the so-called "Peace Democrats" or "Copperheads" in the political sphere, Southern Yankees help to illuminate these outliers in the religious realm. As James M. McPherson has shown, the "Butternut" region of southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois was composed largely of Baptist churches, many of which were filled with transplants from the upper South. According to McPherson, "They remained rural, southern, and localist in their

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<sup>49</sup> Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller*, 162.

<sup>50</sup> Noll explains, "This exchange was one of the United States' last serious one-on-one debates where advocates for and against slavery engaged each other directly, with reasonable restraint, and with evident intent to hear out the opponent to the extent possible. The argument between Wayland, a careful reasoner and a careful biblical exegete defending an antislavery (but not abolitionist) stance, and Fuller, a resolute defender of slavery who nonetheless admitted that Southern slavery contained substantial abuses, represented a signal moment in American moral history" (Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 36–37).

<sup>51</sup> J. M. Pendleton, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (Louisville: Press Baptist Book Concern, 1891), 126.

<sup>52</sup> Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller*, 262.

<sup>53</sup> Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller*, 261–62, 264.

<sup>54</sup> Pendleton, *Reminiscences of a Long Life*, 133.

orientation, hostile toward ‘Yankees’ of New England heritage who settled the northern portions of these states made accessible by the Erie Canal after 1825.”<sup>55</sup> From Maryland to Pennsylvania to the Old Northwest, Southern Yankees could be found virtually everywhere in the lower North, as these regions were sympathetic with Southern politics and religion. Indeed, after the war, W. T. Brantly Jr. moved to Baltimore, where he replaced Richard Fuller at Seventh Baptist, ministering there until his death. In the case of Fuller, his desire for unity can be seen most vividly in his 1865 sermon *A City or House Divided Against Itself*, but he never left the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>56</sup> In fact, for the first half of the war, Fuller served as its president.<sup>57</sup> From his arrival in Baltimore in 1846 to his death in 1876, Fuller was a man between two worlds. In some sense, these Southern Yankees were citizens of the North *and* the South, and yet belonged to neither.

### 4. Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, as the United States continues to wrestle with its past and Southern Baptists attempt to face honestly the origins of their denomination, the Southern Yankees of the antebellum period are a vivid reminder that the Southern Baptist Convention has never been a purely “Southern” denomination nor were its founders necessarily agreed upon the best way to engage brethren with whom they disagreed on social issues. In addition to the explosive question of race, issues like urbanization and poverty and local associations were just as divisive two centuries ago as they are today. Yet, despite the barbarity of so many Baptists in defending and even practicing human enslavement, the buildup to 1861 was not without those who at least attempted to bring peace between two warring factions. Indeed, the history of the Baptist denomination represents the agonizing story of nineteenth-century America, and to examine the paradoxical lives of the Southern Yankees is to face, rather painfully, the best and the worst of redeemed humanity.

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<sup>55</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 31.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Fuller, *A City or House Divided Against Itself* (Baltimore: J. F. Weishampel, Jr., 1865).

<sup>57</sup> Richard Fuller was the third president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1859–1863).

# Reassessing Nicholas Wolterstorff's Objections to Divine Simplicity

— Jean Gomes —

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**Abstract:** This article offers a reading of Nicholas Wolterstorff's objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity, which has seen a kind of rebirth amongst both Catholic and Protestant theologians in recent decades. For some, Wolterstorff denies divine simplicity because it might rule out all distinctions in God and thereby be inconsistent with the variety of divine attributes. Others locate Wolterstorff's position as part of the modern philosophical movement that rejects divine simplicity because of a conflict between essentialist and actualist ontologies. Although the above criticisms are fair, there is more to Wolterstorff that prevents him from accepting divine simplicity. From a liturgical point of view, he argues that divine simplicity entails confusions for people attending worship, such as the notion that divine interaction with human beings would be merely metaphorical language. Although this last argument by Wolterstorff should be appreciated given its pastoral appeal, this article proposes to demonstrate that none of Wolterstorff's arguments compels us to deny divine simplicity, not even his most significant liturgical critique.

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The doctrine of divine simplicity has been rediscovered in recent decades by both Catholic and Protestant theologians, showing a remarkable ecumenical point of contact with all Christian traditions.<sup>1</sup> However, a number influential thinkers, even within the Reformed tradition, have critical misgivings about this doctrine.<sup>2</sup> This essay looks closer at Nicholas Wolterstorff's recent objec-

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<sup>1</sup> *Modern Theology* has published a special themed issue on "Catholics and Evangelicals on Divine Simplicity," which underlines the significant ecumenical convergence of Catholic and Protestant theologies in this topic. See *Modern Theology* 35 (2019): 409–597. See also R. T. Mullins, "Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account," *JTS* 69 (2018): 895–98.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980); Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); J. P. Moreland and William L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003); Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996):

tions to divine simplicity.<sup>3</sup> For some, Wolterstorff denies divine simplicity because it might rule out all distinctions in God and thereby be inconsistent with the variety of divine attributes.<sup>4</sup> Others examine the tenability of Wolterstorff's argument that modern theologians and philosophers reject divine simplicity because of a clash between "constituent" and "relation" ontologies.<sup>5</sup>

Although the above criticisms are fair, there is more to Wolterstorff that prevents him from accepting divine simplicity. From his early philosophical works to his recent contributions on liturgical theology, I have noticed three main concerns Wolterstorff has against divine simplicity. First, Wolterstorff agrees with Alvin Plantinga that divine simplicity should be rejected because it reduces God's being to a property or a mere abstract object. Thus, God loses his personal character.<sup>6</sup> Second, Wolterstorff suggests that divine simplicity is of Hellenic origin, thus questioning a Christian appropriation of it without biblical warrant.<sup>7</sup> Third, he argues that divine simplicity entails "bafflements" for people attending worship, such as the notion that divine interaction with human beings would be merely metaphorical language. The first two objections have been discussed in previous studies, but no one has noticed the liturgical argument against divine simplicity, and perhaps that is the significant contribution of the present work.

This essay suggests that although Wolterstorff's critiques go beyond what scholars have already pointed out, his arguments are not solid enough to discard divine simplicity. The article addresses his objections with three arguments. First, I seek to understand Wolterstorff's acceptance of a relation ontology and its possible pitfalls. I claim that when properly understood, divine simplicity and the traditional ontology do not clash with our trust in the personal God. Then, I evaluate the accusations that divine simplicity is rooted in the Greek tradition. I argue that rather than uncritical absorption, the doctrine of divine simplicity more closely resembles the result of a missionary encounter of the early church with the Greek society. Finally, I look at Wolterstorff's liturgical argument against divine simplicity. Although one might appreciate the argument in view of its pastoral value, it does not necessarily compel us to deny divine simplicity.

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165–86. PhD dissertations have also been written to answer the main challenges posed by modern critics to divine simplicity. See, James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 30 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). See also Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004); and Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 221–58.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 91–111, 133–222; *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 71–170; and *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 230–48.

<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:40, 58 (hereafter PRRD); Reita Yazawa, "John Howe (1630–1705) on Divine Simplicity: A Debate over Spinozism," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, David Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 629. For a nuanced analysis of five recent criticisms of divine simplicity, see Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 42–53.

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 27; Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 44, 45, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 27–28, 47–53; Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 91–95.

<sup>7</sup> Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 93, 108–9, 135, 208.

## 1. Divine Simplicity and the Clash of Ontologies

In this first section, I offer a brief overview of Wolterstorff's take on divine simplicity and examine how his relation ontology played a role in his critique of the doctrine. But, first of all, let me clarify what divine simplicity is. This question might look simple, but it carries several complexities. What exactly are we saying when we say that God is simple? The Belgic Confession made divine simplicity its opening statement: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God."<sup>8</sup> The basic definition of divine simplicity is that God is not composed of parts. James Dolezal explains, "Whatever is composed of parts depends upon its parts in order to be as it is. A part is anything in a subject that is less than the whole and without which the subject would be really different than it is." If God is composite, then he would be doubly dependent: on the parts and on the composer of the parts, which he rejects since it makes God derive his being from another. As Dolezal points out, "God cannot depend on what is not God in order to be God."<sup>9</sup> In other words, to talk about the *uncompoundedness* of God is the first step to understand the basic idea of divine simplicity.<sup>10</sup>

Wolterstorff deals with this doctrine in his article "Divine Simplicity," where he pursues the answer for the underlying reasons of conflict between the medieval and contemporary attitudes toward the doctrine.<sup>11</sup> In his view, there are three theistic identity claims that sum up Thomas Aquinas's approach to divine simplicity: (1) God is not distinct from God's essence; (2) God's existence is not distinct from God's essence; and (3) God has no property distinct from God's essence. Although Wolterstorff recognizes that some modes of composition in God are false—that God is matter, for example—he finds the above claims ontologically problematic. Wolterstorff asks how any substance could possibly be its essence? How could such an entity's essence be its essence? And how could all its properties be identical with its essence?<sup>12</sup> Or he might ask, "Why would a medieval thinker find the theistic identity claims ontologically non-problematic, whereas so many of us find them inscrutable or incoherent?" And his solution is: a clash of ontologies between the medievals and moderns.<sup>13</sup> Wolterstorff's article, therefore, is an attempt to go back in time and think within the medieval ontological framework to see if the three theistic claims make sense.

Wolterstorff portrays the medievals using a constituent ontology while contemporary thinkers use a relation ontology.<sup>14</sup> Under a constituent ontology, everything is a "what-it-is-as-such" and "does not have a certain nature in the way that it has a certain property. It is a certain nature."<sup>15</sup> Under a relation ontology one looks not at "what an entity is as such" but rather acknowledges relations between a thing and something it necessarily exemplifies—a property or set of properties that comprise essence—a thing

<sup>8</sup> Belgic Confession, article 1 (1561), in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 2:425.

<sup>9</sup> James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017), 40–41.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of what divine simplicity implies, see Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 80–9.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 532.

<sup>12</sup> Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 534.

<sup>13</sup> Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 535.

<sup>14</sup> It is also common to refer to these ontologies as essentialist and actualist, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 541.

and something it contingently exemplifies (a contingent property), and instances of properties present in things.<sup>16</sup> The main difference between medieval and contemporary ontologies, says Wolterstorff, “hangs on these two different construals of ‘having.’ Whereas for the medievals, having an essence was, having an essence as one of its constituents, for us, having an essence is having an essence as one of its properties: exemplifying it.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, after analyzing the three theistic identity claims through medieval lens, Wolterstorff finds nothing problematic in divine simplicity, after all, medieval ontology has a completely different view of essence from that espoused by the moderns. Yet, because he judges that medieval ontology inadequate for our time—though not making it clear for what reasons—the doctrine of divine simplicity is necessarily problematic for those who operate from a relation ontology.<sup>18</sup>

Wolterstorff closes his essay by pointing out that the problem is not divine simplicity itself (or the three theistic identity claims) but the framework in which these claims derive from: constituent ontology. He then suggests that a stronger denial of divine simplicity would need to address three questions: (1) whether the constituent ontology is tenable; (2) whether it is possible for simplicity's supporters to develop a theory of predication which adequately accounts for the multiplicity of God's attributes; and (3) whether the doctrine of simplicity does not contradict other fundamental doctrines. Answering the three questions would require one article for each. What follows is an attempt to show that constituent ontology is much closer to the New Testament than Wolterstorff supposed.

There are at least two flaws in Wolterstorff's approach. The first is that instead of arguing about the reasons why he embraces this relational ontology, he simply assumes it to be self-evident. One may wonder what is the ontology accepted by the biblical authors? Although it is hard to say dogmatically, it is clear that New Testament authors dialogued with the Greeks using their terminology and thus presupposing some ideas of their ontology. We see divinity in Romans 1:20; nature in Galatians 4:8; deity in Colossians 2:9; substance in Hebrews 1:3; divine nature in 2 Peter 1:4. And there are also passages referring to human nature from similar categories (cf. Acts 14:15; Phil 2:7–8; James 5:17). Duby writes, “Whether the New Testament authors, in employing such terminology, were bearing in mind all the niceties of philosophical conceptualization or not, the point still remains that even the allegedly simple-minded apostolic communities do not shrink back from describing God with metaphysical language.”<sup>19</sup>

Galatians 4:8 says, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who *by nature* are not gods.” What does “by nature” mean in this text? Wolfhart Pannenberg correctly states that this expression implies that “the God Paul preaches is alone God by virtue of his essence.” Pannenberg accurately comments that Paul is linking up with the philosophical question of God raised by Stoic's natural theology, “even if by means of a critical refraction.” Pannenberg also mentions Romans 1:20 in which Paul assimilates the negative designations of God as invisible and incorruptible apparently from

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<sup>16</sup> Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 541–42, 548.

<sup>17</sup> Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 542.

<sup>18</sup> That the doctrine of divine simplicity is automatically problematic for relation ontologists is not necessarily true either. Karl Barth, for example, bases all his *Church Dogmatics* using an actualist ontology—which is the same ontology of Wolterstorff—and remained confessing the doctrine of divine simplicity, albeit with his own peculiarities. Cf. Bruce L. McCormack, “Grace and Being,” in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98–99; and “The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 185–242.

<sup>19</sup> Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 59.

the same tradition.<sup>20</sup> In my analysis, these few examples serve to discredit a radical break with the old ontology.

In the second place, Wolterstorff's rejection of the essentialist ontology raises the problem that God would depend on or coexist with elements outside of himself. Wolterstorff indeed argues that the question of whether the divine perfections or universals are uncreated or created is irrelevant to the Christian view of creation. To him, the fact that universals are never mentioned in the biblical account of creation, and the fact that the doctrine of creation in biblical thought is designed not to deliver a theoretical ontology but to incite trust and praise of God, suggests that universals are not enclosed within God's creative action.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to reconcile the idea that there is a conglomerate of objective universals that are neither God himself nor things created by God with Paul's discourse at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34) and even his words in 1 Corinthians 8:6: "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

Still, does divine simplicity prevent us from confessing a personal-relational God? In my view, when properly comprehended, divine simplicity does not clash with our trust in the personal God but rather enhances it. Although Wolterstorff is careful to present the doctrine of divine simplicity, his criticism has a couple of misconceptions. For instance, referring to medieval theologians, Wolterstorff opens his essay by saying that "God, they said, is simple; in God there are no distinctions whatsoever."<sup>22</sup> Near the conclusion, he seems to explain what he had left open, "The general strategy of the medievals was clear: to interpret these different predications as expressing different 'cognitive fixes' on God. What they could not say, however, was that the difference between these different cognitive fixes on God is grounded in some difference within God's essence or God's accidents; for that, of course, would introduce composition."<sup>23</sup> After all, are there distinctions in God or not? Wolterstorff's explanation is unclear.

A careful look at the classic orthodox tradition will show that patristic, medieval, and Reformed theologians affirmed that there are distinctions in God's simple being. As Richard Muller argues, the point was not to deny the distinctions of God, but to understand the precise nature of the distinctions that belong to the Godhead. The doctrine of the Trinity, for example, indicates that there are relational distinctions in the Godhead in such a way that "threeness of person does not conflict with oneness of essence." Muller explains, "The three persons participate in the one essence without dividing it into three parts: Christianity is monotheistic, not tritheistic." Accordingly, the concept of unity and distinction of the persons is not to identify the distinction of persons, "but to find a way to argue a certain manner of distinction (for the sake of manifesting the three) while at the very same time denying other kinds of distinction (for the sake of confessing the One)." Therefore, with regard to its purpose, the

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<sup>20</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays Volume II* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 136.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *On Universals: An Essay in Ontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 293–96. "Plantinga and Wolterstorff conclude that there is a conglomerate of objective universals that are neither God himself nor things created by God." Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 172. For a detailed analysis of their views, see also pages 167–78.

<sup>22</sup> Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 531.

<sup>23</sup> Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 550.



theological role of divine simplicity is not ruling out distinctions, but “allowing only those distinctions in the Godhead that do not disrupt the understanding of the ultimacy and unity of the One God.”<sup>24</sup>

Discussing the Holy Trinity, Thomas argues that there are distinctions in God without compromising his simplicity. There are three types of distinctions possible, according to Thomas. The first he calls *real distinction*, which is the kind of distinction that subsists between things and other things. The second is called *rational distinction* founded on the thing and assumes that our attributes reflect actual properties and are not merely rational distinctions made for the convenience of the human knower. The third might be called *purely rational distinctions*, and has to do with distinctions made only from the human point of view without necessarily having any foundation in the thing. Thomas argues that “there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute—namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity—but according to that which is relative.”<sup>25</sup> What does Thomas mean by relative distinctions? He is concerned whether there are real relations in God: “The Father is denominated only from paternity; and the Son only from filiation. Therefore, if no real paternity or filiation existed in God, it would follow that God is not really Father or Son, but only in our manner of understanding; and this is the Sabellian heresy.”<sup>26</sup> Muller comments that “the paternity, filiation, and procession are real relational or relative distinctions, but they are not real essential distinctions such as subsist between things and other things or such as would imply composition in one thing.”<sup>27</sup> Putting it differently, “The basic doctrinal point is plain: in God there is an essential or substantial simplicity but there are distinctions—and these distinctions can be represented on the analogy of distinctions in the intellect.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, there must be distinctions in God, *real relational* distinctions, not *real essential* ones. If we deny the first distinction, we deny the truth of the Trinity, which Scripture stands as witness; if we affirm the possibility of the second distinction, we deny monotheism, which is also absurd. As a result, by denying the classical concept of essence, Wolterstorff puts himself in a risky position having to give explanations of how we can continue to confess the Trinitarian doctrine. Although the doctrine of divine simplicity remains a mystery, it is perfectly possible to speak of a simple and relational God from the Trinitarian standpoint.

## 2. Doing Theology with the Greeks

In this second section, I address Wolterstorff's charge that divine simplicity is of Hellenic origin, thus making a Christian appropriation of it problematic. He writes,

As I read the history of medieval philosophy and theology, the medievals were ineluctably gripped by the Plotinian vision of reality as requiring something that is the unconditioned condition of everything not identical with itself; this they identified with God. Says Plotinus: “If there were nothing outside all alliance and compromise, nothing

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<sup>24</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:41.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia q.28 a.3. See also, Muller, *PRRD*, 3:54–55.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.28 a.1.

<sup>27</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:55.

<sup>28</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 3:58.

authentically one, there would be no Source. Untouched by multiplicity, it will be wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundations of its composite existence.” Anyone who is gripped by these convictions and arguments would see our twentieth-century claim, that God *has* an essence—i.e., that God stands in the relation of exemplification to an essence—as an obvious violation of God’s self-sufficiency.<sup>29</sup>

For Wolterstorff, therefore, Thomas and those who operate with an essentialist ontology are struggling to reconcile the Plotinian vision of reality to their biblical framework.<sup>30</sup> By saying this Wolterstorff is not affirming that everything that the Greeks said is false. “Of course, not every bit of dehellenization is laudatory from the Christian standpoint.” What is at stake, he continues, “is that the patterns of classical Greek thought are incompatible with the pattern of biblical thought.”<sup>31</sup> Wolterstorff alludes to Plotinus once more as an example of the perils of doing theology with the Greeks:

Plotinus, has been deeper than any other in classical Christian theology; namely, the assumption that God is unconditioned.... On most Christian theologians this deliverance of Plotinus has had the grip of obvious and fundamental truth. From it has been extracted a truly astonishing list of conclusions: that God is simple, thus having no nature as we would nowadays understand “having a nature”; that God is immutable; that God is eternal; that God is entirely lacking in potentialities, thus being pure act; that God exists necessarily, since God’s essence and God’s existence are identical; that no predicate correctly predicated of something other than God can with the same sense be correctly predicated of God; and—to break off the listing—that God has no passions. Of course, these conclusions were not all derived *directly* from God’s status as unconditioned. Chains of argument were used.<sup>32</sup>

Given the way Wolterstorff canvasses the question, it looks as if the Christian tradition has absorbed Greek philosophy without much judgment. Is that true, though? Various scholars say otherwise. In his fine essay “The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem,” Christoph Schwöbel argues that the engagement of Christian theology with Greek metaphysics is an inevitable development given the eschatological finality of Christ’s resurrection.<sup>33</sup> Schwöbel notes that this extraordinary event “motivated the mission to the Gentiles and brought Christian faith in an often controversial conversation with Greek philosophy.”<sup>34</sup> He explains,

<sup>29</sup> Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 108–9. Plantinga takes the same direction, “This mysterious doctrine has its roots deep in antiquity, going all the way back to Parmenides, with his vision of reality as an undifferentiated plenum in which no distinctions can be made.” Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> “Aquinas struggled, then, to find a way of accounting for the predications that his biblical and Greek inheritance required him to make of God that would preserve the distinctness of these predications without compromising God’s simplicity.” Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 93. For a more nuanced assessment of Plotinus, cf. Paul Gavrilyuk, “Plotinus on Divine Simplicity,” *Modern Theology* 35 (2019): 442–51.

<sup>31</sup> Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 135.

<sup>32</sup> Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, 208.

<sup>33</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, “The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem,” *JRT* 3 (2009): 37.

<sup>34</sup> Schwöbel, “The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem,” 38.

By claiming to be *vera philosophia*, Christian theology took on the interpretation of reality as a whole which had shaped the development of philosophy in Greece since the Ionic philosophers of nature who were devoted to understanding the whole of the world from its foundational principle.... Perhaps one can also see Philo's identification of the one God of Judaism with Plato's doctrine of the One as a precursor of this mode of doing theology.... Greek philosophy of the first four centuries was no longer practiced in the schools of their founders, but scattered throughout the Mediterranean.... All this provided a basis for a controversial and fruitful interchange. Christian theologians perfected the exercise of snatching the intellectual weapons from their philosophical opponents, modifying and reshaping them for their purposes, to a fine art. All this, of course, for the purpose of demonstrating the truth of the Christian message by the most sophisticated intellectual tools available.<sup>35</sup>

From Schwöbel's reasons we might suggest that although acknowledging that divine simplicity has Hellenic roots (e.g., Xenophanes, Plato, Philo, and Plotinus), it does not necessarily contradict the teaching of Scripture but offers a new way of understanding the perfections and unity of God's attributes. Rather than uncritical absorption, the doctrine of divine simplicity more closely resembles the result of a missionary encounter of the early church with the Greek community. And in this encounter with Greek philosophy, the Christian model was to accept what the Greeks said that was in harmony with Scripture and reject what was pure paganism.

In Paul's experience with the Athenians, some things are worth mentioning. First, Paul knew Greek literature profoundly, as he quotes the Cretan philosopher Epimenides—"For in him we live and move and have our being"—and the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus—"We are his offspring" (Acts 17:28). Second, Paul approved some points of the divine ontology elaborated by the Greeks, and here is the greatest example that God is relational and yet simple, namely, the idea that God "is not from anyone of us," and that he is one and the very source of all existence (17:27–28). Third, it is also clear that Paul challenged their idolatry, called them to repentance, and that he fearlessly introduced the concept of the resurrection of the dead. As a result of this judicious speech, "some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.' At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others" (17:32–34).

Herman Bavinck also demonstrates that divine simplicity is not part of a careless appropriation of the church amid the dominant philosophies of its time. Bavinck says that "the simplicity of God is absolutely not a metaphysical abstraction. It is essentially distinct from the philosophical idea of absolute being, the One, the only One, the Absolute, or substance, terms by which Xenophanes, Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and later Spinoza and Hegel designated God." Instead, Bavinck stress that it "is not found by abstraction, that is, by eliminating all the contrast and distinctions that characterize creatures and describing him as the being who transcends all such contrasts. On the contrary: God's simplicity is the end result of ascribing to God all the perfections of creatures to the ultimate divine degree."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Schwöbel, "The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem," 38.

<sup>36</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:176. For a thoughtful discussion of the reception and defense of divine simplicity at the time of the Post-Reformation, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:271–99. For view on Turretin, cf. Steven J. Duby, "Receiving in Perfection from Another: Francis Turretin on Divine Simplicity," *Modern Theology* 35 (2019): 522–30.

For the above reasons, Wolterstorff's second objection—though it is a valid reminder of the way we do theology—is not fair to the struggle that classical orthodox Christianity has made to appropriate judiciously the good of Greek thought.

### 3. *Divine Simplicity and Liturgical Theology*

In his recent books, *The God We Worship* and *Acting Liturgically*, Wolterstorff explores the relevance of doctrines such as divine simplicity and aseity to the field of liturgical theology. He deals with the doctrine of divine simplicity in the chapter, “What Are We Saying When We Say That God Listens?”<sup>37</sup> And he considers the doctrine of divine aseity in the chapter, “Does God Know What We Say to God?”<sup>38</sup> In both cases, Wolterstorff discusses the cogency of the two doctrines in dialogue with Thomas Aquinas.<sup>39</sup> In this last section, I will focus only on Wolterstorff's remarks on divine simplicity, although both doctrines are interdependent.<sup>40</sup> One might ask: what has liturgical theology to do with divine simplicity? Interestingly, the expression “doctrine of divine simplicity” appears in the very first page of *The God We Worship*. Wolterstorff refers to the doctrine while distinguishing Thomas and Calvin's styles of doing theology. Before we talk about divine simplicity *per se*, it is worth clarifying Wolterstorff's views of these notable theologians.

Aquinas structured theology to fit what he regarded as the requirements for something's being a science—in Latin, *scientia*. He began with a proof of the existence of the object of this particular *scientia*, namely, God.... Aquinas argued, that there must be something that is the unconditioned condition of all that is not identical with itself; this we all call “God,” he says. The fact that God is the unconditioned condition of all that is not identical with God implies, so Aquinas argued in a long chain of deductions, that God is simple, perfect, good, infinite, immutable, eternal, and so forth.... The theology that Calvin developed in the *Institutes* had a very different configuration. It presented a way of interpreting Scripture that was aimed at cultivating in readers what Calvin called “piety”—piety being understood as “that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of [God's] benefits induces” (*Institutes* I.ii.1). Whereas the doctrine of divine simplicity had looming importance in the configuration that Aquinas gave to theology, it had none at all in Calvin's configuration.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 87–106.

<sup>38</sup> Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 230–48.

<sup>39</sup> For a different view of Thomas on simplicity, see Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2016). See also the fine essay by Stephen D. Long, “Thomas Aquinas' Divine Simplicity as Biblical Hermeneutic,” *Modern Theology* 35 (2019): 496–507.

<sup>40</sup> Aware of this, Wolterstorff points out that “God's having epistemic contact (knowledge by acquaintance) with things other than God would be incompatible with God's aseity, with God's impassibility, and with God's simplicity. And if we agree with Aquinas, as I think we should, that aseity implies simplicity, and if we also agree with him, as I think we should, on his criterion for the non-identity of acts of knowledge, then God's having knowledge by description of things other than God would be incompatible with God's simplicity, and hence with God's aseity. I see no way in which God's having knowledge of things other than God can be harmonized with the doctrine of God's aseity.” Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 246.

<sup>41</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 1.

Wolterstorff seems unaware of the configuration and purpose of Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*. The structure of the *Summa* attempts to reproduce the very movement of divine wisdom and divine action in the work of creation, culminating in man, who is made in the *imago Dei*, and the work of government, leading all creatures back to God as their ultimate goal and happiness. Thomas theology mirrors the way in which revelation has happened. He puts into words the way in which God, the teacher, has taught humanity, and the purpose for which God's teaching has been made: a divine reunion with God in heaven. In this structure, according to Vivian Boland, Thomas "is thinking not only about how to present theology in a material way, but is also thinking of the students studying theology for particular spiritual and pastoral purposes."<sup>42</sup>

Wolterstorff's interpretation of Calvin seems problematic. While it is true that Calvin did not cover the doctrine of divine simplicity in detail as Thomas did, it is inaccurate to say that it has no significance in Calvin's theology. Parallel to Thomas, for instance, Calvin mentions divine simplicity when dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity. He says, "When we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we understand three persons, or hypostases."<sup>43</sup> Calvin also distinguished the doctrine of divine simplicity as a key piece to safeguard the one identity of the three persons of the Trinity. Discussing the errors of Servetus, Calvin even goes so far as to say that those who publicly declare that there are parts and divisions in God's essence fall into an execrable heresy: "Indeed, to be execrated far beyond all else is the fact that he [Servetus] indiscriminately mingles both the Son of God and the Spirit with created beings generally. For he publicly declares that in the essence of God there are parts and divisions, each portion of which is God."<sup>44</sup> Calvin, therefore, is not a good ally to be used in rejecting divine simplicity. On the contrary, he saw it as a fundamental divine attribute of our language about God and specifically for a correct understanding of divine triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

Leaving these details aside, Wolterstorff has an intriguing "liturgical argument" against divine simplicity. He wonders if speaking of God as a listener would be making God in our own image. Or put another way, he asks, "Is it unacceptably anthropomorphic to think and speak of God as listening and speaking?"<sup>46</sup> This is a question not addressed by the defenders of divine simplicity. Wolterstorff asks if God really listens to our prayers or whether the very act of "listening" would be figurative language, given that God is spiritual and therefore has no physical ears. His question is very pertinent, for if the "hearing" of God is merely metaphorical—not real, then—the liturgy becomes a perplexing service at its best. Why talk to a being who figuratively listens to me but does not truly hear me? As we will see later, for Wolterstorff, the doctrine of divine simplicity is at the root of the problem.

Wolterstorff begins his investigation by looking at Maimonides's thesis that because speech is a characteristic of those who have bodily organs, God cannot literally speak, for he has no mouth, tongue, or vocal chords. The human attributes we ascribe to God are simply figurative, means for grasping

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<sup>42</sup> Vivian Boland, "The Healing Work of Teaching: Thomas Aquinas and Education," in *Towards the Intelligent Use of Liberty: Dominican Approaches in Education*, ed. Gabrielle Kelly and Kevin Saunders (Adelaide: ATF, 2011), 37.

<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed., John T. McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1.13.20.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.13.22.

<sup>45</sup> For more on Calvin's view of divine simplicity, see Muller, *PRRD*, 3:273–75.

<sup>46</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 88.

divine actions, and thereby not identical with his being: “since God has no ears or eyes, God cannot listen. And so just as we should understand ourselves as using language figuratively when we attribute speech to God, so also we should understand ourselves as using language figuratively when we attribute listening to God.”<sup>47</sup>

Wolterstorff argues against Maimonides that our responsiveness to God is not a bodily action. He explains that we perform this response by doing something with our bodies, “but they are not themselves bodily actions. They are imperceptible particulars.” Therefore, Wolterstorff concludes that “the fact that God has no eyes or ears is not a reason for holding that God cannot listen.”<sup>48</sup>

If Maimonides’s theory is not a good solution to avoid the accusation of idolatry (anthropomorphizing), how do we solve the problem? To answer this requires an exploration on the topic of predications concerning God, Wolterstorff argues. He begins his solution by defining the terminology of the question. In order to predicate things, one can use terms literally, figuratively, and with analogical extension. What does he mean by this type of analogy? Wolterstorff takes a dog as an example. He explicates that analogical extension happens when we predicate something to this dog, such as “He knows his master.” Yet, since we know nothing about the interior life of dogs, we do not know whether it is literally true of the dog that he knows his master, or “whether what is literally true of him is, rather, that he does something a good deal like that.” Consequently, Wolterstorff says, “What I am doing, when I predicate the term ‘knows’ of my dog, is saying that he literally either knows or does something a good deal like that. That’s an example of what I mean by ‘using a term with analogical extension.’”<sup>49</sup>

Next, Wolterstorff distinguishes the single use of a term—which can be done literally, figuratively, or by analogical extension—from the univocal, equivocal, and analogical terms that can only be used for making comparisons between two or more uses of a term.<sup>50</sup> He sums up this distinction as follows:

Whether it is possible to say something true about God by speaking literally, or only by speaking figuratively or by analogical extension, is one question. It’s a different question whether a predication of God that is true of God, and a predication of human beings that is true of human beings, can ever be univocal with respect to each other, or whether two such predications are always equivocal with respect to each other; and if they are always equivocal with respect to each other, whether in some cases they are analogical with respect to each other.<sup>51</sup>

This distinction is important to Wolterstorff because he understands that Thomas’s doctrine of analogy applies only to the second category mentioned, that is, for making comparisons between two or more uses of a term. After a well-elaborated exegesis of Thomas’s view on predicating literally to God (first category) and predications that are analogous to God and creatures (second category), Wolterstorff concludes that Thomas is more complex than his interpreters imagined. On the one hand, Wolterstorff tries to prove against the majority of commentators that some of our predicates apply literally to both God and creatures, such as “being,” “good,” and “living,” which are perfections that flow from God and

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<sup>47</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 89–90.

<sup>49</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 91–92.

<sup>50</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 92–93.

<sup>51</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 94.

are to be found in creatures, according to Thomas.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Thomas understands that between God and creatures, neither perfection terms nor any others are ever predicated univocally. For Wolterstorff, Thomas's claim that there are some predications that apply literally to God, but that with respect to predications compared to humans they are never univocal; it is a dilemma.<sup>53</sup> Wolterstorff then asks, "How can the same term in the same sense apply literally both to God and to us, and yet our predications not be univocal with respect to each other?" And the answer is: Thomas holds the doctrine of divine simplicity.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, God is said to be "being," "good," and "living," which are perfections literally attributed to human beings as well, but because God has a simple essence, he "is" his perfections differently from the humans who are complex beings. Thomas says, "The forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power: for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way. It is evident, then, that nothing can be said univocally of God and other things."<sup>55</sup> The expression "measure up" is key to understand his point. Thomas is arguing that all that is in God is in him in a simple way, whereas all that human beings receive from God they receive in proportionately inferior and divided form. In other words, "there is nothing in God that is not the divine being itself which is not the case with other things. Nothing, therefore, can be predicated of God and other things univocally."<sup>56</sup> Thomas explains,

Neither, on the other hand, are names applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said. Because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation. Such a view is against the philosophers, who proved many things about God, and also against what the Apostle says: "The invisible things of God are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). Therefore it must be said that these names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, i.e. according to proportion ... this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but a term which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing.<sup>57</sup>

Wolterstorff concludes that neither Maimonides nor Thomas offers satisfactory explanations for the predications dilemma concerning God. Both are caught up in the Greek framework and thereby are unable to abandon divine simplicity. But unlike the stance he took previously, Wolterstorff is more convinced that divine simplicity should be discarded. He argues,

I think it [divine simplicity] should be discarded.... Among my reasons for thinking the doctrine should nonetheless be discarded are the following two. I do not find the

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<sup>52</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 95; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.13 a.3.

<sup>53</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 98; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.13 a.5.

<sup>54</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 98; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.3.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), I.32.2.

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32.3.

