

# themelios

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

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## DESCRIPTION

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

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## EDITORIAL

# One of the Saddest Texts in the OT

— D. A. Carson —

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Three OT passages devote considerable space to the life and times of King Hezekiah, and disclose what a good and faithful man he could be (2 Kgs 18–20; 2 Chron 29–32; Isa 36–39). We gladly remember his far-reaching efforts to lead the nation into reformation in line with Torah, and we are moved by Hezekiah’s stunning courage and faithful trust when he is forced to confront Sennacherib.

None of these three OT documents glosses over Hezekiah’s moral failures. But two of the three, viz., 2 Kings and Isaiah, treat one of his failures in a distinctive way that generates a narrative of surpassing sadness. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus attention on Isaiah 39:1–8, and draw attention to three details.

*First*, like many biblical narratives, this chapter provides the capstone to stunning moral contrast. After witnessing Hezekiah’s faith and courage in Isaiah 36–37, and after meditating on his extraordinary prayer in 37:14–20, we cannot help but feel let down when we learn about his whining self-pity in chapter 38 and his foolish boasting to the Babylonian emissaries in 39:1–2, which leads to the staggering divine rebuke of 39:5–7. How can the same man be so good and so bad, so wise and so foolish, so God-centered and so self-focused? We like our heroes and models to be a little more consistent. The moral contrast is not only startling, it is discouraging.

*Yet this is not what makes Isaiah 39 one of the saddest texts in the OT.* Even as it provides the capstone to stunning moral contrast, it is entirely in line with many biblical narratives, as I stipulated. There is no warrant to extract a superlative out of this narrative: so far, it is sad enough, but certainly not the “saddest.” Abraham, that great man of faith and father of the faithful, lies so shamefully that he endangers his wife; Moses, that most humble of men, vents his frustration in self-righteous anger when he strikes the rock; David, a man after God’s own heart, is not only a blameworthy father but an adulterer and a murderer. And if we look for NT examples, we soon think of Peter, the apostle who is shown by the Father who Jesus is, yet thinks he knows enough he can correct Jesus’s theology, and, worse, three times denies knowing who Jesus is, bringing himself to tears; and so on, and so on. True, there is a handful of characters in the Bible about whom nothing negative is recorded (e.g., Joseph, Daniel, Esther), but their numbers are vastly exceeded by those whose lives betray discouraging moral contradictions, deep moral contrasts. And Hezekiah falls into their number.

*Second*, while holding to some form or other of the doctrine of providence, Hezekiah twists it to no good purpose. To put it a slightly different way, Hezekiah tips his hat to honor God’s sovereignty, but applies it to his life with a perverse willfulness: he commits himself to whole-hearted submission to God’s will in order to secure his own selfishness. When in the name of God the prophet Isaiah rebukes

Hezekiah for the way he stooped to disgraceful bragging before the envoys from Babylon, thereby endangering the kingdom, the prophet spares Hezekiah no details of the disastrous judgment ahead: the wealth of the kingdom will be “carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left” (Isa 39:6). Moreover, the impending disaster will have a personal dimension: “And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (39:7). Hezekiah’s response? “The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,” he replies (39:8a). A superficial initial glance might lead the reader to think that Hezekiah wants nothing more than the will of God, even if that will spells judgment. But the last line of verse 8 betrays the utterly selfish heart of this spent king. The reason Hezekiah can sound so sanguine about the terrible justice hanging over him and his dynasty is that he thinks, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime” (39:8b).

Contrast the response of David to the threat of judgment. In the wake of the adultery and murder he committed, David is told not only of the judgment that will befall the nation, but of the death of his son born to Bathsheba. David repents of his sin, and Nathan the prophet declares, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die” (2 Sam 12:13–14). For the next week, as the child fights for his life, David clothes himself in dust and ashes, and refuses to eat. When the infant finally dies, David’s attendants are hesitant to tell their master: “While the child was still living, he [David] wouldn’t listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate” (2 Sam 12:18). But the tragic news is soon made clear, whereupon David washes himself, puts on clean clothes and lotions, worships the LORD, and then sits down to a good meal. David’s attendants make no sense of this: “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!” (2 Sam 12:21). It is in his reply that David shows himself to be so different from Hezekiah. David tells, his attendants, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam 12:22–23).

David hears the pronouncement of God’s judgment and knows it is deserved, but he also recognizes that God is more than raw will. God interacts with his people, and he is very merciful: despite the divine decree, perhaps the child will be spared. Hezekiah too recognizes the will of God, and he too knows that the pronounced judgment is deserved, but his affirmations of God’s will are blindingly selfish. He offers no intercession for the people over whom he rules. Even when he is told that some of his own descendants will be castrated in the wretchedness of war, he remains unmoved. “The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,” he tells the prophet Isaiah—not because he throws himself on the mercy of God, but because the judgments that God has ordained are scheduled to hit after Hezekiah is dead: “There will be peace and security in my lifetime” (39:8). This king who could face down Sennacherib now cares for no one, not even his children and grandchildren, more than he cares for himself. It was once said of this king, “Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook” (2 Kgs 18:5–7). But Hezekiah ends up with no horizon larger than his own comforts. There is a poignancy in this narrative that is immeasurably sad.

*Third*, Hezekiah serves as a tangible demonstration of one of the great themes of Isaiah 40–66. In some ways, this sad chapter, Isaiah 39, announces one of the drumming themes of the rest of this prophecy. In the rest of his book, the prophet keeps flipping back and forth between a focus on spiritual vitality and a focus on catastrophic condemnation. God is immeasurably merciful; Israel is immeasurably unfaithful (Isa 43:14–28). Israel is chosen by God; Israel cherishes worthless idols (Isa 44), and pursues iniquity and injustice (Isa 59). Jerusalem will be restored (Isa 44:24–28; 51:1–16; 54) and Israel will be freed (Isa 48:12–15; 49:8–21), but with salvation comes judgment (Isa 65). Even in the closing two chapters, there is both judgment and hope: new heavens and a new earth, along with ghastly failure and death.

Whether in the profile of one individual leader or in the profile of the covenant people of God, we are called to press on—to emulate the examples of courageous faith and to grieve bitterly over the examples of blistering selfishness. The voice of the exalted Master still says, “Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (Rev 2:10).



STRANGE TIMES

# A Late Review of a Late Sonata in Late Modernity

— Daniel Strange —

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I know, I know. From this Brit, you might have been hoping for some incisive theological analysis and comment on the cultural phenomenon that has been the reaction to the death of Queen Elizabeth II including that ‘one last magnificent porous day’<sup>1</sup> of her funeral. But so much has already been said and more eloquently than I ever could. I would like to do a review, somewhat belatedly, of another event that took place on a much less grand scale. No pomp, no circumstance.

On the fourteenth of March 2020, I made the journey from my home in North London over the river Thames to St Luke’s Church Battersea to attend what was probably one of the very last musical events in the UK before we starting shutting stuff down: the pianist Steven Osborne playing the triptych that are Beethoven’s last three piano sonatas—Op. 109, 110 and 111—in a series of events to mark the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the composer’s birth. I’ve had a fascination (bordering on obsession) with these late sonatas for many years, listening to, and owning, a multitude of interpretations. Osborne’s 2016 recording of these works on the Hyperion label has been critically acclaimed, and so the chance to hear him live was a real treat.

Of course, back then none of us knew the practice, let alone the term ‘social distancing’, and yet as I arrived, the atmosphere was a little awkward as we squashed in cheek by jowl along hard wooden pews. Rumours of COVID (and maybe the virus itself!) were swirling around. As a result, more than once I witnessed old friends meeting and chuckling nervously at the novelty of elbow bumping only *after* they’d realised they shouldn’t have shaken hands. Should the recital be going ahead? Should we be attending, especially given the average age of the couple of hundred attending must have been well over fifty? Was I imagining it, or was that a tickle at the back of my throat? As the recital was about to start, and the lights dimmed, Osborne walked onto the stage to make an announcement. There would be no encores that evening, but this was nothing to do with a COVID restriction. Osborne never plays encores for this particular programme. After these three sonatas he has no more to give, and there nothing more to say.

And so began over an hour of transcendental music played transcendently. It would be a mistake to think that the value of an experience like this is about distraction or diversion. These occasions are not about escapism from the mundanities of real life and its frustrations and fears. Rather, music like this is

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<sup>1</sup> Steve McAlpine, ‘One Last Magnificent Porous Day’, *TGC Australia*, 20 September 2022, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/one-last-magnificent-porous-day/>.

a deep-dive into reality in all its ambiguity and mystery, an ever-moving narrative of tension and release, consonance and dissonance, comic and tragic, form and freedom. Of leaving, and yes, of homecoming. In these sonatas we encounter restless Beethoven, resigned Beethoven, resolved Beethoven. I know it sounds trite to say, but this music manages to contain and combine both the earthy and the heavenly.

Just recall the Op. 110, on balance my favourite of these last sonatas. The serene singing opening is followed by the almost bizarre Allegro which plays with two popular folk tunes of the day, 'Our cat has had kittens' and 'I am down and out'. Then a drastic change of mood, an *Adagio* with a strange repeated right-hand hammering on the 'A' key which to my mind at least suggests someone banging their head against the wall in frustration. At this point in the recital I was worried that Osborne was going to break both the key and his finger. Then a plunge into pitch back and crushing despair of the *Arioso dolente* (lamenting song) followed by the *Fuga* which starts in a determined manner before stuttering and collapsing back into the darkness. It's marked '*ermattet*' (exhausted), and the broken melody is undoubtedly the sound of sobbing. And then, the clock strikes ten and seemingly *ex nihilo*, the rebirth of the inverted fugue which starts so quietly but gradually grows and grows gaining ever more momentum as it comes back to life, going higher and higher in register, and ending in a chorale and a pealing climax of triumphant arpeggios, 'a theme that leaps out of its own chasm of counterpoint, and when finally freed rings with a kind of joy which should be impossible after the arioso but somehow isn't.'<sup>2</sup> Osborne finished here with such a flourish that I thought he was about to take off in flight. Spine-tingling, tummy-wobbling moments. In the gloaming we tumbled out of that church on that fourteenth of March not knowing what was about to happen to our lives, but knowing we were not just existing but alive.

I love this music, but I'm no musicologist and only a *very* average trumpet player. Therefore, I was delighted a few years ago to discover that András Schiff's celebrated Beethoven cycle of all thirty-two sonatas at the Wigmore Hall in London (and performed over a period between 2004 and 2006), had been preceded by the pianist's series of eight lecture recitals covering every sonata. These lectures are freely available and a must listen, at once engaging, erudite, and humorous—not bad for a man who says he's not very good with words, and for whom English is probably his fourth language.<sup>3</sup> I return to these lectures frequently.

In his final lecture covering those last three sonatas (composed sometime between 1820 and 1822), Schiff is at pains for us to recognise the psychological, existential and metaphysical weight of these later works—'this is no longer piano music.' Although each of these sonatas has its own opus numbers (signifying their significance), they were written simultaneously, and also at the same time as the *Missa Solemnis*, Beethoven's version of the Mass. Back to the Op. 110 sonata I've already described above, Schiff is confident that the crushing despair of the *Arioso dolente* (lamenting song) is confessional as Beethoven articulates the severe struggles he was facing in terms of his personal relationships, his deafness, and in particular a grave physical illness afflicting him. Conversely the triumphant end of the fugue is Beethoven overcoming this near-death experience.

However, there is another layer of association to be acknowledged. Although these piano sonatas are purely instrumental pieces with no text, Schiff notes that religious feeling is omnipresent and must

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<sup>2</sup> A comment made by Ashish Xiangyi Kumar in his analysis of the sonata. See 'Beethoven: Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110', *Youtube*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3S8slvoHoU>.

<sup>3</sup> 'András Schiff Beethoven Lecture-Recitals', *Wigmore Hall*, <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/podcasts/andras-schiff-beethoven-lecture-recitals>.

be recognised. The theme of the *Ariosa dolente* is a straight quotation from an aria in Bach's St John Passion with the words of Jesus on the cross—'Es ist vollbracht' ('it is finished'). Schiff notes that if the *Ariosa* is the *Agnus Dei*, then the fugue is the *Dona nobis pacem*. In my view, yes, it's about Beethoven own suffering and eventual healing, but it's also a picture of the despair of stasis and death, and then miraculously the bursting triumph and momentum of resurrection. As Schiff notes rather drolly, having given a number of other religious allusions in these sonatas, 'Not really the music of an atheist. So as a listener you are welcome to have whatever belief or a lack of belief, but I think as a performer and or even as a listener of Beethoven, we need to try and get on his wavelength.'

Discerning Beethoven's own 'spirituality' and religious convictions remains a puzzle which has led to much scholarly speculation.<sup>4</sup> There certainly appears to be an unorthodox anti-clericalism in his own practice, or rather, non-practice, which means some claim him as a deist in the fashion of Enlightenment humanistic freedom fighter, even though his background and environment were deeply religious and some of his closest friends were orthodox, devout Catholics.<sup>5</sup> The contemporary Catholic composer Sir James MacMillan makes a good case arguing for Beethoven's Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> What we do know, and the picture of the man caricatured in popular imagination, is that of the shaking fist of struggle—a struggle with life, a struggle with people, and a struggle with God. As Beethoven wrote to his confidant Karl Amend, "This Beethoven is living a most unfortunate life in conflict with nature and the Creator. Many times I cursed the latter for exposing his creatures with the smallest accident, so that in this way often the most beautiful blossom is broken and annihilated."<sup>7</sup> Commenting on this quotation, and presumably referring to Beethoven's deafness, J. H. Bavinck notes, 'Sometimes one hears in his sonatas the powerful, irascible resistance to the fate that had befallen him precisely in that part of his being to which he was most sensitive.'<sup>8</sup>

Having recognised this fight however, it's worth returning to András Schiff's lectures and his closing comments on the final bars of the final sonata, Op. 111, the *Arietta*, a movement famously philosophically rhapsodized by Thomas Mann in his novel *Dr Faustus*. As Schiff's left hand moves down the keyboard and the right hand moves up so we hear the extremities of the keyboard, Schiff notes that time almost stops as Beethoven considers our place as human beings between the grounds and the heavens. And as we then move from the faraway land back towards a homecoming and resolution, Schiff concludes,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (New York: Random House, 1960); Maynard Solomon, 'Intimation of the Sacred', in *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*, ed. Maynard Solomon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 198–212; Lewis Lockwood, 'The End of the Beginning', in *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*, ed. Maynard Solomon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 14–23.

<sup>5</sup> One thinks of Beethoven's greatest patron, friend and dedicatee of some of Beethoven's greatest works, the Archduke Rudolph of Austria who became Archbishop of Olmütz in 1820.

<sup>6</sup> Listen to James MacMillan's conversation with the journalist Damian Thompson about 'Beethoven's Spirituality', *The Spectator*, 17 December 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/podcast/beethoven-s-spirituality-a-conversation-with-sir-james-macmillan>.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Heim, *Glaube und Leben: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Furche, 1928), 421, quoted in John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul Visser, ed., *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 198.

<sup>8</sup> Bolt, Bratt, and Visser, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, 198.



And indeed this wonderful thanksgiving returns in all majesty and all simplicity, and we can feel gratitude. If there are two words it's 'gratitude' and 'forgiving'—that's what I feel when I listen to this music or when I have the privilege to play it. Because of a fantastic great genius who had really suffered more than anyone and still being able to write this music and transmitting gratitude and a deep profound and wholly religious feeling. A gratitude to God for being alive and for being able to write music like this.

As a Christian disciple, theologian and one interested in cultural apologetics, I am immediately encouraged to hear Schiff gesture towards an explanation of this music in these 'religious' terms with its allusions to more explicitly Christian liturgical resources, especially given our cultural context in the West, and even given the ambiguity of Beethoven's own personal faith. In my mind it resonates with some of the themes of Jeremy Begbie's extremely insightful and stimulating recent work, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts*,<sup>9</sup> whose argument concludes with a plea and an invitation. The plea is that claims about transcendence in the arts (and he particularly focuses on the dimensions of 'otherness' and 'uncontainability'), 'make explicit and assess, the theology those claims presuppose. Every judgement we make about divine transcendence, even the outright denial of it, presupposes a belief about a deity (however inchoate) and the kind of relation that deity has (or does not have) with the finite world.'<sup>10</sup> Begbie's invitation is to enter into what he calls 'a scriptural imagination', 'palpable in Christianity's normative texts, and no less in the creedal traditions that resonate with them—we will discover a kind of transcendence that will not only recompose what we think divine transcendence to be, but also generate immense fruitfulness and explanatory power.'<sup>11</sup> I would contend that even a misshapen fruit like Beethoven still conveys this scriptural imagination and power. Begbie begins his final chapter entitled 'Redeeming Transcendence' with a quotation from Charles Taylor: 'There are certain works of art—the list is endless—whose power seems inseparable from their epiphanic, transcendent reference. Here the challenge is to the unbeliever, to find a non-theistic register in which to respond to them, without impoverishment.'<sup>12</sup> It's back to familiar cultural apologetic tropes of 'borrowed capital', and the 'air that we breathe'.

However, there is a 'sting,' or maybe better, a 'sadness' in the tail. Inspired by Schiff's lectures, I was eager to read over the summer Schiff's memoirs published in 2020, *Music Comes out of Silence*. Once again it's a fascinating and edifying read, and yet in conversation Schiff is asked if he is a religious person:

That's hard to say. In any case, I'm not an atheist—more of an agnostic. I can't say that I believe in God. I experience my religion, religion, my religiosity, through art. That to me is evidence of some higher force, of a spirit and a soul. Life after death? Who knows? You can't rule it out, and you also can't prove the contrary. I find it hard to believe that every thought that ever came into the world simply dissolves into nothing. There's a further life inherent in every note, every thought, perhaps in the cosmos. But I must stress one thing: I have a strong aversion to any kind of fundamentalism and dogmatism. The teaching of original sin is absurd. Of course, one makes mistakes in one's life, and feels

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts* (London: SCM, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts*, 184.

<sup>11</sup> Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts*, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 607.

guilt. But to live in fear of punishment—that’s appalling. One can forgive, but certain things are unforgiveable and should never be forgotten.<sup>13</sup>

Schiff, the evangelist for recognising the religious and even ‘Christian’ in Beethoven, and moreover the pianist who has done so much to champion the much more explicitly Christian work of J. S Bach, is himself an agnostic with an ill-defined, vague and distinctively un-Christian notion of transcendence.

It’s this I don’t understand. It’s this I’m frustrated by. It’s this I wrestle with and want to bang my head against a wall, because isn’t it so clear, so obvious, so simple? Just look! Just listen! Just believe! But then, of course, as I calm down, I remember that while it is obvious, in another sense it’s not, as I recognise once again *in my own life* as well in those around me, the madness of unbelief, the monumental nature of a culture’s defeaters, the mysteriousness of the Spirit’s work who blows where He will, the miracle of grace in the gift of faith, and our continuing mission to continue to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have.