<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.13 a.5.

argument compelling, that reality is such that there has to be something that is the unconditioned condition of all that is not identical with itself. And, more important, the doctrine seems to me ultimately incompatible with the doctrine of God as triune. To say that God is triune is perforce to say that there is some sort of distinction within God, a distinction of persons, to use the traditional concept.... What my rejection of divine simplicity implies is that I have no need for Aquinas's idea of predications concerning God and creatures that are equivocal with respect to the copula but univocal with respect to the predicate. On my view, the copula is used with the same import when speaking of God and of creatures.<sup>58</sup>

After all, what are we saying when we say that God listens? Wolterstorff's solution to the danger of making God in our own image is rather simple: to address God using analogical extension. He explains, "When saying that God listens and speaks, we are not impaled on the dilemma of either speaking literally and hence thinking anthropomorphically, or speaking figuratively. We are using the terms 'listens' and 'speaks' with analogical extension."<sup>59</sup>

Wolterstorff's argument has at least three problems. First, those who endorse divine simplicity have the same solution as he found for the supposed dilemma. Bavinck, for example, states that it must not be overlooked that "we have no knowledge of God other than from his revelation in the creaturely world." "Though not exhaustive, he explains, "it is not untrue, since all creature are God's creatures and therefore display something of his perfections." Therefore, all who think about God or want to speak about him "derive—whether by way of affirmation or negation—the forms and images needed for that purpose from the world around them."<sup>60</sup> As a result, when we claim that God listens, speaks, and responds, we are analogously assuming that God does all these things differently from how we humans do, nonetheless performing all these in his own uncompounded way. In this sense, Wolterstorff's idea that God does not need a body to respond to human beings is helpful. But it does not make the doctrine of divine simplicity necessarily untenable either.

In the second place, the fact that the predications "being," "good," and "living" are applicable to God and human beings literally does not make them univocal. In fact, it seems that Wolterstorff himself confuses the two categories—which he himself said were easy to fall into—by assigning the same meaning to the words literal and univocal.<sup>61</sup> Even though Wolterstorff denies the presence of analogical extension in Thomas with respect to the single use of a term, analogical thinking remains implicit in the way Thomas develops his argument. He made it clear that such literality was not absolute, given that all attributes "pre-exist excellently" in God. Also, the fact that a name is applied to God figuratively does not preclude it from having an analogous and true aspect in God.

Finally, there is the dilemma that Wolterstorff left open: his own. He claims that his rejection of divine simplicity implies that he need not be for Thomas's idea of predications concerning God, for his view "the copulation is used with the same import when speaking of God and of creature." If so, why continue to emphasize the analogical extension solution? In this case it would be more coherent for Wolterstorff to advocate for a more explicit univocity when speaking of God and of creatures than to

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<sup>58</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 106.

<sup>60</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:130.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 99–100.



assume the analogical relationship between them. In arguing for the analogical extension, Wolterstorff is operating with some remnant of divine simplicity even he is unaware of it.

Does divine simplicity, after all, have any relevance to our liturgical action? Among other things already mentioned, divine simplicity offers us a grammar to address God in prayer, adoration, and preaching. It helps us discern the ontological distance that needs to be kept between God and creation; otherwise, we would be very close to idolatry. Muller notes that divine simplicity is not a doctrine so speculative as to be devoid of practical use. He reminds us of Richard Baxter, who declares that “the simplicity of God should make us know the imperfection and vanity of all the creatures that are compounded things; and so should help to alienate us from them.” Baxter continues saying that human knowledge is mixed with much ignorance, humility, pride, and love with selfishness, but that “in God is none of all this mixture, but pure uncompounded good.” For that reason, Christian piety learns to “leave then the compounded, self-contradicting creatures, and adhere to the pure, simple Deity.”<sup>62</sup>

#### *4. Final Considerations*

The aim of this study was to carefully examine Wolterstorff's objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity. I have tried to make it clear that while he raises ingenious challenges to the doctrine, none of them are definitive or compel us to abandon it. On the contrary, Wolterstorff's critiques might encourage us to refine our understanding of divine simplicity and how it can be addressed from different angles: metaphysical, theological, and liturgical.

This article has shown the limitations of Wolterstorff's relation ontology and proposed that when correctly understood, divine simplicity and the traditional ontology do not clash with trusting in the personal God. This essay also highlighted that rather than naive absorption of Greek thought, divine simplicity more closely resembles the result of a missionary encounter of the early church with that of the Greeks. And in this exchange with Greek ideas, the Christian exemplary was to agree to what the Greeks said that was in accord with Scripture and to jettison what was paganism. Finally, although Wolterstorff's liturgical argument against divine simplicity has some pastoral value, his reasoning does not require us to discard divine simplicity from the Christian tradition.

More has to be done, and I hope this article will foster further discussion on the pastoral significance of divine simplicity. Fortunately, a number of scholars have been grappling with the doctrine and showing its philosophical, theological, historical, and exegetical robustness. The doctrine of divine simplicity has its place in the liturgy and not just in speculative debates. It has pastoral value because it helps us understand how God is one and triune, to recognize that all divine perfections are symmetrical, and particularly to ensure that we are not facing a manipulative idol but a God who is simple, even though his simplicity constrains us to think with greater complexity.

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Divine Life in Three Treatises* (London: 1664), 144 (I.vi.2), quoted by Muller, *PRRD*, 3:284.

# The Divine *and* Adopted Son of God: A Response to Joshua Maurer and Ty Kieser

— Richard B. Gaffin Jr. and David B. Garner —

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**Abstract:** This article responds to the recent article by Joshua Maurer and Ty Kieser, “Jesus, ‘Adopted Son of God?’ Romans 1:4, Orthodox Christology, and Concerns about a Contemporary Conclusion.” While we commend these authors’ desire to promote orthodox Christology, we correct their misreading of our own positions, particularly our view regarding the adoption of the divine Son according to his human nature, an adoption essential for the perfecting of the Son in accomplishing the salvation applied to believers. We conclude with an important pastoral observation concerning the adoption of the Son for the adoption of believers.

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We appreciate the evident concern for orthodox Christology in the article by Maurer and Kieser, “Jesus, ‘Adopted Son of God?’”<sup>1</sup> We assure readers that we share this concern. Also, we appreciate the tone of the article and take at face value their saying that they are not accusing those whose views they critique—including us—of heresy (p. 328, n. 53). However, despite this distinction intending to de-escalate, an unavoidable conclusion remains, even though the authors do not choose to draw it: *If the positions they attribute to us are in fact ours, then we are guilty of serious heresy and in fundamental violation of our ordination vows as ministers of the gospel.*

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Maurer and Ty Kieser, “Jesus, ‘Adopted Son of God?’ Romans 1:4, Orthodox Christology, and Concerns about a Contemporary Conclusion,” *Themelios* 46 (2021): 319–35. Hereafter we cite this article with parenthetical page references.

The whole of the article seeks to show that our views are “incompatible with orthodox Christology” (p. 328) and “*unlike* the affirmations of orthodox Christianity” (p. 332, emphasis original). Having made these general assertions, they specify our alleged kinship with particular heresies:

1. *Adoptionism*. “The only possible means to affirm Jesus’s adoption is to deny that Jesus was the Son of God before the resurrection” (p. 327), and Gaffin and Garner argue for “a change in Jesus according to his divine nature” (p. 331).
2. *Nestorianism*. Gaffin and Garner “incline toward affirming two sons, two persons” (p. 331); “the only way to speak of filial progress is to introduce a second Son” (p. 332); and “the implication here is that the ‘eternal Son’ and ‘economic Son’ are distinct persons, two Sons” (p. 332).
3. *Kenotic Christology*. “These accounts could appeal to some version of Kenoticism” (p. 331, n. 70).<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to see how the quotations they selected, let alone the fuller body of our writings, could possibly be aligned with the Christological errors they attribute to us. We are disappointed by the massive misreading of our work that has led to the alien views imposed upon us.

Where the authors get untracked and are wrong in their basic assessment of our views is signaled in the final, summarizing sentence of their opening paragraph: “Paul, they suppose, spoke of the eternally divine Son’s ‘adoptive divine sonship’” (p. 320). Put in quotation marks yet without any indication of a source, “adoptive divine sonship” presumably highlights their own representation of the basic view they are intent on critiquing as erroneous: that the Son’s divine nature is not immutable but changes.

“Adoptive divine sonship” occurs multiple times in characterizing our views: in the introduction (1 time), in section 1.1. in relation to Gaffin (3 times, in two of which “adoptive” is italicized) and in section 1.3 in relation to Garner (1 time in the body, 1 time in n. 26; in each occurrence “adoptive” is italicized).

Suffice it to say, at no place have we ever spoken or written of “divine adoptive sonship” or of “Jesus’s acquiring of divine sonship.”<sup>3</sup> As an encapsulation of our view we reject such language as thoroughly misleading.

In what follows, we reply further to Maurer and Kieser’s critiques. Gaffin responds first to the authors’ critique of his view. Then Garner addresses their assessment of his position and offers some observations about issues related to orthodox Christology raised by their article. Finally, together we offer concluding remarks concerning some pastoral implications of adoption.

### *1. Response from Gaffin*

Maurer and Kieser summarize my view of Jesus’s sonship as follows in their article:

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

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<sup>2</sup> Of the three heresies mentioned, accusations of Kenotic Christology receive the least attention in this article.

<sup>3</sup> This is another formulation employed by Maurer and Kieser to describe our view (p. 333). See more about the “adoptive divine sonship” formula below in 2. Response from Garner.

humanity) and thereby seems to fall into the ditch of a Son whose divinity changes. (pp. 330–31)<sup>4</sup>

This quotation and the conclusions the authors draw from it prompt several observations.<sup>5</sup>

First, this is what I actually wrote in *The Centrality of the Resurrection*: “Verse 4 teaches that at the resurrection Christ began a new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God, *who was born, lived, and died κατὰ σάρκα, has been raised κατὰ πνεῦμα and so, in his messianic identity (of the seed of David), has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.*”<sup>6</sup> Further, to reinforce what is meant by these two sentences, I directly appended this footnote from Geerhardus Vos: “From resurrection-beginnings, from an eschatological genesis dated the pneumatic state of Christ’s glory which is described as sonship of God ἐν δυνάμει.”<sup>7</sup>

To say that there is a considerable difference between the way Maurer and Kieser have quoted me and what I wrote is an understatement. I have puzzled over what prompted them to elide the material they did (italicized for easy reference above) and without any indication why they had done so. Presumably, it is to find an instance of the notion of “adoptive divine sonship” they are concerned to critique as erroneous and unorthodox.

However, in the second sentence of what I wrote, the relative clause they elided (“who was born...”) is not there as dispensable filler material that can be ignored without drastically changing the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Nor can “the Son of God in power” be omitted as they did without removing the specific bottom-line conclusion of both sentences taken together. The elided material is essential to the meaning of the two sentences. The way the authors have quoted me so substantially changes what I wrote that they do not simply obscure its meaning, but give it a sense *it does not have*.

At the end of the excerpt quoted above, Maurer and Kieser append footnote 67: “Gaffin shows that he is aware of, and willing to, predicate particular attributes to Jesus according to one nature and not the other (Gaffin, *Centrality*, 105). Yet, he (curiously) does not make these same qualifications for adoption” (p. 331).

To this I can only say that what they find “curiously” to be the case is because in quoting me (see above) they have deleted from their consideration the relative clause in the second sentence. There “... born, lived, ... died, ... raised, ..., (of the seed of David)” are true and can only be true of Christ, the eternal Son of God, *according to his human nature*, not his divine nature. The sense of the sentence, particularly when it is read within its immediate and the broader context of the book, is accurately restated by substituting “according to his human nature” for the relative clause: “The eternal Son of

<sup>4</sup> Note that the deletion and the ellipses inserted in this quotation are by Maurer and Kieser, not by me.

<sup>5</sup> The words Maurer and Kieser quote are found in Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 111—not page 11, as they have on p. 333, n. 66. Also on p. 327, n. 49, the page number in *The Centrality of the Resurrection* should be 119, not 19. This book has subsequently been republished and is now available as *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), with slight changes to the text but not to the pagination.

<sup>6</sup> Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, 111 (italics added).

<sup>7</sup> This quotation is from his seminal chapter, “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, by members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 230. This chapter has been reprinted *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, in ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), where the quotation is on p. 105.

God, according to his human nature, has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.” The two sentences, properly cited and read, do not by any stretch of sound reasoning provide evidence of attributing change to the deity of the Son (rather than his humanity), or, as the authors think, of seeming “to fall into the ditch of a Son whose divinity changes” (pp. 330–31).

In Romans 1:3–4, there is indeed a change in view for God’s Son, a change that is at the heart of the gospel, a change without which there is no gospel (note how these verses connect with vv. 1–2 and that the gospel is a primary focus of vv. 1–4). That change is this: In his human nature the eternal Son of God, the person of the divine Son, “for us and for our salvation” (Nicene Creed), having persevered in his state of humiliation (v. 3), entered his state of exaltation (v. 4).

The authors’ concern for orthodox Christology is commendable. Their misreading of my view is regrettable.

## *2. Response from Garner*

### **2.1. Adoptive Divine Sonship Predicated upon Eschatological Sonship**

As previously noted, Maurer and Kieser designate our positions with the formula “adoptive divine sonship”—a phrase likely drawn from Michael Peppard.<sup>8</sup> Whoever is the source, the quotation deserves attribution. More pertinent to my response here, however, is the unorthodox theological baggage toted in the phrase, since Peppard rejects the pre-existent sonship of Christ and openly aligns himself with the adoptionism of James D. G. Dunn.<sup>9</sup> Just as Maurer and Kieser do with Gaffin, they impose the phrase and its objectionable theological baggage upon me.

The authors write, “He [Garner], like Gaffin, understands Romans 1:3–4 ‘is an epochal designation of *historically attained sonship rather than an ontological one* concerning the hypostatic union.’”<sup>10</sup> Then, deploying their refrain of choice, Maurer and Kieser draw the following conclusion: “This means that Jesus’s *adoptive* divine sonship is, therefore, properly predicated only to this ‘eschatological’ sonship” (pp. 324–25, their emphasis).

In this quote, as in the one from their note 67, referenced in Gaffin’s response above, the writers here employ a grammatically strained formulation of a matter predicated “to” something rather than

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Peppard, “Adopted and Begotten Sons of God: Paul and John on Divine Sonship,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 92–110. James Scott also employs the phrase and presents a possible source for Maurer and Kieser, but that seems unlikely, as he uses the phrase in a manner different than either Peppard or Maurer and Kieser. See James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of YIOTHESIA in the Pauline Corpus*, WUNT 48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), e.g., 104–5, 186, 212. By the phrase, Scott speaks of adoption enacted by God upon men, *not* the means by which a man becomes God.

<sup>9</sup> Opposing orthodox Christology, Peppard writes, “Interpreted in the framework of post-Nicene orthodoxy, God’s ‘sending’ of his son implies the preexistence of Jesus Christ as God’s son. It is possible that Paul meant that, but it is not very likely. As Dunn and others have argued, God’s sending of Jesus is eschatological, not protological” (“Adopted and Begotten Sons,” 98). I on the other hand, categorically reject Adoptionism both in its historic forms and in its versions revived by Dunn, Peppard and others. For further critique of adoptionist Christology, see David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 177–82.

<sup>10</sup> Citing Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 195.

“on” or “upon” something.<sup>11</sup> If what they mean here is that Christ’s divine sonship is predicated *upon* his adoption, the response is an emphatic *no* to such Christology from-below argumentation. Jesus is the divine Son from eternity past and remains ever so. He does not and cannot acquire, obtain, mature into what he already is eternally as “very God of very God” (Nicene Creed), the only-begotten Son of God.

Jesus’s divine sonship does not derive from his incarnational experience or eschatological sonship, formulations more reflective of Pannenberg than of Paul. Contrary to Maurer and Kieser, who seek to demonstrate that I make Christ’s divine sonship contingent upon his resurrection, I openly contend precisely the opposite: Christ’s human sonship experience is only properly predicated upon his antecedent divine sonship.

In fact, the chapter in *Sons in the Son* from which the selected quotation comes begins with an extensive treatment of the deity of the Son of God.<sup>12</sup> I affirm the tried, tested, and trusted Christological creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon, and applaud the brilliant summation of orthodox Christology in the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 8. In this same chapter of *Sons in the Son*, I further counter the heterodox and heretical Christology from-below paradigms, which predicate any notion of divinity upon his humanity. Instead, “the Son of God is ‘very and eternal God’ who took ‘upon him man’s nature. Christ’s divinity lies antecedent to his humanity.’”<sup>13</sup>

Maurer and Kieser further misconstrue my view when they degrade my approach to Christ’s eternal sonship: “As Garner admits, ‘this sending *does not create sonship, but presupposes it*’” (p. 333). As the structure, argument, and tone of *Sons in the Son* unequivocally manifest, never do I “admit” the eternal sonship of Christ. Mere admission of Christ’s divinity strikes the protological and doxological heart of faithful Christology. As I make explicit, “The Logos *asarkos* precedes and qualifies the Logos *ensarkos*.”<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the sentence immediately following their chosen quote from *Sons in the Son* cites Herman Ridderbos affirmingly: “The divine glory of Christ, even already in his pre-existence with the Father prior to his redemptive revelation, determines and underlies the Pauline Christology.”<sup>15</sup> It is the divine Son that became incarnate, *not* a human son that became divine. This theological priority we must celebrate and effectuate, and never moderate or merely tolerate.

In short, Maurer and Kieser misrepresent me and Gaffin. One will seek in vain, in fact, to locate either of us in their divine mutability ditch. To put a point on it, we repudiate any change to the deity of the Son, as both impossible and heretical. We have not and would not speak of Christ’s “adoptive divine sonship,” and reject such language, as the authors use it, as an inaccurate and misleading encapsulation of our views. Indeed, Maurer and Kieser’s consistent imposition of the alien and heretical formulation upon us begs the credibility of the entire critique.

In order to illuminate possible reasons for their misdiagnoses, I turn now to address select features of their article.

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<sup>11</sup> This distracting “predicate[s/d] ... to” expression appears five times in Maurer and Kieser’s article.

<sup>12</sup> See Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 173–95.

<sup>13</sup> Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 176.

<sup>14</sup> Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 176.

<sup>15</sup> Garner, *Sons in the Son*, 178–79, quoting Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 70.

## 2.2. “Zero-Sum” Sonship

### 2.2.1. *One Conclusion: Two Sons*

According to Maurer and Kieser, the *sine qua non* of the adoption motif is relational: “Adoption necessarily includes the notion of relational change of status between persons” (p. 335), and adoption thereby inherently excludes the Son of God. Maurer and Kieser insist that if Jesus is eternally Son, then he cannot be Son by adoption. If he is Son by adoption, then he cannot be eternally Son. For them, the decision is binary. He cannot be both.

I would wholeheartedly agree *if* the term “son” and Jesus’s sonship were thusly constrained by Scripture and *if* the adoption motif functioned in the wooden way they insist (by assertion, but without defense). This tunnel vision verdict, which barrels through the entire essay, can only be sustained if Scripture presents Christ’s sonship through an exclusively ontological lens. Bound to this framework, Maurer and Kieser infer one heretical conclusion: if Christ is eternal *and* adopted, then Gaffin and I affirm *two sons* (or *Sons*) (pp. 331–32).

It is instructive, for my concern here, to consider the various contours of the term “Son” in Hebrews. In the recently published work, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*,<sup>16</sup> R. B. Jamieson summarizes three most common interpretive approaches to the sonship of Christ of Hebrews:

1. Son is what Jesus is eternally: “If Jesus is already the divine Son, then there can be no strong sense in which he becomes Son.”<sup>17</sup>
2. Jesus was not Son of God, but became Son: “a less-than-divine Christology.”<sup>18</sup>
3. Scripture presents a conflicting, incoherent and irresolvable picture of Christ’s sonship: “When Hebrews speaks in bracingly high terms of the Son’s being and acts, this necessarily stands in tension with ‘Son’ being something this same figure becomes upon exaltation.”<sup>19</sup>

Jamieson shows how these interpretive schemes, notwithstanding their disparate approaches and conclusions, share what he calls a “zero-sum” perspective: “Despite their substantial differences, the scholarly approaches ... above all treat the title ‘Son’ in Hebrews as finally capable of only one meaning. Given this constraint, the three positions exhaust the range of logical possibilities.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> R. B. Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 17. He continues, “Either Jesus became Son at his exaltation, and so his bearing the title or identity of Son before that point is strictly proleptic; or Jesus is eternally the divine Son, and so his becoming Son is simply a restatement or manifestation of what he is already; or Hebrews is fundamentally inconsistent on this point.” Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977), 30–31: “The indications are ... that the words and practices of Jesus himself, together with the fact of the cross and its sequel, presented the friends of Jesus, from the earliest days, with a highly complex, multivalent set of associations already adhering to the single word ‘Son.’”

For the remainder of the book, Jamieson makes a historical, biblical, and theological case for an alternative approach to Hebrews' Christology: "the Son who became Son."<sup>21</sup> That is, the divine Son at the culmination of his incarnate work receives a new designation as Son, according to "the office of rule he enters at his enthronement."<sup>22</sup> "The first is prerequisite to the second,"<sup>23</sup> the ontological the backdrop for the functional, the preexistent sonship the foundation for the eschatological and redemptively efficacious.<sup>24</sup> Jamieson contends that Hebrews uses "'Son' to name both who Jesus is by divine nature and what he became at the conclusion of his incarnate mission. If a twofold use of 'Son' in both divine and messianic registers in Romans 1:3–4 is regarded as overly subtle or linguistically implausible, Hebrews provides a precise parallel in close historical and conceptual proximity."<sup>25</sup>

While he opposes the zero-sum courses most commonly charted in the history of interpretation, Jamieson travels a path that is neither novel nor unorthodox. He carefully analyzes key biblical texts, while drawing on the Church Fathers and conciliar Christology. Though I do not align myself with Jamieson at every exegetical or theological point, I gladly join him with a formidable cast of other orthodox scholars, who reject the *either-or* approach and embrace the *both-and* approach concerning Christ's eternal *and* attained sonship, including Geerhardus Vos,<sup>26</sup> Moises Silva,<sup>27</sup> Gregory Beale,<sup>28</sup> Michael

<sup>21</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 17. Jamieson surveys the Church Fathers and conciliar Christology, and then interacts with other contemporary exegetes and theologians (e.g., Frank Matera and Moises Silva), as he probes key passages in Hebrews in relationship to the sonship of Christ. Without qualification he defends both the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ in his mode of existence *and* his consequent appointment as messianic Son at his enthronement. For two reviews of Jamieson, see Brandon D. Crowe, "Review of *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*," *WTJ* 88 (2021): 404–6, and Jared Compton, "Review of *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*," *Themelios* 46 (2021): 685–88.

<sup>22</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 122. So, too, James Scott concludes, "The adoptionistic language of v. 4, which even the church fathers recognized, cannot be pitted against Paul's preexistence Christology (Phil. 2:6). There must be a sense in which Paul can affirm that Christ was appointed 'Son of God in power' on Easter" (*Adoption as Sons of God*, 236).

<sup>23</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 122.

<sup>24</sup> Douglas J. Moo, who states that Romans 1:3 "assumes the preexistence of the Son," also identifies a strong consensus that behind Romans 1:4 lies Psalm 2:7, "which speaks of the coronation of the Davidic messianic King (cf. also Heb. 1:5). In speaking this way, Paul and the other NT authors do not mean to suggest that Jesus becomes the Son only at the time of his resurrection. In this passage, we must remember that the Son is the subject of the entire statement in vv. 3–4: It is the *Son* who is 'appointed' Son. The tautologous nature of this statement reveals that being appointed Son has to do not with a change in essence—as if a person or human messiah becomes Son of God for the first time—but with a change in status or function" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018], 46–48). Interestingly, on p. 335, Maurer and Kieser call upon Moo to defend their "ruling out any notion of adoption here." However, Jamieson (*The Paradox of Sonship*, 166) reads Moo's commentary quite differently than they do.

<sup>25</sup> Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> See Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," 104.

<sup>27</sup> See Moises Silva, "Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews," *WTJ* 39 (1976): 62–63.

<sup>28</sup> See G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 500. Here Beale explicitly ties believers' adoption with Christ's own. On p. 671, he distinguishes believers' sonship from Christ's. On pp. 707–8, through his treatment of Hosea 1:10, he offers a fuller argument concerning the biblical-theological motifs of "firstborn" and "son" in relation to Israel, Christ, and believers.



Horton,<sup>29</sup> and Sinclair Ferguson.<sup>30</sup> If Maurer and Kieser are correct about my heresy, they have a long line of heavy-weights to wrestle next.

### 2.2.2. *Cyril the Nestorian?*

To defend their own zero-sum approach to the sonship of Christ, Maurer and Kieser turn to the Church Fathers and conciliar Christology—that particularly of Nicaea and Chalcedon (pp. 329–30). While I wish that they had read us more carefully, I also wish they had read church history more thoroughly.

The most forceful opponent of Nestorius and Nestorianism in the debates leading up to the Third Ecumenical Council (Nicaea) was Cyril of Alexandria. In his famous twelve anathemas, he blasted Nestorius and the heresy of Nestorianism (and Eutychianism), and deploying the emerging conception of the *communicatio idiomatum*, he affirmed Mary as *theotokos*. It was in Nicaea that Cyril's robust Christology won a first battle over Nestorianism, and then again later, after Cyril's death, at the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451 in Chalcedon). But a century later the Nestorian arguments stubbornly persisted, and had to be revisited and refuted at the Fifth Ecumenical in Constantinople in 553—yet again with Cyril's prevailing theological influence.

How important is Cyril of Alexandria? Keith Mathison summarizes,

It is not an exaggeration to say that if you look to the Definition of Chalcedon (as well as to the Council of Ephesus and the Second Council of Constantinople) for the contours of your Christology, then you are looking to Cyril of Alexandria for the contours of your Christology. These three ecumenical councils viewed Cyril's teaching as the most accurate expression of the Christology found in the Scriptures. They relied on Cyril's works to help them express precisely the parameters of orthodoxy.<sup>31</sup>

Notably, this same Cyril of Alexandria, who defied Nestorianism and defended the eternal preexistence of the Son of God, also affirmed his *adoption*: “And he endured such things, in order that, as a man, he would be adopted as Son, although by nature he exists as God, and that he would make a way, through himself, for human nature to participate in adoption, and would call into the kingdom of heaven those tyrannized by sin.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 642, 703–04.

<sup>30</sup> See Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 105.

<sup>31</sup> Keith A. Mathison, “A Forgotten Father: Cyril's Fight for the Faith,” *Tabletalk*, 4 May 2020, <https://tabletalk-magazine.com/posts/a-forgotten-father-cyrils-fight-for-the-faith/#fn4>. See also Keith A. Mathison, “A Forgotten Father: Cyril's Fight for the Faith,” *Tabletalk*, 23 October 2020, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/a-forgotten-father-cyril-of-alexandria/>. For a more technical treatment of Cyril's role in the development of Christology, see John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts*, VCSup 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, translated by and recorded in Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 48. Jamieson further develops Cyril's arguments for Christ's adoption on pp. 166–67. See also, Joshua W. Jipp, “Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations of Romans 1:3–4: Reception History and Biblical Interpretation,” *JTI* 3 (2009): 241–59. Maurer and Kieser show some awareness of Cyril's argument for Christ's adoption, at least through James Scott (*Adoption as Sons of God*, 221–23). Contrary to the way Maurer and Kieser summarize Scott on early church scholarship, Scott examines Severian and Cyril's consideration of the connection between ὀπίζω and υἱοθεσία with

The great father of our historic, conciliar Christology, the primary formulator of the theology of the hypostatic union as expressed in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds, and the most ardent opponent of Nestorianism, argued that this same eternal Son of God is the adopted Son of God. Concerning the one Son, he elegantly distinguished ontological and economic realities:

God the Word full by nature and in every way Perfect, and distributing *out of His own Fullness* His own goods to the creature, we say was emptied: in no wise wronged in His own Proper Nature, nor changed so as to become otherwise, nor made in ought inferior, for inconvertible and unchangeable is Himself also even as He Who begat Him, and never may He be capable of passion. But when He was made Flesh, i.e. Man, He made (as He said, *I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh*) the poverty of human nature His own; first, in that He was once made man, albeit He remained God; next in that He took the form of a servant, Who is in His own Nature free, as Son, and while He is Himself the Lord of glory He is said to receive glory: Himself Life, He is said to be quickened: and receives power over all, Himself King of all and with God, and He [sic] was obedient to the Father, suffered the Cross and so on. But these things befit the measure of the human nature, yet He makes them His own with flesh and fulfils the economy, remaining what He was.<sup>33</sup>

Was Cyril himself a closet Nestorian while publicly, passionately, and persuasively denouncing it? Read his letters to Nestorius and to John of Antioch, and you will not wonder. Was Cyril guilty of arguing for two Sons of God? Hardly.

Though accused by Maurer and Kieser as such, Richard Gaffin and I are no more Nestorian than was his most ardent opponent, Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril understood the *soteriological* necessity for the eternal Son of God to become the adopted Son of God on behalf of “those tyrannized by sin.” Two sons? No! Instead, with Cyril, we affirm one Son whose sonship is both ontological and adoptive, eternal and redemptive-historical.

Richard Gaffin and I, two sons of God by grace through faith, affirm the *one eternal Son of God*, Jesus Christ the Lord, who as the incarnate One, was also humiliated and exalted as “Son of God in power” (Rom 1:4).

### 2.3. Incarnational Adiaphora

While affirming the historical fact of the incarnation without qualification, Maurer and Kieser seem to give it insufficient weight in their theological paradigm. For them, it appears incarnational growth and attainment are facts of history, rather than shaping features of biblical Christology and soteriology. To the point, with reference to a portion of Luke 2:52, they write that Jesus “*can* ‘grow

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reference to Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 1:4. Then he concludes, Severian “disagrees that the Son is adopted” and Apollinaris “balks at the fact that Rom. 1:4a affirms the adoption of the Son” (*Adoption as Sons of God*, 222–23). Scott (appropriately) does not make these judgments concerning Cyril. Moreover, Scott also notes that Irenaeus “seems to affirm that Jesus became the Son of God by receiving υιοθεσία” (*Adoption as Sons of God*, 221, n. 2). In their footnote 18, Maurer and Kieser neglect the important reference to Irenaeus, and misrepresent Scott’s analysis of Cyril, Severian, and Apollinaris.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten*, LFC 47 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881), §5, [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril\\_scholia\\_incarnation\\_01\\_text.htm#C5](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_scholia_incarnation_01_text.htm#C5).

in wisdom” (p. 330, my emphasis).<sup>34</sup> This concessive (“can”) orientation calcifies in their response to Hebrews 13:8. Appealing to the *communicatio idiomatum*, they write, “because the “person” of Jesus is the same *person* as God the Son, we can validly say ‘God the Son grows in wisdom,’ and ‘is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (p. 330).

What they “validly say” happened or “can” happen is not reducible to theological adiaphora. Without Christ’s growth in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, there is no salvation. Without Jesus learning obedience through what he has suffered (Heb 5:8), he fails to become the all-adequate Savior. Without Christ attaining the cosmic, once-for-all filial affirmation of the Father in heaven at the culmination of his own perfect obedience, there is no “Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29), no Pioneer (ἀρχηγός, Acts 3:15, 5:31; Heb 2:10, 12:2) qualified to lead the sons of God into the blessed rest of their Creator (Heb 4:8–10).

Do we dare embrace a theology that regards the perfecting sufferings of Jesus—his obedience learned—as incidental rather than integral, serendipitous rather than salvific? That Jesus “can” grow is an entailment of his humanity. That he *did* grow is a necessity for his saving efficacy. Without this advance in the life experience of the Son of God (Heb 1:2–13; 2:10–18; 4:15; 5:5–10; Rom 1:3–4) there is no enthronement, no realization of the new phase/experience of glorified sonship, and no receiving of his new name. And without his filial *attainment*, there are no children of God (Rom 8:15–17)!

One’s conception of the deity of the Son must not obfuscate the soteriologically *compulsory* growth, suffering, and qualifying attainment of Christ—including his maturity in favor with the Father. Thus, I concur with Gaffin that the authors’ concern for orthodox Christology is laudable, while their misreading of our views is lamentable. In addition, I find their downplaying the change in the Son of God—that perfecting of his human nature, which is necessary for an efficacious salvation—to be disconcerting.

## 2.4. The Son of God and the Sons of God

I conclude this section of the response where Maurer and Kieser began: “Ultimately, the good news of our adoption is rooted in the immutable foundation of Christ’s eternal Sonship” (p. 319). If by “ultimately” they mean that there is no adoption apart from Christ’s eternal sonship, I heartily agree. If by “ultimately” they mean that Christ’s eternal sonship is uniquely and unchangeably his, I heartily agree. But if by “ultimately” they mean that we receive adoption apart from Christ’s historical adoption, attained at his resurrection, *when he became Son of God in power*, I humbly and heartily disagree.

To be clear, Christ’s relationship with us is not like that of an all-star quarterback whose teammates run, block, catch and carry the ball to help the superstar to victory. Redemption was not accomplished as a team sport. Christ alone suffered and died; he alone was raised from the dead. *But* these divinely-purposed experiences of his became effectual for his people. Redemption applied means the participation of believers in all that Christ accomplished and attained.

Yes, the distinction between the Redeemer and the redeemed abides forever. We are not the Redeemer; we are the redeemed. We are not the Savior; we are the saved. We are not the Mediator; we are those for whom the Lord mediates. We are not the Intercessor; we are those for whom the Lord intercedes.

But this essential Son/sons distinction neither demands nor permits theological minimization of all that our union with the incarnate and risen Christ means. As Vos has put it, “the resurrection of Christ

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<sup>34</sup> They oddly, if not revealingly, neglect the remainder of the verse, which speaks of the Son of God growing not only in wisdom, but in stature and favor *with God* and man.

... works *instrumentally*. There is a causal connection between the justification of Christ and that of those who belong to Him, between the making alive of His soul and the regeneration of the children of God, between His resurrection and their resurrection”<sup>35</sup>—and thus, as Romans 8:23 and 8:29 also reveal, between his adoption and their adoption.

Accordingly, as I express in the introduction to *Sons in the Son*,

The believers’ adoption ... does not serve to distinguish redemptive sonship from that belonging to the Redeemer, the Son of God, but quite contrarily (and astoundingly!) celebrates the filial realities fully *shared* by and with Christ Jesus. Believers, united to Christ in his resurrection, enjoy the full bounty of benefits, the panoply of spiritual blessings attained by their Elder Brother. The motivation to preserve the uniqueness of the sonship of Jesus Christ is biblical and noble. He is the divine Son eternally, and this sonship remains unique to him. He alone is the Mediator, whose identity, nature, and work distinguish him from all other humanity. But we must not allow this proper impetus to exalt the Son of God to receive improper application, and thereby compromise the way in which believers are understood as sons and daughters of God—adoption “*in and for ... Jesus Christ*,” as WCF [Westminster Confession of Faith] 12 puts it. What Christ attains in his exalted state of sonship comes to the redeemed in full.... Adoption, then, does not serve to *differentiate* believers from Christ; rather, it serves to *expose* the crowded graces of our salvation, secured in our union with the resurrected, exalted, perfected, and *adopted* Son of God! The believers’ redemptive adoption comes by the *adoption of the Redeemer*. His adoption is our adoption, his holy sonship our holy sonship.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

We do value the significant experience, shared in the final paragraph of their Conclusion (p. 335), that both authors have, as parents of adopted as well as natural-born children, of seeing these children, adopted and natural, come to recognize and relate to one another as siblings belonging to the same family. In this experience, the authors see a pastoral illustration, by analogy, of how Christians as sons by adoption are related to Christ as the Son by nature. They cite Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 2:11 in parentheses for support.