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<sup>13</sup> András Schiff, *Music Comes Out of Silence: A Memoir* (London: Orion, 2021), 135.

# The Cryptic Saying of Isaiah 28:10, 13 and Paul's Controversy over Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:20–25

— Etienne Jodar —

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**Abstract:** While the study of the New Testament use of the Old Testament has received much attention in the last decades, this discipline has not generally had much bearing on translation. In this article I use Paul's use of Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 in order to shed light on the cryptic saying of Isaiah 28:10 and 13. Presupposing that Paul draws from the immediate context of Isaiah 28:11–12, I suggest that the rhetorical effect of Paul's quotation is stronger if Isaiah 28:10 (and 13) is interpreted to represent an incomprehensible sequence of syllables, like a minority of English translations do. Starting in the Old Testament, the most likely meaning of Paul's quotation in its original context is determined. The focus then turns to 1 Corinthians 14:20–25, as various views are presented and considered successively. The discussion concludes by explaining the rhetorical effect that Paul's quotation would have made upon the Corinthian believers and why the minority view of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 might be the most likely.

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How should we interpret Isaiah 28:10 and 13? Should we read, “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” as the majority view represented here by the NRSV,<sup>1</sup> or should we read an incomprehensible sequence of syllables like the minority view taken by the Message Bible: “Da, da, da, da, blah, blah, blah, blah...” (Isa 28:10, 13)?<sup>2</sup> In trying to answer this question, studying Paul's use of Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 might prove useful because the apostle usually draws from the context of his quotations, and his interpretation

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The NET Bible also understands the Hebrew as expressing only syllables, as shown by its editorial rendering: “They will hear meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there (Isa 28:10, 13). Other English versions that follow the minority view include: CJB, CEB, GW, LEB, REB. Spanish versions following the minority view include: DHH, BDT, BLP. The French NBS follows the minority view as well with, “B. a.-ba, b.a.-ba, d.a.-da, d.a.-da, un peu par-ci, un peu par-là.” More on this issue below.

of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 might therefore be inferred.<sup>3</sup>

After determining the best interpretations for both the Isaiah quotation and 1 Corinthians 14:20–25, I seek to show that Paul makes an especially strong rhetorical point if Isaiah 28:10 and 13 are intended to represent unintelligible speech, like the uninterpreted tongues-speaking of Corinth. As such, the incomprehensible-sequence-of-syllables interpretation of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 is a natural corollary for interpreters who believe Paul usually draws from the context of his quotations.<sup>4</sup>

This essay develops in several stages. First, I examine some early versions of Isaiah 28:9–13 to demonstrate that the first translators had great difficulty in understanding the Hebrew text. Then, different issues regarding the meaning of the unit Isaiah 28:7–13 are discussed in order to clarify the context in which Paul's quotation (Isa 28:11–12) occurs. The remainder of this article is dedicated to 1 Corinthians 14:20–25. After locating this passage in the context of the letter, I consider important interpretational challenges in these verses and then discuss the rhetorical effect that Paul's quotation might have created in a church that overestimated speaking in tongues.

### 1. Early Versions of Isaiah 28:9–13

While the existence of a majority view concerning the translation of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 might be taken as proof that the meaning of the underlying Hebrew text is well established, early versions imply that the *Vorlage* is not straightforward.<sup>5</sup> The following table compares the LXX, the MT, and the NRSV.

9 τίνι ἀνηγγείλαμεν κακὰ καὶ τίνι ἀνηγγείλαμεν ἀγγελίαν, οἱ ἀπογεγαλακτισμένοι ἀπὸ γάλακτος, οἱ ἀπεσπασμένοι ἀπὸ μαστοῦ;	9 אֶת־מִי יוֹרֶה דָּעָה וְאֶת־מִי יְבִין שְׁמוּעָה גְּמוּלִי מִחֶלֶב עֲתִיקִי מִשְׁדֵּיִם:	9 “Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?
10 θλιψὶν ἐπὶ θλιψὶν προσδέχου, ἐλπίδα ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρὸν	10 כִּי צֹ לְצֹ צֹ לְצֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ זַעֲרִיר שָׁם זַעֲרִיר שָׁם:	10 For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”
11 διὰ φαυλισμὸν χειλέων διὰ γλώσσης ἐτέρας, ὅτι λαλήσουσιν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ	11 כִּי בִלְעָגִי שִׁפָּה וּבִלְשׁוֹן אֲחֵרֶת יְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם הַזֶּה:	11 Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people,
12 λέγοντες αὐτῷ Τοῦτο τὸ ἀνάπαυμα τῷ πεινῶντι καὶ τοῦτο τὸ σύντριμμα, καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ἀκοῦειν.	12 אֲשֶׁר   אָמַר אֲלֵיהֶם זֹאת הַמְנוּחָה הַנִּיחוּ לַעֲיֹף זֹאת הַמְרִגָּעָה וְלֹא אָבּוּא שְׁמוּעָה:	12 to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; yet they would not hear.

<sup>3</sup> That NT authors generally respect the OT contexts of their quotations is contended by several scholars. A non-exhaustive list of them is found in G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 4 n. 9, 5 n. 14, and 7 n. 18.

<sup>4</sup> This is, to be sure, assuming that Paul is more authoritative than other interpreters.

<sup>5</sup> It is well possible that no single *Vorlage* existed and that early versions differences (see below) come from variations in Hebrew texts. All the same, these variations in Hebrew texts reveal a difficulty in the interpretation of their own source for Isaiah 28:9–13 (see discussion hereafter).

<p>13 καὶ ἔσται αὐτοῖς τὸ λόγιον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ θλιψὶς ἐπὶ θλιψὶν, ἐλπίς ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρόν, ἵνα πορευθῶσιν καὶ πέσωσιν εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ κινδυνεύουσιν καὶ συντριβήσονται καὶ ἀλώσονται.</p>	<p>13 וְהָיָה לָהֶם דְּבַר־יְהוָה צֶוּ לְצֹו צֹו לְצֹו קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ זַעִיר שָׁם זַעִיר שָׁם לְמַעַן יֵלְכוּ וּכְשָׁלוּ אַחֹר וְנִשְׁבְּרוּ וְנוֹקְשׁוּ וְנִלְכְּדוּ: פ</p>	<p>13 Therefore the word of the LORD will be to them, “Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little;” in order that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.</p>
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In addition to a difference of speaker in Isaiah 28:11,<sup>6</sup> the main challenge of this passage is the cryptic line of Isaiah 28:10 and 13: צֹו לְצֹו צֹו לְצֹו קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ זַעִיר שָׁם זַעִיר שָׁם.<sup>7</sup> Should we read, “Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” like most versions, or should we read, “Be expecting affliction upon affliction, hope upon hope, yet a little, yet a little” (θλιψὶν ἐπὶ θλιψὶν προσδέχου, ἐλπίδα ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρόν) as the LXX? The apparent consensus of English versions should not be taken as proof that the issue is settled. The rendering of the LXX is witness of the difficulty of taking these verses as meaning “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”<sup>8</sup>

That the common rendering is not altogether obvious is also supported by the lack of consensus of other early texts. The Peshitta translates the cryptic saying, “Filth upon filth, filth upon filth; vomit upon vomit, vomit upon vomit, a little here, a little there,” thus departing entirely from both the LXX and the MT.<sup>9</sup> The Qumran text of Isaiah (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) replaces each ו (waw) with י (yod), which for Grudem

<sup>6</sup> The LXX puts the words of Isaiah 28:11 in the mouth of the future invaders—presumably, the Assyrians—rather than in the mouth of God (MT). The verb “to speak” varies in person and number; the MT has יְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם הַזֶּה (“he will speak to this people”) while the LXX has λαλήσουσιν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ (“they will speak to this people”). Consequently, while the MT emphasizes the guilt of Israel, “the Septuagint pictures these verses as an example of Israel’s valiant endurance against the Assyrians’ accusations” (Michael P. Theophilos and A. M. Smith, “The Use of Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21,” in *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, ed. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 121 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013], 60). Because Isaiah 28:7–13 announces an incoming judgment upon Israel, the LXX reading that apparently construes judgment as coming upon the invader rather than Israel has less contextual grounding than the MT and thus seems inferior. Interestingly, for the Isaiah Targum the speaker is neither God (MT) nor the future invaders (LXX), but the people of Israel who did not listen to the prophets God sent (Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum, Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes*, ArBib [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987], 55).

<sup>7</sup> There are other differences between the MT and the LXX. Isaiah 28:9a, for example, has יוֹרֶה (he will teach) in the MT and ἀνηγγείλαμεν (we announced) in the LXX.

<sup>8</sup> As mentioned above (note 5), the possibility that there was no standard version of scriptural texts and therefore that variations come from different sources is irrelevant to the point made here. In any case, the differences in the sources reveal a difficulty in interpreting the one original Isaianic source.

<sup>9</sup> Here the Peshitta probably follows the Greek translation of Theodotion (AD 150), which reads, δεισαλία εἰς δεισαλία ... ἐμετὸς εἰς ἐματόν (“filth upon filth... vomit upon vomit”) (Frederick Field, *Origensis Hexaplorum, Tomus II* [Reinheim: Druckerei, 1964], 479–80).

indicates that “the scribe apparently had no idea what the phrase meant.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Isaiah Targum is marked by more than usual paraphrasing. The hard line of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 reads, “They were commanded to perform the law, and what they were commanded they did not wish to do ... they went in their own pleasure and did not desire to perform my pleasure ... my sanctuary was as little in their eyes, to serve there; my Shekinah was as little in their eyes to serve there.”<sup>11</sup> The interspersed explanations (not included here due to space limitation), as well as the interpretive expansions of the cryptic line show that this line needed to be interpreted to make sense. In any case, the Isaiah Targum is far from the traditional English rendering “precept upon precept ... line upon line.”

## 2. *The Meaning of the Unit: Isaiah 28:7–13*

A common view is that Isaiah 28:7–13 represents an exchange between the drunk religious leaders of Israel and the prophet Isaiah.<sup>12</sup> Following this view, the words of verse 9 are put into the mouth of the drunk leaders who would be saying, “Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?” Under this view the leaders of Israel are mocking sarcastically Isaiah as if he were teaching them basic obedience (“precept upon precept...line upon line,” 28:10). There is, however, no clear indication in the text that verse 9 records the scoffing of the religious leaders of Israel.<sup>13</sup> Although as a prophet Isaiah would surely urge the people to obey God’s commands, maintaining that the leaders of Israel respond to his exhortations in a scoffing and boiled-down imitation “precept upon precept ... line upon line” is quite subjective. In fact, the context seems to plead against this possibility. The hard saying (commonly translated “precept upon precept...”) is indeed repeated in Isaiah 28:13, and there, it is placed in the mouth of the foreign invaders—not the leaders of Israel. Coherence demands that if we take the hard line as being an imitation of Isaiah’s call to obedience in Isaiah 28:10 (with the translation, “precept upon precept...”), then the foreign invaders are prophesied to imitate Isaiah’s call to obedience *to* the drunk leaders of Israel in Isaiah 28:13. This fanciful yet necessary corollary shows that this interpretation is unlikely.

Another interpretation is that the words of verse 9 come from Isaiah. In this case, verse 9 would record a rhetorical question that the prophet asks: “Whom will [God] teach knowledge...?” This is the view that the NET Bible made clear with its rendering, “Who is the LORD trying to teach? To whom is he explaining a message?” Such a rhetorical question makes good sense given the intoxicated state of the leaders of Israel (Isa 28:1, 3, 7–8). By asking this question Isaiah would be drawing the attention to the pitiful state of the leaders who could literally be compared to babes (28:9).

<sup>10</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, “1 Corinthians 14:20–25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God’s Attitude,” *WTJ* 41 (1979): 384.

<sup>11</sup> Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 206–7; Paul R. House, *Isaiah*, Mentor (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 2:34–36; Alec J. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 209; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 509–13; and J. P. M. Sweet, “A Sign for Unbelievers: Paul’s Attitude to Glossolalia,” *NTS* 13 (1967): 242.

<sup>13</sup> That the leaders are called “scoffers” in Isaiah 28:14, 22 does not indicate that Isaiah 28:9 records their scoffing.



Concerning Isaiah 28:10, 13 (צוֹ לְצוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ זְעִיר שָׁם זְעִיר שָׁם), the assumption followed by most English Bibles is that the word צוֹ is a derivative of צִוָּה and thus means “command/precept.” This assumption, however, should not remain unchallenged. The only other time this word occurs in the OT is in Hosea 5:11, where its meaning is no clearer than in Isaiah 28:10 and 13, as can be seen by comparing different versions—some have “command” (NASB), others “filth,” (ESV), “vanity” (NRSV), or “what is worthless” (HCSB).<sup>14</sup> Many versions in fact recognize the uncertainty of the meaning of this word in a footnote. Concerning קוֹ, the meaning “line” (usually “measuring line”) is attested with thirteen occurrences in the OT.<sup>15</sup> HALOT, however, remarks that in Isaiah 28:10, 13 the meaning is disputed.<sup>16</sup> Grudem adds that קוֹ “is never used to speak specifically of a standard by which men should guide their conduct.”<sup>17</sup> This is, however, the meaning this word would convey if placed beside “precept” as in the common interpretation followed by most translations. Because the common rendering does not make much sense of Isaiah 28:7–13 anyway, others have looked for a different solution.

Another possibility is that צוֹ and קוֹ are unintelligible words.<sup>18</sup> In this case, Isaiah 28:10 and 13 would be a record of sounds. A strong argument for this view is the fact that the next verse (Isa 28:11) connects the cryptic sequence to “stammering lip” and “alien tongue,” something likely to be unintelligible. Under this view, God would be inflicting judgment over the religious leaders of Israel by the unintelligible speech of the foreign invader—presumably, the Assyrians—and verse 13 would give an audible representation of it. This interpretation is favored by a minority of versions, of which the NET Bible reads, “Indeed, they will hear incomprehensible gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there.”

Some have argued that צוֹ and קוֹ are old names for successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and that the cryptic line, therefore, pictures a child with his schoolmaster teaching him the basics of a language.<sup>19</sup> Under this view, God would be prophesying that the religious leaders of Israel would be, in front of their invaders, like infants who do not yet understand the words of their schoolmaster. Because this interpretation departs substantially from the rendering “precept upon precept ... line upon line,” and because the sound of the letters would constitute syllables that are not intelligible to the child, this interpretation coheres with the idea that Isaiah 28:10, 13 is basically incomprehensible.

As is now becoming clear, the rendering “precept upon precept ... line upon line” is not necessarily the best. Early versions reveal a difficulty of interpretation, lexical analysis suggests that “command” and

<sup>14</sup> The meaning is disputed in Hosea 5:11, according to HALOT 3:1009.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Kgs 7:23; 2 Kgs 21:13; Isa 28:17; 34:11, 17; 44:13; Jer 31:39; Ezek 47:3; Zech 1:16; Ps 19:5; Job 38:5; Lam 2:8; 2 Chr 4:2.

<sup>16</sup> HALOT 3:1009.

<sup>17</sup> Grudem, “Prophecy and Tongues,” 383.

<sup>18</sup> Motyer remarks that it is possible that these words are “intentionally meaningless” (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 210). Isaiah 28:10 and 28:13 “may be nothing more than a string of nonsense syllables” according to Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 240.

<sup>19</sup> William W. Hallo, “Isaiah 28:9–13 and the Ugaritic Abecedaries,” *JBL* 77 (1958): 337–38. Grudem, “Prophecy and Tongues,” 382–83, favors this view as well. Working backwards by starting with Isaiah 28:13, where the cryptic line occurs for the second time, Grudem remarks that this line is a cause of judgment. He then suggests that צוֹ לְצוֹ ... קוֹ לְקוֹ “must be a set of sounds which give no coherent meaning to the hearers” because the phrase “precept upon precept...” is not something that would have caused the people of Israel “to fall backward, be broken, snared and taken captive (cf. Is. 28:13).”

“line” might not be the meanings intended in verses 10 and 13, and this understanding does not bring clarity to Isaiah 28:7–13. On the contrary, a sequence of incomprehensible sounds makes sense in the context of drunk leaders and foreign invaders.

A resolution is now possible. Isaiah 28:7–13 announces an incoming judgment over the people of Israel and especially its religious leadership. The latter indulges in drinking to the point of tottering (28:7) and their tables are full of vomit (28:8). Seeing this scene, Isaiah asks the sarcastic and sad question: “To whom will God teach knowledge...?” (28:9). Intoxicated by wine and strong drinks the leaders’ speech is unintelligible. They sound like babes learning how to speak so that Isaiah continues his sarcasm, “To those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?” (28:9). As a punishment, God, who previously warned the leaders of Israel about what they should do—give rest to the weary (28:12)—will bring invaders whose speech will be incomprehensible to them (28:11). It will sound like the senseless babbling of drunkards (28:13), and the result for the leaders of Israel will be their doom.<sup>20</sup>

### *3. The New Testament Context of Paul's Quotation*

First Corinthians 14:20–25 is Paul’s final argument for persuading the Corinthians to desire prophecy more than tongues. In the previous two chapters (chs. 12–14), Paul expounds on the topic of spiritual gifts and on the superiority of prophecy over tongues-speaking. The main difference between these two gifts is that glossolalia, if not interpreted, is self-centered while prophecy is benevolent; if not interpreted, tongues do not benefit the other while prophecies always do because they build up believers (1 Cor 14:4). Throughout the whole letter Paul has pointed to a lack of unity, maturity, and love in the Corinthian believers that led to various problems in their assembly. Lack of maturity was causing disunion (ch. 3), and lack of love was causing some to sin against their conscience (ch. 8) or elevate tongues-speaking above prophecy (chs. 12, 14). Paul thus sees fit to include a pericope on love—commonly called the “love chapter”—in the middle of his argument on the superiority of prophecy (ch. 13). After his appeal to the heart, Paul appeals to the mind in chapter 14 so that the Corinthians would not only do what is most loving (ch. 13) but also what is most reasonable (ch. 14). It is at this final junction in the argument that Paul introduces the Isaiah 28:11–12 quotation (1 Cor 14:21). First Corinthians 14:20–25 reads,

Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. In the law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not [a sign] for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you.”

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<sup>20</sup> In other words, God punishes the leaders of Israel by returning to them their unintelligible speech. The difference is that their unintelligible speech is due to their being under the influence and the unintelligible speech of the invaders is due to the fact that they speak a foreign language.