This analogy, however, misses a critical emphasis in both passages. It breaks down at what is in fact a crucially important *pastoral* point. Romans 8:29 states that Christ is “the firstborn among many brothers” as the Son in whose image believers are predestined to be conformed. But he is this firstborn Son only as he has *become* “the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18; cf. Rev 1:5) and now possesses what he did not have prior to his resurrection, a *glorified* human nature. In Romans 8:29 “firstborn” is not a pre-existence predicate of the Son in his (undeniable eternal and immutable) deity, but an exaltation predicate of the Son as incarnate. United with the Son, believers, as *adopted*, will have a glorified *nature*

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<sup>35</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 3: Christology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 221 (emphasis original). Vos develops this summation on pp. 221–23. See also Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship*, 95: “Christology and soteriology are mutually determining.”

<sup>36</sup> Garner, *Sons in the Son*, xxiv–xxv (emphasis original).

like his. They will share in the eschatological harvest of resurrection, of which his is “the firstfruits,” in their own bodily resurrection at his return (1 Cor 15:20, 23, 48-49). In the meantime, however imperfectly and partially, they are already being transformed “from glory to glory” into the glory-image the (incarnate) Son (according to his human nature) has become (2 Cor 3:18).

In Hebrews 2:11 the sense of the indefinite expression ἐξ ἑνός has to be made specific from the immediate context: The sanctifier-Son and his sanctified brothers/children are all “of one” only as and because he likewise shares with them in their “flesh and blood” humanity (v. 14). Only in his consummate and perfected (Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:28) incarnate state, does he, the resurrected and exalted Son of God, qualify as the ἀρχηγός to “lead many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10).

The adopted sons’ predestined sharing by resurrection in a human nature like that of the glorified firstborn Son rests on and derives from the adoptive significance of the Son’s own resurrection, when by the Spirit he was effectively declared/appointed what he was not previously (in his human nature), “the Son of God in power” (Rom 1:4).

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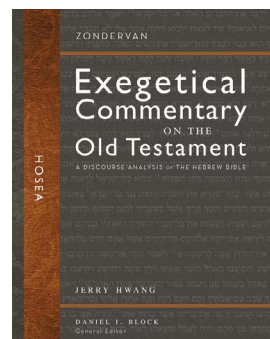
— OLD TESTAMENT —

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Jerry Hwang. *Hosea*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021. xxii + 362 pp. £25.99/\$39.99.

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This series of commentaries sets out to explore what the biblical writers meant their audience to hear, arguing that any contemporary interpretation of the text should be directly related to the author's intention and rhetorical agenda. The primary approach, highlighted in the series's subtitle, is discourse analysis, which aims to look at the whole text not only sentence by sentence or verse by verse, but also at how these fit in to the wider discourse. Although only relatively recently applied to biblical studies, discourse analysis incorporates a range of elements associated with more traditional exegesis and several other commentaries and series use similar approaches, without mentioning the term. I find this approach both useful and appropriate. To achieve its goal, the series looks at biblical passages under six headings: a brief summary of the main idea of the passage, its literary context, translation and exegetical outline, structure and literary form, a detailed explanation of the text and, finally, the passage's canonical and theological significance, which considers the way the text may be used by other biblical writers and its contribution to biblical theology more generally (p. xi). These elements combine well to achieve the series's aim, and that is true of this volume on Hosea, which is a valuable addition to the series.



The Hebrew text of Hosea is difficult, maybe because it uses a northern dialect, and many commentators and translations suggest emendations. Hwang offers his own translation, generally following the standard Masoretic text, with alternative readings only where he considers there to be sufficient textual evidence. This means not following some emendations found in English versions, and whilst these decisions are justified, explanations are sometimes quite brief. The resulting translation reads awkwardly at some points. This approach is valid; however, in my view, the commentary is more useful when read alongside alternative views.

The approach of the commentary is broadly conservative and, to give more attention to exegesis, it focuses less on some critical issues. These, though, are not ignored, and there is engagement with a range of biblical scholarship, much included in substantial footnotes. The Introduction is wide-ranging and covers most key points. It includes helpful insights into the background of the book, including its historical, political, economic, and religious context, its literary style and transmission, and its theology. There are occasions, though, where I found the discussion a little too brief, or too dependent on footnotes, and so less clear than it might have been.

Hwang sets the book in the eighth century BCE (pp. 23–31). He notes that the text may have been transmitted in Judah, following the fall of Samaria, though argues against any substantial Judean redaction. In my view, he is correct to minimise editorial intrusion, though there might have been more discussion of the different portrayals of Judah: sometimes sharing Israel's guilt and judgement and sometimes pointing to future hope.

In discussing the book's theology, an important element is the extension of the kinship between Yahweh and Israel to the land, and so to creation (pp. 31–41). This includes the use of similes and

metaphors drawn from nature, negative imagery of Yahweh withdrawing blessings and even the reversal of creation, and the hope of restoration and renewal, which also extends to the natural order.

The commentary notes two main divisions in the book (chs. 1–3 and 4–14), which are then subdivided into sections. Each section begins with the author’s translation and there is also an indication of how these sections fit into the overall structure of the book.

The first three chapters set the scene for what follows, especially in describing the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as husband and wife, and the idolatry that results in the charge of spiritual adultery. This is reflected in the sign-act of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. Hwang focuses here on Hosea’s obedience, and there is, intentionally, little reference to historical or emotional aspects of the marriage. In my view these aspects are significant; however, information on them is sparse, and I understand why others see this differently. There is more discussion of the identity of the woman in chapter 3 and the relationship of this passage to chapter 1; Hwang concludes that this is a reference to Hosea taking Gomer for a second time. There is also necessary and appropriate discussion of the problematic nature of the metaphor, in particular the shaming of, and suggestion of sexual violence against, Gomer.

The rest of the book of Hosea comprises oracles, in the form of divine speech, which continue the theme of spiritual adultery. As noted, the Hebrew text is far from straightforward, and there are points where I do not fully agree with Hwang’s translation. Nevertheless, discussion of the text, the explanation, and the canonical and theological significance is generally well done and insightful.

Overall, I found this commentary to be well-written. It is scholarly, engaging well with other sources, and it also provides a very valuable resource for the preacher and expositor. It moves well from the interpretation of the text in its original setting to its significance and application in today’s church. This is a commentary that I am very happy to add to my library, and I am sure I will consult it frequently.

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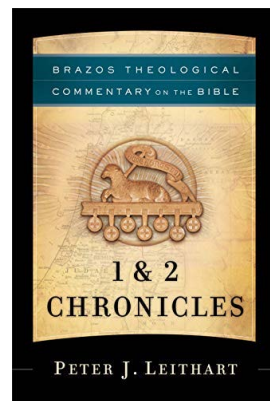
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Peter J. Leithart. *1 & 2 Chronicles*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019. xx + 268 pp. £23.99/\$35.00.

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The central premise of the Brazos Theological Commentary series is that “doctrine provides structure and cogency to scriptural interpretation” (p. xv). Its authors are guided by the Nicene tradition but have liberty in method and interpretive approach to write their commentaries (pp. xii–xiii). Peter Leithart (Theopolis Institute) traces the main themes in Chronicles, rather than explaining each verse. He focuses on the literary structures and stylistic features to draw out theology. His aim is to make Chronicles preachable (p. 7). So, in this review I will assess his commentary on this basis. In short, he is mostly successful.

The comments about Jabez (1 Chr 4:9–10) illustrate how this commentary could be helpful in preparation for preaching. Leithart highlights the reversal of Jabez’s origin: although he is “called” (קרא) Jabez (“pain”), God responds to his “calling” (קרא) out to him by blessing him with prosperity and more honor than his brothers (p. 19). Following Sara Japhet (*I and II Chronicles* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 109), Leithart notes that the phrase



“in pain” alludes to Genesis 3:16; hence, Jabez is a child of Eve, “a child of the curse.” God’s hand is with him to deliver him “from the pain of primordial curse,” and the God who chose Abram for a “supernatural” destiny hears the prayers of those who seek deliverance from ‘nature.’” Within the context of Chronicles, Leithart comments that Jabez provides a glimpse of Yahweh’s commitment to bring Israel to “an enlarged space” from the “pain” of its exilic birth. And Jabez is emblematic of the hope that the seed of David, despite being guilty of breaking faith, can be delivered to a place of blessing (p. 20). In the largest canonical context, Jabez stands for “Adamic humanity ... born of pain” but “destined to become a new humanity in the last Adam.” As a preacher, my first question would be how the original audience in the post-exilic period would have understood these verses, which comprise one of a few vignettes that interrupt the opening genealogies (1 Chr 1–9). Leithart does not spell this out, but from what he has written, perhaps the original audience would identify with Jabez’s pain and would be encouraged to trust God. Perhaps first hearers had a concern for territorial expansion and would be encouraged to pray to Yahweh. Nonetheless, Leithart’s multi-directional inner-biblical links, although brief, provide paths for preachers to develop biblical-theological implications.

Other overarching themes in this commentary are helpful for a preacher. Fundamentally, Leithart views Chronicles as recapitulating the whole of Israel’s history, from Genesis (1 Chr 1–9) to the establishment of the monarchy (2 Chr 36; p. 4). Within this scheme the Chronicler’s genealogy resembles Genesis, the Philistine capture of Israelite land is a reverse exodus, David is a Moses figure, David’s speeches to Solomon parallels Moses’s to Joshua, the time of the divided kingdom as similar to that of the judges, Josiah’s death resembles Saul’s, and Cyrus surprisingly inherits David’s task rather than Josiah (pp. 4–6). Typologies are many in this commentary; a preacher will need to use judgement to determine which are convincing and would be helpful in a given sermon passage.

Leithart also provides some thought-provoking theological insights that would be at home in a sermon. He highlights his ecclesiological insights—structure and singing (pp. 6–7). Just as the Chronicler stresses the organizational features of God’s people in great detail (gathering, storage, accounting, distribution of temple gifts), so also the church should place emphasis on bureaucracy to maintain a vibrant church. The regular depiction of Israel in assembly affirms the public, institutional nature of the church. And what I found most striking was Leithart’s assertion that Chronicles is instructive about music in worship. “Music-making is a priestly activity. Song rises to God like the smoke of a sacrifice.... To sing, we rule our bodies and breath. To make musical instruments, we cut and trim trees.... Music turns creation into culture and cult” (p. 7; see also pp. 81–83). Since, according to Leithart, Chronicles describes who sings, and when and why, it can be instructive for church musicians. This insight opens up new paths for reading and applying Chronicles, but a preacher would also need to consider other OT texts (e.g., the Psalter) as well as NT texts related to music and singing (e.g., Eph 5:18–20; Col 3:16).

There are at least two aspects of the commentary I would not use in a sermon. First, much of the biblical structure, from one verse to several chapters, is presented as a chiasm. Chiasms can be found almost on every third page. Not only are they plentiful, some are unusual; to give one example of several (2 Chr 23:23–28; p. 236):

- A Tell Josiah (v. 23)
- B I bring evil and curses (v. 24)
- C They have forsaken me (v. 25a)
- D My wrath will be poured out (v. 25b)
- A’ To the king of Judah (v. 26)

C' Because you heard and humbled yourself, I will gather you (v. 27)  
 B' You will not see evil (v. 28)

I'm partial to chiasms as a Hebrew structuring device, but I wonder if such an asymmetrical structure was intended by the author and could have been identified by an audience. Second, Leithart uses a few gematria to make exegetical points. For example, the total number of Levites is 862, the gematria of תִּנְבָּה, the Hebrew word for "pattern" in reference to the tabernacle and temple; hence, the priests form the pattern for the temple and David "forms a human temple of living stones" (p. 53). Such a connection seems extremely tenuous; I would not be confident to use such a reading in a sermon.

Despite these minor drawbacks, this commentary contains enough distinctive theological insights to be worth consulting for sermon preparation. It meets Leithart's stated aim. It also meets the aim of the series, to focus on the doctrinal issues found in or deriving from the biblical text. It is not a technical commentary and there is minimal interaction with scholarly literature, so those performing a more academic study of Chronicles will need to supplement their reading.

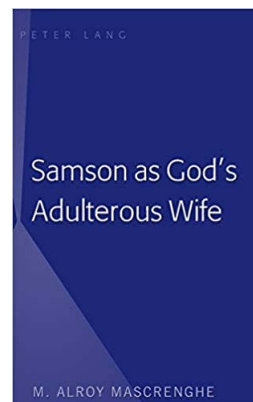
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M. Alroy Mascrenge. *Samson as God's Adulterous Wife*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2019. xvi +142 pp. \$94.95.

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In this slim monograph, M. Alroy Mascrenge offers a fresh interpretation of the Samson narrative (Judg 13–16), as well as the Levite-concubine narrative (Judg 19), in which he argues that "the motif of God's adulterous wife is a thread that runs throughout these stories" (pp. 1, 3). To support his thesis, Mascrenge briefly surveys the motif of God's adulterous wife through the OT (ch. 3) and compares the Samson story with Ezekiel 16 (ch. 3) and the Levite-concubine story with Hosea (ch. 5). To Mascrenge, Judges 3:6 with its statement that intermarriage leads to idolatry serves as a framework for reading the Samson and Levite-concubine stories as metaphors for spiritual adultery (pp. 4, 11–12). Within the adultery framework is the element of betrayal, leading to one of Mascrenge's most provocative assertions, namely that all Samson's lovers (including the prostitute at Gaza; 16:1–4) and the concubine betray their men, Samson and the Levite, respectively (p. 4).



The book begins with a brief introduction followed by Mascrenge's methodology (ch. 1); after which he seeks to apply his method to Judges 13–16 and 19 (chs. 2–5). Mascrenge offers a nine-element methodological framework to compare the Judges narratives to the adulterous wife motif of the OT (pp. 26–29). He uses most of these in his analyses of Samson as an adulterous wife (pp. 67–78) and of the concubine (pp. 128–32).

Chapter 3, "Samson as God's Adulterous Wife," contains the author's greatest contributions. Mascrenge adds new evidence about Samson representing Israel. He persuasively shows that the same cycle of adultery, bondage, crying out and deliverance in the cyclical framework (Judg 2:11–19) is followed in Samson's narrative (pp. 69–73). In the first set of narratives, Samson enters into a disastrous marital relationship with the Timnite woman and is bound with ropes. In his relationship with Delilah,

he is placed in bondage without eyesight. According to Mascrenge, in all three stories (Timnite, Gaza prostitute, and Delilah) Samson is betrayed by the woman he loved or trusted. Also in chapter 3, the author compares the Samson story with the adulterous-wife metaphor in Ezekiel 16 using five distinct themes: (1) vow-making initiated by God, (2) playing the whore with the passerby, (3) lovers (Samson/Israel) taking the initiative, (4) judgment and humiliation brought by Yahweh, and (5) Yahweh remembering the covenant (pp. 81–89). This chapter is written in a very accessible manner and can aid pastors by offering them a way to view Samson that has wide application for believers.

Although chapter 3 aids readers, the monograph overall would benefit from better organization and focus. For example, chapter 4, “Destruction of the Dagon Temple as a Polemic Against the Philistine Cult,” contains no argumentation about spiritual or physical adultery; it instead relates to the Ark of the Covenant in Dagon’s Temple (pp. 108–10) and Elijah on Mount Carmel (pp. 110–11). Rather than including chapter 4, chapter 3 could have been expanded and divided into two chapters: one that looks at the Samson narrative as a microcosm of the larger cycle and the other that looked at Ezekiel 16.

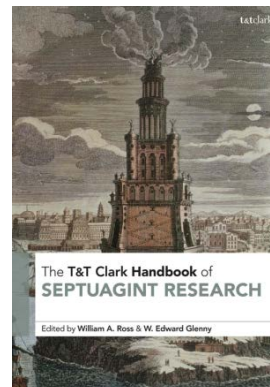
Most importantly, the author needs more serious and sustained argumentation. Although Mascrenge is aware of relevant works for his argument, he characteristically does not interact with scholars. For example, his understanding that the prostitute at Gaza was the betrayer hangs on a textual variant with ambiguous grammar. He assumes that she is the one that said, “Samson has come here” (16:2). Rather than requiring the prostitute to be the unstated betrayer of 16:2 (pp. 4, 45, 75), perhaps keeping it ambiguous and following J. Cheryl Exum’s well-accepted interpretation of chapters 14–15 and chapter 16 as serving as symmetric panels would resolve the tension (“Aspects of Symmetry and Balance in the Samson Saga,” *JSOT* 19 [1981]: 3–29). This would allow one to recognize the cyclical pattern and betrayal motif in the Timnite and Delilah stories. As presented, if one rejects Mascrenge’s reading of the variant, one rejects much of his claim.

Similarly, the Levite-concubine interpretation rests on another textual variant. Did the concubine “play the harlot” (MT, NASB, NKJV) or “become angry” (LXX, NRSV, NLT, NET)? Mascrenge is aware of Isabelle Hamley’s recent work that would bolster his case (“What’s Wrong with ‘Playing the Harlot’? The Meaning of זָנָה in Judges 19:2,” *TynBul* [2015]: 41–62), but he asserts his view rather than engage meaningfully with the literature (pp. 115, 117, 119, 121). He gives her excellent article a mere footnote, saying “Hamley argues that ‘playing the harlot’ is indeed the most suitable reading” (p. 135 n. 25). Notwithstanding these criticisms, Mascrenge offers a fresh, creative interpretation of Samson as God’s adulterous wife worthy of consideration and, in key places, adoption. I would like to see Mascrenge’s future research engage with scholarly literature more and offer deeper exegetical analysis.

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William A. Ross and W. Edward Glenny, eds. *T&T Clark Handbook of Septuagint Research*. T&T Clark Handbooks. London: T&T Clark, 2021. 512 pp. £130.00/\$175.00.

William Ross and Ed Glenny present the first topical handbook of Septuagint research to date, harnessing the expertise of twenty-three other scholars. With a wink and nod, the volume—dedicated to “Cantabrigian Septuagintalists” (p. v)—arrived two months before another handbook the editors hinted would “likely appear” (p. xii; cf. pp. 4, 393): *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint*, edited by Alison G. Salvesen and Timothy M. Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Ross and Glenny assume their audience, which includes “specialists and non-specialists” (p. xii), the latter encompassing “graduate students and scholars in parallel fields” (p. 4), has an introductory knowledge of the field. As a state-of-the-art guide to Septuagint research, intended to facilitate readers’ own contributions to the field (p. 1), the volume delivers on its promises.



Following Ross’s introduction (pp. 1–5), the twenty-five chapters of the book are arranged into six sections according to general topic. Within each chapter, the contributors were asked to provide (1) an introduction, (2) perspectives, (3) assets/tools, (4) unanswered questions, and (5) a brief annotated bibliography (pp. 3–4). While every contribution deals expertly with its topic, several chapters stand out for how they advance old questions (esp., those by Aitken, Gentry, Meade, Cox, Kotzé, Boyd-Taylor, and Seleznev), hone methodology (see the entries by Cañas Reillo, Screnock, and Glenny), or chart new territory (for example, contributions by Myers, Fresch, and Mandelbrote). I anticipate that even specialists will find the glossary (pp. 397–406) and Brown Jones’s literature survey (pp. 381–96) valuable.

Additional dilemmas in the field become apparent when one looks beyond the ongoing questions discussed within discrete topic boundaries. I highlight five.

First, some like Bons (pp. 95–98, 107–8) and Screnock (p. 143) emphasize significant differences between the Hebrew and Greek languages, but Fresh (p. 90 n. 18) believes the discontinuity between them is overplayed. This has a bearing on how one conceptualizes the Greek in the LXX/OG, not to mention Koine at large, as either sub-par or natural (cf. Ross, Hiebert, and Porter).

Second, although Wright cautiously (pp. 232–38) and Gallagher more willingly (p. 265) seek to infer the status of texts based on how they are used, Meade hesitates to do so (pp. 218–23). The inferences one makes based on such evaluations can have an important bearing on how one views the origins and status of the Greek translations (cf. Aitken).

Third, while Gallagher urges Protestants to reappraise the authority of Greek Scriptures (p. 265), Seleznev encourages the Eastern Orthodox to re-evaluate the authority of the Hebrew MT (p. 296). Porter argues idiosyncratically that the NT authors and the early Orthodox churches saw both languages and text-groups as having (a functionally?) canonical status (pp. 373–75), while Meade contends that from the earliest era, the scope of the Christian OT has generally overlapped with the Tanakh and presupposed the Hebrew’s authority (throughout ch. 14). Those interested in the scope/language of canonical Christian Scripture will want to read these authors.

Fourth, major disagreements exist over the place of theory in LXX research, especially in relation to translation. Aiken critiques the felt need to espouse a theory in research (pp. 18–19), while Dhont says methodology (p. 23)—by which she means Translation Studies, especially but not limited to Gideon Toury’s approach (cf. pp. 23–25, 31–32)—is necessary; Hiebert (pp. 349–59) and Porter (p. 369 n. 17; cf.



pp. 377, 368 n. 15) also emphasize the need for translation theory. In this connection, I would want to distinguish between a *theory* or *paradigm* versus a conscious *methodology*.

Fifth, Ross rightly remarks that *the* differentiating consideration behind modern LXX/OG translations is the extent to which one thinks the Greek translations were originally intended to be dependent upon their *Vorlagen*, and that this consideration reflects upon competing perspectives in the field (pp. 330–32; cf. 332–35, esp. p. 334 nn. 7–8). Much of this revolves around the interlinear paradigm (IP). Cameron Boyd-Taylor’s *Reading between the Lines: The Interlinear Paradigm for Septuagint Studies*, BTS 8 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011) most fully articulates the IP while critiquing its earlier iterations. Yet explicit critiques of the IP here (Pouchelle, pp. 70–71; Fresch, pp. 84–85; Bons, pp. 96–97) do not account for Boyd-Taylor, whom Porter alone mentions by dismissing him in a footnote (p. 365 n. 7). Otherwise, Hiebert (throughout) and Wright (pp. 240–41) espouse the IP enthusiastically. Someone needs to appraise the IP—including Boyd-Taylor—comprehensively *and* appreciatively if we are ever to bypass this now-stifling stalemate.

As for shortcomings, two *lacunae* stand out: the absence of (1) guidance on *how to use* documentary papyri and inscriptional evidence, given the great emphasis placed upon this throughout, and (2) research comparing Greek translations and other ancient language translations. There are also formatting problems with emphasis in special characters (e.g., “wāw,” *passim*; “tōlādōt,” p. 81), titles (e.g., pp. 162, 247, 251), and foreign languages (e.g., pp. 40, 198, 329; cf. esp. pp. 381–95), once making the difference between a typo and Latin: “variatio” (p. 73; cf. also “emphasis added” without emphasis given; pp. 40, 46, 244). Until chapter 11, third-level subheadings are poorly demarcated (cf. the glossary, pp. 397–406). Hopefully, these oddities are limited to the PDF version; I did not receive a hardcopy because of restrictions due to COVID-19.

Ross and Glenny have provided a resource that should serve specialists and students well in the coming years. Hopefully, their *enchiridion* will provoke answers to the questions this excellent volume raises.

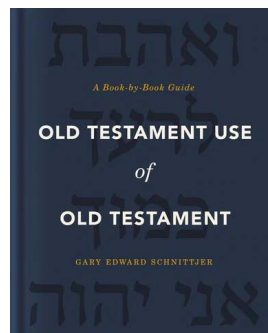
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Trinity College Dublin  
Dublin, Ireland

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Gary Edward Schnittjer. *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021. li + 1052 pp. \$74.99.

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How does the Old Testament *use* the Old Testament? It’s an important question, especially for Christians trying to trace the progress—the *story*—of God’s revelation in the Bible. In fact, what better way to learn to read the Bible than to see how the biblical authors read biblical texts! Of course, others have asked and answered this same question, but none as comprehensively as Gary Schnittjer now has. In one enormous volume, Schnittjer, professor of OT at the School of Divinity of Cairn University (Langhorne, PA), meticulously identifies, discusses, and synthesizes *every instance* of OT inner-biblical exegesis ... or, at least, as he modestly puts it early on, every “leading” instance (p. xlvi), which



is to say, every instance where a later text, a “receptor” text, “explain[s], enhance[s], expand[s] ... [or] adjust[s]” an earlier, “donor” text (p. xix).

Schnittjer’s data—the lion’s share of the book, comprising 846 pages—are prefaced by a useful introduction, where, among other things, Schnittjer presents the criteria he developed to identify instances of inner-biblical exegesis and the corresponding UBS-like grading-scale (i.e., grades A–F) he used to quickly and transparently indicate the certainty attached to each identified allusion. The data are then followed by two illuminating chapters, one on the implications of his findings for the NT (ch. 36), not least the fertile ground of OT “vertical contexts” for NT uses of the OT (e.g., Mark’s use of Zechariah’s use of Gen 49:11; see p. 850), and one identifying twenty-one “lightning rod passages” or “favorite contexts” of the biblical authors, a kind of hermeneutical profile of the entire OT, which includes one or two surprises. And this is to say nothing of the backmatter, comprising five indices, a 33-page bibliography, and a 15-page glossary where Schnittjer defines all the specialized vocabulary contained his book (see, e.g., “constellations,” “excavative,” and “Seidel’s theory,” among eighty-five others).

As helpful as this frame is, the real pay-off comes in Schnittjer’s 35-chapter, book-by-book deep-dive into OT inner-biblical exegesis. Each chapter covers one OT book, following the order of the Hebrew canon, and presents its data in four steps. First, each chapter begins with a shaded text box, sometimes covering five or more pages, giving a snapshot of the book’s use of the OT (including internal allusions), the use of the book elsewhere in the OT, and the use of the book in the NT. Each allusion, moreover, is graded (except NT ones) and summarized. Thus, we are told, e.g., that 2 Chronicles 35:13 alludes to Exodus 12:9 and Deuteronomy 16:7, that this allusion is probable—it receives a B-grade, and that it concerns how the Passover meal was to be prepared (p. 697). Second, Schnittjer gives a hermeneutical profile for the book. Here he discusses discernible patterns he sees in the author’s use of the OT or, as he puts it, an author’s “recurring areas of exegetical concern” (see, e.g., p. 475). He notes, for example, that Haggai “everywhere seems to presuppose the covenant in his use of scriptural traditions” (p. 437), Daniel “demonstrates familiarity with Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah” (p. 617), and Job includes “parodies of interpretations of scriptural traditions” in order to challenge “faulty views of retribution” (p. 552). Third, Schnittjer works through each allusion, from sure (A) to “probably not” (D), putting each in its context, describing its use (its exegetical development), and giving the verbal, syntactical and contextual evidence justifying its identification. So, for example, in his chapter on the Psalms, Schnittjer identifies an allusion to Exodus 34:6 in Psalm 103:7–8, assigning it an A-grade, due to the shared vocabulary (“Yahweh,” “compassionate and gracious,” “slow to anger,” “abounding in love”) and setting (see, e.g., “Moses” in Ps 103:7) of the donor and receptor text but also to the psalmist’s exegesis of the donor text, which teases out the implications of Exodus’s reference to Yahweh’s “love” (see, esp., Ps 103:9–14; p. 504). Fourth, Schnittjer discusses non-exegetical parallels. These are instances where language from a donor text or texts is reused but *not* interpreted (and, therefore, graded “F”). Thus, Schnittjer notes, for example, that Zechariah 8:12 cites but does not expand Haggai 1:10 and that Zechariah 2:8 does the same with language (“apple/pupil of eye”)—Schnittjer calls it “stock phraseology”—found in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Psalm 17:8 (p. 459). These non-exegetical parallels, he notes, may not contribute to our understanding of how OT revelation advances (see p. xlii), but they do nevertheless “point ... strongly to [the] continuity within and between the scrolls of Israel’s Scriptures” (p. xxiii).



Whatever quibbles one may have about Schnittjer's method or conclusions or, here and there, prose, one must marvel at the staggering industry this volume represents. Serious Bible readers are and will remain for the foreseeable future very much in Schnittjer's debt. It's a debt, however, that they—*we*—can begin to repay if only we will consult his volume before teaching or preaching on any particular OT book. Simply using the volume to get a sense for what earlier Scriptures were formative for a particular OT book's argument and what in the particular book's argument was formative for later Scriptures will give us one more way of reading any book "along its grain" and, therefore, one more way of ensuring that God's living and active voice is heard in all its life-giving fullness, for our good and for the good of those in our care.

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Jerry E. Shepherd. *Leviticus*. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021. xviii + 398 pp. \$39.99.

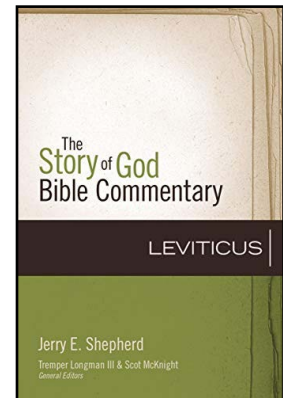
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The Story of God Bible commentaries are written for clergy and lay readers. The series aims to exposit the biblical text within its ancient context and to read each passage canonically; that is, to identify "the trajectories (historical, typological, and theological) that land in Christ in the New Testament" (p. xv). Jerry Shepherd, associate professor of Old Testament at Taylor Seminary, Edmonton, has produced a readable and engaging commentary which realizes those aspirations admirably.

The introduction covers expected ground with a discussion of author, date, genre, style, structure, and historical setting (pp. 1–13). Matters of composition are deftly tackled and with greater nuance than many commentaries at this level. Shepherd does not shy away from compositional complexity but, instead, expands the notion of inspiration to encompass the various processes that produced Leviticus, known or unknown. He approvingly cites H. L. Ellison in this regard: "No doctrine of inspiration is worth its salt that does not take the work of editors into account" (p. 6). Major theological themes are surveyed (pp. 13–21) before Shepherd outlines reading strategies for Leviticus (pp. 21–27).

The commentary proper divides Leviticus into twenty-six units which generally, but not always, follow the chapter divisions in English versions (exceptions include taking 6:8–7:38 as a unit and subdividing ch. 24 into vv. 1–9 and 10–23). For each unit, a threefold rubric is applied. A "Listen to the Story" section reproduces the text of the NIV and considers any canonically prior biblical parallels plus relevant ancient Near Eastern comparative texts. This is followed by an "Explain the Story" section which works through the main interpretative issues in the passage at hand. Key options are surveyed and important (and, generally, accessible) secondary material is listed in the footnotes. Finally, a "Live the Story" section addresses matters of canonical meaning, Christology, and application.

Although adopting a similar approach to other non-technical commentaries, Shepherd nevertheless succeeds in making a distinctive contribution. Two features are worth highlighting, which alone make this volume a must for one's bookcase. The first concerns the ancient Near Eastern texts surveyed



throughout the commentary. While an expected feature of more technical discussions, Shepherd presents the series' target audience with an array of comparative materials. This induction to life and religion in ancient West Semitic cultures builds a rich contextual background against which Leviticus is better read and interpreted. Thus, readers concurrently become students of both the ancient world and the Scriptures. Gaining a sense of the normalcy of Leviticus in its ancient context becomes a helpful corrective for those who find themselves confronted (repelled?) by the book's seeming strangeness.

The second feature of note is the "Live the Story" sections. While suggesting possible applications is a common feature of commentary writing, such treatment sometimes tends towards being minimalistic or rudimentary. Pastors and teachers can be left underwhelmed. Not so here. Not only do the "Live the Story" discussions often comprise the lengthiest part of each chapter, they also succeed in providing more than tokenistic or culturally limited implications. The driving force for these sections is Shepherd's conviction that there is more continuity between the world of Leviticus and contemporary churches than is often assumed (see pp. 24–27 and throughout). This conviction is coupled with a considered and nuanced Christology which exposes any misguided sense that the legal texts of the Old Testament are somehow made redundant by the advent of Jesus. Shepherd consistently teases out the ongoing instruction that Leviticus provides for Christians. For example, the legislation in Leviticus 15 regarding impurity arising from bodily discharges raises the specter of seeming irrelevancy for contemporary readers. To the contrary, Shepherd draws out ongoing significance. He rightly questions an understanding of the Gospels which holds that "when Christ came, he put an end to a very oppressive and overly cruel system of purity rules and regulations" (p. 199). In fact, Shepherd utilizes his understanding of Levitical purity legislation to illuminate dimensions of Jesus's salvific work portrayed in the New Testament: "Christ is the one who not only heals us of our impurities, but he does so by taking our impurities on himself" (p. 202). Similarly, other Levitical themes such as living a life that God finds pleasing (p. 40) or God's people becoming covenant breakers (pp. 353–55) are carefully explored with an eye to *Christian* implications. The result is a deeper appreciation of oft-muted New Testament themes.

Of course, not all readers will be equally convinced at every point. For instance, and against the grain of scholarly consensus, Shepherd argues, based on appeal to "the sin of the first parents" (p. 166), that the dynamic of purging sin should be maintained with respect to the purification offering (NIV "sin offering") even in situations where sin is not identified as a problem (e.g., childbirth in Lev 12). Also, in places, Shepherd remains (in my opinion) overly dependent on the work of Mary Douglas—either directly (e.g., pp. 156–60) or indirectly through other commentators (e.g., p. 293). Furthermore, some readers (denomination dependent, perhaps) will deem the strong correlation maintained between Israel's priests and ordained Christian ministers problematic (e.g., pp. 120–27).

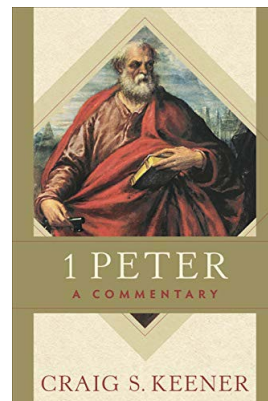
These, however, remain minor quibbles with what remains an excellent commentary. For those desiring to understand and teach Leviticus, Shepherd's volume is a must have. The "Live the Story" sections alone are worth the investment. Here also lies the primary benefit for seminary students: application of a rigorous hermeneutic that takes seriously the task of reading Leviticus as Christian Scripture. The results are consistently thought-provoking and theologically rich.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Craig S. Keener. *1 Peter: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. xlv + 608 pp. £42.99/\$59.99.

In this recent commentary on 1 Peter, Craig Keener has produced a significant volume that will prove to be a helpful resource for the serious student of Scripture. As with many of the works that flow from Keener's pen, this commentary is heavily footnoted and showcases his vast knowledge of the primary sources. Indeed, the main contribution of the commentary lies in the extensive comparisons that it draws between various Petrine themes and similar motifs in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. As a result, those who will benefit most from this volume are theological students and scholars. The editorial decisions to include a fresh translation of 1 Peter by Keener (pp. xxxvii–xliv) and to include Greek only in transliteration suggest an attempt to broaden the commentary's appeal, but the effort feels out of step alongside dozens of references to Philo, Pliny, Cicero, and even Duke University's papyrological database.