Ἀδελφοί, μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσὶν ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσὶν τέλειοι γίνεσθε. ἐν τῷ νόμῳ γέγραπται ὅτι ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις καὶ ἐν χείλεσιν ἐτέρων λαλήσω τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως εἰσακούσονται μου, λέγει κύριος. ὥστε αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημείον εἰσὶν οὐ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις, ἡ δὲ προφητεία οὐ τοῖς ἀπίστοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν. Ἐὰν οὖν συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις, εἰσέλθωσιν δὲ ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαίνεσθε; ἐὰν δὲ πάντες προφητεύωσιν, εἰσέλθῃ δέ τις ἄπιστος ἢ ἰδιώτης, ἐλέγχεται ὑπὸ πάντων, ἀνακρίνεται ὑπὸ πάντων, τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς καρδίας αὐτοῦ φανερά γίνεται, καὶ οὕτως πεσὼν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον προσκυνήσει τῷ θεῷ ἀπαγγέλλων ὅτι ὄντως ὁ θεὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν.

Paul makes extensive use to the OT in his letter,<sup>21</sup> so the appeal to the law in 1 Corinthians 14:21 comes with no surprise.<sup>22</sup> Various parallels in the situation of Corinth and in the situation of ancient Israel might have triggered Paul to use Isaiah 28:11–12. No doubt, “weaned from milk” and “taken from breast” (Isa 28:9) are phrases that could characterize the lack of maturity of the Corinthians. As early as 1 Corinthians 3:1–2, Paul tells the Corinthians that he speaks to them as “infants,” and that they are at the “milk” level. Just before introducing the quotation of Isaiah 28:11–12, Paul in fact explicitly warns the Corinthians not to be “children” in their thinking (1 Cor 14:20). The drunkenness of the leaders of Israel (Isa 28:7) might also have come to Paul’s mind when he heard that some of the wealthy Corinthians were drunk at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:21). If the interpretation above is correct—that is, the cryptic line records unintelligible speech—then there is yet another resemblance between the two settings. The unintelligible speech of the drunkards (Isa 28:10)—auguring the unintelligible speech of the invaders (28:13)—parallels the tongues-speaking of Corinth that was unintelligible to people unacquainted with a tongue (1 Cor 14:5).<sup>23</sup> If left uninterpreted, glossolalia in Corinth was incomprehensible in the same way that the language of the Assyrians was for Israel.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. *The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:20–25*

The text of 1 Corinthians 14:20–25 contains some challenges of which the first is the wording of the quotation. Christopher Stanley once said, “Determining the precise relationship between the wording of 1 Cor 14:21 and the text of the Septuagint is one of the greatest challenges in the entire

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<sup>21</sup> In ch. 1 alone, Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 (1 Cor 1:18) and Jeremiah 9:22 (1 Cor 1:31). The high frequency of quotations continues throughout the letter.

<sup>22</sup> Although Paul seems imprecise in using the word νόμος for something that does not come from the Pentateuch but from Isaiah, we should be reminded that it was not uncommon to refer to any part of the Tanakh as the law; the word νόμος can refer to Scripture in general, as evidenced by John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; and Romans 3:19. It is also worth mentioning that by using the term “law” Paul may be wanting to englobe other passages such as Deuteronomy 28:45–49 and Jeremiah 5:13–15. This is argued quite persuasively by John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians*, SBLMS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 192–94.

<sup>23</sup> I concur with Peter Nagel (“1 Corinthians 14:21: Paul’s Reflection on Γλῶσσα,” *J ECS* 3 [2013]: 33–49), that the OT context of Paul’s quotation pleads for real languages in Corinth, not a language uniquely divine.

<sup>24</sup> Paul might also find a parallel between the context of judgment present in Isaiah 28:7–13 and the judgment implicit in the rejection of the gospel of the unbelieving visitor introduced in 1 Corinthians 14:23.

corpus of Pauline citations.”<sup>25</sup> Although in general Paul tends to follow the LXX rather than the MT, in 1 Corinthians 14:21 he sides with the MT.<sup>26</sup> His quotation, however, is not verbatim. Whereas Paul writes, “with other tongues and with lips of others” (ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις καὶ ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἑτέρων), the MT reads, “with stammering lip and with alien tongue” (בְּלִעְגִי שִׁפְהָ וּבִלְשׁוֹן אֲחֵרָת).<sup>27</sup> While it is possible that Paul had a source no longer extant or that the orality of transmission may account for his version of the Isaiah quotation, given its adequacy in addressing the Corinthian situation, it is more likely that he altered the LXX (or MT) to fit his context and make his specific point.<sup>28</sup>

The second and greater problem is the relationship between the point Paul makes based on his quotation (v. 22) and the illustrations that follow (vv. 23–25). The problem is best stated by Theophilus and Smith:

The explanation of the quote in verse 22 seems antithetical to the illustration provided in verse 23–25. The text seems to contradict itself: for in verse 22 Paul explains that tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy for believers, whereas in verse 23–25 he demonstrates both the negative effects of tongues and the positive effect of prophecy on unbelievers!<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature*, SNTSMS 74 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 197.

<sup>26</sup> So, Theophilus and Smith, “The Use of Isaiah 28:11–12,” 65; David E. Lanier, “With Stammering Lips and Another Tongue: 1 Cor 14:20–22 and Isa 28:11–12,” *CTR* 5 (1991): 268; and Grudem, “Prophecy and Tongues,” 386–87. Paul affirms that the Lord, not “they” (LXX), will speak to the people of Israel. This is made clear by the addition of λέγει κύριος at the end of the quotation in 1 Corinthians 14:21. While the LXX says, “They did not want to obey” (οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ἀκούειν), Paul specifies that God is the object by adding the pronoun μου. Also, Paul’s “with other tongues and with lips of others” (ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις καὶ ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἑτέρων) shows some distancing from the LXX which reads, “through contempt of lips through another language” (διὰ φαυλισμὸν χειλέων διὰ γλώσσης ἑτέρας).

<sup>27</sup> Paul also substitutes the third person “he will speak” (יִדְבֹּר, Isa 28:11) with “I will speak” (λαλήσω, 1 Cor 14:21).

<sup>28</sup> Thus, Anthony C. Thiselton rejects an explanation based on “the use of memory or version no longer extant” and argues that “Paul combines exegesis and application” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary On the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 1120, 1122). Similarly, David E. Garland says that “The nine differences from the LXX and the MT fit Paul’s purposes so well, however, that it seems more likely that 14:21 represents an interpretive paraphrase of the text that he adapts to this context” (*1 Corinthians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 647). For Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “More than likely it is an instance of Paul’s free use of the words of Isaiah, or less likely a quotation from memory, which is not verbatim” (*First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 520).

<sup>29</sup> Theophilus and Smith, “The Use of Isaiah 28:11–12,” 54. Similarly, for Hays, “This comment seems to stand in direct contradiction to the explanation that follows in verses 23–25, in which unbelievers are turned away by tongues and converted by prophecy” (*First Corinthians*, 239). “The main difficulties lie with v. 22 and its relationship to the illustrations drawn in vv. 23–25,” according to Karl Olav Sanders, “Prophecy—A Sign for Believers (1 Cor 14,20–25),” *Bib* 77 (1996): 1. “The assertion, that prophecy is not destined for the unbelievers, but for the believers (v. 22b) is incompatible with the example, which shows how prophets irresistibly bring unbelievers to faith (vv. 24–25),” according to Joop Smit, “Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor 14, 22,” *Bib* 75 (1994): 176.

While it is commonplace to bypass this difficulty by using much freedom in the interpretation and/or translation of 1 Corinthians 14:22,<sup>30</sup> this section will analyze Paul's argument to explain how his illustrations (14:23–25), as they are, support his point (v. 22).

As is apparent, to properly understand Paul's use of Isaiah 28:11–12 readers must ascertain the meaning of σημεῖον ("sign") in verse 22. Usually, in the NT and LXX this word denotes divine intervention or activity. Although some construe the word "sign" as conveying the idea of divine judgment, occurrences of this word in Scripture show that it is a neutral term.<sup>31</sup> It is possible that Paul uses "sign" in a negative way—that is to mean "judgment"—in 1 Corinthians 14:22a ("Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers"), because the rejection of the gospel by the unbelieving visitor (v. 23) can be construed as a judgment. However, this reading is problematic in light of verse 22b, where Paul implies that prophecy is a sign for believers.<sup>32</sup> How could Paul mean that prophecy is "judgment" for believers when he has praised prophecy during the last two chapters and encouraged the Corinthians to eagerly desire it (1 Cor 14:1, 39)?<sup>33</sup> In fact, given the different contexts in which σημεῖον is used in the Bible, Lanier's view seems best: "Perhaps the best way to view the concept of 'sign' is to take it as a neutral term connoting evidence of divine activity whether for judgment or blessing."<sup>34</sup>

Another issue in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:20–25 is the identity of the unbelievers mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:22. Who are these ἄπιστοι? Is the referent the same in verse 22 as in verses 23–25? These questions are raised by the point Paul makes in verse 22b: prophecy is not [a sign] for unbelievers but for believers (ἡ δὲ προφητεία οὐ τοῖς ἀπίστοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). This point seems to contradict the illustrations of verses 23–25. There, an unbeliever is repelled at a church meeting where everybody speaks in tongues, yet, if at a church meeting the Corinthians speak in prophecy rather than in tongues, the unbeliever gives glory to God and is won to his cause (v. 25). Consistency in construing the ἄπιστοι of verse 22 and the ἄπιστοι of Paul's hypothetical scenarios (vv.

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<sup>30</sup> Interpreters often claim that prophecy is for believers (as Paul asserts in 1 Cor 14:22) *in the sense that* it makes believers of unbelievers. Making this clear, Robert J. Gladstone adds the word "resulting" in his translation of 1 Corinthians 14:22: "Therefore tongues are a sign not *resulting* in believers but *resulting* in unbelievers; whereas prophecy [is a sign] not *resulting* in unbelievers but *resulting* in believers (italics mine)" ("Sign Language in the Assembly: How Are Tongues a Sign to the Unbeliever in 1 Cor 14:20–25?" *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 [1999]: 185. Heil follows Gladstone's translation in his study ("The Rhetorical Role," 200). Hays remarks that "perhaps we should interpret [Paul] to mean 'prophecy is not [primarily] for unbelievers but for believers'" (*First Corinthians*, 240).

<sup>31</sup> Σημεῖον can convey the idea of divine judgment but does not necessitate it. Sometimes it conveys the idea of blessing (it is both used to refer to the ten plagues of Egypt [Exod 7:9; 8:19; 10:1–2; 11:9–10] and to the birth of Immanuel [Isa 7:14]).

<sup>32</sup> Whether or not σημεῖον must be supplied in 1 Corinthians 14:22b will be discussed hereafter.

<sup>33</sup> Σημεῖον is "a sign of judgment for believers in the positive sense that it creates Christians by convincing unbelievers of their sins and bringing them to repentance," according to Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 271. It goes without saying that this understanding seems farfetched.

<sup>34</sup> Lanier, "With Stammering Lips," 273. The following interpreters concur that σημεῖον is not negative per se; they understand Paul as speaking of two kinds of sign—tongues being a sign of judgment upon unbelievers while prophecy a sign of grace upon believers: Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 720; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 601; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 683; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 650; and Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 702–3.

23–25) does not appear to make sense. In Paul’s illustration divine activity (σημεῖον) in the life of the unbeliever is seen with *prophecy*, not tongues; the “sign” seems thus to be prophecy rather than tongues. This leads to the possibility that Paul uses ἄπιστοι with no single referent in mind.<sup>35</sup> The ἄπιστοι of verse 22 are unmistakably those of the quotation of Isaiah 28:11–12 in verse 21. These are the unrepentant unbelievers of Israel who were babbling under the influence. The ἄπιστοι of verses 23–25 are not the same; they are hypothetical first century unbelievers that apparently never heard the words of God. They are visitors to a church meeting possibly after someone invited them or out of their own curiosity. This understanding explains away the apparent contradiction between Paul’s point in verse 22 and the two hypothetical scenarios he presents in verses 23–25. In his illustrations Paul would be talking about another kind of unbeliever, so the statement “prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers” (v. 22b) is not directed to the unbelievers of the city of Corinth.

Because this understanding contradicts what Paul says at a *prima facie* level, Bruce C. Johanson proposed the view that verse 22 should not be read as a proposition but as a question.<sup>36</sup> Paul would be *asking*, “Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers?”<sup>37</sup> He would be asking this rhetorical question only to refute such *misunderstanding*, which was presumably in the air in Corinth. Though an interesting possibility, the context gives no indication that Paul is asking a rhetorical question.<sup>38</sup>

Working under the assumption that glossolalia was common among pagans during the first century, Joop Smit proposed the view that Paul uses σημεῖον to mean *distinguishing* sign.<sup>39</sup> He notes that in verse 23 Paul says that if the church speaks in tongues, visitors will say “μαίνεσθε” (“you are out of your mind”). He then associates this word with mystery rites among pagans and suggests that tongues are not a sign for Christian believers *because* it does not identify them as such.<sup>40</sup> In other words, if the Corinthians speak in tongues, visitors will recognize the μανία of pagan religions, not the God of Israel.<sup>41</sup> Because

<sup>35</sup> So, Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 276.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce C. Johanson, “Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers: A Structural and Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 14:20–25,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 180–203. Quite surprisingly, Leon Morris favors this view (*1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 7 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 189).

<sup>37</sup> A similar construction appears in Galatians 4:16 where Paul clearly asks a question (ὥστε ἐχθρὸς ὑμῶν γέγονα ἀληθεύων ὑμῖν;)

<sup>38</sup> When Paul asks a rhetorical question—for example in Romans 6:1 with the question, “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?”—his words *could* lead someone to a wrong conclusion (that we should continue in sin). In 1 Corinthians 12–14, however, nothing in what Paul says would appear to lead someone to the conclusion reflected in Paul’s hypothetical question. Why would the Corinthians have believed that tongues are a sign for unbelievers and not for believers? Chapters 12–14 instead show that the Corinthians overemphasized tongues in the life of believers. For Smit (“Tongues and Prophecy,” 177), the conjunction οὖν in v. 23 constitutes the main difficulty of Johanson’s view. For Florian Wilk, “Since 1 Cor 14:23–25 and 14:22 are connected by the conjunction οὖν, 14:22 cannot be read as a rhetorical question.” (Wilk, “Isaiah in 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken [London: T&T Clark, 2005] 141 n. 41).

<sup>39</sup> Smit, “Tongues and Prophecy,” 175–90.

<sup>40</sup> Ciampa and Rosner (*The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 704–5) say that μαίνομαι was a word sometimes used in the context of religious experience to refer to a divinely induced altered mental state, such as was associated with Bacchic possession and inspiration.”

<sup>41</sup> Smit, “Tongues and Prophecy,” 185–89. This is, in substance, also the view of Stephen J. Chester, “Divine Madness? Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:23,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 417–46. The difference between the



μαίνομαι can be used to describe pagan ecstatic speech but does not have to,<sup>42</sup> and because Smit's view is based on a particular interpretation of σημεῖον, other views should be considered.<sup>43</sup>

While most commentators agree that "sign" must be supplied in the second line of verse 22 ("And the prophecy not for unbelievers, but for believers" [author's translation]),<sup>44</sup> Theophilus and Smith suggest that σημεῖον should not be supplied.<sup>45</sup> They argue that Paul's omission of the word σημεῖον is actually the key to make sense of his argument. They construe tongues as a sign of judgment upon unbelievers, but prophecy not as a sign at all, only an activity for believers to participate in. Paul then proves the truth of what he says by his illustrations. The fact that prophecy is for believers (not a *sign* for believers) is seen in the conversion of unbelievers who visit the church when the church is prophesying. Not supplying σημεῖον, however, is problematic to the thought structure of Paul's argument. The repetition of words (οὐ ... ἀλλά, πιστεύουσιν, ἀπίστοις) indicates a parallelism that breaks if the idea of "sign" is missing in the second line of verse 22.<sup>46</sup> Grudem rightly remarks, "It is necessary to import some idea into the second half of the verse on any reading, but the most natural one, and the one which provides the most clear contrast, is the idea of 'sign' which lies so close at hand in the first half of the verse."<sup>47</sup>

While Theophilus and Smith's view depends on an unnatural reading of the Greek text, it rightly emphasizes that the focus of Paul's illustration is not on visitors but on the Corinthian church members. This is the key that makes sense of Paul's argument. There is no need to see a contradiction when an unbelieving visitor gets saved upon the hearing of prophecy (v. 25)—although prophecy is a sign for believers, not for unbelievers (v. 22)—because *the focus is not on the unbelieving visitor but on the Corinthians*. Paul is continuing to exhort the Corinthians to prefer prophecy over tongues, so the argument revolves around them. The illustrations of verses 23–25 simply serve to make the point that God's activity (σημεῖον) will be seen among the Corinthians when they prophesy, not when they speak in tongues.<sup>48</sup> Visitors will not recognize God's activity among the Corinthians if they all speak in tongues; on the contrary, they will say "you are out of your mind" (v. 23). But if all speak prophecy, God's activity

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two is that whereas for Smit "μαίνεσθε" (v. 23) represent the negative response of the unbelievers, for Chester it represents their positive reaction. For Chester, "the verb μαίνεσθε would best be translated not as 'You are mad,' but as 'You are inspired'" ("Divine Madness?," 430). Although this understanding naturally removes the apparent incoherence between Paul's point (v. 22) and the two illustrations (v. 23–25), the interpretation hereafter seems preferable.

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere in the NT it does not describe ecstatic speech (John 10:20; Acts 12:15; 26:24–25).

<sup>43</sup> An additional difficulty for many interpreters is that Smit's view does not take into account the meaning of the quotation in its original context. Paul, however, seems to connect the idea of tongues being a sign (v. 22) with the quotation of verse 21 because verse 22 starts with the inferential conjunction ὥστε.

<sup>44</sup> So, Lanier, "With Stammering Lips," 274; Sanders, "Prophecy—A Sign for Believers," 10; Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 241; Grudem, "Prophecy and Tongues," 389; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 521; and Heil, "The Rhetorical Role," 200 n. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Theophilus and Smith, "The Use of Isaiah 28:11–12," 67–68.

<sup>46</sup> Paul can use an ellipsis when confusion of referents is improbable (i.e., the omission of στέφανος in 1 Cor 9:25).

<sup>47</sup> Grudem, "Prophecy and Tongues," 389.

<sup>48</sup> For David S. Robinson, that the focus is on the Corinthian believers is supported by Paul's allusion to Isaiah 45:14 (in 1 Cor 14:25) where outsiders give a sign of recognition to the people of God that God is among them ("By the Lips of Foreigners': Disclosing the Church in 1 Corinthians 14:20–25," *Ecclesiology* 14 [2018]: 306–21).

and presence will be visible in the church through the effect that prophecy has on unbelievers.<sup>49</sup> Visitors will not only bow down but also recognize that God is at work within them; they will say, “God is really among you” (v. 25).

This interpretation is consistent with the flexible meaning of σημεῖον, which connotes evidence of divine activity (whether for good or bad), and it also fits well in the context of chapters 12–14. Paul has been arguing that prophecy is better than tongues unless tongues are interpreted (1 Cor 14:5), and with the quotation of Isaiah 28:11–12 he gives a final proof: prophecy—not tongues—is the hallmark of God’s activity, for which the Corinthians were eager (1 Cor 14:12).

### 5. The Hermeneutical Use of Isaiah’s Quotation

Can we speak about typology in Paul’s use of Isaiah 28:11–12? Are the drunkards of Israel and their babbling a type of the Corinthian believers and their speaking in tongues? While answering this question is left to further study, there is surely a strong analogy between the two situations that Paul exploits to create powerful rhetorical effects.<sup>50</sup>

The first effect of the quotation is straightforward: it proves that tongues-speaking per se should be devalued by the Corinthians when they worship together as an assembly.<sup>51</sup> Unless interpreted, tongues are of no profit, even for evangelism. Just as the unbelievers of Israel would not be led to repentance by hearing the language of the invaders—God said, “They will not hear” (Isa 28:12)<sup>52</sup>—so tongues, unless interpreted, would not achieve anything in Corinth.

Through his quotation, Paul also implicitly adds strength to his exhortation to speak less in tongues and favor prophecy instead. Since in Isaiah the babbling came from the intoxicated religious leaders, Paul indirectly compares the Corinthians’ unregulated speaking in tongues to the scene of drunkards babbling under the influence. We can almost hear him say, “Stop this charismatic madness, you sound like drunkards!”<sup>53</sup>

Finally, through the quotation, Paul implicitly rebukes the Corinthians for their lack of love. The Corinthians are being unloving not only towards their brothers/sisters in Christ, but also towards outsiders because they do not transmit to them a clear message from God. Instead, they speak to them in unintelligible speech, thus reinforcing their alienation from God. While this was appropriate for

<sup>49</sup> So, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 683; Sweet, “A Sign for Unbelievers,” 242.

<sup>50</sup> The question of a typology depends on one’s definition of a type. If one follows Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 19, because there is no sense of fulfillment between the two situations there is no typology here.

<sup>51</sup> So, Heil, “The Rhetorical Role,” 200, 203.

<sup>52</sup> Although most English versions translate the qal perfect of אָבַר in Isaiah 28:12b as frequentative (“They would not hear”), the future (“They will not hear”) is probably the best option—Paul clearly reads the future in 1 Corinthians 14:21 when he says, “Even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord,” (ESV). Under this reading, the words, “To whom he has said, ‘This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose’” (Isaiah 28:12a) are a parenthetical comment and “they will not hear” (Isa 28:12b) refers back to Isaiah 28:11 which speaks about God’s words uttered through the foreign tongue of the invader.

<sup>53</sup> It would not be the first time that the speech of drunkards and the speech of tongues’ speakers is brought close in human experience. Acts 2:13 records that some were mocking the disciples’ speaking in tongues and saying that they were drunk.

the unrepentant unbelievers of Israel, it is not for the unbelievers of Corinth. The latter have not been rejecting God as the former had; they are not under a curse like the religious leaders were. By speaking to them in tongues, however, the Corinthian believers execute judgment on them—like the Assyrian invaders of Isaiah 28:13.

Can the modern interpreter “use” Paul’s use of Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 to discern the most likely interpretation of Isaiah 28:10 and 13? Yes, provided we presuppose that Paul draws from the context of Isaiah 28:11–12 as much as can give a satisfactory explanation for his use in 1 Corinthians. As I have highlighted in this study, if Paul draws from the immediate context of his quotation, the incomprehensible-sequence-of-syllables interpretation of Isaiah 28:10 and 13 is much more likely than the majority interpretation followed by most English versions (“precept upon precept...line upon line...”). While a relationship between the Corinthians’ speaking in tongues and the “precept upon precept...” interpretation awaits a demonstration, the Corinthians’ speaking in tongues resonates both with the Assyrian foreign tongue (Isa 28:13) and the unintelligible speech of the drunkards of Israel (Isa 28:10).

## *6. Conclusion*

In this article I have argued that Paul’s appeal to Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is even more appropriate if Isaiah 28:10 and 13 is construed as an audible representation of unintelligible speech. Not only the lack of maturity and drunkenness of some Corinthian believers but also their speaking in unintelligible tongues correspond with the Isaianic context. While degrees of correspondence between contexts is not something that is generally used in adjudicating between interpretations, because Paul elsewhere takes into consideration the near context of his quotations, the greater degree of correspondence of the minority view of Isaiah 28:10, 13 might tip the scales of Bible translators towards what is still today a minority rendering of the Hebrew text.

Besides having a direct impact on translation, the study of Paul’s use of Isaiah 28:11–12 also sheds light on the much-debated question of the nature of tongues in the Corinthian church and whether it consists of real human languages or “angelic” ones. If it is true that for Paul the tongue-speaking of Corinth echoes the Isaianic context, then it seems more likely that the tongue-speaking of Corinth was speaking real languages (like in Acts 2). Neither the drunken religious leader of Israel nor the foreign Assyrian invaders spoke an angelic language. Both spoke real languages yet unintelligible in both cases.

Finally, lest we become so focused on the brushstrokes that we miss the big picture, let us not forget Paul’s point: the hallmark of God’s activity is prophecy, not tongues. It is when Christians proclaim the words of God that unbelievers have an encounter with God. It is not sensationalism but enlightened forth-telling of God’s truth that saves people. To our modern church context this implies that we cannot look for something more efficient than preaching to bring people to God. No program, event, or activity will ever beat the faithful exposition of God’s word in evangelism. Let us not make the same error as the Corinthians who failed to understand that God meets people in the intelligible proclamation of his word, not in the show.

# Numerical Symbolism in the Book of Revelation: A Weakness of Modern Bible Versions

— Michael Kuykendall —

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**Abstract:** Several modern Bible versions do a disservice to John’s use of numbers in the book of Revelation. This article first offers a short primer on symbolism in Revelation, then overviews the book’s symbolic use of numbers. John utilizes “good” numbers and “bad” numbers to express theological truths. The bulk of the study examines how several modern versions unwittingly thwart John’s theological intentions by masking his numerical symbolism. This is evidenced in two ways—changing (updating) the actual symbolic number when measurements and distances are mentioned; and rendering key terms in Revelation found exactly seven times with different English words, which obscures significant numerical interconnections. The conclusion asserts that future modern versions and revisions of existing translations must treat Revelation differently on this issue.

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Several modern Bible versions do a disservice to John’s use of numbers in the book of Revelation. Three topics are addressed in this article. First, a short primer on symbolism in the book of Revelation is offered. Second, the symbolism of numbers in Revelation is likewise briefly overviewed. Third, the bulk of this study is a survey of how several modern versions unwittingly thwart John’s theological intentions by masking his numerical symbolism.

## *1. Symbolism in the Book of Revelation*

The book of Revelation is saturated with symbols and images. Although the genres of prophecy and epistle are present in Revelation, the genre of apocalypse is found the most. Apocalyptic literature such as Revelation was popular in John’s era, and its guidelines for interpretation must be followed by modern readers. Apocalypses included several characteristics such as multiple visions, dualistic outlook, recapitulated structure, deterministic outlook, tribulation, and especially symbolism. In order to describe the indescribable scenes revealed, John opted to use apocalyptic imagery. Such language

is filled with bizarre images and symbols.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, John's symbols can be placed into identifiable categories—heavenly beings, demonic beings, people, names, objects, places, animals, time elements, institutions, colors, and numbers.<sup>2</sup>

### *2. Numerical Symbolism in the Book of Revelation*

Utilizing a dualistic cosmology, John presents good supernatural beings and bad supernatural beings, good people and bad people, good places and bad places, good things and bad things, and so forth. Numerical symbolism, therefore, is one symbolic element within John's cosmological repertoire. Like other symbols, there are “good” numbers and “bad” numbers.<sup>3</sup>

#### **2.1. Good Numbers**

The following numbers are “good” because they are most often connected with God and his people: two, four, seven, ten, and twelve.

##### *2.1.1. Two*

The number “two” (δύο) symbolizes completeness and is often connected to a valid testimony and effectual witness (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 18:16; John 8:17; Heb 10:28). Thus, the two witnesses of Revelation represent the church, particularly its distinguishing characteristic as witnesses for Christ despite persecution and death (11:3–13).<sup>4</sup>

##### *2.1.2. Four*

“Four” (τέσσαρες) signifies full and total coverage, most often in view of God's creation, the surface of the earth, and universality (Exod 25–39; Isa 58; Amos 1–2). Thus, the “four corners of the earth” (7:1; 20:8) refers to the whole earth. The fourfold phrase “every tribe and language and people and nation” (in differing order) symbolizes everyone on earth without exception, and is further accentuated by being listed seven times.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous resources are available that describe the apocalyptic genre found in Revelation, including Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–22; Mitchell G. Reddish, “The Genre of the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 21–36; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 17–29.

<sup>2</sup> A study of 300 symbolic images in the book of Revelation is found in Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> A fuller discussion of Revelation's use of numbers is found in Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 273–99; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 28–32; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1922), cxxxv–cxxxix.

<sup>4</sup> James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, BibInt 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 48–49; Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 97–101.

<sup>5</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 307–8. For intertestamental examples see G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 59.

### 2.1.3. Seven

This number connotes completeness, fullness, totality, and perfection. “Seven” (ἑπτά), with its multiples, is found throughout the ancient Near East as a sacred number. Its symbolism is traceable throughout Scripture, from the seven days of creation (Gen 4:15) to the sevenfold voice of God (Ps 29) to the sevenfold wrath of God (Ps 79:12) to the seven eyes of God (Zech 4:10). The number appears 739 times in the OT, sixty-six times in the Apocrypha, and 108 times in the NT. Eugene Boring cautions, “Not all these have a particularly sacred or symbolic meaning, of course, though the majority have at least this tone.”<sup>6</sup> John’s encompassing use of this number (63% of all NT uses are in Revelation) emphasizes theological truths and underscores the intricate structuring of his Apocalypse—seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and so forth.

### 2.1.4. Ten

This number (and its multiples) emphasizes indefiniteness, magnitude, and completeness, often from the point of view of time and humanity, especially with satanic influence and activity in mind. Long ago, Isbon Beckwith related that “ten” (δέκα) is a number signifying fullness and completeness in the Bible and with apocalyptic writers.<sup>7</sup> When connected to its multiples such as a thousand, it is more suggestive of indefiniteness and of magnitude.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the number “thousand” (χίλις, χίλιοι) is a large, round number that represents multiplicity, vastness, entirety, and fullness. The Bible reveals that “thousand” was used as hyperbole for quantity, immeasurability, or completeness (Deut 1:10; 1 Sam 18:7; Job 9:3; Ps 50:10; Dan 7:10; 2 Pet 3:8). Since various Bible genres understand “thousand” symbolically instead of literally, it should also be understood this way in apocalyptic literature, which is grounded in symbolism.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.5. Twelve

“Twelve” (δώδεκα) symbolizes fullness and completeness, often with humanity in mind, and with special reference to the saints. Twelve is a significant number throughout the Bible. The twelve sons of Israel (Gen 35:22–29) became the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 49:28), and biblical writers soon employed the number to symbolize the tribes as the people of God (Exod 24:4; Num 1:44; Deut 1:23; Josh 4:1–7). Unlike seven, which can be used for both divine and demonic symbolism, the number twelve is reserved exclusively for the saints. Jean-Pierre Prévost relates, “So the number twelve has become a consecrated number: it is *the* number of the people of God.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, John’s readers are treated with the twelve tribes representing the complete number of saints (7:4–8).<sup>11</sup> The woman with twelve stars on her head symbolizes the people of God (12:1). Twelve is especially highlighted in the vision of the new Jerusalem

<sup>6</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “Seven, Seventh, Seventy,” *NIDB* 5:197. See Jean-Pierre Prévost, *How to Read the Apocalypse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 31–32; Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 774–75; Moisés Silva, “ἑπτά,” *NIDNTTE* 1:260–63.

<sup>7</sup> Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cxxxvii; Boring, “Numbers, Numbering,” *NIDB* 4:299.

<sup>9</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “Numbers, Numbering,” *NIDB* 4:299; Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 865–66; Moisés Silva, “χίλιοι,” *NIDNTTE* 4:671–75.

<sup>10</sup> Prévost, *How to Read the Apocalypse*, 32. See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 36; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 64.

<sup>11</sup> The number twelve is found twelve times in 7:4–8.



(21:9–22:9). There are twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve foundations, and twelve names of the apostles (21:12–14) to signify completeness. The multiples attached to twelve such as twenty-four elders, 144 cubits, 12,000 stadia, and 144,000 servants would also indicate symbolism.

### 2.2. Bad Numbers

“Bad” numbers are attached to the demonic realm, to unbelievers, or to the suffering and persecution endured by believers.

#### 2.2.1. Fractions

Fractions such as one-third, one-fourth, and one-half mean something is not complete. Thus, they may be viewed as “bad” because they represent something partial, imperfect, and unaccomplished.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.2.2. Three and a Half

The number “three and a half” (τρεῖς καὶ ἥμις; 11:9, 11) is half of the perfect number of seven. It is a “bad” number because alongside its other matches (“forty-two months,” “thousand two hundred sixty days,” and “time, times, and half a time”), it emphasizes the time period of persecution for the saints. Moreover, the three and a half “days” of the humiliation of the two witnesses symbolizes the suffering to the point of martyrdom the church endures during the interadvental age. Most scholars maintain a distinction between the “days” and “years” attached to these numbers. Thus, three and a half “years” and three and a half “days” signify two distinct short periods of time under God’s control. The three and a half days of humiliation endured by the two witnesses corresponds to the three and a half years of ministry of Jesus analogously.<sup>13</sup> It also serves as a reminder to the length of time from Jesus’s own death to his resurrection “on the third day.”<sup>14</sup> John’s audience would have picked up on the symbolic number three and a half from Elijah’s drought (1 Kgs 18:1) to which both Jesus (Luke 4:25) and James (Jas 5:17) utilize. Yet 1 Kings 18:1 states “in the third year,” not three and a half. Thus, “John has converted the ‘third day’ of Gospel tradition into ‘three and a half days,’ just as the tradition he followed with regard to Elijah’s drought converted the ‘third year’ of 1 Kings 18:1 into ‘three and a half years.’”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Resseguie (*Revelation*, 142) for a description of “one-half”

<sup>13</sup> So Beale, *Revelation*, 595; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1974), 186; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 296; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 334; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AYBC 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 502; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 221; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 267; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 428; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 282. On the other hand, Robert L. Thomas (*Revelation*, WEC [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 2:95) finds no connection between three and a half days and three and a half years: “the correspondence to the three and a half years of prophetic ministry being only coincidental.”

<sup>14</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 165; Koester, *Revelation*, 502; Osborne, *Revelation*, 429; John Christopher Thomas, *The Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 337.

<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 280. See David E. Aune, *Revelation*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 2:621; Beale, *Revelation*, 594; Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 263–64.

The point is that John is emphasizing the theological import of the number three and a half, not the “days” or “years.” Therefore, the number “three and a half” is much more significant than the added time elements of “days” or “years.” Edmondo Lupieri stresses that symbolism is not as significant in the measurement (days, weeks, months, years) as in the numerical value attached to the measurement (one-half, three and a half, seven, ten, twelve).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, James Resseguie states that “A broken seven appears once again, but now in terms of days, not years. The numerical portion (three and a half) is more important than the time span (days). The church’s life and work is symbolized by the number three and a half, whether three and a half days or three and a half years.”<sup>17</sup> John Sweet adds, “In other words, John is urging the church to see its whole life and work under the sign of *three and a half*.”<sup>18</sup> John is not referring to two separate time periods (days and years) but presenting two angles on the same time period—the Christian era.<sup>19</sup> In sum, “three and a half” emphasizes the time period of the witness of the church. It symbolizes the entire interadvental age from the resurrection to the return of Christ. The significance of the number is that the church (two witnesses) testifies and suffers even to the point of martyrdom. When the two witnesses arise after three and a half days, it reflects the second coming and the end of the age. Since three and a half is matched with forty-two (months), thousand two hundred sixty (days), and “time, times, and half a time” (12:14), they would all signify the same interadvental time period.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.2.3. Forty-Two

“Forty-two months” (μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο) is a numerical symbol for a short yet intense period of persecution for the saints, covering the entire church age. This time designation occurs twice. First, John is instructed not to measure the outer court of the temple “because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months” (11:2).<sup>21</sup> Second, it is the time period for the beast “to exercise its authority for forty-two months” (13:5).<sup>22</sup> Forty-two recalls the time period of

<sup>16</sup> Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, trans. Maria Poggi Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 154, 174–75.

<sup>17</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 165.

<sup>18</sup> John P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, TPINTC (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1979), 183. David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:621; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 299–300; Felise Tavo, *Woman, Mother, Bride, Woman, Mother and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation into the “Ecclesial” Nations of the Apocalypse*, BTS 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 212–13.

<sup>19</sup> David Chilton (*The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of Revelation* [Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987], 274) provides a chiastic arrangement of “forty-two months,” “thousand two hundred sixty days,” and “three and a half days,” with the last item serving as the peak of the chiasm. This lends support for its inclusion with the other designations.

<sup>20</sup> The phrase “time, times, and half a time” comes directly from Dan 7:25 and 12:7. The context of Dan 7–12 includes a future tribulation centered on the temple, one who comes and speaks words against God, the “abomination of desolation,” and the coming of God’s kingdom of saints, including “one like a son of man.” Daniel asks how much longer until the end (Dan 12:6). The answer is “time, times, and half a time.” The historical backdrop is the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (167–164 BC). Beale (*Revelation*, 566) adds this is specified as “three years and six months” in 1 Maccabees 1–4, 2 Maccabees 5, and Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.19; 5.394.

<sup>21</sup> This study will follow NIV’s renderings for quotes from Revelation.

<sup>22</sup> NIV and NLT are inconsistent with renderings of “42 months” and “forty-two months.”