The imbalanced nature of the commentary is confirmed in the preface (pp. xi–xii). Keener acknowledges that this book is not designed to replace standard treatments of 1 Peter (e.g., John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 2000]; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter Hermeneia* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996]; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990]). He is likewise candid about the fact that, due to time constraints, he interacted very little with recent secondary literature. Taking note of these admissions is vital if readers are to avoid approaching this commentary with improper expectations. Keener goes on to explain that this volume originated out of research conducted for a seminar presentation on the ancient context of 1 Peter. Thus, while it would not be entirely accurate to call it a backgrounds commentary, the main body of the volume (pp. 42–413) evokes a similar “feel.” For example, the commentary includes twenty-five excursuses on topics such as “Slavery in the Early Empire” and “Marriage Expectations in Greco-Roman Antiquity.” In total, these excursuses span no less than 141 pp. As an aside, careful attention to the footnotes shows that most of the excursuses either reprint or condense material from Keener's other writings. One presumes this decision was also due to the aforementioned time constraints.

Despite these caveats, there is much in this volume that can be appreciated. First, the commentary begins by addressing a number of standard introductory matters (pp. 1–41), centrally the contentious issues of authorship and date. Keener advances a “somewhat contrarian opinion” (p. 8) in modern NT scholarship. He argues that the Apostle Peter actually had a hand in the authorship of 1 Peter while still alive (perhaps as part of a collaborative authorial community). Keener maintains, “While Peter's authority stands behind the letter ... others are likely primarily responsible for the quality of Greek and perhaps even input on some of the Diaspora allusions” (p. 12). Because of the ambiguity of internal evidence regarding Petrine authorship (i.e., “what constitutes genuinely ‘Petrine’ style?”), Keener places much weight on external attestation. The tradition of the early church unequivocally attributed 1 Peter to Peter, and Keener provides extensive documentation of possible literary citations and allusions to 1 Peter in the writings of early Christianity (pp. 16–25).

Relatedly, Keener turns his attention to whether Silvanus is described as Peter's scribe (and thus perhaps a co-author) or simply as Peter's courier in 1 Peter 5:12. He devotes a ten-page excursus to the issue (pp. 393–402), carefully weighing the arguments for each position before turning to fresh data gleaned from the Duke University papyrological database. Keener finds that the lexical evidence points to both readings as legitimate possibilities, concluding that "scholars who have stated conclusively that 1 Pet. 5:12 refers only to the courier, not to an agent of composition, have worked from too narrow a sample of evidence" (p. 401).

Finally, as mentioned above, the true value of this work is found in Keener's careful comparative work. The footnotes will repay the diligent reader, and a ninety-four page bibliography (pp. 415–509) and extensive indexes (pp. 510–608) are an added bonus. Written with remarkably clear prose, this volume does an admirable job of setting 1 Peter in its ancient context. As such, it will no doubt be a valuable resource for years to come.

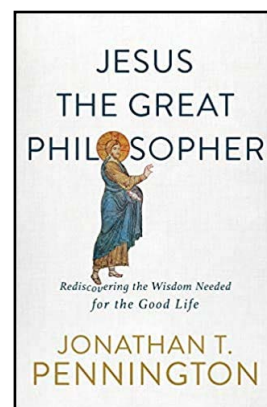
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Jonathan T. Pennington. *Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for the Good Life*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020. 232 pp. £12.99/\$18.99.

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People tend to view philosophy today as an esoteric discipline, engaged in "meaningless speculations about whether chairs exist when we leave the room" (p. 18). This popular perception is reinforced by the common stereotype of philosophers as quirky intellectuals who give little attention to the practical issues of daily life. In his book, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, Jonathan Pennington attempts to recover the purpose of ancient philosophy, arguing that the Greek philosophers trained people to live wisely and pursue goodness. With the goal of philosophy thus understood, Pennington declares that the Bible can be read fruitfully as a work of ancient philosophy, since it has a similar aim. Indeed, the early church viewed and depicted Jesus himself as a great philosopher and our modern loss of this perspective on Jesus has had dire consequences. Those familiar with Pennington's work will recognize that this book is a popularization and extension of many of the themes presented in his commentary, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017).



The book consists of ten brief chapters. The first chapter introduces Pennington's thesis that Jesus should be viewed as the greatest philosopher and Christianity as a "whole-life philosophy." If these insights become obscured, Christian faith becomes disconnected from "real life" and Christians begin to seek wisdom from alternative gurus, stop searching the Bible for answers to life's biggest questions, and consequently limit their witness to the world. The second chapter describes how ancient philosophers sought to model and inculcate wisdom for the art of living well, for the cultivation of flourishing societies. Yet the rise of the modern "scientific" university, among other factors, has contributed to the present-day divorce between philosophy and practiced virtue (p. 31). Pennington's introduction to ancient philosophy and his explanation of how it has changed is creative, easy-to-follow, and interesting.

The next chapter pairing explores the philosophical “big ideas” of the Bible, first in the Old Testament (ch. 3) and then in the New (ch. 4), through the grid of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics. Pennington’s claim that “the Hebrew Scriptures present themselves as a work of divinely revealed ancient philosophy” (p. 39) seems anachronistic, although of course the Old Testament does answer the ultimate questions of life. (One might ask whether any important work of ancient Near Eastern literature, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, would count as ancient philosophy.) In turning to the New Testament, Pennington is on firmer ground when drawing parallels between Jesus’s teaching style and that of the Greek philosophers. The title of this book is potentially misleading, though, since the focus is not exclusively on Jesus. Pennington ranges throughout the Old and New Testaments to prove that the entire Bible, like Greco-Roman philosophy, is concerned to bring people “into the fullness of humanity and maturity” (p. 79).

The final six chapters discuss three topics that one may not typically associate with philosophy, or perhaps even the Bible: the emotions (chs. 5–6); relationships, especially friendship (chs. 7–8); and happiness or human flourishing (chs. 9–10). Pennington’s pattern is to set up the ancient philosophical dialogue about each topic, with a few modern voices, before showing how Christianity speaks into the debate. Pennington weaves a fascinating array of conversion partners into his analysis. He asserts that the Bible and Christianity “have a remarkably sophisticated philosophy of emotions” (p. 101), a vision for restored relationships that is “not naive or idealistic” (p. 181), and a hope-filled philosophy of true human flourishing. In each case Christianity offers distinct contributions to these important topics.

*Jesus the Great Philosopher* is a popular-level book, not specifically written for an academic audience, so Pennington does not burrow too deeply into any of the areas he surveys. Nevertheless, the book could have compared more thoroughly how Greco-Roman philosophy and Christianity think about creation, wrongdoing, and justice. While Pennington persuasively demonstrates how Christianity overlaps with yet remains distinct from ancient philosophy, one wonders if these conceptual frameworks were *incongruous* at any points. In other words, does the conception of Jesus as philosopher constrain our sense of his mission as much as it clarifies? Does the New Testament traffic in or transcend philosophical categories?

The book contains several images and diagrams, some more helpful than others. There are relatively few endnotes, but it is obvious throughout that Pennington is tapping into a wealth of previous research. The book is chock-full of references to popular culture, works of great literature, and contemporary figures (from Jordan Peterson to John Piper). This will make the book an engaging read for many American evangelicals but may limit its impact on more distant readers. Overall, the book is an intriguing mix: sometimes it feels as if Pennington is sitting on a couch, offering cultural critique, sometimes as if he is at the podium lecturing on Greek terms, and sometimes as if he is exhorting fellow believers from the pulpit. This reviewer gained many insights into ancient philosophy and the Bible’s interface with it and, for that reason, would highly recommend this book. Hopefully scholars will not overlook it and ordinary Christians will somehow find it, because *Jesus the Great Philosopher* deserves a wide audience.

Alexander N. Kirk

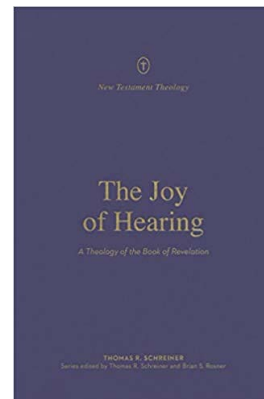
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Thomas R. Schreiner. *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*. New Testament Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 208 pp. \$19.99.

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In this initial volume of Crossway's New Testament Theology series, Professor Thomas Schreiner of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary sets out to provide a thorough, scholarly, and readable account of the distinctive biblical-theological themes of Revelation, which many Christians regard as "the most puzzling book in the New Testament" (p. 12). Schreiner explains, "The book of Revelation both attracts and repels readers" with its strange yet captivating visions (p. 17). Nevertheless, believers today desperately need its message "that God rules, even in an evil day; that God has not forsaken his people; and that goodness will finally triumph and prevail." Revelation reminds us "that a new world is coming, that a new creation is coming, and that all will be well" (p. 18).



The book's title reflects the seven "blessed" statements in the Apocalypse that promise comprehensive eschatological happiness and satisfaction to those who truly hear and obey this prophecy (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Schreiner writes, "The joy of hearing Revelation consists of heeding the call of Jesus, listening to the words of the Spirit, and remaining confident that God rules on his throne" (p. 12).

The Introduction ably explains Revelation's historical setting and genre. Schreiner adopts the majority view of evangelical scholars that John wrote near the end of the first century during Domitian's reign, when Christians experienced persecution and social pressure. Revelation combines features of epistolary, prophetic, and apocalyptic genres; the latter is particularly important for interpreting the book's pervasive symbolism and its disclosure of "the true nature of things" from a transcendent, divine perspective (p. 28).

Chapters 1–2 first consider the world's deafness and disobedience to the truth, and then the saints' obedient hearing. Schreiner intriguingly opens his study by contrasting unbelievers and adversaries (the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon) with the people of God who "conquer" and persevere in faith. *The Joy of Hearing* is organized rather differently from two similar books on the theology of Revelation. Richard Bauckham's *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) has chapters on God and the Lamb before a lengthy treatment of "the victory of the Lamb and his followers" (ch. 4), and he addresses Revelation's critique of Roman power and vision of divine judgment as subsections within the chapter on God, "the One who is." In *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), I begin with three chapters on the Triune God, then discuss the followers of the Lamb (ch. 5) and address the beast and Babylon in ch. 6 ("The Battle for Universal Worship"). While Schreiner does not explicitly explain why he organizes the chapters as he does, I commend his consistent emphasis on the urgent need for believers to "hear the message so that they truly grasp what is going on in the world and so that they persevere until the end and refuse to compromise with Rome" (p. 44).

Chapter 3 focuses on the sovereignty, holiness, and judgment of God, who rules on his heavenly throne. Schreiner laudably handles difficult theological questions surrounding God's permission of evil, arguing that while God is not directly responsible for evil in this world, "evil exists within the circumference of God's sovereign will" (p. 69). John's throne room vision in Revelation 4 uses rich OT imagery "to describe the indescribable," amazing readers with "the splendor and loveliness of



God himself” (p. 73). Schreiner understands the seals and trumpets to portray judgments throughout the church age, while the comprehensive bowl judgments are poured out near the end of history. He helpfully reflects on the pastoral significance of Revelation’s emphasis on God’s justice and judgment of evil, which offers comfort to suffering Christians and also encouragement to persevere in faith.

Chapter 4 expounds the message about Jesus, “the center of Revelation” (p. 103). This wide-ranging chapter ably expounds the book’s “extraordinarily high Christology” (p. 104) while also touching on various other topics such as the saving work of the slain lamb, the sealing of the 144,000 (all those redeemed by Christ), the vision of the dragon and the woman (who signifies God’s people), Christ’s return, and the final judgment, which represents “the final vindication of believers” (p. 139).

Chapter 5, “The Testimony of the Holy Spirit,” is the briefest in the book. Schreiner takes the enigmatic saying about “the spirit of prophecy” in Revelation 19:10 to mean that the Spirit inspires the “‘essence’ and heart of prophecy” and “centers on the testimony about Jesus Christ” (p. 142). He helpfully emphasizes the need to hear and heed true revelation, but he could have developed further the contrast between “what the Spirit says to the churches” and the competing claims of the false prophets (“Balaam” and Jezebel”) and “unclean spirits” that seek to lead people astray. Schreiner rightly understands “the seven spirits” to signify the Holy Spirit. He notes briefly a possible allusion to Zechariah 4, but I would have liked to see more reflection on Isaiah 11:2 as a potential background for Revelation’s seven-fold Spirit.

Chapter 6 expounds the final reward for believers in the new creation. Revelation merges together the images of the new creation and new Jerusalem (following Isa 65–66), offering an enchanting and enthralling picture of “God’s presence with his people” (p. 150). Schreiner explains that “the eschatological consummation has to do with a people and a place,” the Lamb’s wedding and God’s transformed temple-city (p. 158). This chapter does not draw out Revelation’s contrast between Jerusalem the bride and Babylon the harlot, as Schreiner chooses to discuss Babylon the great in chapter 1.

Chapter 7 discusses the thousand-year reign with Christ in Revelation 20. While this may strike readers as anticlimactic after a discussion of the new creation, Schreiner explains that this chapter functions as “a kind of appendix” (p. 161). Schreiner surveys the arguments for postmillennialism, premillennialism, and amillennialism, concluding that “the amillennial interpretation ... has many strengths since it fits with the reading of the entirety of the Scriptures, but the premillennial position in many ways seems to be a more natural way to explain Revelation 20” (p. 178). Regardless of one’s millennial view, it is important to keep in mind that the thousand years do not continue forever, while “the new creation is eternal, where we see our God face-to-face” (p. 178).

The brief Epilogue sums up the book’s stress on the urgent need to hear God’s word, the everlasting joy promised to conquerors, and the glorious hope of the coming new world, in which “the joy of dwelling with God and the Lamb will never grow old” (p. 180).

In summary, *The Joy of Hearing* offers a well-written, exegetically responsible, heart-stirring treatment of major themes in the book of Revelation. Schreiner’s work is comparable in length to Bauckham’s *Theology* and shorter than my *All Things New*. Each of these three books has areas of overlap and unique emphases, and Schreiner’s distinctive contribution is his sustained focus on the call to hear and heed the consummate revelation of the risen Christ. *The Joy of Hearing* is essential reading

for pastors and teachers and is accessible enough for students and thoughtful Christians to benefit from this rich and rewarding study of Revelation.

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Thomas G. Weinandy. *Jesus Becoming Jesus: Volume 2: A Theological Interpretation of the Gospel of John: Prologue and the Book of Signs*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021. 454 pp. £35.95/\$34.95.

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Weinandy is a Roman Catholic priest and theologian who has written a number of books. With this volume, we have the second installment of his three-part series, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*. The first volume (*Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Reading of the Synoptic Gospels* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018]) provided a theological reading of the Synoptic Gospels. This second installment provides a theological interpretation of the first thirteen chapters of the Gospel of John.

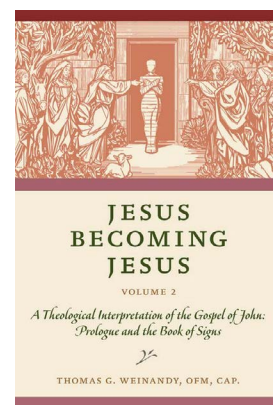
Weinandy explains that he aims “to discern the theological and doctrinal content of John’s Gospel” and, as such, he chooses not to treat such topics as “textual and form criticism” nor to employ the “historical critical method.” In terms of the theological starting point for his interpretation, he makes clear that he is attempting to “apply the teaching of Second Vatican Council,” that is, that Scripture must be interpreted in light of “the living apostolic tradition,” “later magisterial conciliar teaching” and “the subsequent theological tradition” (p. x). In a word, Weinandy’s offering is a thoroughly *Roman Catholic* theological interpretation of John 1–13.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of two chapters and covers in some depth John 1. Part 2 consists of twelve chapters, which cover John 2–13. The conclusion briefly summarizes some of the main highlights in the body of the work.

A number of insights or, at the very least, statements that give food for thought emerge from Weinandy’s reading of John 1–13. Commenting on the first half of John 1, Weinandy writes,

What we will see throughout the Gospel of John is the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son, a mutual glorification that is rooted in their eternal being as Father and Son.... Moreover, again as John will demonstrate, only by living in the life that comes from the Word ... can one live in the light. (p. 17)

He helpfully contends that the theological import of “the Word became flesh” in John 1:14 is best understood as “*came to exist as a man*” (p. 26, emphasis original), which, he argues, preserves the fact that neither the Word nor Christ’s humanity is altered; that is to say, the Word remains God and Christ’s humanity remains true humanity. Later, Weinandy makes the intriguing suggestion that John’s baptism of Jesus was understood by John the Baptizer “as being the preeminent act by which Jesus is made known, for in that baptismal act, Jesus is revealed to be the Spirit-anointed Son of God” (p. 61). This suggestion is built on Weinandy’s (perhaps overstated) contention that the Gospel of John as a whole is a theological interpretation of the prior Synoptic Gospels and therefore it “provides a deeper or more





reflexive theological interpretation of the” Synoptic tradition (p. xii). From this, Weinandy questionably concludes that the theological reading provided by John offers a “more profound” perspective on “Jesus’ words and actions” (p. 434) than the perspective offered by the Synoptics.

There are a few points at which Weinandy’s interpretation is questionable. For example, after suggesting that for all the Gospels, “Peter ... is and will be the rock of faith upon which the future church will be built,” he writes that “Peter stands alone at the epicenter of the entire gathering” in John 1:35ff (p. 71). One wonders if he would draw that conclusion without his aforementioned theological commitments. Similarly, in his discussion of the wedding feast of Cana in John 2, he writes that it is not “simply the celebration of the betrothal of a man and a woman”; rather, it “is the contextual graphic image of Jesus’ saving betrothal of the church, the ecclesial woman, personified in Mary” (p. 107). One wonders if it is truly likely that John’s intention was to place this level of theological significance on Mary in his account? Also, as one would suspect, Weinandy understands John 6 primarily as a “Eucharistic Discourse” with John 6:52–58 strongly supporting the notion of transubstantiation (i.e., that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus).

Despite these and other shortcomings, Weinandy has provided a very helpful theological interpretation of John’s Gospel. He truly does draw out some substantial theological insights from the text while at the same time writing lucidly and even devotionally. Moreover, the thematic connections he makes as well as his comments on the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Johannine Gospel at the very least give the reader food for thought and at times his points are compelling. It must be stressed that this is not a normal commentary that the busy pastor or NT scholar can consult to find Weinandy’s comments on a particular verse, since he discusses blocks of texts rather than providing verse-by-verse exegesis. Further, while exegesis is unavoidable on some level, as promised, his work is primarily theological not exegetical and as such it will not be useful for every person interested in a scholarly analysis of the Gospel of John. However, I hasten to add that his deep and oftentimes accurate and thought-provoking theological reading should garner a wide audience. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in an explicitly theological reading of John 1–13 atypical of a normal commentary, or for the reader desiring a theological nuanced yet devotionally rich approach to John’s Gospel.

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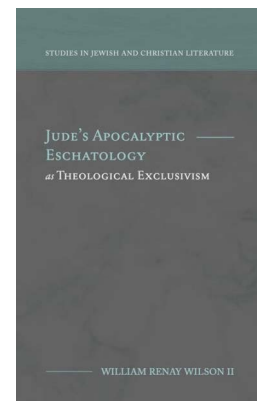
William Renay Wilson II. *Jude's Apocalyptic Eschatology as Theological Exclusivism*. Studies in Jewish and Christian Literature. Dallas: Fontes, 2021. 163 pp. £32.98/\$40.95.

This book is a revised version of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary PhD dissertation of William Renay Wilson II, associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Luther Rice College and Seminary. Wilson describes how Jude's apocalyptic eschatology resists the theological pluralism of false teachers who had inserted themselves into early Christian churches. In successive chapters of this book, Wilson surveys previous research on Jude, defines apocalyptic eschatology and identifies it in Jewish and Christian literature antecedent to Jude, expositis apocalyptic eschatology in Jude, and argues that Jude's apocalyptic eschatology confronts false teachers.

Wilson leaves no stone unturned in his survey of research on Jude in chapter one. Wilson first addresses text-critical issues in Jude. He seems to endorse Joel Allen's 1998 position on Jude 22–23a, that these verses are three clauses that “do not indicate distinct groups of persons, but amplif[y] the same group, i.e., those who doubt” (p. 7). In Jude 4, Wilson argues that “Master” (δεσπότης) refers to “God,” and he considers “Lord” (κύριος) to be the original reading of Jude 5, not “Jesus” (p. 8). Wilson next considers Jude's use of earlier Jewish and Christian traditions. He argues that Jude interacts with the Old Testament in its original Hebrew and that Jude uses 1 Enoch and the Assumption of Moses as “material revered by his audience, or perhaps his opponents” (p. 11). Regarding Jude's often-discussed literary relationship with 2 Peter, Wilson contends that the two letters are independent applications of an earlier “shared preaching campaign developed jointly by the earliest church leaders designed to combat widespread antinomian tendencies” (p. 14). Wilson affirms that Jude the brother of James and Jesus wrote this letter, and he argues that it is a product of the AD 50s and most likely addressed to an at least partially Jewish Christian congregation “somewhere between Jerusalem and Asia Minor” (p. 24). He identifies the opponents condemned in Jude as “itinerant antinomian syncretists” (p. 27).

The second chapter is significant for its definition of apocalyptic eschatology and Wilson's investigation of its presence in other Jewish and Christian literature, which would have been formative for Jude. Piecing together elements identified by other scholars, Wilson defines apocalyptic eschatology as the “loosely defined worldview” that is “common to apocalypses” and that “includes such themes as dualism, God's sovereignty, pessimism, paraenesis, judgment, the intervention of a redeemer/judge, the fate of humanity, and an imminent end” (p. 33). Wilson then demonstrates how apocalyptic eschatology applies these themes to combat “invasive and omnipresent theological pluralism” (p. 36). Apocalyptic Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah decried how God's people Israel in various generations participated in pagan, polytheistic idolatry. During the Second Temple period, 1 Maccabees and the documents of Qumran alike promoted purified monotheism over against Greco-Roman polytheistic encroachments. Paul confronted idolatry in both Athens (Acts 17) and Corinth (1 Corinthians).

In chapter 3, Wilson describes how Jude features the elements of apocalyptic eschatology outlined in the previous chapter. Jude affirms Christian dualism by attributing “a unified omnipotence presiding over the universe with eternal power and authority” to both God the Father and Jesus Christ (p. 70). He also distinguishes between righteous and wicked people throughout his letter. Jude is deterministic



in that he refers to God calling (v. 1), keeping (vv. 1, 13), and preserving (v. 24) Christians. Jude's three prophecies concerning how the ungodly will face eternal judgment (vv. 4, 14–15, 18) evince his pessimism and his use of the apocalyptic judgment motif. Like other apocalyptic authors, Jude affirms divine sovereignty "while simultaneously exhorting [his audience] to live obediently" to God (p. 86). The Lord Jesus is either each person's redeemer or judge; as he was at the exodus (v. 5), so he will be when he returns (vv. 14–15).

In the final chapter, Wilson applies Jude's apocalyptic eschatology and its concomitant theological exclusivism to twenty-first century postmodernism. He demonstrates that the sexual promiscuity promoted by pagan polytheism is functionally the same as that of postmodern moral relativism. Wilson concludes, "In the first century, Jude responded to the challenge with an apocalyptic eschatology that can only be described as theologically exclusive. If affirmed and obeyed, his doctrinal stances push the church toward a stricter theological conservatism, a more closed and guarded worldview that expressly contradicts the spirit of the age" (p. 108).

Though this book's primary argument is sound, *Jude's Apocalyptic Eschatology* is not without its flaws. In particular, it does not interact extensively with literature on Jude written after 2002, when Wilson first defended this dissertation. Wilson has updated his survey of research on Jude to include the major evangelical commentaries on Jude published since 2002: those of Thomas R. Schreiner (NAC, [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003]), Gene L. Green (BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]), and Herbert Bateman IV (EEC [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015]). However, Wilson interacts with each of these commentaries less than a handful of times throughout this monograph. Wilson identifies the opponents in Jude as "itinerant antinomian syncretists" (p. 27). He thus disagrees with Bateman, who identifies the opponents as "Zealot or Siccari revolutionaries agitating for war with Rome in the A.D. 60s," but he calls Bateman's argument "lengthy and well-documented" (p. 26 n. 167). Refuting Bateman's new argument concerning the opponents would have made Wilson's more traditional identification of the opponents more compelling.

Despite this shortcoming, this monograph is excellent in both its scholarly and devotional quality. New Testament scholars will find in the first three chapters a concise and thorough survey of research on Jude, a clear definition and discussion of apocalyptic literature, and an analysis of Jude as an apocalyptic document. In the third and fourth chapters, pastors will find an exposition of Jude that makes its sometimes-confusing uses of the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish writings understandable and applicable to the theological and ethical dilemmas that continue to beset Christians today. I certainly found this book a welcome companion as I preached Jude.

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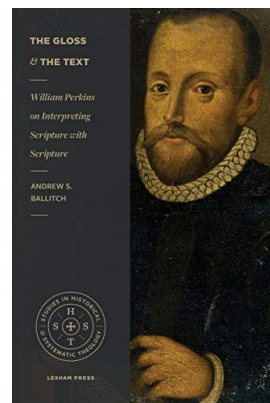
— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

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Andrew S. Ballitch. *The Gloss and the Text: William Perkins on Interpreting Scripture with Scripture*. Studies in Historical & Systematic Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. xix + 272 pp. £23.50/\$28.99.

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This book is a light revision of the author's 2017 doctoral dissertation from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It examines William Perkins's interpretation of Scripture as seen across the full range of his written works. Ballitch's main historiographical foil is Donald McKim, who argued that Ramism held a central place in Perkins's interpretive arsenal (*Ramism in William Perkins' Theology* [New York: Peter Lang, 1987]). Yet it is worth noting that McKim, in a fine display of scholarly generosity, has written a short foreword to Ballitch's present work. Against McKim's argument for the centrality of Ramism, Ballitch contends that biblical exegesis and Scripture itself were the animating principles behind Perkins's written corpus. In making his argument, Ballitch also aims to combat charges against Perkins of rationalism, eisegesis, and proof-texting. He states, "While the central role that Scripture played in [Perkins's] thought has been recognized, that exegesis was at the heart of all his efforts has yet to be demonstrated. I intend to fill this gap in the historiography" (p. 17).



This rather fine distinction between Scripture as central and exegesis as central animates the book's argument. Ballitch bases his argument regarding the centrality of exegesis on a statement by Perkins himself. In *The Arte of Prophecyng*, Perkins said that the Bible should be interpreted with three tools: context, collation, and the analogy of faith. Ballitch's work is essentially a sustained argument that when Perkins wrote this, he told the truth. Perkins, according to Ballitch, stayed consistent with his own stated interpretive ideals, regardless of what genre he was writing in. In other words, across Perkins's corpus, one can see him interpreting Scripture by paying attention to context, by comparing Scripture with Scripture (collation), and by staying within a Reformed understanding of the analogy of faith.

Chapter 1 lays out this thesis against the backdrop of previous historiography and offers a brief analysis of the approach to Scripture laid out in *The Arte of Prophecyng*. Chapter 2 then turns to give a broad overview of Perkins's exegetical method, briefly comparing him to patristic, medieval, and earlier reformed antecedents. The next four chapters constitute the heart of the argument and attempt to prove Ballitch's thesis by examining Perkins's works in thematic groupings and arguing for the centrality of biblical exegesis across all of them. Chapter 3, therefore, looks at Perkins's sermons and his commentaries, all of which originated as sermons. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ballitch finds exegesis central in these works and argues that Perkins consistently uses his three stated methods. Chapter 4 examines Perkins's practical works, such as those dealing with conscience and the assurance of faith. Chapter 5 looks at theological works, such as Perkins's famous *A Golden Chaine*, and treatises on free will and predestination. Chapter 6 closes by examining polemical works, including those written against the Roman Catholic Church, such as *A Reformed Catholike*, and works that Perkins wrote against witchcraft and astrology. In all these genres, Ballitch repeatedly contends that exegesis is central to Perkins's efforts and that he consistently interprets Scripture according to context, collation, and the analogy of faith. A

short conclusion then restates Ballitch's argument and briefly suggests some questions his work has left unanswered.

Ballitch's study would serve well as a helpful entryway into the works of Perkins. Much of the book essentially consists of summaries of the contents of Perkins's numerous works. By reading Ballitch, one can easily gain a sense of the full range of Perkins's published endeavors and the concerns they address. Ballitch also writes lucidly and with a clear, logical flow, which admirably mirrors Perkins's style.

While Ballitch summarizes Perkins's writings lucidly, as a reader, I did wonder if the range of works he chooses to address hindered his argument. For example, some of Perkins's works are treated so briefly as to be covered in less than a single page (e.g., pp. 133, 137–38, 140–41). This leaves little room for true analysis, and the reader must often take Ballitch's word that biblical exegesis was central to these writings. Further, occasional arguments seem to strain credulity. Ballitch, for example, contends that all of Perkins's 1597 work, *A Reformed Catholike*, is simply an extended exposition and application of a single verse, Revelation 18:4 (p. 196). Yet the work is more than 350 pages long! This begs the question of what legitimately counts as exegesis, a methodological question that the study never addresses. Finally, when Ballitch searches for Perkins's English intellectual context, he relies solely on works written in or translated into English (pp. 48–54). Perkins, however, often wrote, spoke, and read in Latin, as did a great many of the English (and continental) contemporaries that he read. Examining only works written in English, therefore, gives a lopsided view of Perkins's intellectual world.

Despite these misgivings, Ballitch argues a straightforward thesis and writes with great clarity. His book could also serve as a helpful primer on Perkins's written corpus. Ballitch succeeds in showing any who are skeptical that Perkins was deeply steeped in biblical exegesis. However, in doing so, he only minimally accounts for other sources of intellectual and cultural influence on him, Ramism included.

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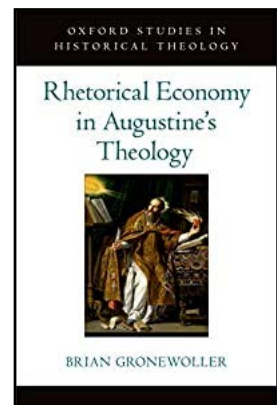
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Michael W. Bruening. *Refusing to Kiss the Slipper: Opposition to Calvinism in the Francophone Reformation*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. xv + 361 pp. £64.00/\$99.00.

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With his second historical monograph, Michael Bruening, professor of history and political science at Missouri University of Science and Technology has sought to capture a perspective on the Francophone Reformation that contrasts with recent historiography. He does so by focusing on “Calvin’s evangelical opposition together ... as a network of opposition to Calvin, Beza, the Genevan Reformation, and the French Reformed churches” rather than merely as discrete, “idiosyncratic voices” (p. 4).

This monograph consists of eight chapters. The first chapter surveys leading figures of the effort at reform led by Marguerite of Navarre. In contrast to Calvin and his followers, this effort “envisioned a state-sponsored, national reform that would take place within the existing French church” (p. 9). In the second chapter, Bruening gives a detailed look at the formation of networks led



by Guillaume Farel and later John Calvin. Here, he argues that because Calvin essentially severed the connection between reform and the “secular magistrate” (p. 37), he departed from both Marguerite’s efforts and Zwingli’s. Already, in the early years of the formation of Calvin’s network, we begin to see doctrinal stances on “excommunication, the Eucharist, and predestination” (p. 64) that would both strengthen the bounds of the network and eventually force out those who did not adhere to the same positions.

In the third chapter, Bruening describes opposition to the Calvinist network in Francophone Switzerland. Those belonging to Calvin’s network faced numerous defeats as the more Zwinglian approach to reform, which favored a closer tie with secular authorities, had broad support in the region. Chapter 4 continues the story of opposition to Calvin’s network in Francophone Switzerland, which saw its consolidation under the leadership of Andre Zebedee and others.

The fifth chapter gives attention to Sebastian Castellio’s challenge to the Calvinistic network since he advocated a theology that “was personal, spiritual, and moral” and thus a threat because followers of Castellio “could be Calvinists institutionally but Castellionists inwardly” (p. 156). The sixth chapter discusses a network of people throughout “Basel in the Suisse Romande and in Montbeliard” (p. 180), specifically who stood behind the emphases of Castellio, forming into another network in opposition to Calvin’s network. The seventh chapter explores what Bruening designates “Gallican evangelicals” (p. 211), i.e., those who saw Calvin’s reforming efforts as an obstacle to true reform and advocated for the continuance of the episcopal system of church government. In the final chapter, the author describes the assault of “a minor French nobleman” (p. 256), Jean Morely, on Calvinist ecclesiology. The main reason for Morely’s opposition, according to Bruening, is his opposition to the foreign Genevan influence on the French church. The conclusion of the book makes further observations and summarizes the various connections of individuals aligned with different networks of opposition to Calvin.

This monograph is a work of serious historical scholarship. Bruening is deeply conversant with primary sources while engaging with secondary literature. He demonstrates, by looking at movements and particular figures, that endorsement of Calvin and his reforming efforts was not accepted across the board. In fact, there are several occasions when it was unclear if the Calvinist network would survive the opposition it faced—a point Bruening makes throughout.

Beyond painting a clear picture of the opposition to Calvin in the Francophone Reformation, several other strengths stand out in this book. First, his discussion of Andre Zebedee advances scholarship on this neglected figure. Second, he persuasively argues against the defense that Calvin’s role in Servetus’s execution was because he was only a man of his time by building the case that many people contemporaneous to the event were opposed to the execution of Servetus as well as Calvin’s role in it. Third, Bruening makes the intriguing suggestion that Sebastian Castellio was a forerunner to “the liberal Protestant tradition” (p. 179), which warrants further attention. Fourth, he compellingly argues that one of the main reasons for the success of Calvin and his network is that people craved a decisive leader, and Calvin fit the bill.

In summary, this is a welcome and necessary addition to French Reformation and Calvin studies. By looking at Calvin and his followers through the lens of those who opposed his reforming efforts, one gains a fuller understanding of the man and the Reformation he led. We are in Bruening’s debt for producing an offering that gives long-overdue attention to the broad opposition to Calvinist reform in



the Francophone and corrects earlier historical works that present an oversimplified picture—highly recommended.

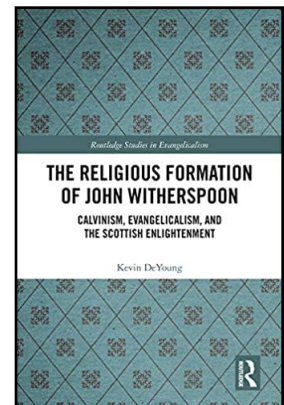
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Kevin DeYoung. *The Religious Formation of John Witherspoon: Calvinism, Evangelicalism, and the Scottish Enlightenment*. Routledge Studies in Evangelicalism. London: Routledge, 2020. x+ 221 pp. £36.99/\$48.95.