Israel's wilderness wanderings, which included forty-two encampments (Num 33:5–49).<sup>23</sup> The number is also associated with violence (2 Kgs 2:23–24).<sup>24</sup> For certain, forty-two months is equivalent to three and a half years mentioned above, a common figure signifying a short intense period of suffering for the people of God. By John's time, "three and a half" had become a symbol, a metaphor, a standardized expression of persecution of the faithful.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.2.4. *Thousand Two Hundred Sixty*

This time designation emphasizes the church's role in witnessing the gospel in spite of persecution. The saints are promised spiritual protection and provision to enable them to be witnesses throughout the church era. The two occurrences of a "thousand two hundred and sixty days" (ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἑξήκοντα) are found in the second (10:1–11:14) and third interludes (12:1–15:4). In the first instance it relates the time period of witnessing for the church (two witnesses). "And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (11:3). The second mention relates the protective care the people of God (symbolized by the woman) receive during this period. "The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days" (12:6).<sup>26</sup> "Wilderness" alludes to the forty years that the Israelites were cared for by God (Exod 16:32; Deut 1:31; Ps 78:52). Thus, a thousand two hundred sixty days "symbolizes not just testing and trial but also divine comfort and protection."<sup>27</sup> Whereas forty-two months stresses the persecution of the saints (11:2; 13:5), a thousand two hundred and sixty days stresses perseverance, protection, and provision for the saints.

Another link to spiritual provision is that the woman is taken care of for "time, times, and half a time" (καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ; 12:14). This direct allusion to Daniel 7:25 confirms that all these time elements correspond to three and a half years, a common expression for persecution of the people of God. What John has added is the promise of spiritual protection and nourishment during this time that enables believers to witness. The beast and his forces are allowed to "kill the body" but they "cannot kill the soul" (Matt 10:28).

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<sup>23</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 565; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., TNTC 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 143; Osborne, *Revelation*, 414.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, NBBC (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2012), 163. J. Massyngberde Ford (*Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 170) and Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 52) note that forty-two is both a messianic number (3 x 14; Jesus as the new David; Matt 1:1–17) and a demonic number (6 x 7; "perfection missing the mark"). Bauckham (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 400–402) intriguingly explains that John used square numbers to represent the saints (12; 144), triangular numbers to represent the beast (666), and rectangular numbers to depict the apocalyptic period of the reign of the beast. Thus, forty-two is the sixth rectangular number (6 x 7). A thousand two hundred sixty is the thirty-fifth rectangular number (35 x 36).

<sup>25</sup> Kendell Easley (*Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998], 189) compares it to the typical American expression of a "forty-hour week" for "fully employed" without necessarily meaning an exact length of time.

<sup>26</sup> English translations use a variety of expressions for this number: "1,260 days" (CSB, ESV, GW, GNT, NET, NIV, NLT); "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (CEB, CEV, NASB [12:6 only], NCV, NKJV, NRSV); and "twelve hundred and sixty days" (NABR, NASB [11:3 only], NJB, REB). The normally consistent NASB is inconsistent at 11:3 and 12:6. KJV has "a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

<sup>27</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 464.

In sum, the temporal markers above are used synonymously and interchangeably. They all reflect persecution, protection, testing, and witness for the saints. On closer inspection, however, it appears they stress different aspects of the same thing. “Time, times, and half a time” and forty-two months accent persecution; a thousand two hundred sixty days emphasizes perseverance, protection, and provision; and three and a half highlights witness.<sup>28</sup> As Frederick Murphy concludes, “All of these are the same thing seen from different angles.”<sup>29</sup>

### 2.2.5. Six Hundred Sixty-Six

There is one more “bad” number to consider. “Six hundred sixty-six” (ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ) is the numerical symbol for the beast (Rev 13:18). It stands for incompleteness and imperfection. The threefold six is a demonic parody of the Trinity. This number is the most obvious “bad” number in Revelation. Countless studies have attempted to interpret the number and identify possible human referents.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately, six hundred sixty-six causes no translation problems among modern Bible versions. The previous numbers, however, do cause problems.

This study supports the approach that numbers are important in John’s symbolic universe. If so, then altering his numbers for modern audiences could damage his symbolic purposes.

## 3. The Weakness of Modern Bible Versions on the Numerical Symbols of Revelation

Several modern Bible translations do poorly in bringing out the numerical symbolism presented in Revelation. Their poor performance is evidenced in two ways. First, many modern versions change (update) the actual symbolic number when measurements and distances are mentioned. Second, many Bible versions are inconsistent in rendering key terms in Revelation with the same English equivalent, with the result of hiding significant numerical interconnections.

### 3.1. Masking John’s Symbolism by Updating Measurements and Distances

The unfortunate choices made by several modern versions is found in the following four numbers: “twice ten thousand times ten thousand,” “hundred forty-four,” “thousand six hundred,” and “twelve thousand.” The first number is a standalone number. The second is applied to a measurement, and the last two numbers deal with distances.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 566; Osborne, *Revelation*, 464.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 262.

<sup>30</sup> Factors that complicate the interpretation include a notable textual variant that reads 616 instead of 666. See James Jeffrey Cate, “The Text of Revelation: Why neither Armageddon nor 666 May Be Exactly What You Think,” in *Essays on Revelation: Appropriating Yesterday’s Apocalypse in Today’s World*, ed. Gerald L. Stevens (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 116–29; and David C. Parker, “A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Revelation: P115 (P. Oxy. 4499),” *NTS* 46 (2000): 159–74. The majority of scholars maintain an original reference to Nero. See Craig R. Koester, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13 in Light of Papyri, Graffiti, and Inscriptions,” *JECH* 6.3 (2016): 1–21. Recently, a reference to Solomon (1 Kings 10:14) was proffered by Keith Bodner and Brent A. Strawn, “Solomon and 666 (Revelation 13.18),” *NTS* 66 (2020): 299–312.

### 3.1.1. *Twice Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand (9:16)*

This is the number of demonic mounted troops mentioned in the sixth trumpet. It is not a literal number, but rather symbolic hyperbole for an incalculable number. “Thousand” in Revelation is translated from two words—χιλιάς (19 of 23 NT uses) and χίλιοι (9 of 11 NT uses).<sup>31</sup> An additional word (μυριάς) is often translated as “thousands” and occurs in two passages. First, an innumerable number of angels is mentioned in the throne room vision (4:1–5:14). John hears “the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders” (5:11). Listed twice, μυριάδες μυριάδων is translated as “ten thousand times ten thousand.” Some translations update the number to “thousands and millions” (CEB, CEV, GNT, NLT). A few versions transliterate it as “myriads on myriads” (ESV, NASB, NRSV, REB).<sup>32</sup> The phrase derives from Daniel 7:10 where the idea of countless is apparent. Thus, almost all English versions do well at 5:11 in recognizing the incalculable nature of the number. The phrase is not meant to limit the number of angels there are. CSB’s “Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands” translates the phrase well.

The same cannot be said, however, for the similar number listed at 9:16. Once again, μυριάς is used twice—δισμυριάδες μυριάδων (“two myriads of myriads”), literally “twice ten thousand of ten thousand” or “twenty thousand of ten thousands.” John likely alludes to previous hyperbolic numbers (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17; Dan 7:10). The prefix (δισ) is frequently translated as “twice.” But the Hebrew understanding of qualitative aspect reveals this means “times” rather than a doubling of the number.<sup>33</sup> This is carried forward in Greek and “is an indefinite number of incalculable immensity.”<sup>34</sup>

Many contemporary versions regrettably modernize the number. This inadvertently limits and literalizes the Greek phrase to “200/two hundred million” (CEB, CEV, CJB, CSB, EHV, GNT, HCSB, ISV, MEV, NABR, NASB, NCV, NET, NKJV, NLT, VOICE). Updating this number began early. Scarlett’s New Testament (1798) used “200 million.” Likewise, early twentieth-century versions such as Weymouth (1902), Goodspeed (1923), and Moffatt (1924) followed suit. Yet the number is intended to signify an incalculable figure similar to 5:11. Only a few modern efforts attempt to show possible symbolism by using the odd phraseology of “twice ten thousand times ten thousand” (ESV, Message, NIV, NJB, REB).<sup>35</sup> Attempts to reduce this expression to an exact arithmetic calculation misses the point. It is an immense, innumerable, and uncountable number. An international student showed me his Russian translation of 9:16. He translated it into English as “uncountable times two.” That is the idea. Thus, as Stephen Smalley

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<sup>31</sup> Intriguingly, the two Greek words total twenty-eight. Thus, like the Lamb’s twenty-eight occurrences, “thousand” signifies completeness of seven multiplied by the full coverage of four (7 x 4).

<sup>32</sup> NCV reduces the incalculable number down to “thousands and thousands.” Modern versions that update to “millions” offer readers a sense of the quantity. The rendering of “myriads” on the other hand may confuse readers who do not have a dictionary close at hand. The middle of the road attempts at literally producing “tens of thousands times ten thousand” may actually be best for giving a sense of the numeric symbolism. The point is overwhelming innumerability.

<sup>33</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 2:539; Beale, *Revelation*, 509.

<sup>34</sup> BDAG 252.

<sup>35</sup> In addition, KJV reads “two hundred thousand thousand.” The awkward English phrasing lends a hand in identifying numerical symbolism.

observes, “the translation ‘two hundred million’ is mathematically inaccurate.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, many contemporaries assume or lobby for a literal two hundred million troops.<sup>37</sup> Modern versions are not helping to combat this misconception.

### 3.1.2. *Hundred Forty-Four Cubits (21:17)*

This number refers to the measurement of the great wall of the heavenly city. It symbolizes eternal protection and complete security for those inside. The cubit was the principal unit for linear measurement in the OT, based on the length of the forearm to the tip of the middle finger (about 17.5 inches).<sup>38</sup> “Cubit” (πῆχυς) is found four times in the NT with an array of renderings. It is translated in Matt 6:27 and Luke 12:25 as “moment,” “hour,” and “a bit longer” (HCSB chooses the more literal “cubit to his height” but CSB revises it to “moment”). The word is usually translated as “yards” in John 21:8. The final mention is found in Revelation 21:17: “The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick.” Many English translations retain the archaic reading of “cubits,” most likely for the sake of numerical symbolism. These versions include CSB, EHV, ESV, GW, HCSB, ISV, Message, NABR, NET, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NRSV, REB.

Regrettably, several modern versions update “cubits” into “feet” or “yards.” Thus, “two hundred feet” (MEV), “216/two hundred sixteen feet” (CEB, CEV, CJB, GNT, NCV, NLT), and “72 yards” (NASB, VOICE) have been proffered. This modernizing of measurements and distances is not new. The TCNT (1904) had “288 feet.” Weymouth and Moffatt produced “72 yards.” Montgomery’s Centenary Version (1924) went with “216 feet.” Yet these updated measurements undercut the numerical symbolism that John employs.

Scholars and Bible versions divide over whether height<sup>39</sup> or thickness<sup>40</sup> is intended by John. Several versions add either “thick” or “high” even though those words are not present in the Greek text. Either way, a literal view should not be in mind. Updating cubits into literal measurements is nonsensical when

<sup>36</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 239. Another insight is mentioned by Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 155: “By responsible estimates, the population of the whole earth was about two hundred million at the time Revelation was written. A demonic reality needs a number to match its subject.” Nevertheless, this still places limitations on an uncountable number.

<sup>37</sup> Primarily, it is dispensationalist scholars who appeal for a literal number, including Easley, *Revelation*, 160; Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation*, 21st Century Biblical Commentary 16 (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2002), 110; Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 174; Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973), 140; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 224; Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 75; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:46. John F. Walvoord (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1989], 166) wavers but reasons that a literal number is not impossible. On the other hand, Buist M. Fanning (*Revelation*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020], 303) states that “a literal count (whether exact or rounded) is not intended but rather the sense that such an army would wreak unspeakable levels of destruction.”

<sup>38</sup> See F. B. Huey Jr., “Weights and Measures,” *ZEB* 5:1061–73.

<sup>39</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1076–77; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 323; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 390; Morris, *Revelation*, 244; Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 420; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 407; Smalley, *Revelation*, 552; CEV, GNT, NCV, NJB, REB, VOICE.

<sup>40</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 2:1162; Fanning, *Revelation*, 542; Keener, *Revelation*, 494; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 282; Osborne, *Revelation*, 753; Patterson, *Revelation*, 371; Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:468; CEB, NIV, NLT.



considering the spaciousness of the rest of the heavenly city. Thus, the translation of a hundred and forty-four cubits “high” makes little sense. Likewise, those who choose to add the word “thick” to the heavenly city’s wall, picturing a 216-foot-thick structure, are similarly hampered. It must be asked, for what purpose are the walls so thick if the twelve gates are left perpetually open? G. K. Beale, therefore, reminds us that the wall is measured in the same way as the city was measured in the previous verse—by its height, width, and length. The angel who measures the temple in Ezekiel (40:5) measures the height and width, and they are equal. If one aspect is in mind it is height, not thickness, since in the OT a city’s walls emphasize security by their height (Deut 3:5).<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the point is not width or height or length, but the *number*—a hundred and forty-four, the square of twelve, which is the number of completion for the people of God. It multiplies the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles on the foundation of the city.<sup>42</sup> It also brings to mind a hundred and forty-four thousand (12 x 12,000), which is the number of the saints (7:4–8; 14:1–5), the witnessing church throughout the centuries between Christ’s ascension and return. Resseguie states that “the wall, like the city itself, is complete—an eternally secure place for all its inhabitants. The perfect cubic city is the ideal dwelling place for God and his people.”<sup>43</sup> This measurement for the heavenly city suggests that the church—the bride of the Lamb—is the holy city.

Therefore, attempts to update cubits into contemporary measurements of feet or yards or height or thickness obscure the figurative nature of the number, reducing the symbol to a bizarre and minimalist meaning. The point of the number is that the wall represents total and complete security and safety for the people of God forever.

### 3.1.3. *Thousand Six Hundred Stadia (14:20)*

This numerical symbol indicates coverage of the whole earth, and its context confirms the universal judgment of the wicked at the return of Christ. The phrase “thousand six hundred stadia” (σταδίων χιλίων ἑξακοσίων) occurs once near the conclusion of the third interlude (12:1–15:4). The angel swings his sickle and gathers the grapes. “They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia” (14:20).

Temporally, this reflects Armageddon, the second coming, and the ushering in of divine judgment. Even extreme futurists recognize the connection to Armageddon at 14:20, using phraseology such as “a reference to Armageddon,”<sup>44</sup> “preview of final events,”<sup>45</sup> “a prophetic fore-glimpse of what is to come,”<sup>46</sup> an “overview” and “proleptic summary”<sup>47</sup> of what follows in greater detail, and “obviously a picture of ultimate judgment of the wickedness of men at the time of the second coming of Christ.”<sup>48</sup> For

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<sup>41</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1076–77.

<sup>42</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 616; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 569; Mounce, *Revelation*, 392.

<sup>43</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation*, 254.

<sup>44</sup> Patterson, *Revelation*, 297.

<sup>45</sup> Lindsey, *New World Coming*, 204.

<sup>46</sup> LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled*, 241.

<sup>47</sup> Hindson, *Revelation*, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 223. See also Fanning (*Revelation*, 397–400) and Easley (*Revelation*, 257–58) for similar phraseology.

interpreters who follow a recapitulation approach to Revelation's structure, this verse simply relates one of several retellings of the Armageddon event, often signaled at the conclusion of an individual vision.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, only EHV, ESV, GW, ISV, and NIV translate the number exactly as "1,600 stadia" (NKJV and NJB select "furlongs"). Most translations have updated the distance to "about 180 miles" (CSB, HCSB, NLT, NCV), "185 miles" (VOICE), "one hundred eighty-six miles" (MEV) or "(almost) 200 miles" (CEB, CEV, CJB, GNT, Message, NABR, NASB, NET, NRSV, REB). Weymouth, Moffatt, Goodspeed, and Montgomery also had "200 miles."

Many interpreters argue that this distance reflects a literal measurement, and pictures the length of Palestine. Consequently, the last battle becomes limited to a geographical locale. The literal bloodbath is to be 200 miles wide and five feet deep.<sup>50</sup> A few literalists, however, waver on limiting it this way. For example, John Walvoord asserts "There is no reason, however, for limiting the battle to the precise boundary of the holy land, and there is really no serious problem here in taking the distance literally."<sup>51</sup> Thus, Palestine may be emphasized, but even a few literal proponents suggest an earth-wide catastrophe. Buist Fanning exemplifies this with "the cataclysmic defeat, submission, and destruction of all enemies arrayed against him in that day will be unimaginably vast."<sup>52</sup>

The majority of scholars, however, recognize that John's symbolism is at work again. The number is not a simple measurement of geographical distance. It is a numerical symbol. Theological significance is found in a variety of ways (4 x 4 x 10 x 10; 40 x 40; 4 x 4 x 100). Beale asserts "the number also could well have been thought of as the square of forty, a traditional number of punishment."<sup>53</sup>

This is hyperbolic imagery at work. The number refers to a slaughter of exceptional proportions, and thus complete, consummative, end-time judgment. A few scholars among the majority opinion deliver even stronger cases for numeric symbolism. Resseguie affirms, "Four is the number of the earth or creation and ten represents totality. Thus, the blood covers the earth completely."<sup>54</sup> Paul Rainbow appends that numbers that are squared or cubed intensify their significance. Thus, the square of four multiplied by the square of ten "together represent God's judgment as comprehensive."<sup>55</sup> The beast's kingdom is worldwide and not limited by geography. Therefore, several scholars stress the symbolism not merely as hyperbolic emphasis of Palestine, but in light of numerical symbolism, a figure of complete, worldwide judgment at the end of history.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For example, the sixth seal (6:15); sixth trumpet (9:14–19); here at the third interlude (14:20); sixth bowl (16:12–16); fall of Babylon (17:12–14); rider on the white horse (19: 17–21); and the millennial vision (20: 7–10).

<sup>50</sup> Lindsey, *New World Coming*, 206; Ryrie, *Revelation*, 106.

<sup>51</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 223. See also Hindson, *Revelation*, 159; Patterson, *Revelation*, 297; Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:224. Chilton (*Days of Vengeance*, 376) interprets this as fulfilled in AD 70.

<sup>52</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 400.

<sup>53</sup> G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 313.

<sup>54</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation*, 202.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Rainbow, *The Pith of the Apocalypse: Essential Message and Principles for Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 56.

<sup>56</sup> So Boxall, *Revelation*, 215; Brighton, *Revelation*, 394; Duvall, *Revelation*, 204; William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 156; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 421; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, IVPNTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 159; Morris, *Revelation*, 181; Murphy, *Fallen Is Baby-*

### 3.1.4. Twelve Thousand Stadia (21:16)

The measurement of the holy city pictures perfection, vastness, magnificence, and immeasurability. “Twelve thousand stadia” (σταδίων δώδεκα χιλιάδων) combines the symbolism of twelve with a thousand to signify completeness with reference to the people of God. The OT relates ten appearances of twelve thousand that support symbolic usage (Num 31:5; Josh 8:25; Judg 21:10; 2 Sam 10:6; 17:1; 1 Kgs 4:26; 10:26; 2 Chr 1:14; 9:25; Ps 60).<sup>57</sup> John utilizes twelve thousand at two locations—twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes (7:4–8) and twelve thousand stadia (21:16).