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In the last few decades, there has been a revival of sorts in the academic study of the scholars who taught at Princeton College and Princeton Seminary from the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. Until recently, this revival has focused almost exclusively upon rescuing the theologians who taught at the seminary from its founding in 1812 to its reorganization in 1929 from the charge that the authenticity of their Reformed commitments had been compromised by what their critics maintain was their accommodation of the moral, religious, and epistemological optimism of the Scottish Enlightenment. While the body of scholarship that is dedicated to retrieving a more philosophically precise assessment of the Princeton theologians' relationship to the Enlightenment continues to grow, it is now being supplemented by more broadly historical studies that are establishing that in the main, the scholars who stood in the mainstream of the "Witherspoon" or "Old Princeton" tradition did not abandon, but remained committed to the moral, religious, and epistemological convictions of their fathers in the Reformed faith. Indeed, recent scholarship has established that from the founding of the college in 1746 to the reorganization of the seminary in 1929, those who stood in the mainstream of the "Old Princeton" tradition were not just occasionally but consistently—and even enthusiastically—orthodox.



In this regard, one of the most important contributions to this growing body of more expansive historical analysis is Kevin DeYoung's recent effort "to explore the theology of John Witherspoon in his historical context, with special attention given to the Scottish half of his career" (p. 4). In *The Religious Formation of John Witherspoon: Calvinism, Evangelicalism, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, DeYoung offers a meticulously researched, closely argued, beautifully written, and finally compelling corrective to the all-too-common assumption that Witherspoon's theology—as well as his contribution to the moral and intellectual life of the emerging nation—can be understood correctly without acknowledging the "considerable continuity of thought" (p. 4) between "[his] Scottish ministry and the second half of his career as one of America's Founding Fathers" (p. i). While DeYoung concedes the obvious, namely that Witherspoon's "trip across the Atlantic" to serve as the sixth president of Princeton College entailed "a change of scenery and a change of primary vocation" for the erstwhile minister in the Scottish Kirk, he nonetheless insists—in a bold rejoinder to the prevailing historiographical consensus—that Witherspoon's emigration to and participation in the life of the burgeoning American Republic "did not mark a change in the man or in his most deeply held beliefs" (pp. 162–63). In short, what DeYoung contends and successfully establishes is that Witherspoon's career will never be understood correctly

until interpreters “see him as not only *engaged* with the Scottish Enlightenment, but also *firmly grounded* in the Reformed tradition of High to Late Orthodoxy, *embedded* in the transatlantic evangelical awakenings of the eighteenth century, and *frustrated* by the state of religion in the Scottish Kirk” (p. 4, emphasis original). When interpreters view Witherspoon from this fuller, more multi-dimensional perspective, DeYoung argues, they will conclude that despite what the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe, there are *no* grounds for concluding that Witherspoon’s “chief contribution” to the moral and intellectual life of the emerging nation was found where those who embrace the historiographical consensus insist it is found, namely in a transparently unorthodox attempt to establish “a beachhead for an enlightened moral sense philosophy that could undergird [the] republican political convictions” of the Founding Fathers (p. 10).

Among the more important contributions of DeYoung’s analysis, two are particularly noteworthy. First, DeYoung contends that Witherspoon should be remembered not just for being a “minister, president, educator, philosopher, and Founding Father,” but also for being a “Reformed apologist” (p. 5). “Like his theological mentor, the Genevan theologian Benedict Pictet (1655–1724), Witherspoon held firmly to the tenets of confessional Calvinism. And like Pictet,” DeYoung forcefully argues, “Witherspoon was eager to show that the truths of supernatural revelation (i.e., historic, orthodox, Reformed theology) could be squared with reason” (p. 5).

DeYoung’s second contribution of note follows from and is intimately related to his retrieval of Witherspoon’s enduring interest in apologetics, for it has to do with the implications of this interest for the viability of what has come to be known in the scholarly literature as “the Witherspoon problem.” According to this view, Witherspoon should not be regarded as a Reformed apologist during the second half of his career because shortly after he arrived at Princeton College, he accommodated a number of the more progressive philosophical commitments that he had enthusiastically opposed as a minister in the Scottish Kirk. Moreover, he did so to inculcate an understanding of public virtue that he had come to believe was essential to the civic and educational needs of the emerging Republic. In response to this “sea change” hypothesis (p. 151), DeYoung demonstrates conclusively that during the second half of his career in the American context, there was *nothing* in Witherspoon’s “views on reason, human nature, and true virtue that were not present in his Scottish ministry” (p. 18). He makes it clear, in other words, that Witherspoon was an outspoken advocate of Reformed orthodoxy not just on one but on both sides of the Atlantic. In so doing, DeYoung establishes that when all is said and done, Witherspoon should be remembered not for being a “conduit”—even if only an unwitting “conduit”—of Enlightenment philosophy in the emerging Republic. Instead, he should be remembered for being “a Presbyterian clergyman and a traditional Reformed theologian who found ways to make his old School views relevant in a new day” (p. 18).

For these and other reasons, DeYoung’s incisive analysis comes with my highest and most enthusiastic recommendation.

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David L. Eastman. *Early North African Christianity: Turning Points in the Development of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 174 pp. £16.99/\$22.99.

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The reader or browser who takes up David Eastman's *Early North African Christianity* will readily call to mind another book of a similar title by Thomas Oden (d. 2016), *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007). Beyond the common geographical reference, there is a basis for associating the two titles. In beginning this new volume, Eastman acknowledges happy past associations with Oden.

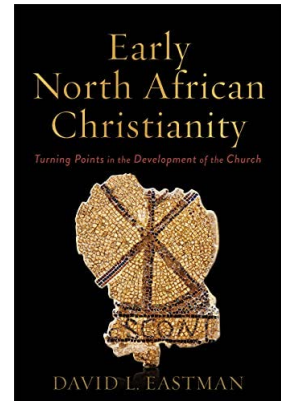
Eastman's *Early North African Christianity* is distinguishable from the earlier work, especially by its more specific geographic focus upon the territories that today make up Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. This territory, some a corner of the Roman Empire and some Berber tribal areas, was linked to Mediterranean Europe by government and commerce. Polite inhabitants used Latin, but there were also regional languages. This region was the theater in which stirring examples of heroic early Christian martyrdom unfolded, the "launching pad" of impressive efforts in early Christian theology, and the scene of important early Christian disputes.

It becomes evident that Eastman has taught this material repeatedly in various classrooms. Now the professor of Bible in Chattanooga, Tennessee's noted McCallie School, Eastman shows that with years of experience, he knows how to communicate fairly complex material to a student audience still finding its way in early Christian studies. It is, in many ways, a model of how such instruction can be done with a combination of gravity and a light touch.

The book has five focuses, each occupying three chapters. Narrative is provided about the five: (1) Perpetua and Felicity, early North African Christian martyrs; (2) Tertullian and (3) Cyprian of Carthage, both theologians of note; (4) the Donatists; and (5) Augustine. Each such narrative is supplemented by analysis of the martyr-records, select theological treatises, and called consultations produced in connection with these great lives.

The evaluator of what Eastman has written is confronted with paradoxes: the book constitutes a popular exposition of what is, in fact, a specialized subject. As well, this handsome paperback—by its focus upon one corner of a continent and one portion of an Empire—cannot support an entire course on early Christianity. And while it obviously represents a distillation of vast reading, the virtual absence of reference notes means that the reader is left to guess what the writer has grappled with in reaching his conclusions (a difficulty not addressed by the inclusion of a final list of suggested readings).

As for the theological perspective displayed in *Early North African Christianity*, it is one that is broadly orthodox, enabling this book to be read with confidence in a wide range of settings. The reviewer did look for greater readiness to identify and name embellishment for what it is in the clearly embroidered martyr stories of Perpetua and Felicity (ch. 2). He noted with gratitude the highlighting of the non-subservience of Tertullian and Cyprian to Roman bishops who were too eager to extend their sway beyond Rome to North Africa (chs. 5 and 8). He wondered whether Tertullian's flirtation with Montanism was taken seriously enough. He was glad to see it noted that Augustine's teaching on grace gained new popularity in the era of Protestant reform (chap. 16) but wondered why this teacher's medieval disciples were passed over—as if to suggest that Augustine had been forgotten for a millennium.



*Early North African Christianity*, in sum, is briefer, more geographically specific, and more an exposition than an investigation than I hoped to find. But it is of very good quality, and it leaves this reviewer hoping that it will either soon have a companion or be subsumed in a larger, more fully documented work that could serve as a text for a semester-long course.

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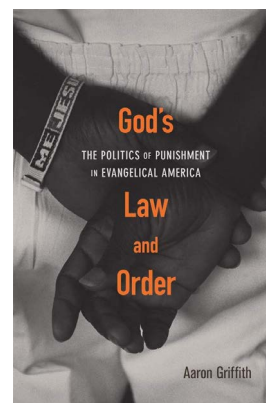
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Aaron Griffith. *God's Law and Order: The Politics of Punishment in Evangelical America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. 335 pp. £28.95/\$35.00.

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"I was in prison, and you came to visit me." (Matt 25:36)

In *God's Law and Order: The Politics of Punishment in Evangelical America*, Aaron Griffith, assistant professor of modern American history at Whitworth University, traces the intertwining stories of American evangelicalism and American formulations of crime and punishment. He describes a symbiotic relationship where American conservative Protestantism increasingly provided the penal system a broad and uncritical endorsement, and crime provided evangelicals a cohesive rallying point by which to anchor their morphing identity—"each facilitated the rise of the other" (p. 4). Further, he presents the paradoxical story of how evangelicals could be "complicit in the American justice system's most grievous problems" while also functioning as "pioneers in humanitarian engagement with modern prison life" (p. 3).



Griffith begins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including an examination of the horrific role of lynching in the Jim Crow social order. Approaching the 1920s and 1930s, crime was becoming a "broader issue of public concern" (p. 36). While conservative and moderate Protestants held contrasting diagnoses of increasing crime rates, they shared two influential beliefs that anticipated later conversations: (1) rising crime reflected increasing secularity, and (2) state influence was the best remedy to the problem (p. 39).

Griffith then turns to the ministry of Billy Graham. He argues that Graham (and the movements, leaders, and institutions that he sparked) focused on Christian conversion as the solution to juvenile delinquency. This was an important wrinkle distinct from later evangelical framing of crime and punishment: for evangelicals in these early postwar years, "the ideal outcome for criminals was their *conversion*, not conviction" (p. 57). Graham continued to elevate the danger of crime, but he pressed for heart change rather than harsher penal codes.

But this mindset changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Voices advocating for stronger law and order mechanisms (in light of still increasing crime rates) began to author legislation and cast a national vision for safer communities utilizing state force. Through media outlets (such as *Christianity Today*) and the platforming of conservative politicians, Evangelicals generally supported these efforts. According to Griffith, advocating for a stronger hand in the administration of law and order "helped to take evangelicalism public" (p. 167).

Simultaneous to evangelical activism on the outside, evangelical ministries proliferated on the inside to such an extent that “American prisons have not been the same since” (p. 175). I’ve volunteered with similar ministries (as has Griffith), and he captures the ethos of such groups exceedingly well with respect and appreciation as only a participant on the ground can describe. Griffith notes, however, that these ministries often unconsciously trafficked in faulty assumptions about the nature of crime and the shortcomings of the penal system, particularly in their avoidance of how race intersects with the criminal justice system. As Griffith argues, the “smoothing over of racial complications, however unintentional, was a regular theme of postwar evangelical crime concern,” a point illustrated by these groups (p. 5).

Griffith then turns to Prison Fellowship, Charles Colson, and the lasting influence of twentieth-century evangelicalism on contemporary prisons. As one would expect, Colson takes center stage, and Griffith explains how and why Colson had mixed success navigating the tensions of prison reform and the underlying cultural and social issues inherent in the conversation.

*God’s Law and Order* is a detailed interpretation of why evangelicals “possess deep comfort with the state’s capacity to surveil, constrain, and take life, even as they remain highly attuned to the spiritual well-being of those caught in the grips of the state system” (p. 11). Griffith provides a scholarly exposition of how evangelicals have understood crime and punishment and how they have mobilized (in ways helpful and unhelpful) to address the situation. Griffith demonstrates the connections between two spheres rarely discussed: American evangelicalism and the modern prison system. Readers see that there is more overlap than they may imagine.

I did leave with a nagging question related to Griffith’s presentation of evangelicals as uniquely “enmeshed” with the penal ecosystem (p. 9). The book argues their attentiveness to crime, justice, incarceration, and related policy. Griffith correctly notes that crime was not the *only* issue mobilizing evangelicals and that geopolitical concerns about Communism occasionally took precedence over the domestic pressures of crime and punishment. Still, having revisited a fair amount of the source material (including early *CT* issues), Griffith is right: evangelical outlets focused on crime to a greater extent than I realized. But, as Griffith shows, others beyond evangelicalism articulated these concerns on a grander scale, especially given the ever-increasing crime rates throughout the twentieth century. So did evangelicals pilot this enthusiasm for law and order, or did they simply ride a wave of wider cultural concern? If the latter, what made evangelical interest in these issues altogether different than the rest of the nation? I left with that question unresolved.

Of course, disagreements abound concerning policing, environmental factors vis-à-vis crime rates, and reasons for the disproportionate representation of people of color in prisons. Griffith’s book is not ultimately about solutions, though he does nudge readers toward suggested pathways forward. Readers who “feel the pull of law-and-order” will face more challenges absorbing and affirming some of his conclusions (p. 267). Still, Griffith is respectful toward those who share his concerns about poorly applied penalties, but who may offer alternative solutions that recognize the dignity of the incarcerated while maintaining an appropriate role for state disciplinary action. On such tension-laced topics, Griffith models how to write with clarity and winsomeness without sacrificing his argument.

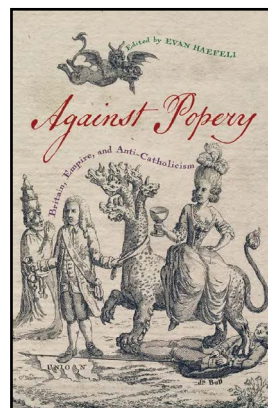
*God’s Law and Order* is an illuminating examination of evangelical identity through the lenses of crime, punishment, justice, and redemption. Despite the numerous fractures in evangelicalism today,

Griffith highlights a point of commonality: when it comes to serving prisoners and their families, “Evangelicals are the ones who show up” (p. 264).

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Evan Haefeli, ed. *Against Popery: Britain, Empire, and Anti-Catholicism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020. xii + 342 pp. £31.50/\$39.50.

Historians such as Philip Jenkins have called anti-Catholicism in America “the last acceptable prejudice.” As the wide array of literature on this topic makes clear, concern about Roman Catholicism has a long and deep history that stretches back to the 1600s. However, anti-Catholic thought is by no means limited to America. Its origins come from England and Scotland. While historians such as Anthony Milton have written extensively on anti-Catholic thought in England, *Against Popery* advances the field of anti-Catholic studies by showing how anti-Catholic thought—particularly fears about Roman Catholic political power and freedom—unified the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British empire, provided a point of cohesion amongst British colonies in North America, and led in part to both an eventual undoing of the British empire and an emergence of religious liberty for Roman Catholics.



Edited by Evan Haefeli, *Against Popery* brings together roughly a dozen scholars to trace the sources and outworkings of anti-Catholic thought in the British empire. The book contains three parts that progress from the foundational events and thoughts of anti-Catholic ideology (part 1) to the societal and political facets that helped coalesce anti-Catholic thought (part 2). Further, the book elucidates the transformation of anti-Catholic practice as events in the British Empire led staunch anti-Catholics in colonial America to start a political revolution that, counterintuitively and ironically, increased political and religious liberty for Roman Catholics across the British empire (part 3).

Some of the book’s main points that recur in multiple essays deserve brief mention. First, different essays discuss the large definitional challenges with terms such as “anti-Catholic” or “anti-papal.” Unfortunately, scholars use these terms in diverse and, at times, contradictory ways, so readers must pay careful attention to definitions. Evan Haefeli summarizes John Wolffe’s helpful taxonomy of four different strands of anti-Catholic thought. Second, anti-Catholic thought played a much more important role in shaping cultural hegemony and forming debates about political liberty than historians have hitherto acknowledged. It not only divided Catholics and Protestants but also pitted Protestants against each other.

Additionally, the socio-cultural and political concerns that gave rise to anti-Catholic machinations transferred naturally to anti-Puritan thought. In other words, many of the same species of arguments used against Rome, and their underlying motivating fears, reappeared against Puritans. Also, anti-Catholic thought spanned the British empire and allowed the American colonies to cohere. Ironically, it served as an impetus for the colonies to rebel. Finally, fear of Catholic tyranny led to anti-Catholic thought and the curtailment of religious liberty in the British empire.

*Against Popery* has several strengths. Evan Haefeli's introduction proffers a superb overview of the relevant historiography, particularly regarding the socio-cultural and political aspects of anti-Catholic thought. In addition, most essays contain lengthy footnotes of anti-Catholic literature, especially as it relates to the juxtaposition of political and cultural factors. Further, a few chapters offer fascinating lenses on anti-Catholic thought. One such essay, entitled "Shuffling Tyranny," examines a deck of playing cards produced in 1679 that essentially catechized users in anti-Catholic thought. Another one, "A Deal with the Devil," focuses on the role of anti-Catholic thought in the American Revolution.

Nonetheless, at times, some essays largely imply that any opposition to Roman Catholic doctrine entails "prejudice." In addition, perhaps not surprising for a work that focuses more on cultural-political history than theological history, *Against Popery* contains a handful of inaccurate statements about Protestant theological history. For example, Laura Stevens writes that the "elevation of the Virgin Mary within popular devotional practice and eventually within church theology" during "the late medieval period ... was at the core of the Protestant critique of the Roman Catholic Church beginning with Martin Luther" (p. 170). However, matters such as indulgences, papal power, the role of Scripture, and justification by faith alone played a more central role for Luther.

In conclusion, *Against Popery* provides a wide-ranging treatment of anti-Catholic thought in the British empire. While the book focuses primarily on socio-political thought (instead of historical theology) from 1600 to 1850 and the authors assume a substantial amount of background knowledge on the part of the reader, for scholars or educated laypeople interested in the nexus of anti-Catholic thought, political history, and the British empire, *Against Popery* will prove both interesting and fruitful.

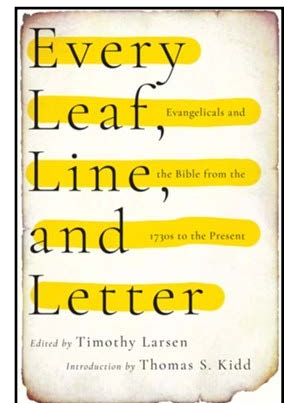
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Timothy Larsen, ed. *Every Leaf, Line, and Letter: Evangelicals and the Bible from the 1730s to the Present*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. 328 pp. £29.99/\$36.00.

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"I was filled with a pineing desire to see Christs own words in the bible.... every leaf line and letter smiled in my face; I got the bible up under my Chin and hugged it; it was sweet and lovely." Enraptured by the stirring preaching of the itinerant English revivalist George Whitefield, the Connecticut farmer Nathan Cole found solace for his troubled soul in the living words of Holy Scripture (pp. 1–2). Cole's quest for a vital and authentic faith according to the Bible marks a critical continuity in the evangelical movement from its eighteenth-century origins to today. British historian David Bebbington sets biblicism alongside conversionism, crucicentrism, and activism as the four main characteristics of evangelical identity—a definition known as the "Bebbington Quadrilateral" (see *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Routledge, 1989]).



The essays in this collection examine the multifaceted nature of biblicism in evangelical history. They originated from a 2019 conference commemorating Bebbington's distinguished career and the enduring influence of the "Quadrilateral" over the past three decades. The Quadrilateral and similar

definitional approaches have recently faced increasing criticism from scholars who argue that they mirror their proponents' essentialist constructions and normative theological agendas more than actual historical realities. Many plead instead for cultural history approaches to evangelicalism that devote greater attention to entanglements in politics, race, gender, social networks, education, media, and more. (For a helpful survey of the historiographical debates concerning evangelical history and a nuanced definitional approach, see Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 1–24.)

As the authors in *Leaf, Line, and Letter* compellingly demonstrate, however, the two approaches are not incompatible but, in fact, mutually fruitful. On the one hand, their recognition of biblicism's enduring importance throughout evangelical history furnishes an essential connective thread that integrates diverse women and men across centuries and lands in shared traditions, experiences, and communities (with exceptions, like the English liberal evangelicals examined in Timothy Larsen's chapter). On the other hand, the contributors' sensitivity not only to varieties of evangelical theology, practice, and church polemics (chs. 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10) but also politics (chs. 1 and 11), race (chs. 5, 9, and 11), age and gender (chs. 4 and 6), and global contexts (chs. 10 and 12) reveal that evangelical biblicism was never monolithic but always fluid, contested, and culturally conditioned. The combination in these focused studies largely preserves the sweeping historical continuities Bebbington identified while providing more complex and variegated analyses of evangelical biblicism in practice and social life.

The book has four parts organized chronologically from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. The contributors are based in North America and Great Britain and include evangelical and non-evangelical scholars. There are several well-known historians such as Mark Noll, Catherine Brekus, Bruce Hindmarsh, Thomas Kidd, Brian Stanley, Timothy Larsen, and David Bebbington, as well as a handful of junior scholars.

While all the chapters are worth reading, I will only highlight select contributions to convey a sense of the book's substance. Kristina Benham's chapter opens the book examining evangelicals' versatile and contested political uses of the biblical exodus narrative in the years surrounding the American Revolution, demonstrating how "biblicism could mean quite different things, especially when applied to national purposes" (p. 13). In chapter 2, Bruce Hindmarsh challenges Bebbington's influential thesis that the Enlightenment was the key causal agent of evangelicalism, contending that evangelicals preserved pre-Enlightenment exegetical and devotional reading practices in the age of reason and science. K. Elise Leal probes an overlooked dimension of biblicism by incorporating children as pivotal historical agents in the construction of evangelical Bible cultures in the early American republic. Mark Noll examines evangelical antislavery and proslavery biblical arguments in the antebellum US, concluding that the impasse represented a crisis for traditional Protestant reliance on *sola scriptura*—a crisis that endures in American evangelical debates over race still today. In his analysis of Francis Grimké's sermons against lynching, Malcolm Foley observes that while evangelical biblicism and activism have long intersected, White and Black Christians have generally diverged over what constitutes "worthy activism" (p. 197)—particularly when it comes to applying Scripture to racial justice. Catherine Brekus utilizes *The American Patriot's Bible*, edited by Southern Baptist leader Richard G. Lee in 2009, as a window into "the long and close relationship between evangelical biblicism and White Protestant nationalism" (p. 275). Finally, Brian Stanley asks whether the Quadrilateral applies to non-Western global Christians, concluding that it still more or less holds but has significantly adapted to new environments.



As a whole, the chapters provide a panoramic and complex portrait of evangelical biblicism over the past three hundred years. Yet they also offer significant interventions as individual studies in their respective historical eras and subject areas, be it political ideology in the American Revolution, lynching in the era of Jim Crow, White nationalisms, and more. Evangelical readers will gain new historical insights about their tradition, and they will discover anew the fact that while God's word remains timeless, one's uses and misuses of it are often conditioned by ever-shifting cultural contexts. Generations of evangelicals have echoed Cole's fervent desire to encounter God truly and spiritually in the word. However, biblicist commitments to harmonize Scripture and one's world has also often yielded mixed results—in some cases applying the Bible to overcome the injustices and errors of one's culture, in others, using it to sanction and expand them. Learning from history can help evangelicals discern the difference and grow more aware of the cultural influences and social commitments that shape their reading and application (or misapplication) of Scripture.

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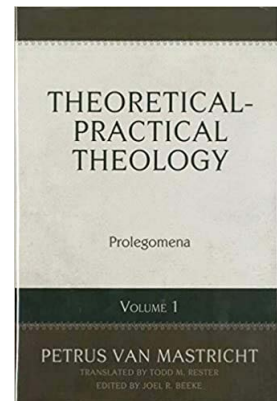
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Petrus Van Mastricht. *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Volume 1: Prolegomena*. Translated by Todd M. Rester. Edited by Joel R. Beeke. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. xci + 238 pp. £36.93/\$50.00.

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Jonathan Edwards once described the system of doctrine produced by Dutch scholastic Petrus Van Mastricht as “much better than Turretin or any other book in the world, excepting the Bible, in my opinion.” *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (*TPT*), published in 1699 in a high point for Reformed orthodoxy, is now for the first time available in a reliable and fluid English translation from the Latin. This new edition represents a landmark in English-speaking historical theology, possibly even rivaling the translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*.

While Turretin defined theology as theoretical and excelled at elenctics (i.e., polemics), Brakel shone in devotional or practical theology. However, Richard Muller in his endorsement notes that “Mastricht's work represents the *full* achievement of the Reformed orthodox theological program of developing an exegetical, doctrinal, elenctic or polemical, and practical approach to Christian doctrine” (emphasis added). Hence, as indicated by the title of this work, theology is for Mastricht “theoretical-practical.” He writes, “For just as practice without theory is nothing, so theory without practice is empty and vain.... The Savior joins them together: ‘If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them’” (p. 70). Single all his life, Mastricht's life was remarkably well-rounded spiritually and intellectually, evidenced not least by the surprising fact that he was even once a professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. Mastricht brings to bear a unique mixture of a scholastic approach to theology and an emphasis on preaching that permeated his life and writing. This yields a work that is exceptionally valuable to the pastor and preacher: not only does it teach a classical doctrine of the Trinity, for example, but the exegetical parts of each section expound the Scriptural bases with the detail and rigour of a Hebrew expert (no proof-texting is to be found here), and the distinctive practical sections even provide specific points of application from these classical doctrines that readers will surely not encounter elsewhere.



*TPT* was always meant to comprise theology in service of preaching. To that end, this first volume includes a curious treatise by Mastricht on “The Best Method for Preaching.”

Mastricht conceded that the print of the Latin original was vanishingly small but reassured readers it was to save them money and space by condensing three volumes into two. Besides, “I thought this trouble easily compensated: the young have sharp eyes, and the old have glasses” (p. 43)! By contrast, this modern edition is much more legible than the original but, for good or ill, will eventually rack up no fewer than seven volumes. The entry under discussion includes a brief but excellent biographical sketch, the preaching treatise, and the sermon from his funeral before proceeding to the final part of the book, which is book 1 of *TPT*. The first and last section will likely be of far more interest than the middle two. Book 1 then comprises the *prolegomena*, or how the study should be carried out, which in turn is neatly organized into (1) the nature of theology, (2) its principle or foundation (Scripture), and (3) its distribution into parts (its structure). While it may be more realistic for some to skip straight to the doctrine of God in volume 2, a survey of some highlights will hopefully showcase the value even of Mastricht’s *prolegomena*, including for apologetics.

Mastricht starts by turning to 1 Timothy 6:2–3 to shed exegetical light on the nature of theology. In this passage, Mastricht notes, Paul exhorts Timothy to uphold and teach the entirety of sound Christian theology and to do so “according to godliness.” He indicates the significance of the first point in this way: unlike all other sciences, including even natural theology—which he unambiguously affirms—doctrine cannot be *learned* but can only be *taught*. It cannot be acquired or individually mastered but can only be passed on or transferred, and only then from God himself. Meanwhile, Timothy’s teaching of this true theology must promote piety, specifically “rightly worshipping God ... which is elsewhere expressed synonymously as living for God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:11) for which reason theology is called ‘the word of life’ (Acts 5:20)” (p. 66). These verses, including the opening 1 Timothy 6:2–3, are among Mastricht’s favorites to which he frequently returns.

Most of the other central insights of Mastricht in this volume are found in the second section on the foundation for theology, and thus in his doctrine of Scripture, given that the latter is theology’s only source or norm. For example, copious ink has recently been spilled on the question of an allegorical sense. Mastricht is particularly concerned about the idea that “the words of Scripture [might] signify whatever they can signify, from which also a manifold sense usually results.” In contrast, there is “only one sense, and that the literal, namely, that which the writer himself intends by his words” (p. 169). Yet he tempers these claims by pointing out that this single sense of authorial intent can also be a composite of the literal and the figural. Thus, a Christological sense in many Psalms, which may not have been the human authorial intent, could still be legitimate and even be labelled “literal” if it was intended by the divine author of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this single sense does not preclude manifold *applications* or *uses* of that single sense of Scripture. Indeed, that is precisely what we see in much NT use of the OT, with Mastricht referencing 1 Corinthians 9–10 and Galatians 4. However, Mastricht’s argument for insisting on a “single sense” is not entirely persuasive, since his claim, “That which does not signify [only] one thing surely signifies nothing,” seems unjustified (p. 169). Regardless, his position is more than sufficiently nuanced to secure the classical and unashamedly theological interpretation of Scripture and Christological and Trinitarian readings of Scripture to come in Volume 2.

Also illuminating are Mastricht’s defenses of the Reformed doctrines of Scriptural clarity and sufficiency; his responses demonstrate detailed knowledge of Jewish, Muslim, and Roman Catholic traditions. In the face of Catholic attacks on Scripture’s perfection for “faith and life,” he repeatedly



comes back to the limitedness of the Reformed claim. Here it is everything necessary for *salvation*—alternatively, “the necessary articles of faith”— for which Scripture is sufficient and perfectly equipped.

With the nature and foundation of theology outlined, all that is left in the final portion is to delineate its structure. Mastricht broke with tradition and with his contemporaries by front-ending the doctrine of faith. Instead of putting it in a much later section of the dogmatics in the doctrine of salvation (*ordo salutis*), he moved it right after the prolegomena and even before the doctrine of God. Thus, in the context of Cartesian idolatry of reason, he emphasized the central importance of faith for the rational study of God to bear any fruit. When a theologian of Mastricht’s stature devotes so much thought and attention to faith in a sceptical context, we ought to take note of his rich and compendious definition: “Saving faith is nothing other than an act of the whole rational soul, by which it receives God as its highest end, and Christ as its only Mediator, to this end, that we may be united with him, and so united obtain communion in all his benefits” (xlvi–xlvi). Therefore, even Mastricht’s *structure* is Christ-centered: Christ’s salvation and mediation, and indeed our reception of it, is a means to the end of *union* with Christ, from which flows our joyful communion with him.

Mastricht’s remarkable prescience partially stems from his self-consciously unique attempt to show the relevance of Christianity in a skeptical world: “We [Reformed] have been rather prolix against the pagans, because fewer systematians are used to arguing with them” (p. 137). Mastricht was at the forefront of responding to the new philosophies of his day; one of his most popular works was a response to Descartes entitled “The Gangrene of Cartesian Novelties.” Accordingly, readers will find that he knows more than a thing or two about defending the faith. His recommendations include demonstrating to the skeptic the general reliability and truth of Scripture *before* turning to questions of its divine inspiration. In turn, one of the best strategies for establishing the Bible’s veracity is to ask the inquirer why they currently accept the books they do and then show that the Bible more than satisfies these criteria. He advocates the use of deduction (reasons and arguments) *and* induction (evidence); we might say he mixes classical and evidential approaches. Christian advocates of “circular reasoning” may be challenged to find this Reformed scholastic firmly rejecting the idea: “These testimonies to Scripture must not be presented here as divine, so that we might not argue in a circular way, but rather as human, although they are altogether true, based on what we presuppose from the preceding paragraphs” (p. 135).

Yet this is not to say that Scripture is being held to a human standard or that philosophical reason serves as the foundational principle for theology. No, Scripture, as divine speech, is self-authenticating and thus the only principle for theology proper. Neither has Mastricht intellectualized faith. Readers will frequently find their wills challenged or their hearts warmed by the practical parts of each section. Mastricht’s applications range from the bodily positions most conducive for prayer (noting that Scripture includes prostration, walking around, or with lifted eyes) to the love we should have towards Scripture: “This love in the divine Word consists in an affection toward the Scripture, an affection so inclined that we honor Scripture as we would God speaking to us with his own mouth ... as if we had God speaking such things in our presence (1 Thess. 2:23)” (p. 185).

How do we reconcile this high view of reason, argumentation, and evidence in apologetics, with a theology that is also entirely exegetical, devotional, practical, and Christ-centred? Mastricht’s whole point in *Theoretical-Practical Theology* is that theology is a multi-faceted, fully orbéd, and holistic “art,” in which the devotional and practical is never in conflict with the polemical. Neither is the Scriptural and exegetical in tension with the dogmatic and systematic: they reinforce and feed into one another.

So Mastricht's *TPT* entreats seminarians and ministers to devour Scripture, parse those Hebrew and Greek verbs, provide historical evidence and philosophical arguments, mark up outlines, put doctrines together systematically, preach your hearts out, make logical syllogisms, enjoy living for God through Christ in prayer, and convincingly answer every skeptical objection. Because theology is the art of living for God through Christ, and exegetical, dogmatic, elenctic, and practical elements all find their place in that most sacred art.

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Stephen J. Nichols. *R. C. Sproul, A Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 371 pp. £27.99/\$34.99.

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R. C. Sproul kept a card on his desk with the words printed, "You are responsible to preach and to teach what the Bible says, not what you want it to say" (p. 64). That statement marked the Reformed theologian's life and ministry. The founder of Ligonier ministry, Reformation Bible College, and St. Andrew's Church, who passed away on December 14, 2017, not only fulfilled this lofty calling but inspired generations to do so as well. *R. C. Sproul, A Life* offers a dense account of Sproul's life and ministry, from his beginnings in Pittsburgh to his last days in Sanford, Florida. This book traces his youth, close partnership with his wife Vesta, conversion, seminary and graduate education, and various ministerial pursuits. The biography also recounts his influence on American Evangelicalism as a Reformed pastor, author, professor, college president, and lay teacher. It gives a window into R. C. Sproul's personal and public life and his unique contributions to theology and Christian living in the modern and postmodern world.



This first full-length biography on R. C. Sproul is appropriately written by the Reformed minister's successor and close friend, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols. The church historian, who holds a PhD in Apologetics from Westminster Theological Seminary, currently serves as the president of Reformation Bible College and the chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries. In his position at Ligonier, the author worked closely with R. C. Sproul to actively promote and safeguard the fidelity of the ministry's mission, vision, and theological values. Like Sproul, Nichols is a prolific author in the Reformed tradition. He has published over twenty books, including *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001) and (with Eric Brandt) *Ancient Word, Changing Worlds: The Doctrine of Scripture in a Modern Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009). He also serves as an editor of Crossway's *Theologians on the Christian Life* series and hosts the weekly podcast *5 Minutes in Church History*.

At the heart of this biography, Nichols reveals R. C. Sproul to be a man consumed with knowing God, particularly his holiness and glory, through the Bible, and he inspired others to do the same. In eleven engaging, partly chronological, partly topical chapters, the author chronicles not only Sproul's life as a trained theologian and philosopher, including his various academic positions, but also his primary calling as a pastor and teacher of the layperson, like his heroes Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards. His work at Ligonier Ministry and St. Andrews testifies to this commitment. The author gives us an intimate look at each of these, from their beginnings in his living room to their growth into vast,

thriving ministries. Nichols also reveals Sproul's pivotal role in reintroducing Reformed theology with its focus on the glory of God to the Evangelical church. He did so by clearly articulating the five solas of the Reformation—*sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *solus Deo gloria*—with passion and biblical conviction. As a champion of *sola Scriptura*, Sproul played a key role in establishing the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) and served as the president of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. As an advocate of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, he stood against Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) in 1994. While he believed they could be united on social issues, he saw their differences on the doctrine of justification as ultimately divisive. Similarly, he opposed the New Perspective on Paul. He believed that both ECT and the New Perspective challenged truth and the gospel.

In his final chapter entitled “Doxology,” Nichols discusses Sproul's legacy, remarking, “Depending on when you looked in on R. C.'s life, you might have a different answer as to his contribution to the church and the Christian tradition” (p. 287). In 1978, he focused on the fight for inerrancy, whereas in 1994 and 2016, he championed justification by faith alone. Some remember him for work as a philosopher and others as an apologist and theologian. The author suggests all these emphases are appropriate, coming together in the title “Reformed classical theist” (p. 290). Overall, however, Sproul's own words regarding the Reformers describe him: “an overwhelming, passionate, soul commitment to the transcendent majesty of God. That was the message that captivated me. That is what I have wanted to communicate through my teaching and through my writing more than anything else” (p. 295). Nichols attests to this commitment through examining the details, writings, relationships, theological emphases, and ministries of R. C. Sproul.

Nichols's work is unique in its intimate portrayal of the man behind the doctrine, sharing a perspective that only a friend can give. For instance, the author gives insight into his captivating personality, devoted partnership with his wife Vesta, love of sports, dedication to being a life-long learner (as seen in taking up the violin in his 60s), and his close friendships with people such as James Boice (even reproducing in full a letter R. C. wrote to him when Boice was diagnosed with an aggressive form of liver cancer).

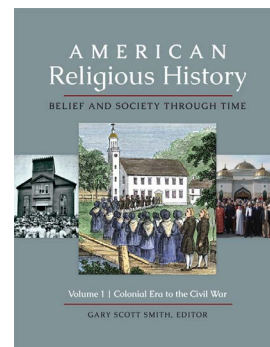
It may be more appropriate to consider it a tribute to R. C. Sproul than a critical biography. While it is well-researched, including details from interviews with his wife and even what he ate at the ICBI Council meeting, Nichols primarily focuses on Sproul's strengths, minimizing his weaknesses or missteps. For instance, in chapter 6, he gives a biased account of Sproul's critique in *Classical Apologetics* of Van Til's presuppositional apologetics. Furthermore, he minimizes the suspension and departure of his son R. C. Sproul Jr. from Ligonier Ministries due to moral failures. For a more critical look at Sproul, we will have to wait for Nate Pickowicz's forthcoming biography, *R. C. Sproul, The Defender of the Reformed Faith*. At times this work is a bit choppy and redundant, with some minor editorial errors. Toward the end, it moves from a chronological account to being more topical.

Overall, any fan of R. C. Sproul or proponent of Reformed theology will appreciate this narrative. The appendixes are a particular treasure, having Sproul's last two sermons and lists of his books, booklet series, lectures, teaching series, and selected sermon titles, as well as thorough indexes. I believe that Sproul would love to have had these final sermons be the centerpiece of his legacy since they truly encapsulate his life's work—to promote the knowledge and worship of a holy God.

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Gary Scott Smith, ed. *American Religious History: Belief and Society through Time*. 3 vols. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2021. v + 1193 pp. £270.14/\$335.00.

This three-volume reference set provides an accessible resource for upper-level high school students, undergraduates, and educated general readers first orienting themselves to the field of American religious history. It will also be helpful to historians whose specialty is in other sub-fields or scholars from other disciplines, e.g., the social sciences, who need a reliable source covering the various aspects of American religious history. Reflecting its historical approach, each volume covers a specified chronological period: Colonial Era to the Civil War, Reconstruction to World War II, and World War II to Present. Each of the volumes is comprised of ten thematic essays, encyclopedia entries, and primary source selections. Volume 1 also provides a helpful chronology and an introductory essay.



As indicated in the subtitle, *American Religious History: Belief and Society through Time* focuses on the intersection of religion and society from colonial times to the present. It pays special attention to how religious belief has shaped and engaged American culture.

The introductory essay presents six major characteristic themes which provide the categories for readers to think about religion writ large in America: pervasiveness, diversity, cultural impact, revivalism, social activism, and ecumenism. While experts might quibble with one or two—or suggest a seventh or eighth—it cannot be denied that, on the whole, these themes work well as organizing features of religion in America throughout its history.

The work takes a fairly traditional interpretation of the history of religion in America, albeit with important emendations. It is clear that neither Catherine Albanese nor Thomas Tweed or other scholars interested in “retelling U.S. religious history” edited these works, although the influence of that approach shows at points. Readers familiar with introductory works on American religious history by Gaustad and Schmidt, Hudson and Corrigan (and Porterfield), and Mark Noll will find themselves on familiar ground. These volumes are organized according to the traditional chronological intervals, breaking at the Civil War and World War II. In addition, they present Protestantism as the main shaping religious force in America with significant effects brought about by Protestant America’s encounter with Catholicism and Judaism (both get their own thematic essays in Volumes 2 and 3) while nodding to the greater diversity of American religion.

Taking Volume 2 as an example, the primary source choices illustrate this approach. Selections from Josiah Strong’s *Our Country* (1891), *The Defence of Professor [Charles A.] Briggs before the Presbytery of New York* (1893), and Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crises* (1907) represent the work’s focus on the development of White Protestantism in America while the inclusion of Henry’s McNeal Turner’s “God Is a Negro” (1898) maintains the commitment to fold African American religious history into the project. Beyond that, selections from three addresses delivered at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago—on Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism—reflect the growing awareness of the diversity of religion emerging alongside the “Protestant Empire” of late 19th century America, prefiguring the actual growth of those religious traditions in America after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. To some degree, the series picks that story up in the articles on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in Volume 3: *World War II to the Present*. Oddly, that volume does not include an entry on post-1965

immigration and religion, a topic that probably deserved its own thematic essay. In addition, thematic essays on “African Americans and Religion” and “Women and Religion” in each volume replicate a persistent challenge in the field, highlighting those important aspects of American Religious History while also isolating them from the larger story.

For the most part, while the essays appear to be based on up-to-date scholarship, some articles are lacking. It is not surprising that James P. Byrd’s recently-published work, *A Holy Baptism of Fire & Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), is not included in the essay on the Bible in America, but other absences are a bit more disconcerting. For example, neither John Turner’s definitive biography, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) nor John Wigger’s award-winning *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) are referenced as “further reading” in the entries for those seminal figures. Beyond that, the inclusion of David Barton’s book in the “Further Reading” recommendations for the entry on Thomas Jefferson is disconcerting.

The hardback version of *American Religious History: Belief and Society Through Time* is easy to navigate, making it immensely usable. Each volume follows the same organizational pattern and contains the Table of Contents for all three. However, the e-version presents some minor challenges. First, the controls and navigation of the native reader are a bit clunky. Second, while the pagination of the printed volumes is maintained on screen, the program frame provides sequential numbering that combines all three volumes. With the 50 pages of front matter, this means, for example, that the last page of the series is simultaneously numbered 388 (volume number) in the reader, and 1193 (Arabic numeral page number) and 1243 (e-page numbering which includes front matter) in the frame. That gets a bit confusing. Even so, the e-version has significant advantages as well. It allows bookmarking, per-page printing, and easy searching—very useful tools for the targeted user demographic.

Overall, while *American Religious History: Belief and Society* has some flaws, it is a welcome addition to encyclopedic resources on American religion, filling an important gap. As such, it should find its way to library reference shelves everywhere. Given the value-adds of the e-version, I would recommend that institutions negotiate a dual-purchase to secure that version for its catalog of electronic resources as well.

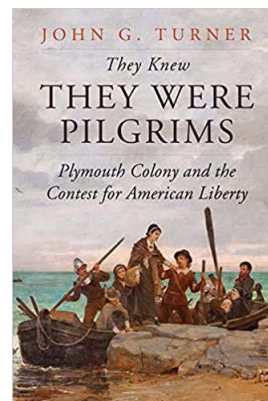
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John Turner. *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. x + 464 pp. £22.08/\$30.00.

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In American folklore, Plymouth Rock emerges as a monument to freedom, the place where a band of English Separatists (later referred to as “the Pilgrims”) made landfall in search of a new way forward. From its physical appearance, the rock itself does not conjure such grandiose notions. Expecting an enormous crag jutting from the eastern Massachusetts coast, visitors happen, instead, upon a relatively small boulder, buried in the Plymouth Harbor beach, surrounded by a tall, man-made portico. What is more, the boulder almost certainly does not mark the geographical location at which these settlers first disembarked. Much of Plymouth’s recorded history amounts to tall tales. Perhaps more consequentially, many such accounts offer skewed representations of the Pilgrim settlers as the heroic progenitors of American democracy, true religious liberty, and congenial relations between diverse peoples.



In *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, John Turner endeavors to set the record straight. Turner’s account is three parts history and one part a statement. While the Plymouth Colony was not the bastion of public warmth, democracy, and religious liberty many modern accounts describe it as, it also was not, as others argue, altogether unimportant in the development of such treasured American ideals. Turner’s account provides a sweeping historical narrative, charting the Separatists’ course from dissidence in England, a retreat to Amsterdam at Leiden, the famed trans-Atlantic journey aboard the *Mayflower*, and the group’s efforts to build and sustain a New World colony amid constant conflict. At the heart of the Pilgrims’ plight was a contest for, and a proper definition of, “liberty.”

The thrust of Turner’s work accords with typical accounts: Plymouth Colony was a product of Protestant impulses with separatist flair. The Americas offered both an opportunity for a new form of government, religious practice unconstrained by Catholic oversight, and the allure of new business ventures and economic prosperity.

According to Turner, and contra popular narratives perpetuated in post-Revolutionary America by figures such as John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster, the Pilgrims’ first attempt at politically-defined cooperation did not amount to a “model” for the American democratic republic that emerged in the next century. Rather, the Mayflower Compact served only as a basic guiding document that, while promoting consent, participation, and a body politic, ultimately threatened those who wished to restrict the colonies’ social and religious liberty.

One of Turner’s unique contributions in the volume reflects the aforementioned tension as he highlights, at length, the rank hypocrisy inherent within the first English colonists’ mission. In Turner’s account, the hypocrisy is most evident in the Separatists’ declaration of liberty for themselves yet the denial of rights for dissident religious groups such as the Baptists and the Quakers, indigenous Native American peoples, and, in some cases, enslaved African Americans after them. Turner offers a substantial reflection on the circumstances surrounding King Philip’s War. This conflict highlights both the complexity of the settlers’ situation and the insidious motivations underlying much of the English conquest. Turner’s historical reading is one showcasing “warts and all.” While he stops short of making sustained moral pronouncements, it is not difficult for readers to fill in the ethical lines: the Pilgrims ought not to be naively lauded.

Still, as Turner's work also demonstrates, it is proper to give credit wherever it is due. In recent accounts of American religious history, the Pilgrims' influence on religious developments among the English colonies has been diminished if not rejected outright. Most notable among the denunciations is eminent New England Puritan scholar Perry Miller. While Miller credits the spread of congregationalism among Puritans in the New World to ministerial philosophies carried over from England by William Ames and others, Turner suggests Miller has "underestimated the Pilgrims" in his conclusions (p. 143). Citing personal visits to new Puritan settlements by Plymouth emissary Samuel Fuller, cordial relationships between Massachusetts Bay governor John Winthrop and Plymouth governor William Bradford, and practices among colonial Puritans that imbibed Plymouth's congregational distinctives, Turner writes, "the evidence for Plymouth's influence is strong" (p. 143). Turner's point could be helped along by further attention to additional source work in this regard, yet that assignment should rightly be reserved for others to complete. Though the Plymouth group did not have the sort of notable, thoroughgoing influence they once hoped for, the entailments of the new course they charted can still be observed and appreciated.

The Pilgrim Separatists' story is complex and meandering, despite most popularized accounts. So it is with all stories set in the human past; historical work often defies equations and formulas. In *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*, John Turner expertly navigates nearly a century's worth of Pilgrim activity, drawing to the fore significant and timely questions concerning the perpetual contest for liberty. While contemporary moral applications are not the express goal of historical works such as Turner's, the project raises questions for present-day advocates for political and religious freedom everywhere: if liberty for some, should there not be liberty for all? What are prudent boundaries? How are we to wisely ascertain the fundamental human rights for all image-bearers? Citing Hebrews 11, Bradford once wrote of the first colonists, "They knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on (their trouble), but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." So, we, too, seeking to answer the profound questions of our day, keep our eyes heavenward, from whence our help does come, and boldly proclaim and advocate for that true liberty that honors God and uplifts our fellow man.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

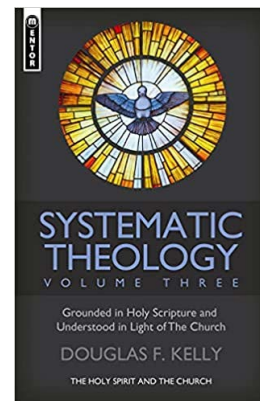
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Douglas F. Kelly. *Systematic Theology: Volume 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church*. Ross-Shire, UK: Mentor, 2021. 387 pp. £27.99/\$39.99.

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Douglas Kelly, professor of theology emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, has completed the third installment of his multivolume systematic theology. Its arrival is bitter-sweet as it signals the end of his systematic theology, with the author's commentary on the book of Revelation (Mentor, 2015) standing in place of a volume on eschatology.

Kelly writes from a Reformed perspective, as is evidenced by his many references to Reformed theologians such as Francis Turretin, Herman Bavinck, and John Murray. The volume is divided into three parts. The first part (chs. 1–4) gives explicit attention to the Holy Spirit. The second part (chs. 5–11) looks at the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. The third part (chs. 12–16) focuses on the Christian life.



It is worth mentioning are some overall strengths that characterize this work at the outset. First, Kelly is deeply conversant with Scripture. It is difficult to find a page that doesn't engage with Scripture somehow. Second, he is engaged with the "Great Tradition" of the church. Such luminaries as T. F. Torrance, Augustine, Athanasius, Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, and Dumitru Staniloae are cited. There is then a catholicity to Kelly's thought that is not always the case with Reformed theologians. Third, this volume is marked by an evident devotion to the Lord. This quality breathes life into the discipline of systematic theology—a field known, even if unfairly, for its dryness.

Kelly starts off his discussion of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (chapter 2) by beautifully writing, "the Holy Spirit, who does not possess His own image (or *eikon*), is precisely fit for the grace and beauty of the image or form of both the Father and the Son to shine through him" (p. 43, emphasis original). Kelly offers a sophisticated account of the Holy Spirit's involvement in Christ's life, death, and resurrection in this same chapter. From the Holy Spirit's role in Christ's work, Kelly presents a fascinating thesis: "the blessed Holy Spirit himself had to be fully adapted to dwell in holy power within human beings, by way of being shaped through His presence and working within the incarnate Christ" (p. 65). By his involvement in the incarnation, the Holy Spirit was prepared to indwell humans united to Christ.

While treating the reception of the church at Pentecost (ch. 3), Kelly persuasively argues that in order to avoid subordinationism, it is the being rather than the person of the Father from whom the Spirit proceeds. In the fourth chapter, Kelly discusses issues that often accompany a discussion of the Holy Spirit, such as the continuation of prophecy and tongues. Though Kelly takes a cessationist approach to these questions, arguing for a closed canon and the ceasing of prophecy and tongues, he argues that we ought not to deny a true encounter with God's grace to believers who have experienced tongues or prophecy. Thus, "We do not need to deny that millions of [charismatic] believers have had some kind of mystical experience of the Holy Spirit" (p. 101).

Discussing justification and sanctification in chapter 7, Kelly argues that such texts as Hebrews 6:4–6 and Matthew 25:41, 45–46 support the idea of temporary faith, i.e., some people seem to experience the effects of salvation but later are shown to be unconverted. Thus, apostasy, given its corollary of



temporary faith, does not conflict with real perseverance of the saints. Giving attention to the attributes and marks of the church, Kelly helpfully affirms that grace is “conveyed through the sacraments” but that this is not mechanical or automatic. Instead, “it is one of the offices of the Holy Spirit to use both baptism and the Supper to convey such grace as He deems appropriate” (pp. 222–23). In his treatment of election (ch. 10), though Kelly does affirm reprobation, he states that “election and reprobation” are not “parallel decrees” (p. 245) since the main emphasis of Scripture is salvation, not condemnation. One last thing is worth mentioning. Kelly compellingly argues that our prayers “go up through” (p. 341) the ascended Christ to the Father’s presence. In sum, the Triune God is involved in our prayers!

This brief sampling of this third volume of Kelly’s *Systematic Theology* ought to give the reader a sense of Kelly’s offering with this volume. There is much to commend this work. It is irenic, theological sound and nuanced, creative, catholic, devotional, biblically saturated, and, on top of that, clearly written. The only drawback that we can discern with this volume, beyond the obvious statement that one will not agree with everything found in its pages, is that Kelly fails to engage with growing contemporary literature on the Holy Spirit besides his discussion of the charismatic phenomenon. Thus, if one is looking for a systematic theology up-to-date with contemporary theological formulations and concerns, this may not be the best place to start. Yet, we hasten to add that the volume’s many strengths significantly outweigh what to some readers would be considered a significant weakness since Kelly proves to be an able and sound theological guide. To conclude, this third and final volume of his *Systematic Theology* is essential reading for the busy pastor, student, or scholar sympathetic to a contemporary articulation of Reformed theology from the pen of a mature theologian.

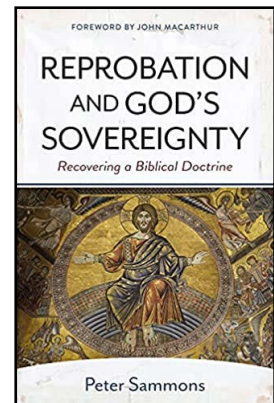
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Peter Sammons. *Reprobation and God’s Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022. 296 pp. \$25.99.

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Few topics in theology are as fraught as the subject of reprobation. The doctrine is frowned upon by many Christians, with some even claiming that the teaching depicts God to be more reprehensible than the devil. Even within more “Calvinistic” traditions, many preachers and scholars tend to avoid discussions of reprobation or to drown out the doctrine under a sea of clarifications. Yet, despite the strong aversions of some to the notion of “the awful decree,” others continue to argue that the doctrine is both biblical and morally defensible. Such is Peter Sammons’s argument in his latest book *Reprobation and God’s Sovereignty*. Sammons is director of academic publications at The Master’s Seminary and previously authored *Reprobation: From Augustine to the Synod of Dort: The Historical Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Reprobation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).



In *Reprobation and God’s Sovereignty*, Sammons aims to “define, clarify, and explain a biblical view of reprobation against misunderstandings of it by retrieving a proper definition from Scripture and history” (p. 15). Sammons contends that the doctrine of predestination has been misunderstood and wrongly maligned. In particular, critics have failed to understand the doctrine of causality, to which the

Reformed tradition has always appealed in order to deny the claim that reprobation makes God the author of sin.

The book opens by surveying important concepts within Reformed theology and by discussing God's authority to judge human beings for their sins. Afterward, Sammons directs five chapters to the interpretation of Romans 9, which he says is "the longest and possibly most detailed biblical account of the nature of reprobation" (p. 47). Here, Sammons argues that Romans 9 is concerned with the eternal destinies of individuals and that the text stresses the unconditional nature of God's choice in election and reprobation. After treating Romans 9, Sammons describes the Reformed understanding of negative predestination while exposing mischaracterizations of the doctrine. Sammons posits that reprobation must be understood to have two aspects: the decree and the decree's execution. According to Sammons, the decree of reprobation involves God's pretemporal will regarding the eternal destiny of the non-elect, while the decree's execution involves acts in time that God intends in order to carry out his decree. Moreover, both the decree and its execution are said also to have two elements. Thus, on the one hand, the decree of reprobation consists of God's decision to pass over the non-elect (preterition) and his decision to hold the reprobate accountable for their sins in accordance with the strict standards of divine justice (predamnation). And on the other hand, the decree's execution in time involves God's use of secondary agents in bringing about what he ordained (causality) and the eschatological judgment of the non-elect on the last day for the sins they committed during their lives (condemnation). After defining these various elements, Sammons discusses the doctrines of concurrence and compatibilism before turning to address objections to reprobation. According to Sammons, the most common objections to reprobation are all rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine. As he states, "Many who object to reprobation do so on the basis of a misunderstanding (or misrepresentation) of compatibilism. They often confuse compatibilism with immediate agency, thereby making God the author of sin. This objection generally does not allow for the distinction between primary and secondary causes, which often leads to even more confusion" (p. 175). Sammons then spends the remainder of the book discussing the doctrine of causality because he is convinced that the doctrine "safeguards the integrity of both agents (God and man)" (p. 192).

Sammons has done the church and the academy a service in penning a meticulous and compelling argument in favor of the Reformed doctrine of reprobation. Few writers have been willing to provide such a defense, and so Sammons has ably filled a gap in modern systematic theology. Moreover, Sammons evidences a deep knowledge of Reformed and Evangelical theology, as he skillfully navigates between the works of a number of important thinkers from both traditions. Sammons is also to be commended for his use of both biblical interpretation and theological argumentation in the formulation of his case for reprobation. But while the book exhibits considerable strengths, it is also marred by a few weaknesses. One problem has to do with the uneven quality of Sammons's writing. Unfortunately, the book contains more typographical errors than usual, and the organization of the materials can be less than clarifying at times. Furthermore, Sammons's exegetical work is not always convincing. So, for instance, while I was persuaded of his overall argument regarding reprobation in Romans 9, I was unconvinced by several specific exegetical claims, such as his suggestion that the verb κληθήσεται ("he will be named") in Romans 9:7 refers to God's effectual call to personal salvation (pp. 49, 60) or his claim that Romans 9:1–5 expresses Paul's disappointment in the Israelites for their refusal to believe (pp. 51–52). Moreover, Sammons occasionally provides poor translations of the Greek text, as when he states that κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς in Romans 8:28 means "the purpose of His calling" (72). Additionally, the book includes some theological statements that are poorly worded or are otherwise questionable.

For example, Sammons repeatedly insists that God is the *only* agent involved in man's salvation. Such an assertion seems to undermine Sammons's statements regarding compatibilism and the necessity of faith and repentance. In other words, Sammons could have stressed that God was the decisive agent behind salvation without implying that human beings exercise no agency whatsoever in their salvation; instead, he could have appealed to the doctrine of compatibilism to note how God's agency is what *causes* the elect to believe, repent, and persevere in the faith. Sammons is also unpersuasive when he tries to distinguish how the persons of the Trinity are involved in the expression of God's wrath. According to Sammons, the Father determines the verdict of hell and pours out wrath, the Son "is the clearest judge of hell" (p. 43), while the Holy Spirit heightens the torment of the reprobate by supernaturally ensuring that they recall every good thing they experienced while on earth. On the one hand, Sammons view of the role of the Holy Spirit is highly speculative; on the other hand, the claim that God's wrath is only poured out exclusively by the Father seems contradicted by texts such as Revelation 6:16–17 and 19:15. Finally, Sammons's tone is overly polemical: those who object to reprobation are charged with being purposefully obtuse (p. 105) and intellectually dishonest (p. 106), so that they are guilty of promulgating a "heinous misrepresentation" of Reformed teaching (p. 109). At the very least, one wonders whether Sammons seeks to represent his interlocutors in the best possible light. These various shortcomings do detract from the overall effectiveness of the book; nevertheless, anyone interested in the subject of predestination would still greatly benefit from engaging with Sammons's work.

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## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

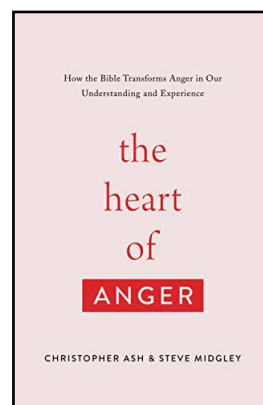
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Christopher Ash and Steve Midgley. *The Heart of Anger: How the Bible Transforms Anger in Our Understanding and Experience*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 224 pp. £13.50/\$16.99.

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Anger traverses our lives, indeed whole societies, on a bewildering scale. It lurks in an unspoken mild, momentary irritation. It bursts forth in red-faced, vein popping, violent rage. In between it hangs out in all sorts of alleyways and gutters of ugly human behavior. Christopher Ash and Steve Midgley describe anger as "the drawn sword of human relationships" (p. 11) and the purpose of their theologically insightful and pastorally rich book is "to bring the Bible to bear" on the phenomenon of anger from the moment our hands reach for the sword to the aftermath of the strike.

While making no direct reference to it, *The Heart of Anger* implicitly follows the helpful biblical counseling model of three trees: replacing the thorns and thistles (tree 1) of human anger through the cross (tree 2) so that the gospel might produce good fruit (tree 3). Consequently, in Part 1 of the book, Ash and Midgley first give a rich survey of "Biblical Portraits of Human Anger," which is full of many sharp thorns and stinging thistles. This portrait reveals the central premise of the book: that at the heart of (ungodly) anger is "the desire to be god" (p. 33). Part 2, "Leave Room for an Angry God," wonderfully



contrasts divine anger with ours and is essential in leading to and from the cross of Christ. This paves the way for “The First Steps in Defusing Human Anger” (part 3) and genuine change to “Find Joy in the Peace of Christ” (part 4). The book ends with two appendices which are short but worthy of lengthy meditation.

One of the great strengths of this book is the refreshing approach to the many biblical examples of anger. There is a rich taxonomy of human anger because the text is given space to breathe and the reader is enabled to see the heart motivations of a Jonah or an Ahab, a Cain or an Ahasuerus. We also see how anger moves from the feelings that stir within the human heart all the way through to the actions that result. On numerous occasions the book caused me to open my Bible, double check and have a quiet inward “Ah, yes!” moment.

One reason why the book succeeds in its portrait of human anger is because the authors look beyond word studies and the obvious biblical texts. The exchange between Nabal and David in 1 Samuel 25 is a good example where none of the normal anger words are used yet David is clearly “seething with fury” (p. 13). This makes for a profound survey, revealing the complexity of causation as we reach for the sword as well as making sense of the various harms the drawn sword can do. We are reminded that “sinful behavior is like a Sicilian family photograph of the mafia” (p. 13). Anger might dominate but he has some ugly mobster cousins like “sadness, regret, shame and despair,” hidden in his shadow. Ash and Midgley put the whole mob in the dock and later (in parts 3 and 4) put them away for some serious time because of their deep biblical insight and refreshing exegesis.

There is opportunity to swim in some deep and wondrous doctrinal waters in this book. It could have, and arguably should have, begun with a biblical portrait of God’s anger (which the authors acknowledge on pp. 15 and 77). Nevertheless, they begin with our own experience of anger, convinced that “we can only understand the Bible’s language about the anger of God when we first have some grasp of the phenomenon of human anger” (p. 15).

Part 2, however, is essential reading to grasp the whole. In just twenty-four pages the authors clarify what God’s anger is and is not, deconstruct some serious misconceptions and present complex doctrines (such as divine simplicity) simply. This rightly leads to worship. There is particular wonder expressed at Christ’s anger (drawing heavily upon B. B. Warfield’s famous essay, “On the Emotional Life of Our Lord”) and great wisdom displayed in discussion of why God’s anger is actually a good thing, rather than something about which we should be embarrassed. Crucially, the theological rigor here helps to explain what righteous anger looks like. Clear doctrine, strong exegesis and a wealth in church history (Augustine, Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Bonhoeffer, Chalmers, and several others receive mention) give foundational strength. However, as expected in a book written by two pastors, the authors are keen to see real change in the lives of believers. Accordingly, there is a right and particular focus on application in part 4 with desires exposed and re-shaped by the love of Christ.

However, much like a good sermon, application is not just left to the end but runs throughout. I had to stop reading regularly after ghosts of anger past re-surfaced in my mind, sometimes followed by ghosts of anger present from the kitchen table that very day. In part, then, this is a devotional book. Time is needed to sigh and confess personal failings, to feel again the pain caused by others, to forgive and be forgiven.

If there is one criticism to be made, however, it is that the life examples are overwhelmingly middle class and tertiary educated. That does not mean the examples are unhelpful or not thought-provoking, but they involve a pastor preparing a sermon, a teacher, a doctor. For those either from or ministering

among a different demographic it would have been good to have some different examples—the Christian refugee waiting for her visa to be approved or the young man recently converted who has not seen his heroin addicted dad since he was 9 and is deeply angry at the mess left behind.

Leaving that aside, there are numerous unexpected insights. As a church leader, I appreciated reflections on the communal aspect of anger and its cousins. We preach Christ into the *culture of the crowd* (chs. 7 and 20) and are shaped by the crowds from which we come. In a season with much reflection on healthy church culture and leadership this is timely. There is also a very welcome exploration of the value of good biblical music and how the Holy Spirit might use the words He has authored to bridge the gap between head and heart knowledge (pp. 170–72). Other insights will surprise other readers. I mention these only as examples of how wide and deep the issues of anger go and how the Lord graciously leads to a better way.

So, what specific contribution does *The Heart of Anger* make, particularly when compared with David Powlinson's *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016)? While the fact that it is written for a British audience does give it a particular flavor, the title holds the real clue. *The Heart of Anger* gets to the theological heart of the matter, developing a full biblical doctrine of God's anger. *Good and Angry*, on the other hand, is focused more on methods to transform our anger. I might encourage church members to start with *The Heart of Anger* before picking up *Good and Angry*. But both books are needed, and both will do God's people much good.

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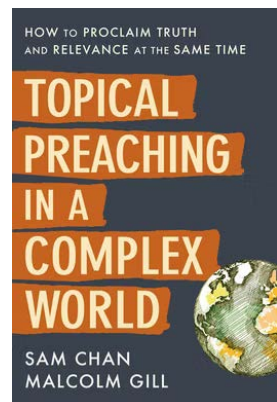
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Sam Chan and Malcolm Gill. *Topical Preaching in a Complex World: How to Proclaim Truth and Relevance at the Same Time*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021. 272 pp. £12.99/\$29.99.

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Perhaps no other two-word combination sparks more rancor and debate within the study and practice of homiletics than “topical preaching.” Within pastoral teams, seminary faculties and other ministries where God's Word is honored and proclaimed, opinions diverge on whether structuring a sermon around issues like abortion, anxiety, or atheism should be fair game or off-limits. Battle lines are drawn, with one's position and practice signaling either biblical orthodoxy or infidelity. (Consider, for instance, the first “mark” of a healthy church according to Mark Dever in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021].)

Sam Chan and Malcolm Gill offer *Topical Preaching in a Complex World* fully aware of the controversies. Gill summarises a common sentiment: “Expository preaching is presented as valuing Scripture, whereas topical preaching is depicted as driven by human interest” (p. 7). Chan observes: “I had been taught to be suspicious of topical preaching; it demonstrated a lack of confidence in the Bible” (p. 1). From their experience as expository preachers and lecturers (both taught homiletics at Sydney Missionary & Bible College), these self-professed



karaoke buddies sing through a collection of incisive chapters on the why and how of “mastering the art of topical preaching” (p. 2).

For the busy preacher, three things are worth noting. First, *Topical Preaching in a Complex World* is just as much a primer on topical preaching as it is a critique of expository preaching—defined here as “verse-by-verse, unit-by-unit, book-by-book preaching” (p. 5). This much is clear in the first chapter, where Gill attempts to deconstruct the view among some evangelicals that “expository preaching is what real Christians are all about” (p. 4). He marshals cross-cultural anecdotes to highlight the practice of expository preaching as unfamiliar among non-Western churches (p. 5), and points to examples in church history such as Jonathan Edwards and Billy Graham to highlight “that there has never been one uniform way to preach” (p. 9). While deeply valuing expository preaching himself, he insists preachers should “not confuse what is mandated in Scripture with what is simply Christian wisdom” (p. 6). On this point though, Gill’s lack of engagement with the various biblical texts proffered in support of expository preaching (e.g., Deut 33:10; Neh 8:8; Acts 2:14–41; 13:16–47; 20:27) weakens an otherwise persuasive plea to consider topical preaching as a “sibling” to expository preaching. Furthermore, the benefits Gill lists in favor of topical preaching—embracing diverse learning styles, honoring various cultural expressions, fostering a Christian worldview—arguably also emerge from expository preaching that’s contextualized, creative, and culturally intelligent. Given the remaining nine chapters focus on the praxis of topical preaching, a more robust opening argument would have helped.

Chan’s critique of expository preaching is more implicit and comes embedded within the meat of *Topical Preaching in a Complex World*, found in chapters 4–6 and 8. Here he walks the reader through how to approach a topic systematically (pp. 78–104), aware of the preacher and listener’s cultural contexts (pp. 105–21), and willing to acknowledge and interpret these in the sermon (pp. 122–48). There is much to gain here for both novices and experienced preachers, with Chan’s insights into preaching in a post-COVID era worth the price of the book itself. While much of the material is witty, missiologically sharp and worthy of careful study and use, the occasional anecdotes of individuals such as the culturally tone-deaf “seminary president” (pp. 107–8) felt a bit off-key. Furthermore, Chan’s implicit but inescapable assertion is that a theological commitment to expository preaching is an enculturated, Western, post-Enlightenment construct (or imposition)—a mark of an Anglo-influenced church, rather than a mark of a healthy church. Readers should evaluate the merits of Chan’s critiques for their own pastoral and missional contexts, but it seems that even a topic as “in-house” as preaching style has not escaped the broader culture wars.

A second point worth noting about *Topical Preaching in a Complex World* is that the insights in the rest of the book will serve preachers, irrespective of their preferred homiletical approach. For example, in chapter 2, Chan outlines the “T-Spectrum” (appropriated from recent insights into cross-cultural evangelism) to show how effective sermons will intentionally express levels of continuity or discontinuity to different salvation-historical stages (pp. 33–45). He then introduces a simple three-part paradigm (resonance, dissonance, gospel fulfillment) to apply all these stages to one’s preaching (pp. 45–49). Gill argues in chapter 3 that regularly and intentionally connecting our preaching to the gospel helps to serve the twin aims of edifying believers and evangelising unbelievers (pp. 51–77). While these and other insights certainly help to construct a persuasive topical sermon, certainly many of this reviewer’s own expository sermons would be much improved by better preaching to two audiences, addressing moral and personal topics sensitively (pp. 149–72), and committing to both resonate with and challenge our hearers in order to “fill their cup with new water” and complete their worldview with the gospel of



Christ (p. 46). Chan's observation of the debate between topical versus expository preaching as a proxy for the dialectic between systematic and exegetical theology (pp. 81–83) is particularly helpful.