The decision by several modern versions to retain “stadia” is helpful in recognizing John’s numerical symbolism.<sup>58</sup> The modern updating found in numerous Bible versions, however, obscures John’s intentions. For example, “1,400/one thousand four hundred miles” (MEV, NLT, NET), “1,444 miles” (VOICE), and “1,500/fifteen hundred miles” (CEB, CEV, CJB, GNT, NABR, NASB, NCV, NRSV) are unfortunate choices. Once again, the practice of updating measurements started a long time ago. TCNT had “1,200 miles,” and Weymouth, Moffatt, and Montgomery translated “1,500 miles.”<sup>59</sup>

John states that the angel “measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long” (21:16). Thus, its length and breadth and height were equal, giving the new Jerusalem a picture of a four-squared, perfectly cubed city. Rainbow explains that “the use of cubic numbers in the Revelation signifies that which is consecrated to God.”<sup>60</sup> This image is immediately recognizable as the holy of holies, the most holy place within the temple. “The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high” (1 Kgs 6:20). The heavenly city itself is a temple—the utter holy of holies.

The holy city should not be limited to fifteen hundred square miles.<sup>61</sup> That may seem like a lot of space, but it stands far away from the point John is making. Sigve Tonstad rightly counters, “Who will contest that theology trumps architecture and geometry in these representations?”<sup>62</sup> John is not interested in delivering human dimensions. These numbers—like all numbers in Revelation—serve a figurative purpose. The number represents universal totality. Mathematicians have long noted the perfection of the number twelve thousand. It is twelve times ten cubed. Kendell Easley explains, “Not coincidentally, a cube has twelve edges. Since each edge measured 12,000 stadia, the total length of the edges is 144,000, exactly the same as the number of the followers of the Lamb (14:1).”<sup>63</sup>

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lon, 328; John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 266.

<sup>57</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 373 n. 1.

<sup>58</sup> NJB and REB utilize “furlongs” for their European readership. NKJV’s choice to retain “furlongs” from KJV for primarily American audiences is an odd decision.

<sup>59</sup> Formally equivalent translations are just as guilty as functional translations on rendering Revelation’s distances. One example of inconsistency is found in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*. He produced 12,000 stadia, as well as “twice ten thousand times ten thousand,” and 144 cubits, yet reverted to “two hundred miles” for 14:20.

<sup>60</sup> Rainbow, *Pith of the Apocalypse*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> LaHaye (*Revelation Unveiled*, 363–64) exemplifies literalism by calculating that each of the estimated twenty billion saints will have a cubic mile for themselves.

<sup>62</sup> Tonstad, *Revelation*, 313.

<sup>63</sup> Easley, *Revelation*, 399.

Therefore, the updates found in modern Bibles lead to problems when these ancient measurements and distance markers are found in symbolic literature where fondness for numerical symbolism plays a significant role in interpretation. Bible versions that modernize Revelation's measurements and distances miss the intended meaning of the number. They also inspire literalistic interpretations for the number. Simply stated, such updating in Revelation obscures John's symbolic purposes.

### 3.2. Masking Numerical Symbolism through Inconsistent Translation of Key Terms

The second area in which many modern Bible translations do a disservice to John's Revelation is their inconsistent renderings of the same Greek word. Under the guise of readability and variety, several modern Bibles miss key numerical connections from John. John utilizes number symbolism not only with actual numbers, but by the number of times certain key words are found. The number seven is a prime example. As mentioned above, seven connotes completeness, fullness, totality, and perfection. John's encompassing use of this number emphasizes theological truths and underscores the intricate structuring of his Apocalypse. It is a keystone symbol and John makes extensive use of it in an artistic way to emphasize theological truths.<sup>64</sup> Even more striking and missing in most scholarly treatments are the quantity of embedded uses in Revelation.

- Two hymns have seven attributes (5:12; 7:12).
- There are seven beatitudes (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).
- Seven people groups are listed (6:15; 19:18).
- Locusts have seven features (9:7–10).
- The Lamb has “seven horns” and “seven eyes” which are the “seven spirits” (5:6).
- Each of the seven letters contains seven elements.<sup>65</sup>
- The three merisms (“Alpha and Omega,” “first and last,” “beginning and end”) appear a total of seven times (1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13).
- The phrase “these are the words” (Τὰδε λέγει) is mentioned seven times (2:1, 9, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).<sup>66</sup>
- The fourfold phrase “peoples and languages and tongues and nations” is mentioned seven times (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).
- The significant title “Lord God Almighty” has seven references (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22).

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<sup>64</sup> Not everyone finds theology behind John's numbers. For example, John J. Davis (*Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the Use of Numbers in the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968], 104–24) does not find much symbolism beyond the general usage of “seven.” Similarly, Steve Moyise (“Word Frequencies in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 43 (2005): 285–99), reacting to Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 29–37), does not dispute John's meticulous use of numbers, but he does minimize that they are used by John to convey theological truths.

<sup>65</sup> Numerous commentators note a sevenfold structure of the charge to write, characteristic of Christ, strengths, weaknesses, solution, call to listen, and eschatological promise. See Aune, *Revelation*, 1:119–24; Beale, *Revelation*, 225; Brighton, *Revelation*, 58–59; J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, TTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 36–39; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 59; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 108; Morris, *Revelation*, 58; Osborne, *Revelation*, 105–6; Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 76; Reddish, *Revelation*, 51; Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:125–26.

<sup>66</sup> The phrase is found 250 times in the LXX to introduce prophetic oracles from God spoken through the prophets. Thus, the formula now refers to Jesus who is treated on the same level as God. See David L. Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 18.

- There are seven occurrences of the “one who sits on the throne” (4:9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5).<sup>67</sup>
- The elders and living creatures are mentioned together seven times (5:6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11; 14:3; 19:4).
- There are seven promises of the second coming (2:5, 16; 3:11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20).<sup>68</sup>
- The hundred and forty-four thousand have seven characteristics (14:4–5).<sup>69</sup>
- The returning Christ is described with seven images (19:11–13).<sup>70</sup>
- The vision of the new Jerusalem falls into seven parts (21:9–27).<sup>71</sup>
- The thrice-mentioned formula (42 months, 1260 days, and time, times, and half a time) add up to seven (11:2, 3, 9, 11; 12:6, 14; 13:5).<sup>72</sup>

Thirty words appear exactly seven times in Revelation. Significant nouns and adjectives include “Abyss,” “Christ,” “cloud,” “earthquake,” “lampstand,” “perseverance,” “mark,” “prophecy,” “sharp,” “sickle,” “sign/signs,” “time” (καῖρος), and “worthy.” Key verbs include “call,” “prepare,” “be full,” and “rule/reign.”

Moreover, several words appear as multiples of seven. Words found fourteen times (7 x 2) include “Jesus” (seven of the fourteen occurrences are connected with “witness/testimony” [1:2, 9; 12:17; 17:6; 19:10 (twice); 20:4]), “Spirit,” “saints” (accepting 22:21 as original),<sup>73</sup> “servant,” “star,” and “woe.”<sup>74</sup> Twenty-eight is another key multiple for John (7 x 4). It is used for the “Lamb” which among its twenty-eight usages include seven instances coupled with God (5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1, 3).<sup>75</sup> The list of cargoes which Babylon imports (18:12–13) equals twenty-eight. Thus, they “are listed as representative of *all* the products of the whole *world*.”<sup>76</sup> If the “seven thunders” (10:3–4) are counted as a potential fourth set of plagues, then a total of twenty-eight plagues are mentioned. It is also intriguing that the

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<sup>67</sup> Variations of the formula can also be found (4:2, 3; 7:10; 19:4; 20:11), but Bauckham (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 34) suggests that the variations are deliberately used in order to keep the number of occurrences to seven.

<sup>68</sup> So Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 34; Bruce W. Longenecker, “‘Linked Like a Chain’: Rev 22.6–9 in Light of an Ancient Transition Technique,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 107–8. Others, of course, could add 1:7 and thereby dismiss this particular element.

<sup>69</sup> Paul, *Revelation*, 35. Paul follows others who note seven unnumbered visions from 19:11–21:1.

<sup>70</sup> See the discussion by Osborne (*Revelation*, 678–83). Mathias Rissi (*The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19:11–22:15* [London: SCM, 1972], 19–28) relates that John purposefully listed seven to accent numerical symbolism (fullness of the Spirit), especially in connection to the four actions of earthly, end-time judgment by the Warrior Messiah found in the subsequent verses (19:14–16).

<sup>71</sup> Rissi, *Future of the World*, 60.

<sup>72</sup> In addition, many scholars adopt a sevenfold outline for Revelation. Ernst R. Wendland (“The Hermeneutical Significance of Literary Structure in Revelation,” *Neot* 48 [2014]: 447–76) proposes seven sections with seven subsections beneath each one. Others note seven heavenly throne-room scenes (with different iterations); seven symbolic beings in chapters 12–14 (the woman, the dragon, the child, Michael, the first beast, the second beast, and the Lamb); and seven defeated enemies in chapters 17–20 (Babylon the Great, beast, false prophet, Satan, Gog and Magog, Death, and Hades).

<sup>73</sup> See Kuykendall (*Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 162 n. 37) for reasons to retain ἄγιοι at 22:21.

<sup>74</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 34–35.

<sup>75</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 31, 350–71.

three words translated as “scroll” (βιβλαρίδιον, βιβλίον, βίβλος), and the two words for “thousand” (χίλιας, χίλιοι) each add up to twenty-eight.

In sum, there are far too many numerical patterns to be coincidental. John is purposeful in utilizing the number seven. He does it for theological reasons. The sevens denote that God controls all the world and practices his sovereignty over it. God guides every event.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, to underscore the patterns of seven, modern Bible versions should translate words that are found in Revelation seven times consistently.<sup>78</sup> Only a few modern versions do this or are even aware of the interconnections. I will address four examples—“perseverance,” “prepare,” “Christ,” and “earthquake.” Again, take note that John’s numerical symbolism is concealed when words found exactly seven times are not translated with the same equivalent word.

### 3.2.1. Perseverance

Enduring resistance, active perseverance, and constant persistence are highlighted in Revelation as the expected character of faithful believers toward the powers of evil, especially in light of the near end. The perseverance of the saints is a chief characteristic of apocalyptic literature. The people of God are exhorted to remain faithful no matter what befalls them. Grant Osborne affirms, “Every passage dealing with the return of Christ ends with a call to conduct one’s life with both vigilance and diligence.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, “perseverance” (ὑπομονή) is a key ethical term in Revelation. The word is found seven times and underscores numerical symbolism on John’s part (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Most Bible translations use a variety of words and expressions at these seven locations, including “patience,” “endurance,” “patient endurance,” “steadfast endurance,” “perseverance,” “persevering,” “patience to continue,” “strength to endure,” “endure patiently,” and “never give up.” The noun is often turned into a verb for variety and English sentence structure. Only a few versions retain translational consistency at all seven locations, thereby aiding the intratextual connection. Those versions are CEB and GW (“endurance”), EHV (“patient endurance”), and NASB and NJB (“perseverance”). All other modern translations use a variety of words.

### 3.2.2. Prepare

This word emphasizes divine sovereignty and guidance in the unfolding events of history. The fact that John mentions “prepare” (ἐτοιμάζω) seven times should alert readers to numerical symbolism (8:6; 9:7, 15; 12:6; 16:12; 19:7; 21:2). In all seven instances, the word indicates that God’s will is perfectly planned out. If John intended to use the word exactly seven times, then extra stress is added to this concept of divine action at work. “Prepare” is found in key verses in the NT (Matt 25:34; John 14:2–3), leading Osborne to call the word “a major term for God’s predestined will.”<sup>80</sup> Beale summarizes this word well. Throughout Revelation ἐτοιμάζω “is used of events that occur *ultimately* as a result of God’s

<sup>77</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Although not specific to Revelation, Robert Alter stresses the need for correct word choices within genres in *The Art of Bible Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 45–64. Leland Ryken makes a case for formal equivalent fidelity in *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 217–28. Form equivalent translations do somewhat better on this issue of consistency but all modern versions can do better.

<sup>79</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>80</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 380.

decrees and not human actions.”<sup>81</sup> All translations settled on “prepared” for 12:6. But all translations reverted to synonyms everywhere else. The renderings include “(got/made/kept/held) ready,” “provide,” “became,” “equipped,” and “armored.” Only CSB consistently renders the word the same way all seven times (“prepared”).<sup>82</sup>

### 3.2.3. *Christ*

This title is applied to Jesus and emphasizes his authority as the Messiah, God’s anointed one, who is victorious over Satan through the means of his shed blood, and who will reign forever. The fact that “Christ” (Χριστός) is found exactly seven times (1:1, 2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6) highlights fulfillment, perfection, and completeness. That John uses numerical symbolism is corroborated by his fourteen (7 x 2) uses of “Jesus,” the seven uses of “coming” (ἔρχομαι) in combination with Χριστός to stress the threat or promise of his parousia, and the twenty-eight (7 x 4) uses of the Christological title “Lamb.” These are strong arguments in favor of numerical symbolism for Χριστός.

Many Bible versions do well in preserving “Christ” (or “Messiah”; CJB, ISV) at all seven locations. The VOICE opts for “Anointed” or “Anointed One” each time. Some modern versions, however, regrettably interchange words for Χριστός. The Message has “Messiah” four times and “Christ” three times. Several translations select “Messiah” (GW, GNT, HCSB, NIV), “Anointed” (NABR), or “Chosen One” (CEV) at 11:15 and 12:10. Although the words clearly refer to Christ, this still masks the intratextual connections and the numerical symbolism.<sup>83</sup> John enhances the symbolism by limiting this title to only seven times. This is aided by giving the full title of “Jesus Christ” three times at the beginning (1:1, 2, 5). The final four references include the article, “the Christ.” They are used in conjunction with the noun βασιλεία (“kingdom” or “rule”) or the verb βασιλεύω (“to reign” or “to rule”). Thus, the placement of this title stresses to John’s original audience that this revelation comes from the authority of the risen Christ himself (1:1–5). He is the one who is victorious over Satan, and his followers overcome and enjoy spiritual victory through his shed blood (12:7–10). Jesus is the Lord over the millennial reign and his followers already reign spiritually with him (20:4–6). Ultimately, when Christ returns, he will reign over the universe for ever and ever (11:15–19).<sup>84</sup>

### 3.2.4. *Earthquake*

“The earthquake” is part of the final conclusion to earth history. It is a feature of cosmic imagery that refers to the dissolution of the world, ushering in end-time judgment and the new heaven and new earth. In the OT, God shook the earth when he judged nations or wicked people, ushering in the day of the Lord (Isa 13:10–13; 24:18–23; Jer 10:10; Ezek 38:18–23; Joel 2:1–11; 3:16; Mic 1:3–4; Nah 1:3–6; Hag 2:5–7; Zech 4:3–5). This final shaking carries over to apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch 1:3–9; 102:1–2; Testament of Moses 10:1–7; 2 Baruch 32:1; Sibylline Oracles 8:232–238) and the NT (Heb 12:26–27). Thus, the earthquake becomes a cosmic, universal quake that shakes the heavens and the earth at the

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<sup>81</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 940.

<sup>82</sup> ESV, HCSB, MEV, and NKJV come close with six out of seven.

<sup>83</sup> HCSB also singularly chose “Messiah” for 20:4, 6. Fortunately, CSB revised all seven instances to “Christ.”

<sup>84</sup> Resseguie (*Revelation Unsealed*, 206–7) stresses the same idea through the three tenses—past, present, future. The slaughtered Lamb reflects Christ’s past work on the cross. The Son of Man is the image of Christ’s present work in his church. The faithful and true warrior is the image of Christ’s future work at his second coming.

day of the Lord.<sup>85</sup> The Gospels mention earthquakes as a part of general prophecies being fulfilled in the present age (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), but the OT day of the Lord passages concerning the shaking of the earth are ultimately tied to the return of Christ (Matt 24:29–30; Mark 13:24–27; Luke 17:24).<sup>86</sup>

The apostle John adapts, synthesizes, and universalizes these aspects of earthquakes. He adapts Exodus 19 and universalizes the prophets' judgment passages that once referred to Israel or a wicked nation to the whole world at the end of history. Allusions by John to Sinai or to the day of the Lord are keys for his universalizing the eschaton. Thus, the imagery of the earthquake emphasizes the last, great, one-time shaking and dissolution of the world at the return of Christ. Significantly, "earthquake" (σεισμός) is found exactly seven times in Revelation (6:12; 8:5; 11:13 [twice]; 11:19; 16:18 [twice]). In addition, the adjective "great" (μέγας) is attached to four of those seven references to emphasize full earth coverage.

Instead of understanding seven separate sequentially-spaced earthquakes, it is better to view all seven references as repeating the one final great earthquake at the end of earth history (Heb 12:26–27). Each mention is located at the conclusion of an individual vision.<sup>87</sup> This supports the view that John reserves this usage of cosmic imagery not only as a structural clue, but as a picture of the end of history.

Once again, modern Bible translations reveal inconsistency and the subsequent loss of potential cross reference connections. Most versions do well in translating σεισμός as "earthquake" at all seven locations. But several Bibles interchange "earthquake" with "shook" (CEV, NJB), "earth trembled" (VOICE), or simply "quake" (CSB) at least once. However, it is the adjective μέγας that modern Bibles fumble the most. Many versions utilize several different adjectives to describe the earthquake. The synonyms start flying—"big," "mighty," "powerful," "huge," "major," "tremendous," "violent," "severe," "massive," "terrible," and "worst" are renderings of μέγας. The Message reveals four separate English renderings: "bone-charring," "gigantic," "colossal," and "huge and devastating."

Furthermore, a handful of translations delete one mention of "earthquake." In 16:18, σεισμός and μέγας are listed twice as well as τηλικοῦτος ("so great"). But the repetition of the words and the quest for style and readability led some versions (CEV, EHV, NJB, NLT, REB) to delete one of the references to "earthquake." Conversely, GNT and the Message actually add another "earthquake," giving them three mentions in 16:18 and eight overall. All this variety lends itself to suggesting that more than one earthquake is taking place. It masks the symbolic teaching of the number seven. If indeed John is speaking of the final end-time great earthquake, then σεισμός μέγας should be considered a technical term. Whichever noun and adjective are selected, they should remain consistently translated at all locations.

Readers may properly ask whether the exact number of times that certain words are found is that important. It comes into play when word studies on Revelation are done. An in-depth Bible study on any of these four words would produce another layer of theological understanding if numerical symbolism were included.