Finally, a minor point about the book's layout is worth noting. Pedagogically, the book in large part follows Chan's prequel, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), with frequent sidebars to address smaller but important principles, and helpful worked examples of effective topical sermons (e.g., "How can we survive and thrive in disruption?" [pp. 102–4]). However, the reader may find the authors' commitment to tag-teaming throughout the book as odd or uneven, and those of us planning to use this book to train preachers may be tempted to focus exclusively on either Gill's melody lines or Chan's. But as with good karaoke, it's the duets that are more rewarding. So listen along with both Chan and Gill, catch their tune, and let your preaching (topical or otherwise) hit the high notes and better connect with your listeners.

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Mary A. Kassian. *The Right Kind of Confident: The Remarkable Grit of a God-Fearing Woman*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021. xviii + 206 pp. £12.99/\$18.99.

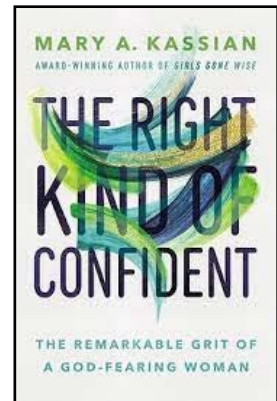
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We named our first daughter Matilda. It means strong. Back then we believed we needed more strong women. Fast forward to today and we now have four daughters we're endeavoring to raise into strong, confident women. I'm armed with the knowledge that girls suffer lower self-esteem than boys and that as they grow, this inadvertently sabotages their relationships and impedes them from attempting new ventures. The difficulty is that the old adage to just believe in yourself doesn't seem particularly effective or theologically robust. Kassian's new book *The Right Kind of Confident* successfully provides a birds-eye biblical framework that speaks into this.

*The Right Kind of Confident* is an accessible and practical read that's meant to be shared and discussed with friends in order to maximize its full benefits. Accompanying questions and leaders' guide are available at the author's website (pp. xvi–xvii). Kassian's aim is that the reader might understand fear properly, rightfully fear God and break free of other fears that control them (p. xvii).

To achieve this, the book is set out in three sections. The first section (ch. 1) establishes the "Bible's confidence code" (p. 26) that underpins the book. Kassian surveys four Hebrew words for confidence to demonstrate that there are two main opposing sources of confidence in Scripture: a foolish one and wise one. The wise source relies on (and fears) God *more* than other sources, the foolish type does the reverse.

This foundational concept is built around Old Testament material. In the following chapters, there are sections that elegantly move Old Testament themes into their New Testament counterparts showing how Christ develops them (pp. 81–83, 110–12). But overall, this Old Testament emphasis remains throughout the book. For this reason, it can feel as though the themes of grace and eschatology are not as developed as other themes, such as the holiness of God.



Following this, chapters 2–4 outline a biblical understanding of fear before chapters 3–7 apply this “real, down-to-earth, practical” (p. 112) doctrine to everyday life. Kassian starts with fear because while the world says fear blocks confidence, the Bible says fearing God is the root of confidence. Thus, to explain how fear could lead to confidence she establishes the case for both the negative and positive elements of fear. The story of the fall shows this. Human beings were created with a good, God-given fear that positively protected them both physically and spiritually. After the fall, Satan distorted both what we fear and what we trust to alleviate those fears. Kassian wants us to revive the positive, pre-fall aspects of fear before that fear was corrupted.

She then delineates how to do this by outlining a broad definition of fear that has the capacity to hold both its negative and positive elements. This definition hinges on the comparative strength between us and what we fear. That is, we fear what is beyond our control. This is not always a bad thing; it depends on what the object of our fear is. By categorizing a vast number of verses of Scripture, Kassian finds three different types of fear that fit within her definition (p. 73). The first is *apprehensive fear* where you are vulnerable to being hurt by what is out of your control. The second is *respectful fear* where we are still vulnerable but “anticipate benefit and not harm when we show proper respect” (p. 75). The last is *reverent fear* which builds on respect and moves us to veneration. Perhaps the most illuminating part of this chapter is where Kassian explains how we could move from apprehensive fear of God to a reverent fear because of our salvation in Christ (pp. 81–83).

The practicalities of this are outlined in chapters 5–7. These chapters are packed with stories (both biblical and contemporary), illustrations and practical exercises. Some stories and illustrations are powerfully moving and others every-day and easily relatable. However, others stand in danger of losing effectiveness because of overuse in popular talks, articles and sermons —e.g., Aslan (pp. 92, 138) and Blondin (pp. 142–43).

Great attention is given in chapter 5 to the examples of both Moses and the disciples in the storm. However, the reader is placed in the shoes of the characters without particular attention to that character’s special or unique place in the unfolding revelation of Scripture. For example, Kassian claims that God *can* do for us what he did for Moses (p. 124) and the disciples (pp. 128–29). Depending on your biblical-theological framework, you may be left looking for more clarity about what the author means or doesn’t mean by this. However, the book’s context does give the larger framework of the redemptive-historical story (pp. 81–83, 110–12), and also addresses the tension of living in the age between Jesus’s first and second coming—e.g., in a story of two men’s contrasting journeys with cancer (pp. 135–37).

The overall logic of this final section is that our confidence is directly linked to our view of God. It explores what erodes that confidence and what builds it up before returning to the confidence code outlined in chapter one to tie it all together.

In summary, I appreciate the way Kassian investigates the semantic range of key words and how they develop through history, so we can more readily bridge them to the way the Bible uses them. Of course, language is not static. Contemporary use of key terms such as *fear*, *awe* and *confidence* smuggle in a new range of meanings that become part of the landscape we inadvertently live and breathe. This results in language mismatches between current usage and Scripture which can easily distort our understanding of the way Scripture uses these terms.

However, we can’t escape being embedded in our contemporary context. While Kassian laments that “the words at our disposal simply aren’t big enough to contain or communicate” these concepts (p. 95), I think it would be worth considering how we might use the contemporary vernacular to some



extent. While not undermining the challenge this presents, I crave to converse, for example, with my young daughters about confidence without getting too tied down with how words change over time.

The highlight for me was being able to see what confidence means for different kinds of women. In our society, confidence often “looks like” the woman in the board room calling the shots. I don’t doubt for a moment that such women need buckets of confidence, but I live in a socio-economically disadvantaged region where few of my neighbors hold tertiary degrees or will probably ever enter a board room. Yet the hardships they face are immense. They too need confidence. Kassian powerfully shows how the modern advice simply to not be afraid is both an insensitive and ineffective way to deal with such genuine hardship (pp. 1–3, 185–88). We need confidence rooted in a source bigger than ourselves.

Of course, the idea of trusting God through serious hardship opens a can of worms about God’s providence and the problem of suffering. While touching on this question, it is beyond the scope of the book to address it in a sustained and systematic way. Regardless, *The Right Kind of Confident* lucidly illuminates many important truths that are valuable for the real world, and I lapped it up.

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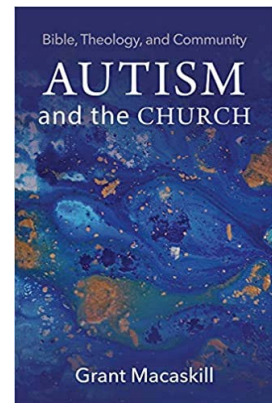
Grant Macaskill. *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology, and Community*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019. 236 pp. £28.50/\$34.99.

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This book by Grant Macaskill, Kirby Laing Chair of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen and co-director of the Centre for Autism and Theology (CAT), is among several critical works published in the last two years to explore autism, theology and Church practice. Macaskill aims to help Christians “think biblically” (p. 2) about autism in light of the Bible’s normative role for most Christians, and he shows how to do so when autism itself is not mentioned and does not appear to be known by the biblical writers.

Because of the newness of this field, Macaskill notes that there currently exists a lacuna between the technical, scholarly literature on autism and autistic people and their families, clinicians, and congregations generally. He writes primarily to fill this need, endeavoring to “minimise the barriers between such individuals and the research itself, without sacrificing necessary technical depth” (pp. 3–4). To help reach his intended readership, Macaskill doesn’t assume any knowledge of the biblical languages—which he transliterates when necessary—and any technical discussion of the secondary literature is relegated to the endnotes leaving the main text uncluttered.

In his introduction, Macaskill discusses potential misunderstandings and misconceptions that the reader unfamiliar with autism may have. These include the stereotype that autistic people “lack empathy” or are “incapable of understanding ‘non-literal language’” (p. 7). Macaskill also addresses concerns that an autistic reader—or someone who has experience of autism—may have. These include the problem of universalizing one’s experience as normative for everyone (a truism repeated widely is



that if you meet one autistic person, then you have only met one autistic person), and whether to use person-first (“a person with autism”) or identity-first (“an autistic person”) language.

In chapter 1, Macaskill summarizes the current medical understanding of autism, particularly its causes and common characteristics. Influenced by disability studies, Macaskill defines autism as a “condition” and argues for autism as a difference rather than a negation. In one helpful section, Macaskill grounds the somewhat abstract understanding of autism within this chapter by relating the characteristics of autism to examples of autistic people’s church experiences (pp. 26–31). In this reviewer’s opinion, this chapter could easily be spun off and edited into a stand-alone introductory booklet.

In chapter two, Macaskill sets out the general interpretative principles he will employ in the following chapters. Readers of this journal may want to challenge or nuance differently some of Macaskill’s points; for example, his claim that the biblical texts reflect the historical prejudices of their day (pp. 60–62) and who precisely he is critiquing when he references “Evangelicals.” Yet, in the broad strokes, there is much to affirm.

In chapters 3 and 4, Macaskill develops one of the interpretative principles from the previous chapter: participation or “being in Christ.” Here he builds upon his research in an earlier book—*Living in Union with Christ: Paul’s Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019)—exploring in detail passages from Matthew’s Gospel and 1 Corinthians, the motifs of the *imago Dei*, the flesh versus the Spirit, weakness and strength, and the metaphor of the church as the body. As one would expect from an accomplished New Testament scholar, Macaskill’s exegesis is clear and nuanced, reflecting his love for Scripture. But he also has a comprehensive and sophisticated grasp of the theological unity of the Bible, enabling him to draw together disparate threads into a cohesive argument. His plea for understanding the sensory difficulties many autistic people have within a church service and the need to moderate or rethink our practices in light of these theological principles is especially challenging.

In chapter 5, Macaskill highlights some of the significant challenges that autism brings; in particular, poor mental health and addiction are more prevalent and present differently in autistic people. The reasons for this are complex and cannot be summarized here, but Macaskill handles these issues deftly and sympathetically. Building upon a point made in his previous chapters, Macaskill states that autistic people are also required to be discipled and have their sinful attitudes and behaviors challenged. But pastors with autistic people in their congregations must carefully consider how autism intersects with these other pastoral issues and how best to support these congregants and their families.

In chapter 6, Macaskill examines four pastoral issues in depth. These are: (1) the inability of profoundly autistic people to verbalize (publicly) a profession of faith; (2) the difficulty with prayer—especially extempore prayer; and (3) how autistic people interpret the Bible, particularly in light of two common characteristics of autism, the preference for precise language and systematization. Macaskill’s suggestions for addressing these within the church will enable busy pastors to reflect on how they may best apply them within their context. The last issue—that a high percentage of autistic people also identify as LGBTQ+—may come as a surprise to many readers and adds another challenge to an already complex pastoral condition. While Macaskill declines to pronounce on the moral questions this raises, his plea for a loving, proportional response to autistic people is well taken.

Finally, in his conclusion, Macaskill draws together some of the main points he has made throughout his book, particularly the themes of weakness and gift, providence and creation, the importance of

community, and leadership. His final point on the supremacy of our identity in Christ over any other identity stands in stark contrast with contemporary identity politics, and to which this reviewer can utter a heartfelt “Amen”!

Overall, Macaskill fulfils his aim to write a scoping work. He writes clearly, summarizing complex ideas succinctly, and explains terms—for example, “neuro-typical” and “stimming”—that may not be familiar to the reader. The highlight is his exegesis and theological sensitivity, coupled with a pastoral heart for autistic people to belong fully within the people of God. In addition, Macaskill’s robust ecclesiology and acute insights into the implications for what it means for every Christian’s identity to be in Christ will reward careful reading and apply to numerous contexts, not just autism.

Despite the book’s clarity, this reviewer believes that some theological education is required, at least at a diploma level, to follow Macaskill’s arguments fully. This caveat, coupled with the price tag—which, although inexpensive for a university press publication, would make a casual reader think twice—calls into question how many of his book’s intended audience would read it. To be clear, this is not a criticism of Macaskill’s work, which deserves to be disseminated as widely as possible. However, it may be other mediums—podcasts, video, blog posts—will enable more people to engage with this book’s content.

I raise this issue as it would be a great pity if the reach of Macaskill’s research was limited, for Church leaders, those with responsibility for pastoral care and those interested in theology and autism will profit significantly from reading and reflecting on his arguments. Therefore, the onus is on publishers to think more creatively about better engaging the audiences they want to reach with their releases.

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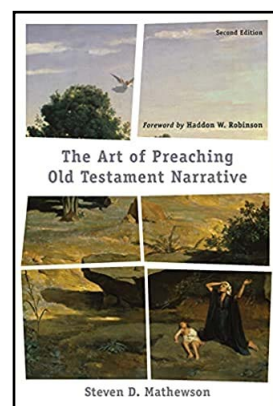
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Steven D. Mathewson. *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. xx + 252 pp. £19.52/\$27.99.

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Since *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* was first released in 2002, the stories of the Old Testament have continued to garner increased attention. Recent developments in both academy and church invite renewed reflection. Accordingly, in this expanded and updated edition, Steven Mathewson, senior pastor of CrossLife Evangelical Free Church in Libertyville, Illinois, addresses a post-Trump, COVID era. Yet, the core aim of the volume remains entirely unchanged: a call to faithfully teach and preach the narrative literature of the Old Testament, and to do so with rigor. This is a necessary invitation for, as Haddon Robinson cautions in the Foreword, “There is no greater abuse of the Bible than to proclaim in God’s name what God is not saying” (p. xiv).

Part 1 consists of two introductory chapters. The first frankly addresses the challenge of preaching narrative texts. Mathewson notes that preachers skilled in other genres can often founder here. Importantly, he diagnoses and speaks to five underlying problems (pp. 7–12): viewing stories as “fluff”; frustration at narrative subtleties; minimizing the canonical importance of stories; finding Old Testament literature intimidating; and enslavement to a particular style of exposition. Regarding the last point, Mathewson advises, “good storytellers do not



convey their stories through analytical outlines” (p. 12). The takeaway is clear for would-be preachers of narrative: neither should you. Chapter 2, new to this edition, tackles the question of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Here, Mathewson champions a mediating position between Christocentric and theocentric approaches that attempts to draw on the strengths of each.

Part 2 contains six chapters that lead readers through the exegetical process. Chapter 3 discusses factors related to choosing a sermon passage. Chapters 4–7 then move sequentially through the acronym ACTS, looking in turn at Action, Characters, Talking, and Setting. In these chapters Mathewson inducts readers into the world of narrative literature. An array of narrative techniques and artistic devices are covered, including plot dynamics (pp. 42–46), narrated versus narration time (pp. 52–54), characterization (pp. 68–73), and the role of dialogue (pp. 75–80). The resulting insights are then utilized to formulate a “big idea,” a concept that Mathewson helpfully nuances as a synergy of the text’s exegetical, theological, and homiletical ideas (p. 94).

The seven chapters of part 3 address the homiletical task; that is, shaping the results of exegesis into a sermon. Mathewson aptly notes that determining the “theological idea” of a text is only the halfway point, and the easier half at that (p. 108). Accordingly, crafting a message for a particular audience is crucial, with all its necessary entailments regarding length, depth, style, and so on. Helpful guidance is offered regarding the culling and shaping of material: “You cannot prove or validate what people do not understand. You cannot apply what people do not accept” (p. 111). The process charted by Mathewson is essentially an exercise in principlizing: the preacher moves from the world of the text to define its central theological idea. This idea is then applied to the real world of the listener(s). Two chapters provide valuable input concerning alternative forms a narrative sermon might take (pp. 128–36) and what constitutes good storytelling (pp. 147–63).

*The Art of Preaching* successfully maintains a balance between theory and practice. The latter is achieved through worked examples which serve to ground principles under discussion. An appendix also provides a full sermon transcript (on Judges 17–18) which nicely illustrates the homiletic fruit borne from exegetical sweat. Mathewson has also worked hard to incorporate, and evaluate, the wealth of secondary literature produced on the topic since the first edition was published. Readers are thus inducted into current discussions surrounding narrative hermeneutics. Illustrations and examples have also been updated throughout. As a result, the book feels fresh and contemporary despite its almost twenty-year vintage.

One area of the volume that feels somewhat underdeveloped, considering recent trends in biblical studies, is the incorporation of Speech Act Theory. While the theory itself is complex (e.g., current deliberation around perlocution), it does have distinct benefits for preachers. Mathewson is aware of Speech Act Theory developments, yet, following Robinson, remains focused on the “big idea” for preaching. Certainly, formulating a “big idea,” as the phrase itself suggests, is a valuable way to distil the *propositional* content of a text. But, as Speech Act Theory so helpfully clarifies, asserting or declaring propositional truths is only one of many things a text may be doing and, in fact, assertions often serve higher-level functions. If, as Sam Chan persuasively argues (*Preaching as the Word of God: Answering an Old Question with Speech-Act Theory* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016]), the task of the preacher is to faithfully “re-illocute” the Scriptures, then attending to the full range of a text’s speech acts becomes essential. Without a doubt, stories teach; they are didactic in that sense. But they also move readers, inspire them, and allow them to imagine alternative worlds. There is an *affective* dimension of the text that must also be communicated.

This is a book written by a preacher for preachers. While technical matters are discussed, the focus is always on moving beyond theory to practice. Mathewson is an experienced guide who deftly leads readers through the world of Old Testament narrative and instructs regarding how best to do the same for their own hearers. Novices and seasoned preachers alike will find much here to stimulate reflective practice. If you want to preach Old Testament narrative, and preach it well, *The Art of Preaching* remains essential reading.

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Karen Soole. *Liberated: How the Bible Exalts and Dignifies Women*. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2021. 181 pp. £8.99/\$12.99.

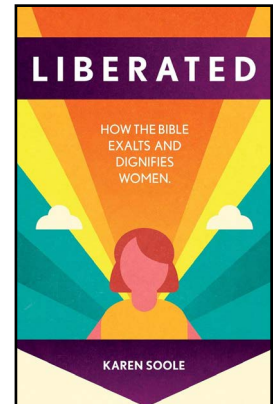
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Everyone who reads the Bible comes across passages that make them deeply uncomfortable and raise questions about who God is, what he values, and how his people behave. I recall my 5-year-old son asking me what rape was after reading his new “grown up Bible” and arriving at Genesis 34. Let alone my own feelings of horror upon reading Judges 19. When you take the accounts of the mistreatment of women in the Bible, and add to them the growing societal view that God is a misogynist, that Christians are patriarchally overbearing, and that the Bible regards women as second-class citizens responsible for the fall, it’s no wonder that we start to ask questions: Is God sexist? Does he value women?

Karen Soole’s refreshing offering, *Liberated*, seeks to “address the fear that God does not exalt or dignify women” (p. 13). She takes readers from Genesis to Revelation, encouraging them to ask “does God offer me liberation or oppression? Can I trust that God is good?” (p. 14). The bulk of attention is given to the Old Testament, acknowledging it “stands accused of being a book that has been used to establish male power and confine women” (p. 22). She does not “directly address the differences in church practice concerning women’s ministry” (p. 13), noting that this has been done extensively elsewhere.

Over the course of twelve chapters, Soole honestly and sensitively addresses the concerns raised by the presentation and treatment of women in the Bible. She explores both current and historical cultural climates, naming errors in both, for “could it be that that it is the traditions of men, not the Word of God, that is the heart of the problem?” (p. 22). She then turns to show how these concerns are met by the gospel. Each chapter brings the reader to Jesus and what he has done, for women and men alike. So, while this is indeed an informative and well researched work, it is also winsomely apologetic and evangelistic. Each chapter also finishes with questions for further thought or conversation and a small Bible study.

Beginning with creation, we see that “men and women are equally created by God, equal in dignity, and equal in worth” with a “beautiful interdependence and mutuality” (p. 30). Genesis 2 “is not pointing to the imperfection of woman; rather, it reveals the incompleteness of man, he was the one lacking” (p. 37). Exploring the fall, and the accusation that Eve was somehow more sinful than Adam, Soole



observes, “Adam and Eve share responsibility, but their sin is defined differently: Eve was deceived, and Adam was disobedient. Both are guilty” (p. 47).

Continuing through the Old Testament, Soole explores the fallout of sin in relationships (e.g., Tamar and Judah) and then arrives at Judges 19, an account of such evil that no one can be unaffected by it:

Why does the Bible describe such ugliness? Not because God approves of it.... It isn't there to show us how to live but how we do live. It is here because God doesn't hide from us the depths of savagery we are capable of. We may want to close our eyes and ears to this woman's cries, but God wants us to see and understand. What happened to this woman is a reflection of what has happened to other young women. (p. 92)

These hard passages are dealt with sensitively and openly. I appreciated Soole's willingness to deal with almost every uncomfortable presentation of women in the Bible. At points I wondered if these chapters moved a little too quickly past the issues they raised and to the gospel message. Sometimes we need to dwell in God's compassion and mercy and meditate on how he stands by us in our pain and our distress. Suggestions for how to manage these passages with pastoral sensitivity may also have been helpful, although she models this implicitly.

Chapter 8 (“Worrying Laws”) addresses the Old Testament teaching concerning polygamy, rape, trials, and purification. Soole presents an interesting interpretation of Numbers 5 (the test for an unfaithful wife), suggesting that it is entirely determined by a supernatural answer, rather than being a trial by ordeal. She also suggests that the purification laws of Leviticus 12:1–8, which decree fourteen days of uncleanness after delivering a daughter (compared to seven for a son), could be for physiological reasons, to avoid the temptation of cult fertility practices, and to protect a woman from the retrying for a son too soon after delivery (p. 120). Not all passages that describe intriguing ways of treating women were addressed (e.g., Lev 27:1–9, Num 30–31), but the general principles were mostly covered.

Regarding education and wisdom, she draws on the wise woman of Proverbs 31 and Abigail's interactions with David (1 Sam 25), noting that God values women with integrity, skills and wisdom, which can be used for good inside and outside the home. By way of application, she argues,

There is considerable freedom for women to engage in intellectual pursuits, choose challenging careers, or work at home or in their communities. But their minds should stir beyond the domestic sphere, and their eyes should be raised far beyond career opportunities. God's Word encourages women to lift their thoughts to even higher things and to seek true wisdom. (p. 139)

Soole reflects on how the Bible uses the image of an adulterous wife to demonstrate Israel's rebellion against God. It is a graphic illustration that “is there to help us grasp the impact of our rejection of God and to feel the weight of our indifference and dismissal of God” (pp. 153–54). Finally, she turns to marriage, noting that “some Christians give the impression that marriage is the ultimate goal in life” (p. 157). She honors both singleness and marriage, and rightly laments that a distortion of submission has resulted in the abuse of some women. Instead, “God's design for marriage is not one of control and ownership but a relationship for the mutual good of the other” (p. 168).

While there is no chapter on Jesus's interactions with women, many of these are woven throughout as a way of bringing the reader to the gospel (e.g., the woman at the well). There may have been value in drawing these together more explicitly, and including some other passages (e.g., the woman anointing Jesus with perfume, and the Syrophenician woman).



Her conclusion, straight from God's heart and written in his word, is that women (and men) are valuable and created in God's image. God cares for them and loves to protect them, even though there are times when the world's evil is all too prominent. Yes, all are sinful and fall short. Yet Jesus came to save women (and men), offering them new life—honoured, respected, loved, and redeemed.

While many who are drawn to read *Liberated* will likely be women, it is a book written for everyone and relevant for all, whether new Christians, those exploring who God is, those established in churches, or those in church leadership.

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John Stott. *Pages from a Preacher's Notebook: Wisdom and Prayers from the Pen of John Stott*. Edited by Mark Meynell. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. xxiii + 297 pp. £19.99/\$24.99.

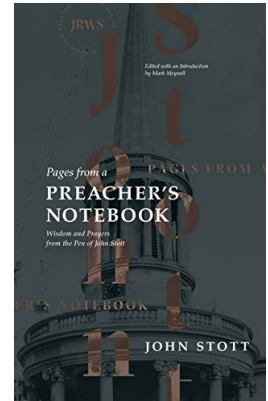
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If we preachers are to grow in our preaching, we must master basic homiletical skills and repeatedly put those skills into practice. Through our hard work and the patience of the congregations we serve, we become more profitable servants of our Master and his people over time. However, as the saying goes, good preaching is both caught and taught. Therefore, in addition to skills and hard work, we need to find examples worthy of imitation. Renowned English evangelical preacher, John Stott (1921–2011), is one such example. Gaining insight into his interests and habits will be helpful to those desiring to preach better.

Stott was one of the towering Christian leaders of the twentieth century. In 2005, *Time Magazine* recognized him as one of the “100 Most Influential People in the World.” Stott spent twenty-five years serving as rector of All Souls, Langham Place, London. His desire to see every pastor in every church around the world equipped to preach the Bible led him to begin the Langham Partnership in 1969. Stott was the principal framer of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974 and the author of over fifty books, including the homiletical classic, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), which continues to be studied in the field of preaching forty years later.

In *Pages from a Preacher's Notebook*, Mark Meynell assembles a compilation of Stott's notes, quotes, and illustrations on many subjects. (Note: A broader selection of this material appeared in digital form in *The Preacher's Notebook: The Collected Quotes, Illustrations, and Prayers of John Stott* [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018]). Meynell was the right pick to introduce and edit this latest anthology. He knew Stott well from their time serving together on the senior ministry team of All Souls, and currently serves as the associate director of Langham Preaching for Europe and the Caribbean.

Readers need to approach this book like stumbling upon someone's commonplace book—a notebook where someone jots down an assortment of tidbits on various subjects, including thoughts, quotes, or ideas. Marcus Aurelius, John Milton, Mark Twain, and Bill Gates, among others, have all profitably used commonplace books as a device to understand and catalog the world around them. Meynell notes: “Instead of using notebooks, he jotted down a whole range of thoughts on 4x6-inch



index cards, which he arranged under various topical headings or biblical references” (p. xiv). If Stott were preaching today, he might use Apple Notes or Evernote instead of index cards.

Meynell believes there are three reasons for publishing these notes: “(1) They are fascinating, insightful, and occasionally provocative. (2) They reveal a great deal about John Stott’s evolving working methods. (3) They model a deep and broad engagement with both Scripture and the contemporary world” (p. xiv). From this collection, readers gain “genuine insight into the workings of his mind and the discipline of his scholarship” (p. xiii). Meynell has done the hard work of collecting and sorting the notecards into seventy-eight different subjects, divided into three parts: (1) God and Gospel; (2) Church and Christian; and (3) World and Worldviews. In part 4, Meynell includes thirty-five short prayers that Stott wrote for special occasions on various subjects.

A few cautions are necessary before the reader attempts this compilation. First, Stott did not write these notes for public consumption. Stott did not have you in mind when he scribbled these notes by hand—he had no idea someone would put this tidbit into a book. Second, not all the notes are equally fascinating. While there is gold in this volume, it does take some digging to get to the buried treasure. Third, some of the notes are antiquated, and preachers may struggle to see how these notes might help them preach better. If readers grow frustrated, they should remember that Meynell “attempted to capture the breadth and depth of the full archive” of the thousands written (p. xviii). He also omitted many notes because they were too parochial, dated, or obscure. Fourth, while it was helpful to see what some of Stott’s handwritten notes looked like, it would have been better to see those ten pictures together in one place or on the opposite page of the type-written notes for comparison purposes.

Cautions notwithstanding, preachers will benefit from reading this book for several reasons. First, the book’s structure assists the reader in finding what they desire. The table of contents and the subject and name indexes will prove beneficial for the reader trying to locate one of the many memorable quotes they found in their reading.

Second, Meynell’s introduction is lucid and thought-provoking. He commends Stott’s practice of “double listening,” which, as Stott explains, means that preachers need to comprehend their contemporary culture so they can “present the gospel in such a way as to speak to modern dilemmas, fears, and frustrations ... equally determined not to compromise the biblical gospel in order to do so” (p. xv, citing Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 13). Meynell points out that these notes reveal that Stott was an avid listener to the surrounding culture, which he used effectively to build a bridge from the biblical text to his listeners. Preachers in the West will do well to practice Stott’s double listening as they engage a post-Christian culture with the gospel.

Third, this book gives readers insight into the workings of the mind and study habits of an excellent expositor. The clarity of Stott’s teaching was the result of deep thought and vigorous study. Meynell says: “Clear communication requires deep levels of comprehension” (p. xiii). Stott’s example should motivate preachers to work harder at communicating with clarity. Preachers would also do well to imitate Stott in noting the date and venue they use illustrations or outlines, so they save themselves embarrassment in awkward repetition.

Finally, Stott’s generosity in the heat of controversy is a needed correction to contemporary cancel culture. So many pretend to be courageous behind a keyboard in our social media age. It is so easy to vilify our neighbors instead of loving them by listening to them with respect. Stott, however, shows us a different way. He was “determined to do justice to opponents’ views, which sometimes caused him



real intellectual turmoil when he wrestled with complex problems. Moreover, he would not let disputes in one area prevent him from being willing to learn from a person in another area” (p. xxii). Like Stott, critical thinking and charitable engagement should mark pastor-theologians.

Those desiring to learn more about the life of John Stott should pick up Timothy Dudley-Smith’s two-volume biography—*John Stott: The Making of a Leader: A Biography of the Early Years* and *John Stott: A Global Ministry: A Biography of the Later Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999, 2001). As a preacher, Stott was primarily concerned with faithfully expounding the inspired biblical text so people could hear God’s voice and respond in trust and obedience. Those desiring to imitate the extraordinary example he has set will only benefit from reading these *Pages from a Preacher’s Notebook*.

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Michael Ward. *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man*. Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021. £18.86/\$24.95.

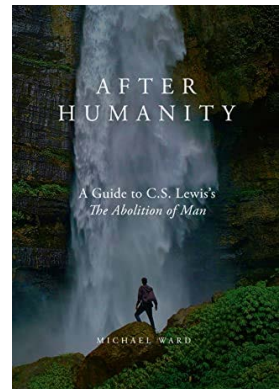
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In 1999, *National Review* named C. S. Lewis’s 1943 book, *The Abolition of Man*, one of the top one-hundred books of the twentieth century. This stands in contrast to Lewis’s perception of the reception of the volume in his lifetime. About a decade after it was published, Lewis complained that it had not gotten the attention it deserved. In comparison to some of his more popular works of the time, it may have indeed been a slow seller. However, the reality is that *The Abolition of Man* may be the most significant of Lewis’s works in the long run. Given the power and popularity of volumes like *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *The Four Loves*, not to mention his fiction works, this is no small claim, but it is not outlandish.

*The Abolition of Man* is so significant that it is frequently referenced in works that consider epistemology, modern culture, education, politics, and other disciplines; its impact is wide ranging, as Lewis gets at the heart of the malignancy of modernity. Within the expansive amount of secondary literature on Lewis and Inklings studies, there has been an exponential growth in books and essays that wrestle with the main ideas of *The Abolition of Man*. However, Michael Ward’s recent book, *After Humanity*, is the first volume to serve as a reader’s guide or commentary on the original work.

Ward is a prominent Lewis expert, having written *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and other volumes that are much debated and often highly appreciated by Lewis scholars. His most recent book demonstrates his deep knowledge of Lewis’s large and varied corpus, as he ties together cross references, background, and biographical data to flesh out the content of Lewis’s original work and deepen the contemporary reader’s understanding of the volume.

*After Humanity* consists of eight chapters. In the first six chapters, Ward introduces *The Abolition of Man* with discussions of its reception, cultural surroundings, an overview, its philosophical framework, its background, and its legacy. These are very concise chapters that are helpful for those who are



encountering Lewis's book for the first time. Chapter 7 is the bulk of the volume at over one hundred pages. Ward subdivides this chapter into four sections that relate to the sections in *The Abolition of Man*. He deals with the frontmatter, the three lectures that comprise the heart of Lewis's book, and the appendix to *The Abolition of Man*. Much like a biblical commentary, Ward breaks down Lewis's prose into sentences and phrases. He also provides a great deal of supplementary information that enriches the experience of reading one of Lewis's most tightly argued treatises. Ward concludes the volume with an essay reflecting on the entirety of Lewis's book, moving from the very particular to the broad sweep of its overall argument. The book also includes discussion questions, which will enhance the use of the volume for the individual or study group, as the two books are read together.

Ward's book is an example of how someone produces a critical edition of a volume that is still under copyright. *The Abolition of Man* is so significant that it warrants deeper study; however, since it was originally published in early 1940s, there are many cultural references that are becoming increasingly obscure to contemporary readers. Ward illuminates many of these dated references. Having the explanations separate from the original text is valuable because it leaves Lewis's content unconfused by excessive notes. The difficulty with Ward's approach is that reading the two books simultaneously requires dexterity, coordination, and several bookmarks. But the extra effort is worthwhile.

The challenge of any commentary is that secondary material can sometimes overwhelm the content of the primary source. Additionally, commentaries sometimes posit as certain connections that are possible but largely drawn from conjecture. Ward uses secondary material to illuminate the content of *The Abolition of Man* while keeping that book and its ideas at the heart of the discussion. Though there are divergent theories on some elements of Lewis's work, Ward stays away from unnecessary rabbit trails. This avoids the first challenge. The second challenge is mitigated by appropriate caution. In places where the connection is absolute, as when Lewis is referencing a classical work, Ward is firm. Those ideas that are conjecture tend to be more carefully qualified and are not presented as more than they are.

As the acid of modernity continues to erode so much of humanity, *The Abolition of Man* will only tend to grow in significance. Ward's book will enhance access to Lewis's book, and thus will be a useful book for decades to come. *After Humanity* is not the sort of book that can be read well on its own; one must have the primary source to make much sense of what Ward is doing. However, for those struggling to understand the trajectory of Western culture or simply seeking to understanding the work of C. S. Lewis better, *After Humanity* is a valuable addition to the bookshelf, though it should not be read apart from the book it is designed to complement.

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Christopher J. H. Wright. *“Here Are Your Gods”: Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. vii + 167 pp. £14.00/\$18.00.

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What words would you use to describe life in the West in the 21st century? Overwhelming? Progressive? Polarizing? Full of outrage? While all these words may be true, in his latest book, *Here Are Your Gods*, Christopher J. H. Wright argues that modern Western society is characterized by one haunting word: idolatry. The average Western Christian may not describe their current cultural moment as idolatrous, which is precisely the problem that Wright is highlighting in this short but excellent book. Idolatry has sunk its teeth deep into our souls and, sadly, we are sometimes unable to see its debilitating effects.

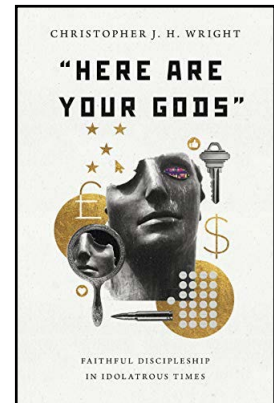
But in a culture that is unfamiliar with the language of idolatry, how can we parse out both its definition and implications for Christians living—particularly in such a time as this?

In part 1 of the book, Wright takes up this challenge by asking two important questions. First, who is the LORD God? What is he like? What is his character? Is he distinct from the rest of the world? Second, what are the other “gods” mentioned in the Bible? Are they “something,” meaning, are they actually divine? Do they have power? In chapters 1 and 2, Wright addresses both of these questions. In relation to the “gods” mentioned in the Bible (separate from the LORD God), what exactly are they? On the one hand, statues and idols are real objects and thus are something. But on the other hand, if Yahweh alone is the only true God, statues are really nothing before him. So then, what are the “gods” the Bible often talks about? According to Wright’s thorough biblical excavation, the “gods” are objects that we form with our hands: “We are the makers of our own gods—which, of course, is part of the absurdity of worshipping them” (p. 30).

In part 2, Wright takes up the difficult challenge of confronting a particular poignant form of idolatry in the West: politics. While some may have hesitations regarding bringing the Bible to bear on politics, Wright admits that it is needed because “it exposes so much that we would prefer should stay hidden and even more that we may not have seen at all—such as the idols that dominate so much of our public and political life” (p. 68). In chapter 5, Wright traces the biblical and historical reality that kingdoms and nations rise and fall but the Lord God reigns forever. This sets the foundation for Wright to address the main idols of Western culture and politics in chapter 6.

The strength of chapter 6 is that Wright can provide helpful analysis and critique of American culture as an outsider to our system. If we allow it, Wright’s words will penetrate deeply into our souls, revealing the way that we, even as Christians, have succumbed to the idolatry of our times. At several moments, Wright is particularly pointed, such as when he argues that one of the main reasons for the “slow but accelerating collapse of Western civilization is the profoundly syncretistic and idolatrous nature of Western Christianity, combined with the idolatry of the culture that surrounds us” (p. 93). What are these idols that Western Christians fall prey to? According to Wright’s observations, they are three: the idol of prosperity, the idol of national pride, and the idol of self-exaltation.

In part 3, Wright concludes by providing a way forward for Christians to engage in the public sphere without succumbing to the idolatrous temptations of the day. Because of the highly influential nature of the idols today, we must therefore heed the wisdom of Joshua 24:15: “Choose for yourselves *this day* whom you will serve” (p. 109). Heeding this wisdom means that we will begin to radically center



our lives around God, rather than on ourselves and the idols of our times. Moving forward as people centered on God, Wright argues that we must be “people shaped by the word of God, sharing in the mission of God, and living under the kingdom of God” (p. 111).

For those familiar with Wright’s previous books, you will find familiar themes in this latter section, such as his emphasis on the grand biblical narrative shaping our lives in the present. Drawing on the work of Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen (*The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014]), Wright proposes that the Bible is telling one story about the whole world, which is unfolding in seven acts. The way forward is to embody the biblical story through evangelism, justice, compassion, creation care, and biblical ethics. In his typical fashion, Wright compellingly calls the church to embrace a holistic biblical understanding of discipleship and mission that is much needed in our day.

The strength of this latest book is its brevity, clarity, and pointedness. In under 200 pages, Wright provides a biblical and cultural analysis of idolatry, a helpful critique of modern idolatry, and a way forward for the church to engage the world missionally. While so much of the modern missional movement has been about engagement with the culture (which Wright is definitely advocating at times), *Here Are Your Gods* provides a way to engage culture critically with biblical language, such as idolatry, and in a manner that is both winsome and nonjudgmental. As we name various activities as idolatrous, we join our heroes of the faith, such as John the Baptist, who named the idolatries of his own times. Wright shows us that commitment to God’s mission and strong language about cultural idolatry are not at odds with one another.

Pastors and church leaders would be wise to heed the insights of this book and begin to teach and live its principles and applications in their contexts. Without a doubt, we are living in tumultuous times that call for radical commitment to God and his mission in the world today. Wright’s latest book is a necessary page in the playbook of missional engagement in the twenty-first century.

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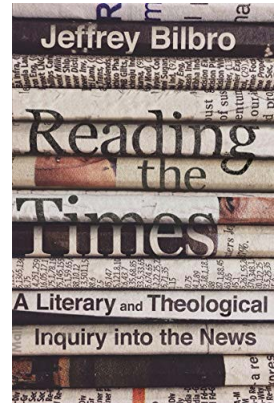
— MISSION AND CULTURE —

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Jeffrey Bilbro. *Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. 200 pp. £20.99/\$24.00.

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In his recent volume, *Reading the Times*, Jeffrey Bilbro presents our habits of news consumption according to three resources we invest in the news: attention, time, and community. Part 1 develops Henry David Thoreau's critique of the "macadamized mind" fostered by the modern news industry, which was just coming of age when Thoreau was writing. Drawn from the small, condensable bits used for paving roads, the image of macadam is suggestive of the fragmented attention Bilbro identifies as problematic in contemporary news media consumption. The macadamized intellect has three major symptoms: (1) "it induces a vague, underlying sense of boredom and dis-ease"; which (2) "renders us vulnerable to the wiles of advertisers and politicians"; (3) thus warping "our emotional sensibilities" directing them to what is distant and spectacular "and making it more difficult for us to sympathize with and love our neighbors" (p. 12). Rather than consume the news with a macadamized soul, we can attend to the events of our days with a contemplativeness which has its anchor in an eschatological hope "that lies outside of the vicissitudes of daily news and politics" (p. 54).



Part 2 emerges from the previous section's consideration of eschatological hope by shifting the focus of the book to the subject of time and its relation to the news. Bilbro's contention is straightforward: "If we want to learn how to read the news Christianly, we'll have to learn to tell time Christianly" (p. 67). He offers us two ways of telling time that help us navigate the tension of being "in the world but not of it": *Kairos* and *Chronos*. "*Kairos* refers to propitious time, time that is right for a certain act ... rhythmic, cyclical, seasonal" (p. 67). *Chronos* names the other form time takes: a "quantifiable duration ... linear and sequential" (p. 67). All too often, we collapse the two modes of time, leading "to an over-emphasis on current events" (p. 69). Bilbro cites Erich Auerbach when he argues that this collapsing of *Kairos* time into *Chronos* time teaches the reader of the news to "account to himself for his real life and his place in human society' according to the chronos-bound, historical narrative of the daily news" (p. 81). Instead, Christians need to remember that "time is systolated around and in the person of Christ, and the meaning of our daily lives and affairs becomes determined by their relation to this person" (p. 96). We do this as individuals and as communities by developing habits and liturgies that structure our days and weeks around Christ. Doing so "orients us to his story and equips us to fit the news of our day into the redemptive pattern of his life and work" not vice-versa (p. 112).

Part 3, on the theme of "belonging," is a reflection on the communal aspects of reading the news. Reading the news is a communal event insofar as reading the news situates us to understand ourselves as a part of a community—the community to which the events of the news unfold. But contemporary news can be a false substitute for real community: "perhaps" suggests Bilbro, "it is *because* we are lonely and detached from our places that we put such outsized importance on the news of the day" (p. 129). We look for the news to offer us a people and a place—things we've lost in the "atomized swarm" of secular modernity (pp. 126–32). What we need as we read the news are "liturgies of belonging" that anchor us to our neighbors and to our local churches within which we can attend to the news together.

Doing so does “not seek to flatten the public sphere but to foster rich, vibrant, lively communities of discourse” (p. 156).

*Reading the Times* is an excellent and much needed book. I’ve already recommended it to many in my parish, to pastor friends of mine who labor alongside me in the work of the gospel in Hawaii, and I commend it here too. For all those who have felt the sense of cautious concern over the nature of news consumption in our families, parishes, and communities but could never quite articulate exactly where that suspicion came from, this book offers an explanation rooted in Christian worldview and practice.

For all that, however, the book does have two weaknesses (though they are faults, not failures): First, while the book operates with a very oblique systematic structure—one that is helpful for following Bilbro’s line of argumentation—the structure in several places can become tedious and distracting, as it sometimes sacrifices the flow of his well-written prose in order to remind you what you’ve just read and to prepare you for what you are about to read. That is fine when occasioned by the text itself, but artificially imposed as an arranging mechanism, it can feel obstructive—especially when one is eager to return to the line of argument that had been, just moments earlier, so enthralling.

Second, while the vision of the concluding chapters is compelling, there could be more flesh on the practices for fostering communities of belonging along that vision. Bilbro provides many helpful practices for *what to read* (i.e., where to draw our news from), and develops a really compelling vision for how to dwell in a neighborhood *in which to read the news*. But when it comes to communal practices, I find myself wishing he had given more body to the kinds of practices Christian *communities*—larger in scope than the self and the home—could foster. Bilbro casts a vision for this kind of communal reading of the news, but the majority of the practices are for individuals or small groups. I commend Bilbro as one of the best recent thinkers to guide Christians how we ought to read the news in ways that shape community. But, one wonders, captivated by Bilbro’s vision, how might a community so formed—how might churches so shaped—read the times?

Mark Brians II

All Saints Anglican Church

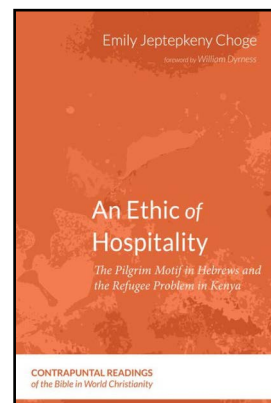
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

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Emily Jeptepkeny Choge. *An Ethic of Hospitality: The Pilgrim Motif in Hebrews and the Refugee Problem in Kenya*. Contrapuntal Readings of the Bible in World Christianity 6. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. 266 pp. £23.00/\$32.00.

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In recent years in America, issues related to refugees have become part of the national consciousness and conversation. All too often, these issues are over-politicized and efforts to find reasonable ways forward become stymied by self-focused partisanship. In the process, congregations lose their sense of clear-eyed calling to care for the vulnerable as Christians wonder whether they must choose between two extremes of open borders or turning away and ignoring those in danger. In the confusion, the dignity of displaced people is easily forgotten and the opportunity for host-nation believers to connect more deeply with their own Christian pilgrim identities through interactions with refugee-pilgrims is lost. This is a tragedy in many ways, but one that can be remedied.





I have often thought that any discussion of the refugee program in America would benefit from impartial outside voices which are not part of the two-party system or even part of America in any way. Emily Choge is such a voice, writing *An Ethic of Hospitality: The Pilgrim Motif in Hebrews and the Refugee Problem in Kenya* as a clarion call to the Kenyan Church (and by implication, the Global Church) to embrace the refugees in their midst not as objects of pity and suspicion but as brothers, sisters, and teachers.

In talking with Kenyan Christians during her research, Choge reports that most “are at a loss as to how to respond to this great need. They are not sure what their role is, especially alongside international bodies like the UNHCR ... or the Kenya government” (p. 12). Choge therefore sets out to consider “the refugee crisis through the lens of pilgrimage” (p. xvii). She contends that “a church that will own its pilgrim identity will respond to refugees in caring and compassionate ways and will lead the nation towards creative life-transforming solutions” (p. xix).

In chapter 1, Choge lays out the problem: while Kenya has shown generous hospitality toward large numbers of refugees for many years, recent hardships have caused public opinion to turn against the refugees who are sojourning there. The remainder of the book then lays out a biblical-theological response that can guide Kenyan Christians to behave ethically—even gratefully—toward refugees in their midst. Chapter 2 brings historical perspective to the ongoing refugee crisis in Africa, particularly focusing on the ways that “European intervention in Africa” has caused many of the dynamics which have created and continue to create large numbers of refugees on the continent.

In chapter 3, Choge asks the question: “There is so much humanitarian effort that has gone into trying to respond to the problem [of refugees in Africa], but what has been the result?” She investigates the responses of African countries receiving refugees, international bodies like the UNHCR, and pan-African church organizations like the All Africa Conferences of Churches (AACC), evaluating whether the approaches used by each were “effective” or “counter-productive” (p. 38).

Chapter 4 zooms in on Kenya’s response to refugees in particular: Choge considers whether Kenyans have followed their own advice found in a Kiswahili proverb which means “A guest is a guest for two days; on the third day give him/her a hoe” (p. 60), concluding that camp life is not sustainable and that other means of integration for refugees should be pursued. In chapter 5, Choge turns to the book of Hebrews, demonstrating that “the pilgrim motif sets the tone for radical faith and hope in the face of adverse circumstances” (p. 96) which in turn influences how believers live in the world, including how they welcome strangers.

Chapter 6 converses with John Howard Yoder and Bishop Henry John Okullu to determine what the role of the Kenyan Church might be in addressing socio-political matters such as the refugee crisis. Choge uses Glen Stassen and David Gushee’s method of concreteness in Christian ethics in order to develop “an ethic for the care of the stranger” (p. 183) informed by the pilgrim motif in Hebrews which involves being careful to live in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, letting Christian identity transcend tribe and ethnicity, and focusing on biblical hospitality toward the stranger. Chapter 7 concludes the book with practical suggestions for Kenyan Christians to address the refugee crisis in Kenya and in Africa at large. These involve “addressing root causes” (p. 190), “responding to needs” (p. 192), and “raising awareness” (p. 195).

*An Ethic of Hospitality* is a well-researched and biblically-informed call to action for Kenyan Christians. While the specific nature of Choge’s work might seem to make it less relevant for a wider, non-Kenyan audience, I would suggest that anyone interested in the global refugee crisis would

benefit from reading it. The pilgrim motif is a key element in Christian identity regardless of culture. Understanding this motif will lead to a greater motivation to welcome refugees, no matter what culture they come from or come to. I highly recommend this book both to Kenyans and to anyone looking to get outside their own cultural viewpoint to gain a fresh perspective on refugee ministry and what it means to live on pilgrimage.

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Rebecca McLaughlin. *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims*. Austin: The Gospel Coalition, 2021. 107 pp. £9.99/\$9.99.

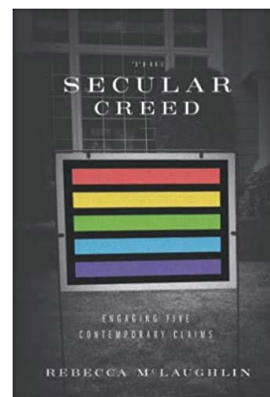
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In *The Secular Creed*, Rebecca McLaughlin outlines five contemporary claims that form a statement of belief for many of our secular neighbors. Since God has called us to live among neighbors and friends, with diverse backgrounds and beliefs, and we are called to love them and point them to the saving knowledge of Jesus, these are claims with which the Christian community must interact. This book helps us dive deeper into some of the critical issues society is facing and shows how contemporary controversies point us back to our need for the rock-solid foundation of the love, mercy, dignity, and justice taught in our sacred text that was written two thousand years ago.

McLaughlin boldly engages sensitive topics that we are taught to avoid at family gatherings. She frames her chapters around five claims that have begun to appear on yard signs in cities across America: “Black Lives Matter,” “Love is Love,” “The Gay-Rights Movement Is the New Civil Rights Movement,” “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” and “Transgender Women Are Women.”

With intellectual precision and genuine humility, McLaughlin models how to engage opposing viewpoints with grace and truth. She begins by asking the reader to consider how Christians should relate to the statement “Black Lives Matter” (p. 6), reminding us that throughout God’s Word—from the opening of Genesis to John’s concluding Revelation—we see God’s “multiethnic heartbeat” (p. 13). She encourages us to carefully disentangle the difference between “Black Lives Matter” as an organization that stands for some things we cannot embrace and the biblical truth that Black lives do indeed matter to Jesus.

Following the BLM discussion, McLaughlin addresses the pervasive contention that “love is love.” This slogan reinforces the view that anyone’s definition of love is valid. Rather than merely offering a differing perspective, she paints a completely different picture and offers an alternative question. Instead of the subjective “*what* is love?” McLaughlin says we should ask “*who* is love?” The answer: God alone. She then shows how our search for belonging is right and good. In fact, we were made for a union that is deeper and more beautiful than what we will find in either same-sex or heterosexual marriage. “Christian marriage, at its best, is a beautiful picture of Jesus’ love for us. But it’s not the only one” (p. 41). McLaughlin reminds us that it is in communion with Christ and in communion with his church where we receive the provision we were made for and that we long for.





Progressing through the credal statements etched on yard signs, McLaughlin's third chapter rejects the argument that to be on the "right side of history,"—as with the civil-rights movement—we must support the gay-rights movement. She contends that sexual orientation is not like race and therefore this claim is invalid (p. 54). She also boldly argues that it was the "historic failure of white Christians to love their Black neighbors" that propelled this powerful claim (p. 43). She gives multiple examples of how the secular perspective does not align with either historical or biblical truth. Without the existence of a Creator God, equality, dignity, and intrinsic worth would not exist. "The problem with Christians who supported segregation was not that they listened to the Bible too much, but too little" (p. 47).

McLaughlin next addresses the pro-choice claim that "women's rights are human rights" and, according to many in society, the belief that Christianity is bad for both. She gives clear examples of how the Bible, the Church, and Jesus himself value and honor women. Yet, she does not concede that the rights of women supersede the rights of other persons also made in the image of God. If Christianity is true, and if people are indeed made in the image of the living God, then both mother and baby matter (p. 82).

Finally, McLaughlin responds to the idea that "transgender women are women." As in previous chapters, she points out contradictions in the messages that society heralds. She challenges the reader to know God's word and proposes that many of the ideas society uses to counter Christianity were actually rooted in God's word and in God's good plan from the beginning. She gives examples of current issues that need to be addressed and models honest communication with those who are asking challenging questions by evaluating their claims against the objective truth of Scripture. McLaughlin does this while offering the encouragement and hope that is found in Christ alone.

Since there is no way to address extremely sensitive topics without offending readers on both sides, it is inevitable that McLaughlin's work will be met with a variety of receptions. Despite the potential that some will take issue with McLaughlin's conclusions, this book is immensely helpful to the church. Although it addresses only five specific claims, the value for the Christian community is much broader. For instance, McLaughlin provides an example for how to sincerely interact with the issues society is facing in a way that holds Scripture as our ultimate authority. We also learn from McLaughlin how to approach a sensitive issue with a helpful balance of grace and truth, a skill that can be applied to a variety of situations or issues. Maybe most importantly, McLaughlin responds to heated contemporary claims with the humble, intellectual honesty that might win a hearing by someone who needs Jesus.

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Matt Rhodes. *No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions*. 9Marks. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 270 pp. £13.98/\$19.99.

Conversations regarding movement methodology are back at the center of missiological discussions these days. Every other week, it seems there's a new book, article, sermon, or podcast either promoting or opposing Church Planting Movements (CPM), Disciple Making Movements (DMM), Training for Trainers (T4T), and the like. It has been almost two decades since the publication of David Garrison's *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake, 2004), yet people are still debating the validity of CPM practices.

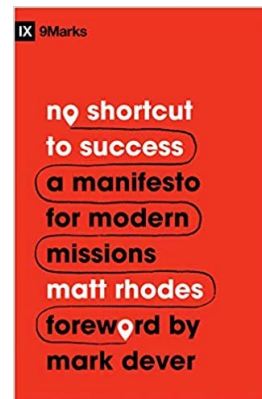
When it comes to movement discussions, some deserve more attention than others. *No Shortcut to Success* is of the attention-deserving variety. Matt Rhodes—a church-planter with a decade of experience among the unreached in North Africa—has written an accessible book, introducing these methods to his readers, validating them where appropriate, critiquing them where needed, and helping pastors and missionaries—current or prospective—correct course according to biblical priorities.

In his chapters on movement methodology, he critiques several well-known practices: an insistence on rapid growth, overutilization of (flawed) science in missions, aversion to incarnational missionary witness, emphasis on self-discovery, persons of peace, obedience-based discipleship, and the installation of ill-prepared pastors. Rhodes contends that the undue emphasis on speed compromises the missionary's goal of making disciples and planting churches *that last*. Thus, he invests the second part of his book in offering a more constructive approach to missionary methodology.

Rhodes sees an implicit danger in what he calls the “amateurization of missions” whereby missionary preparation is eschewed in favor of mobilizing evangelists quickly to the field. In contrast, Rhodes argues for what he refers to as the professional approach (p. 35). The professional skills he encourages potential missionaries to develop are slowly acquired—things like theological education, language acquisition, and an adequate understanding of the target people's culture, religion, and worldview. Drawing on the lives of well-known missionaries, Rhodes describes his proposal in the same terms as William Carey's self-professed plodding faithfulness.

In the second part of the book, Rhodes offers his constructive course correction. Whereas some missiologists argue that the missionary's work is apostolic, Rhodes argues that the missionary's work is better characterized by the Pauline language of being an ambassador (2 Cor 5). As Christ's ambassador, the missionary's main task is communicating the whole of the biblical message clearly, credibly, and boldly. He makes clear “that this is a monumental task,” requiring missionaries to “expend tremendous effort” (p. 174). Rhodes eventually offers “ten milestones” for building a faithful missionary model (pp. 176–80). Each of the milestones requires patience and perseverance. For those looking for both a critical engagement with contemporary missiology and a constructive path forward, I wholeheartedly recommend Rhodes's book.

Still, one qualm movement practitioners are likely to have with Rhodes is that his critique is primarily focused on a carefully-selected handful of their camp's books—some of which are twenty years old—instead of more recent field research on how movement methodology has developed in light of past critique. Thus, some may accuse Rhodes of presenting a caricature of what's really happening



currently on the ground. Such a critique, however, would be unwarranted. Rhodes does a sufficient job of interacting with both the primary sources on this topic and more recent works. He extensively quotes the proponents of movement methodology, allowing them to speak for themselves. Moreover, he often nuances his position by showing the many ways he agrees with them (pp. 70–71, 143, 172). It should also be noted that as practitioners adapt methods on the field, they have often done so without publicizing their correctives and adaptations to prior published works.

A few other clarifications and caveats are worth noting. First, one might think that Rhodes is wholly against pragmatism and numerical assessment of success since it is so characteristic of movement methodology. However, he actually argues himself that “pragmatic wisdom” is a “part of how we seek God’s will” (p. 35). Likewise, Rhodes is not dismissive of the importance of numerical results. Like movement advocates, Rhodes wants to see numerical results in Missions. However, he simply believes that movement methodology will not lead to *lasting* numerical results. He does provide some helpful nuance regarding his view of success: “Simply put, big numbers don’t define success in ministry... Ultimately, ‘success’ in ministry isn’t a matter of numbers but of ministering in a way that honors the Lord” (56).

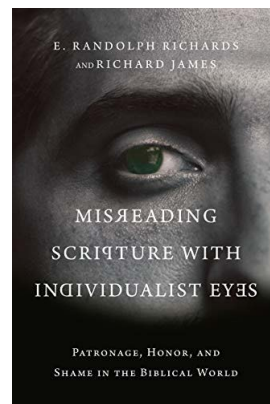
Second, *No Shortcuts* would benefit from expanding its attention on the role of the local church in sending, training, and commissioning missionaries. Though chapter 9, “Equipping and Sending,” provided the chance to dive more deeply into the church-centered nature of a biblical missiology, he does not. Rhodes writes often about sending, yet he does not investigate or propose how churches are also to be involved in *identifying, evaluating, equipping, commissioning, critiquing, supporting, celebrating, and receiving back* their missionaries. If Rhodes is proposing a course correction for contemporary missiology, the church’s role in the whole process must be a central part of it.

Despite these caveats, *No Shortcut to Success* deserves to be read. What Rhodes argues compellingly is that missionaries need to move on from formulaic, reverse-engineered approaches to missions. We must not choose principles, methods, and tactics based primarily on what has worked but rather on *what Scripture says* about the missionary task—and sticking with it regardless of the speed at which results come.

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E. Randolph Richards and Richard James. *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes: Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. xii + 291 pp. £19.99/\$28.00.

*Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes* is a follow-up to *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* by E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012). The sequel retains Richards and his NT scholarly expertise, while switching co-authors from O'Brien to Richard James, a pseudonymous missionary trainer based in the Middle East. It has the same essential aim as its predecessor: to aid Western Christians in understanding the Bible in its original, non-Western context. But as the title indicates, Richards and James focus on the contrast between individualism and collectivism. In particular, the book unpacks collectivist norms of kinship, patronage, brokerage, honor, shame, and boundaries which are less familiar to Western readers of the Bible. As Westerners themselves who have been missionaries in Indonesia and the Arab world, respectively, Richards and James often illustrate from their own cross-cultural experiences for their target audience of "our individualist societies" (p. 51) and "we Western Christians" (p. 84) who "can learn a lot from the body of Christ in collective cultures. Many Lebanese, Syrian, Chinese, Columbian, and Congolese brothers and sisters have long been explaining the good news in collective cultures" (p. 253).



This posture of cultural humility is laudable as the global church becomes more polychromatic. Nonetheless, the sharp binaries of "us/them" and "West/East" running throughout the book sometimes undermine its contentions that "it is not an either-or but a both/and" (p. x) and "generalizations are always wrong and usually helpful" (pp. 2, 7). The aim of the authors to shed new light on the Bible is certainly achieved in their analysis of the NT world and its acknowledged similarities with modern Mediterranean cultures (à la Kenneth Bailey and others). However, the book also exhibits significant gaps in its understandings of "Western" culture, the OT, and Asian cultures. These were three areas of weakness that caught my eye as a bilingual Chinese American, OT specialist, and missionary in Singapore who teaches students from a dozen Asian countries. The shortcomings are potentially "wrong" enough outside Mediterranean and/or Islamic cultures to distort what is otherwise "helpful" for their intended reader who is unaware that everything supposedly not from Western societies can hardly be called "Eastern."

Richards and James structure their engaging book into three parts: (1) Social Structures of the Biblical World, (2) Social Tools: Enforcing and Reinforcing our Values, and (3) Why Does Collectivism Really Matter to Me? Each section interacts extensively with social-scientific scholarship about the Greco-Roman world, especially the notion that institutions such as patronage, brokerage, and kinship hinge upon the "limited good" in these societies (whether conceived as material or social capital), which makes all interactions reciprocal in nature. This application of a pan-Mediterranean anthropological model is beneficial in comparing the Greco-Roman world of the NT with modern Mediterranean societies. But it is insufficient to describe both the ancient Near Eastern world of the OT and non-Mediterranean societies.

The problems in applying so-called “Mediterraneanism” to the OT have been demonstrated elsewhere (by Daniel Wu, William Domeris, and Johanna Stiebert, among others). *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes* exhibits the common tendency of Western missiologists who remain outsiders to romanticize communalist societies. Such a positive view stands in contrast to the perspectives offered by cultural insiders who identify the challenges that communalism’s values bring in areas such as favoritism, corruption, and hierarchical expectations. In Chinese societies, for example, the well-known phenomenon of *guanxi* (loosely but imperfectly translated “connections” or “relationships”) has spawned a massive literature in Chinese business ethics about the crucial differences between *guanxi* and corruption. It is telling that Western scholars of China (including missiologists) can be more apt than Chinese business ethicists themselves to defend the leveraging of *guanxi* through gifts as a cultural necessity distinct from bribes (Ling Li, “Performing Bribery in China: *Guanxi*-Practice, Corruption with a Human Face,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 20.68 [2011]: 1–20).

Similarly in the Philippines, the encouragement of Western missiologists to harness the patron-client dynamics of *utang na loob* (Tagalog for “debt of gratitude”) is often at odds with Filipinos’ own ambivalence about this purported national trait. As “father of Filipino psychology” Virgilio Enriquez observes, Western studies of patronage in the Philippines typically overlook the concept’s colonialist history of inquiry in which (American) patrons/scholars dictated to (Filipino) clients/students about how patron-client dynamics (should) work (“Filipino Psychology in the Third World,” *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 10 [1977]: 3–18). A common lament of Filipino Christians is that the Philippines is both the only Christian nation in Asia as well as ranked by external watchdogs as one of its most corrupt. Eager Western outsiders do well to heed the nuanced critiques of patronage that Asian theologians such as Hwa Yung, Narry Santos, and Melba Padilla Maggay have offered from within the Majority World.

All of this underscores the necessity of moving beyond a binary contrast between “Western” individualism and “Eastern” collectivism, even for purposes of illustration. As British anthropologist Mary Douglas showed in her pioneering use of Grid-Group Theory, the comparative axis of *Group* commitment to measure one’s strength of affiliation with others must be crossed with the axis of *Grid* control to gauge how much behavior is governed by rules external to oneself. The pairing of Group and Grid axes leads to a 2x2 matrix of worldviews: (1) Low Group, Low Grid (Individualism); (2) High Group, Low Grid (Egalitarianism); (3) High Group, High Grid (Hierarchy); and (4) Low Group, High Grid (Fatalism). Each country or culture exhibits variability within itself and over time, but the empirical data collected over several decades by the World Values Survey ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)) show that overall tendencies remain. For instance, the United States tends toward Individualism but Scandinavian countries toward Egalitarianism (Sun-Ki Chai, Ming Liu, and Min-Sun Kim, “Cultural Comparisons of Beliefs and Values: Applying the Grid-Group Approach to the World Values Survey,” *Beliefs and Values* 1 [2009]: 193–208). The fact that the WVS research also locates an “Eastern” country like Japan in the same quadrant as a “Western” country like the United States exposes the fallacy of a simple dichotomy between Western cultures as individualist (i.e., merely Low Group) and non-Western cultures as collectivist (i.e., merely High Group).

In sum, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes* is an important book that affords genuine insights, especially for how the NT contextualizes its message using Greco-Roman kinship, patronage, and brokerage. At the same time, its treatment of the OT world and other non-Mediterranean societies risks becoming another specimen of “How the Honor/Shame Issue Got the Wrong End of

the Anthropological Stick” (the subtitle of Johannes Merz’s important article, “The Culture Problem,” *Missiology* 48 [2020]: 127–41).

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George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk. *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America*. New York: New York University Press, 2021. 291 pp. £19.19/\$30.00.

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What hath Christian progressivism to do with Christian conservatism? Little to nothing, the authors of a new study argue. In *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America*, sociologists George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk contend that the differences between these two groups are so significant that it is time to regard them as distinct species rather than different breeds.

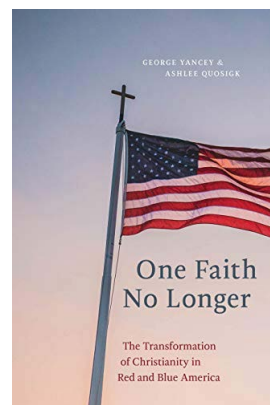
In the introductory chapter, the authors summarize well the book’s conclusions:

We highlight here that progressive Christians emphasize political values relating to social justice issues as they determine who is part of their in-group; they tend to be less concerned about theological agreement. Conservative Christians, however, do not put strong emphasis on political agreement in order to determine if you are one of them—their major concern is whether you agree with them theologically. The bottom line we seek to illuminate in this book is that progressive and conservative Christians use entirely different factors in determining their social identity and moral values. Indeed, we argue that the ways in which these two groups deal with questions of meaning are so different that it is time to regard them as distinct religious groups rather than as subgroups under a single religious umbrella. (p. 4)

The criteria for their determination are two-fold: religiously, distinct groups use contraposed moral frameworks as well as contrasting methods for determining who possesses “in-group” versus “out-group” status. According to the authors, only recently have left-leaning and right-leaning ethical frameworks become so radically disparate, and thus only in recent times have progressive-conservative “insider” and “outsider” statuses become incommensurable.

The first chapter of the book traces the history of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, demonstrating that progressive Christianity uniformly traces its religious lineage back to the Social Gospel and similarly liberal reform movements. As a result, progressive Christians have undergone a seismic soteriological shift, leaving behind the historic Christian emphasis on personal justification and sanctification and embracing instead agendas for social transformation. The second chapter contains the backbone of the authors’ statistical analysis, while the remaining chapters illustrate and nuance those findings with expositions of interviews conducted by the authors.

As a work of scholarly sociology, the authors set forth a convincing case: progressive Christianity and conservative Christianity are not “brothers from a different mother” but are intractably in opposition



to one another. Some details of their argument are counterintuitive and perhaps inaccurate. For example, the authors argue that conservative Christians are more willing to challenge the Republican platform than progressives are to challenge the Democratic platform. Although some conservatives have demonstrated willingness to challenge Republican presidents and leaders and some progressives dispute Democratic orthodoxy, on the whole, the majority of thought leaders and publicly-minded pastors seem unwilling or unable to critique their respective political parties. However, quibbles aside, the authors successfully argue their thesis.

What remains, and what is outside of the scope of their sociological study, is to explore the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the respective camps. A fertile area of theological research would be to explore the work of liberalism's forefather, Friedrich Schleiermacher, comparing and contrasting his theological and ethical convictions with contemporary progressives. In particular, historians might explore Schleiermacher's thesis that Christian doctrine and ethics are properly formulated by disciplined reflection upon the Christian community's shared experience. It seems that modern progressives also formulate doctrine based upon experience but also upon another theological source—modern culture.

Philosophically, a fertile line of research would be an exploration of Charles Taylor's exposition of secularism in relation to Christian progressivism and conservatism. Taylor argues that Westerners—conservative and progressive alike—tend to live their lives within the "immanent frame," that is, they tend to manage their lives without significant reference to God. With relative ease, one could demonstrate progressive Christianity's doctrinal and ethical program is carried out almost entirely within the immanent frame. Similarly, Taylor explores the "extraordinary moral inarticulacy" of our secular age; the contemporary era's jettisoning of any transcendent frame of reference leaves us unable to draw upon a shared point of reference in which we could argue "toward truth," instead enabling us merely to disagree with one another from our own tribal points of view. Such a jettisoning seems to be exactly what many progressive Christians have undertaken.

Conversely, with careful attention one might also find that some conservative Christians—despite their explicit appeals to God, to special revelation, and to a transcendent moral framework—depend so heavily on human resources such as political activism that their eschatology is at least partly immanentized. One suspects that a thorough investigation of contemporary conservative Christianity will reveal that some conservative Christian leaders lapse into a utilitarian ethic when justifying actions undertaken in the political realm or providing warrant for certain conclusions in the realm of foreign policy.

*One Faith No Longer* is a significant contribution to the burgeoning industry of American socio-religious analysis. Its sociological method is impeccable, its conclusions warranted, and its writing lucid. What remains is for theologians and philosophers to draw conclusions about the roots and fruits of these two very different species of American religion.

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