<sup>85</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 291. Moisés Silva ("σεῖω," *NIDNTTE* 4: 279) adds, "all mentions of earthquakes in the New Testament refer to divine intervention."

<sup>86</sup> J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 126–27. See Beale, *Revelation*, 413.

<sup>87</sup> The earthquake is found in the sixth and seventh seals, the end of the second interlude, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl.



#### *4. Conclusion*

Modern Bible translations naturally seek vocabulary that updates the English language while at the same time distinguishes their renderings from competing versions. The book of Revelation, however, must be treated with particular care when it comes to updating distances and measurements and the number of uses of key words. Modern Bibles unwittingly entrench literalism by updating measurements and distances. Their updating practice actually limits the numbers and masks the numerical symbolism. Furthermore, they diminish the theological cross reference system that John employs.

Therefore, for the book of Revelation, modern versions should retain ancient measurements and distances. They can supply a footnote updating these features and add a statement that the number is most likely symbolically significant for John. Moreover, for the sake of and opportunity for deeper Bible study, modern Bibles should remain consistent in their renderings of words that are found exactly seven times.<sup>88</sup> Future English Bible versions and future revisions of existing Bible versions should take note of this issue in Revelation.

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<sup>88</sup> A case can be made for the numbers four and twelve as well.

# Heaven's War upon the Earth: How to Turn a Moderate 17th Century Pastor into a Radical

— Nathan Parker —

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**Abstract:** There appears a strong apocalyptic expectation in the writings of the 17th century Puritan pastor John Flavel (1628–1691), but, as this paper will argue, this materialized in his later writings. Most people who thought the end of the world was imminent in the 17th century tended to be within radical groups that were active during the Interregnum. Though the momentum of apocalyptic thought was generally arrested over the next two decades it is notable that by the time of the Glorious Revolution it was incorporated into the preaching of a peaceable and deeply conciliatory pastor. After providing a brief summary of who Flavel was and why he was an important (though heretofore overlooked) figure, this article will shed light on how one moderate Puritan came to embrace ideas with alarmingly radical implications.

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Puritanism “has left a vast literature of homiletics and casuistry, which is wholly dead save for an occasional excursion of the curious. Nothing could be more wearisome to the modern reader than its voluminous controversy.... The Calvinistic theology, which was the intellectual form of Puritanism, is dead beyond recall.”<sup>1</sup> These words were penned 110 years ago by a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, who was also a Canon of Westminster and the Bishop of Durham. Had he known what the next century held in store in the field of Puritan studies, Hensley Henson would have most likely tempered this precipitous judgment. Today, in the third decade of a new millennium, research into the works of the “wholly dead” is stronger than ever. One aspect of this renewed interest in Puritanism concerns their variegated eschatological views.

The historian Paul Johnson wrote, “All societies contain not only creators and builders but apocalyptics.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there appears a strong apocalyptic expectation in the writings of the English Nonconformist John Flavel, but this appeared only in his later writings. Most people who thought that

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<sup>1</sup> H. Hensley Henson, *Puritanism in England* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 75–77.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Johnson, *Enemies of Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), 87–88.

the end of the world was impending in England in the middle of the 17th century tended to be within radical groups that were active during the Interregnum (the 11-year period between the execution of Charles I and the accession of his son Charles II to the throne in 1660) such as the Fifth Monarchists.<sup>3</sup> For a season just after the monarchy was restored, the so-called Restoration, it was much rarer for people to expect the end of the world. In fact, after the apocalyptically-freighted year 1666 belief in the imminent return of Christ diminished and was almost non-existent by 1676.<sup>4</sup> It is notable that by the time of the Glorious Revolution in the late 1680s this belief was incorporated into the preaching of a peaceable and deeply conciliatory pastor. In his early writings, John Flavel averred that if Christ was not to return soon, England at least stood under the judgment of God and was liable to face his wrath at any moment. Even though Flavel thought the return of Christ was at hand in 1689, he held out some hope that if the nation amended its ways, the cataclysmic end might be averted. Thus, on the political front, Flavel interpreted the religious freedom provided in the Toleration Act of 1689 under William and Mary as both a blessing and a dire warning. This study will address these complex issues in a way that will shed light on how one moderate Puritan came to embrace ideas with alarmingly radical implications.

This article will demonstrate that Flavel's beliefs about the apocalyptic return of Christ shifted through the course of his writing career. After briefly explaining who Flavel was and why he is important, I will lay out the evidence that Flavel interpreted the removal of ministers from their pulpits, the removal of gospel ordinances (or sacraments) from the church, escalating national wickedness, and heightened schism amongst Christians as precursors to national judgment in England. Second, I will prove that in the period from 1660 to 1670 Flavel did not express belief in Christ's imminent return. Third, I will show that he began to warm to this idea between the years 1670 and 1680. Fourth, I will argue that he taught that judgment was at hand in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. That is, because of the appearance of the four omens, his concerns about his own country inflated into the belief that Christ's return was to be expected for the whole world. Fifth, and lastly, I will show that, even given his direct warnings about the end, Flavel was still willing to hold out a glimmer of hope that the end would be delayed if fellow Nonconformists would only heed his words. We will arrive at these conclusions through an analysis of his writings which cover a twenty-five-year period.

First, who was this Dissenter and why is he worth studying? John Flavel (1628–1691) was a Nonconformist minister whose primary labor was that of pastoring a local congregation in Devon, in the sea-port town of Dartmouth. Flavel attended University College, Oxford, and he ministry for 41 years in both Presbyterian and Congregational churches. Flavel's writings had a transatlantic impact, such that when Increase Mather, president of Harvard at the turn of the 18th century, wrote a preface to one of Flavel's writings, he said that his books "have made his name precious and famous

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<sup>3</sup> To take one of many examples: "What gave the proceedings of the House of Commons in early 1629 their urgency was the widespread and almost apocalyptic conviction that the last days of true religion in England were at hand." Michael Finlayson, *Historians, Puritanism and the English Revolution: The Religious Factor in Politics before and after the Interregnum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 102. See also Jeffrey Jue, "Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259–73; Neil Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 7, 45, 145, 165; Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 175, 196, 262ff; John Spurr, *English Puritanism: 1603–1689* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 112, 115; Arthur Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: Dent, 1938), 83.

<sup>4</sup> Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42–43.

in both *Englands*<sup>5</sup> (meaning England and New England). Many political and religious leaders attested to Flavel's influence on their lives such as George Whitefield, John Wesley, John Newton, Jonathan Edwards, William Wilberforce, America's second President John Adams, and even the deistic printer and inventor Benjamin Franklin.

Flavel's writings, of which I have identified 530 distinct printings, were reproduced so often and possessed so frequently within early American households that a survey of the holdings of household libraries in the Upper Connecticut River Valley in the period 1785–1830 reveals that Flavel's works are the 11th most common to appear. Appearing *less* frequently on the list of the top 100 writers/books are the Book of Common Prayer, Edwards, Wesley, Baxter, Bunyan, Benjamin Franklin, Locke, Milton, and coming in last place, Shakespeare.<sup>6</sup> Given Flavel's historical importance, we will now turn to his apocalyptic claims.

### 1. Signs of Judgment

Scattered throughout Flavel's writings are allusions to his belief that certain signs and circumstances tend to presage (and even precipitate) the judgment of God. For Flavel, such judgment of God was entirely warranted in light of the abundance of blessings God had given England. Flavel asserted that these national advantages were gloriously unique. Writing in *Method of Grace* in 1680 he stated the following: "We are bound with all thankfulness to acknowledge the bounty of heaven to this sinful generation in furnishing us with so many excellent means of light beyond many other nations and generations that are past: but yet we ought to rejoice with trembling when we consider the abuses of light in this wanton age, and what a dismal event is like to happen unto many thousands among us." He went on to chillingly warn his listeners:

I fear the time is coming when many among us will wish they had never set foot upon English ground. God hath blessed this nation with many famous, burning and shining lights; it was once said to the honour of this Nation, *that the English ministry was the worlds wonder*: and when a man of another Nation began to Preach methodically and convincingly, they were wont to say, *we perceive this man hath been in England*: the greater will our account be for abusing such light and rebelling against it: the clearer our light is now, the thicker will the mists of darkness be hereafter; if we thus wantonize under it, and rebel against it.<sup>7</sup>

As is clearly shown in a passage like this, Flavel sometimes donned the prophetic hat and enumerated the reasons why God's displeasure justly rested upon the nation. Incidentally, it is significant that Increase Mather called Flavel a prophet in his preface to Flavel's posthumously published exposition on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Speaking about Devonians who would later reflect upon the man who labored amongst them, Mather wrote: "Dartmouth will know, and Devonshire will know, that there

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<sup>5</sup> John Flavel, *England's Duty under the Present Gospel Liberty* (London: Matthew Wotton, 1689), "To the Reader," A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> William Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 64–67.

<sup>7</sup> John Flavel, *The Method of Grace* (London: Francis Tyton, 1681), 560 (italics original).

has been a Prophet among them.”<sup>8</sup> In one sense, for any English Nonconformist, gospel ministers had a prophetic role and could aptly be labeled prophets. However, this capitalized reference to “a Prophet” has an eschatological ring to it, expressing an urgent call for repentance before it is too late. Whether or not the appellation “Prophet” sticks, Flavel posited four signs that God’s wrath was about to be poured out on the nation and bring about the end of the age.<sup>9</sup>

The first precursor to judgment was the removal of gospel ministers from church pulpits.<sup>10</sup> Flavel wrote that the removal of ministers meant that the Lord was about to declare war on the earth and bring about terrific calamity. Speaking about what was “implied and imported in Christs treaty with sinners by his Ambassadors or Ministers,”<sup>11</sup> he wrote, “it implies the removal of the Gospel ministry to be a very great judgment to the people. The remanding of *Ambassadors*, presages an ensuing War. If the reconciling of souls to God be the greatest work, then the removal of the means and instruments thereof must be the sorest Judgment.”<sup>12</sup> In poetic verse he warned the same thing about the removal of God’s ambassadors in *Husbandry Spiritualized*, and in this you will hear the inspiration for this article’s title:

O dreadful, dark, and dismal day!  
How is our glory fled away.

Our Sun gone down, our stars o’re cast;  
God’s heritage is now laid wast.  
Our pining souls no bread can get,  
With wantons God hath justly met,  
When we are fed unto the full,  
This man was tedious; that was dull....

Sure heaven intends not peace, but wars;  
In calling home Ambassadors.<sup>13</sup>

Flavel sounded an eerie note by warning that the removal of God’s ambassadors (i.e., preachers) preceded judgment. The Great Ejection in 1662 effectively defrocked the best (in Flavel’s view) 1800 pastors in England, removing both ministers and the Dissenting understanding of the sacraments.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cotton Mather, preface to John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assemblies Catechism* (London: Thomas Cockrill, 1692), “To the Reader,” A4<sup>v</sup> (italics removed).

<sup>9</sup> In another place he asserted that he believed that their trials were brought on as punishment by God for their lethargic response to the Gospel, calling them “the causes of God’s indignation.” John Flavel, *Character of a Complete Evangelical Pastor* (1691), from the first extant edition in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (London: T. Parkhurst, 1701), 1336.

<sup>10</sup> Flavel never asserted that it was only Nonconformist churches that were true Christian churches. He certainly believed that there were Christians across the spectrum of Protestant Churches, whether “gathered” or established.

<sup>11</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> John Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized* (London: Robert Boulter, 1669), 99.

<sup>14</sup> For these numerical estimates, see T. J. Fawcett, *The Liturgy of Comprehension 1689: An Abortive Attempt to Revise the Book of Common Prayer* (Southend-on-Sea: Alcuin Club, 1973), 5. Duffy, incidentally, argued with good warrant that the ejection spelled the death of Nonconformity by the turn of the century. Eamon Duffy, “The

What was so awful about the removal of ministers was not only that the faithful shepherds were gone, but that the very means of salvation (through the preached word) was now absent. It was the preached word of God that was responsible for the edification, nourishment, and above all salvation of humans. Therefore, the removal of those was a dire judgment indeed. (*This* is how to radicalize a heretofore pacific minister: remove Puritans from their pulpits!)

Secondly, Flavel believed that the eradication of the ordinances from the church was a sign that Christ was about to return. Flavel held the ordinances of God in very high esteem—he saw their function as being integral to the life of the church and human salvation. Of course, as a Dissenting Protestant, it goes without saying that he rejected the Roman Catholic Church’s conception of the sacraments. Flavel valued the ordinances—including the preaching of the word—as good gifts from God. Speaking about the worth of the preached word in *Method of Grace*, Flavel wrote,

’Tis a blessing far above our estimation of it; little do we know what a treasure God committeth to us in his Ordinances ... ’tis the very power of God unto salvation, and salvation is ordinarily denied to whom the preaching of the word is denied. It’s called *the word of life*, and deserves to be valued by every one of us as our life: the eternal decree of Gods election is executed by it upon our souls: as many as be ordained to eternal life shall believe by the preaching of it. Great is the ingratitude of this generation which so slights and undervalues this invaluable treasure: which is a sad presage of the most terrible judgement, even the removing our *Candlestick* out of its place, except we repent.<sup>15</sup>

Flavel linked God’s execution of the decree of election with the preaching of the word—what greater place of prominence could be attached to any human activity? And thus, the removal of the preached word signaled, at the very least, a terrible judgment of God upon the nation. Flavel’s use of the word “judgment” was later to connote the final judgment when Christ returned to judge the living and the dead, but at this point in his ministry his concerns are restricted to English men and women.<sup>16</sup> In short, the absence of the ordinances presaged dark times for England.

The third harbinger of judgment which Flavel clearly warned his people about was that of increased national sinfulness. Flavel was deeply concerned that if the English continued in their sins they were going to prompt Jesus Christ’s speedy return to earth in judgment. In *Husbandry Spiritualized*, he used a nautical image to convey this:

You see now, what are the signs of a full ripe sinner; and when it comes to this, either with a Nation, or with a single person, then ruine is near. It is in the filling up of the measure of sin, as in the filling of a vessel cast into the Sea, which rowls from side to side, taking in the water by little and little, till it be full, and then down it sinks to the bottom.<sup>17</sup>

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Long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism and the Multitude,” in *England’s Long Reformation, 1500–1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (London: University College London, 1998), 65.

<sup>15</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 365 (italics original).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. John Flavel, *A Saint Indeed* (London: Robert Boulter, 1668), 43; *Englands Duty*, 146–47, 317, 312–13, 321; *Method of Grace*, 16, 49–50; *Navigation Spiritualized* (London: Thomas Fabian, 1677), 186.

<sup>17</sup> Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 136. Cf. Flavel, *Englands Duty*, 14–15, 30; *Preparation for Sufferings, or, The Best Work in the Worst Times* (London: Robert Boulter, 1681), 16.

It is vital to note that, as yet, there was no clear eschatological note sounded. By the end of the next decade, he would change his mind about this. In short, Flavel warned his people through the course of his career that a positive sign of God's judgment was an increase in national sinfulness, which Flavel saw on the rise and about which he was deeply concerned.

Flavel warned his fellow Dissenters that the fourth sign that the return of Christ was near was the proliferation of schism and division within their own ranks. He addressed this head-on in *Mental Errors* (1691):

These Schisms and Dissentions in the Churches of Christ are ominous presages, and foreboding signs of some sweeping Judgment, and common Calamity near approaching us. 'Tis a common observation with Shepherds, That when the Sheep push one another, a storm speedily ensues. I am sure 'tis so here, if God turn not our hearts one towards another, he will come and smite the Earth with a Curse.<sup>18</sup>

Flavel was earnest on this point and he spent a significant amount of time practicing what he preached. For example, he was integral to the formation of the "Happy Union"—an attempt in 1691 to unite Congregationalists and Presbyterians.<sup>19</sup> So interested was Flavel in the success of this treaty that when he heard the news that this union was to be effected, he was overjoyed to the point that he burst into tears. John Galpine, a fellow Nonconformist minister in Devon, wrote the first biographical sketch on Flavel's life which was published six weeks after his death. In this brief (2400-word) eulogy, dated August 3, 1691, Galpine described Flavel's intense longing for Dissenters to be unified:

He was of a peaceable and healing spirit, becoming an ambassador of the Prince of Peace. He did what lay in him to live peaceably with all men, but especially to promote peace and love among Professors.... He was even transported with joy when, by a letter from a reverend minister in London, he received the good news of the happy agreement of the ministers in that city, who in some lesser points were of different apprehensions, and went under different denominations, hoping that it would have a good influence on the whole Kingdom.... He did frequently bless the Lord for that mercy, both in public and in private, and even melted into tears of joy at the mention of it, saying God had herein answered the prayers that his people had been putting up to him these many years. When he saw the Heads of Agreement, which had been assented to, and subscribed by the London ministers, he told a friend that was with him that he could now take up the words of old Simeon, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Flavel, *Planelogia, A Succinct and Seasonable Discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of Mental Errors* (London: R. Roberts and Thomas Cockerill, 1691), 436. Here he references Malachi 4:6.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Scribner, 1893), 445–46; Michael Mullett, *Sources for the History of English Nonconformity 1660–1830* (London: British Records Association, 1991), 78; Gerald Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution: 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 253; Alexander Gordon, *Freedom After Ejection, 1690–1692* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1917), 153–55; Alexander Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England* (London: Presbyterian Church of England, 1889), 459–61.

<sup>20</sup> John Galpine, "The Life of Mr. John Flavel," in *Mr. Flavel's Remains* (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1691), a1–a2.

We will now note the development of Flavel's persuasion that the end of time was drawing near.

## 2. Flavel's Early Writings (1664–1671)

Flavel's first written work, *A New Compass for Seaman*,<sup>21</sup> was published in 1664 in his fifteenth year of ministry.<sup>22</sup> As there are no extant writings prior to this it is, of course, impossible to know what Flavel thought or taught about anything, much less eschatology. However, when he began writing, he never suggested that he thought that Christ's return was near. For example, writing in *Preparation for Sufferings* in 1665, he held out the hope that the very end of time was not yet upon the nation: "the light of Gods countenance shall not only be restored *Certainly*, but it shall be restored *Seasonably*; when the darkness is *greatest*, thy troubles at the *highest*, and thy hopes *lowest*. He is a God of judgment, and knows how to time his own mercies."<sup>23</sup> Writing in 1665, Flavel clearly seemed to believe that God's judgment was not to be expected in the near future.

In a sermon he preached in 1670, he even sounded an optimistic note about the future:

Get these great truths well digested both in your heads and hearts and let the power of them be displayed in your lives.... These things that so often warm'd your hearts from the Pulpit, return now to make a second impression upon them from the Press.... Two things relieve me; one is, that future times may produce more humble, and hungry Christians, than this gluttoned age enjoys.<sup>24</sup>

Implicit in expressing hope that future times would generate a better brand of Christian, he suggested that there was a buoyant future for the nation. In short, Flavel did not warn his people that Christ's return was near in the first decade of his writing career. However, events which transpired over the next decade began to shake Flavel's confidence that this fiery grand finale lay in the distant future.

## 3. Flavel's Middle Writings (1671–1680)

Roughly ten years after publishing *Fountain of Life*, especially in the sermon series *Method of Grace*, Flavel began to warm to the idea that something eschatologically significant was approaching. Flavel seemed to suggest that the Lord was about to remove his ministers and ordinances, which, as was shown in the early part of this article, constituted a first step toward final judgment: "those that were wise in heart could not but discern the distress of nations with great perplexity in these seeds of judgment and calamity.... O take up your lodgings in the Attributes and Promises of God, before the night overtake you ... when the Ministers and Ordinances of Christ have taken their leave of you, and bid you good night."<sup>25</sup> He clearly warned his hearers that God would remove the Christian Church's leavening presence if a nation continued in its sins, as England had been doing. Again, in *Method of Grace*, he wrote,

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<sup>21</sup> The second edition was renamed *Navigation Spiritualized* (1677).

<sup>22</sup> Flavel was ordained as a Presbyterian at Salisbury on October 17, 1650. John Quick, *Icones Sacrae Anglicanae* (1706), 923 (italics original).

<sup>23</sup> Flavel, *Preparation for Sufferings*, 141.

<sup>24</sup> John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life Opened* (London: Francis Tyton, 1673), 30–31.

<sup>25</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, "To the Reader," 16–17.



My Friends, let me speak as freely as I am sure I speak seasonably. A sound of judgement is in our ears.... All things round about us seem to posture themselves for trouble and distress. Where is the man of wisdom that doth not foresee a shower of wrath and indignation coming? We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear and not of peace.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, by the early 1680s, Flavel believed that there was trouble ahead for the Dissenters and the nation. During these years, especially in the aftermath of the Popish Plot (1678), Flavel gestured toward the rise of Roman Catholicism as one harbinger of judgment.<sup>27</sup> Giving Flavel's estimate of the state of Christendom, he wrote,

The far greater part [of this world] is overspread with popish darkness: separate from the remainder, the multitudes of prophane, merely civil and hypocritical professors of Religion; and how few will remain for Jesus Christ in this world? Look over the Cities, Towns and Parishes in this populous Kingdom; and how few shall you find that speak the language or do the works of new creatures? How few have ever had any awakening convictions on them? And how many of those that have been convinced have miscarried and never come to the new birth?<sup>28</sup>

Although he certainly sounded pessimistic, Flavel was not yet prepared to say that the end had come. Between 1664 and 1680 Flavel began to fear that God's judgment was about to smite the world, in part because England was persecuting religious Dissenters. By the time another decade passed, he was fully convinced that England's time had expired because of the weak religious state of the nation.

#### 4. *Flavel's Later Writings (1680–1691)*

In the preface to Flavel's 1689 sermon series *Englands Duty Under the Present Gospel Liberty*, Flavel commented upon Paul's warning to Timothy: "In the last days perilous times shall come."<sup>29</sup> Flavel then cited the 4th century Christian Lactantius<sup>30</sup> to support his claim that the last days were at hand: "Of [such] perilous times, Lactantius writes thus; 'When the end of this world is approaching, the state of human affairs must needs be greatly changed, and grow worse, through the prevalency of wickedness...'" Flavel then followed this remark by saying: "What think you, reader, is not this a description of our own times...? That this hath been fulfilled in our late (recent) troubles, none surely can hesitate that hath any discernment."<sup>31</sup> This is an important statement and is the central evidence which demonstrates that Flavel's eschatological expectations significantly shifted by the year 1689, namely, he explicitly asserted that the end of the world was near in the last few years of his life. To erase any doubt, Flavel made a

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<sup>26</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, "To the Reader," 16. Cf. John Flavel, *A Practical Treatise of Fear* (London: R. Boulter, 1681), A5<sup>r</sup>-A5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> The Popish Plot was a supposed conspiracy by the Jesuits to assassinate Charles II and crown his son James II, a staunch Catholic, in order to return England to Rome.

<sup>28</sup> Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 447.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1.

<sup>30</sup> Lactantius (c. 240–320 AD) was an advisor to Constantine. Marginal note reads: "*Lact lib. 70. de divino premio. p. 578, 579.*"

<sup>31</sup> John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Reverend Mr. John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Keene, 1820), "A Letter," 4:8.

similar statement later in the same preface to that work: “It is very probable, that the day which all the prophets foretold, and all good men have, as it were, with outstretched neck, been eagerly looking for, is now at hand.” In its wider context, this quotation is referencing the return of Christ to judge and bring an end to the world. This represents a significant shift in his eschatological views over a 25-year period.<sup>32</sup> It is at this point that Iain Murray is incorrect in his claim that the Puritans did not predict the imminent return of Christ. But we will return to that at the end.

With this said, however, Flavel did not quit his job to wait for the return of Christ. Albeit he was convinced that the end of the age was upon them, he clung to the hope that England would be able to reform herself and delay the Lord’s return. This was for several reasons. One hope Flavel held onto in 1689 was that William and Mary were on the throne, which might postpone God’s judgment: “But God at length, pitying our distresses, hath raised up a man [William of Orange],<sup>33</sup> both zealous for the truth, and a lover of godliness, boldly to assert his cause in the face of danger and toil, and to put a new face on things.”<sup>34</sup> A second hopeful sign which followed the coronation of William and Mary was that the English Parliament passed the Act of Toleration in May 1689, which finally granted religious liberty to Protestant Nonconformists. He seemed optimistic that these factors just might postpone judgment on the nation and the earth.

In light of Flavel’s expectation that the apocalypse was near in 1689, he urged his fellow ministers, whom he explicitly addressed in his preface to *Englands Duty*, to be about the work of proselytizing above all else. He wrote, “Especially and above all, I humbly beseech you, that, having laid aside all designs of smaller importance, you would mind this one thing *how you may gain to Christ the souls committed to you*, to which all earthly things are to be postponed. This is the labour, this the work incumbent on us.”<sup>35</sup> According to Flavel, the best and most important work they could be about was that of evangelizing the unconverted. However, if they neglected to bear fruit in this way, judgment was in store. Flavel likened this to cutting down a tree from the roots: “The mercies and liberties of this day are a new trial obtained for us by our potentate Advocate in the heavens; if we bring forth fruit, well; if not, the ax lieth at the root of the tree. Let us not be secure.”<sup>36</sup> Whether we agree with Flavel’s ontological beliefs or not, we should at least appreciate Flavel’s urging others to preach the gospel given his belief that all people were about to stand before the judgment throne of God. What else could he press them to do? Even though he was wrong in his prediction of the *eschaton*, it is surely significant that a Puritan

<sup>32</sup> For other passages which intimate the brevity of time between the years 1689 and 1691, see Flavel, *Englands Duty*, “An Epistle to the Reader,” A3<sup>v</sup>, 13, 41–42; John Flavel, *Mt. Pisgah* (London: Matthew Wotton, 1689), 321, 322–23, 328, 332; John Flavel, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of John Upton* (London: J. Harris, 1688), 149.

<sup>33</sup> The marginal note at this point in the 1820 edition reads: “William III. Prince of Orange.” Although this note was added later, the context makes it obvious that Flavel is alluding to his new king. This marginal note first appeared in the 1754 Glasgow edition of Flavel’s *Works*. Cf. John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (Glasgow: John Orr, 1754), 2:ii. This sixth edition of Flavel’s *Works* also translated Flavel’s introductory “Letter” from Latin into English for the first time, which translation appeared in the 1820 edition, as well as subsequent facsimile editions of that work in 1968, 1982, 1997, and 2005. The 1754 edition translation appears in some, but not all, subsequent editions. In several the Latin continued to be printed. Cf. 1762 Edinburgh edition; David Gray for J. Johnston.

<sup>34</sup> Flavel, *Works* (1820), “A Letter,” 4:8.

<sup>35</sup> Flavel, *Englands Duty*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Flavel, *Englands Duty*, 3–4.

of Flavel's stature ventured a guess and erred at a time when many had gotten out of the precarious business of prophecy.

### 5. Conclusion

As I close, it seems warranted to criticize Flavel for the implicit nationalism in his claims about the end of the world. After all, it sounds a bit cheeky to think that because events are tumultuous in one's own country, therefore the entire human race is in jeopardy. To be fair, some interpreters of the Puritans do not believe that they had intense apocalyptic concerns. Much as I value his overall take on the Puritans, I differ with Iain Murray's assessment in *The Puritan Hope*: "Christopher Hill in his *Puritanism and Revolution* published in 1958, gives the impression, as do other writers, that the Puritans far from being characterized by hope expected the imminent end of the world!"<sup>37</sup> Some Puritans seemed to expect the end of the world, and Flavel proves an example of this. Murray also states that those books which did deal with prophecy were those written by "men of acrobatic imaginations or of half-crazy fanatics."<sup>38</sup> Presumably Murray is referring to groups like the Ranters, Diggers, Levellers, or Fifth Monarchists, active in the Interregnum. But to group a centrist like Flavel with these fanatics is a serious misreading of the evidence. Apocalypticism was certainly not Flavel's hobby-horse, and he never devoted an entire book to the topic. But his concerns do appear in a number of his important works. Nevertheless, Flavel stands liable to just criticism for having a very Anglo-centric understanding of the world. Clearer heads would one day prevail in the sense of trying to be aware of one's own biases, but not yet.

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<sup>37</sup> Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), xxiii.

<sup>38</sup> Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, xxiii.

# New Insights into the Formative Influence of Spurgeon's Early Years

— Geoff Chang —

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**Abstract:** This article draws on lesser-known primary sources to argue for the formative influence of C. H. Spurgeon's early years on his future ministry. First, it examines John Spurgeon's time in Raleigh, which explains why Spurgeon spent the first five years of his life with his grandfather, a relationship that shaped his view of ministry and the church. Second, it reflects on the ministry of T. W. Davids, pastor of the Congregational church in Colchester, and his influence on young Spurgeon. Third, it summarizes new insights from Spurgeon's earliest preaching notebooks.

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Due to his rapid ascent as one of the most popular preachers of the 19th century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon's (1834–1892) background has become a subject of great interest to his biographers. Writing in 1856,<sup>1</sup> E. L. Magoon provides this basic outline of his background: he was born in Kelvedon, his father and grandfather were Independent ministers, he was educated at Colchester, Maidstone, and Newmarket, worked as a tutor in Cambridge, preached at Waterbeach and other surrounding villages, and then was called to New Park Street in 1854.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent biographers would pull together stories from Spurgeon's early years, drawing from his sermons, writings, anecdotes, and interviews with his family. These beloved stories would all become a part of the Spurgeon lore. As G. Holden Pike notes, they have become so familiar that they are “of everybody's property.”<sup>3</sup> The definitive collection of these stories can be found in his four-volume *Autobiography*, published in 1897. The entire first volume is dedicated to Spurgeon's life up to his arrival in London in 1854. Modern Spurgeon scholarship has also recognized the importance of Spurgeon's early life. Beyond exploring the reasons for his popularity, scholars have studied these early stories, tracing theological and pastoral themes from his

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon would have been 21 or 22 years old when the first biographical work about him was published.

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Magoon, *“The Modern Whitefield”: Sermons of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London; with an Introduction and Sketch of His Life* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Company, 1856), v-vi.

<sup>3</sup> G. Holden Pike, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Preacher, Author, Philanthropist* (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1892), 4.

childhood to his adult life and ministry.<sup>4</sup>

This study, then, will continue in the vein of exploring Spurgeon's early life and looking for connections into his future ministry. But rather than re-telling familiar stories, it will uncover new ones by focusing on two previously unexplored collection of primary sources. The first is a collection newspaper articles, magazines, minute books, and other primary and secondary sources from Essex that shed new light on Spurgeon's early years.<sup>5</sup> The second is *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*. These nine notebooks contain the sermon outlines that Spurgeon preached first as an itinerant preacher, then as the pastor of Waterbeach chapel. By examining these sources, previously unanswered questions about Spurgeon's background will be answered, shedding new light on how the boy preacher became the Prince of Preachers.

### *1. John Spurgeon's Journey from Kelvedon to Colchester*

We begin by examining Charles's family, particularly his father, John. When he was fourteen months old, Charles was sent to live with his grandparents. What led John and Eliza Spurgeon to make this decision? This question has not been fully answered in the existing Spurgeon literature. When Charles was born, the family was living in Kelvedon, Essex. John Spurgeon worked as a grocer like his father, who was a grocer before he became a pastor.<sup>6</sup> This was the family business as John's brothers, Samuel and James Jr., were also grocers in Maldon and Stambourne, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

When Spurgeon was ten months old, most biographers report that the family left Kelvedon and moved to Colchester, where John got a job as a clerk for a coal merchant.<sup>8</sup> They believe that it is at this point that Charles was sent to live with his grandfather. Biographers tend to assume that the transition to Colchester proved difficult, which is why they needed help. The problem, however, is that Charles

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<sup>4</sup> An example of this is Tom Nettles's latest work, which looks at ten different themes across Spurgeon's life. Tom Nettles, *The Child is Father of the Man* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Many thanks to Peter Tervet, retired executive and an elder at Prettygate Baptist Church in Colchester, for providing this collection and sharing his research with me for my work in the Spurgeon Library (Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City).

<sup>6</sup> James J. Ellis, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Lives that Speak* (London: James Nisbet, 1891), 15. Also, Pike quotes from *The Wesleyan Times*, 1864, that James Spurgeon Sr. was "recommended to a gentleman at Finch- ingfield [Essex] to learn the combined business of grocer and linen draper," G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Cassell & Company, 1894), 3:81.

<sup>7</sup> See *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 17 March 1843. The newspaper reported on Samuel Spurgeon's wedding and identified him as "grocer and tea dealer, third son of Rev. Jas. Spurgeon, of Stambourn." For James Junior, see William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of the County of Essex* (Sheffield: R. Leader, 1848), which lists him as a "shopkeeper" at Stambourne.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Pike writes, "Mr. and Mrs. John Spurgeon did not remain long at Kelvedon. In or about April, 1835, they gave up their village home in order to settle at Colchester as a more convenient centre for their business, and where some of their family connections appear to have resided ... soon after he had completed his first year he went to reside with his paternal grandparents at Stambourne." Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 1:7.

was gone for almost five years!<sup>9</sup> What was going on in the Spurgeon family that required help for so long? A closer look indicates that these years were more tumultuous than previously thought.

Among Spurgeon biographers, there is some indication that the Spurgeon family did not move to Colchester right away. For example, James Ellis notes that after Kelvedon, John “removed to Raleigh, in Essex” and “at a later period” became a clerk at Colchester.<sup>10</sup> But he provides no details about the intervening time. W. Miller Higgs provides more definitive proof of the time in Raleigh in his work, *The Spurgeon Family*. He reproduces a handwritten list from John Spurgeon containing the date and location of the birth for each of his surviving children.<sup>11</sup>

In this list, John lists Charles’s birth first, “Kelvedon Essex June 19th 1834.” Next is Eliza Rebecca, “born at Raleigh Essex, January 19, 1836.” Then, we have James Archer, “born at Braintree Essex, June 8th, 1837.” Finally, we come to Emily Jarvis, born in “Colchester, Essex April 28 1839.” According to this list, the family did not immediately move to Colchester after leaving Kelvedon but first went south to Raleigh (also spelled Rayleigh) around May 1835. It would have been around August or September 1835 that Charles was sent to live with his grandparents. Shortly after, on January 1836, Eliza Rebecca was born.

The local Essex newspapers seem to confirm that the Spurgeons lived in Raleigh. The *Chelmsford Chronicle* contains a record from February 1837 about “John Spurgeon, formerly of Kelvedon, in the county of Essex, Grocer and Linen-draper, and late of Rayleigh, in the said county, Baker and General Shopkeeper.”<sup>12</sup> Can we be sure that this John Spurgeon is Charles’s father? Part of the challenge is evidence of at least one other John Spurgeon in Essex around that time.

The *Chelmsford Chronicle* reports in January 1834, “John Spurgeon convicted of stealing a coat belonging to Wm Cook a wagoner at Halsted was sentenced to be transported for fourteen years.”<sup>13</sup> Six years later, we see another report that “John Spurgeon, 66, labourer, was indicted for stealing a quantity of brass, copper and pewter [from] the property of Messrs. Day of Halsted.”<sup>14</sup> The dates, age, and transportation to Australia rule these John Spurgeons out as being Charles’s father. But the description of the other John Spurgeon, being a grocer “formerly of Kelvedon,” but now a shopkeeper in Rayleigh, combined with the birth of Eliza Rebecca in Raleigh, make it almost sure that this is Charles’s father.

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<sup>9</sup> Pike records the following recollection from John Spurgeon: “It has been said that Charles was brought up by his grandfather and grandmother. The fact is, that my father and mother came to see us when Charles was a baby of fourteen months old. They took him to stay with them, and he remained with them until he was between four and five years of age. Then he came home to Colchester where I was then residing,” Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 1:7. In a letter to the mayor of Colchester, Spurgeon states that he lived with his father in Colchester from 1840 to 1849, which would mean he was living with his grandfather from 1835 to 1840. *The Essex Standard*, 6 February 1892, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 15. Ellis was a former student of Spurgeon’s and was personally acquainted with Spurgeon’s son Charles and sister Caroline. Both read his biography and gave their input prior to publication. It is possible that Ellis obtained this information through them.

<sup>11</sup> W. Miller Higgs, *The Spurgeon Family: Being an Account of the Descent and Family of Charles Haddon Spurgeon with Notes on the Family in General, Particularly the Essex Branch* (London: Elliot Stock, 1906), viii. There is a handwritten note in the margin from C. H. Spurgeon confirming his father’s handwriting.

<sup>12</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 17 February 1837.

<sup>13</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 3 January 1834.

<sup>14</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 22 May 1840.

So, John Spurgeon moved to Raleigh in summer 1835, and by September, he opened a grocery store there. Local advertisements show that John Spurgeon sold his business in Kelvedon and purchased one in Raleigh that summer.<sup>15</sup> To finalize the deal, it appears that James Spurgeon came to Raleigh and backed him in that purchase. Eliza Spurgeon was expecting another child, and John needed to devote himself to starting this new business. So, the decision to send Charles with James was likely made during that first visit to Raleigh.

Like any business owner, John Spurgeon faced challenges. In January of 1837, one of his employees was convicted of theft and sentenced to “five months of hard labour and 1 solitary.”<sup>16</sup> More seriously, however, in February 1837 that John Spurgeon “formerly of Kelvedon” was “sued with James Spurgeon.”<sup>17</sup> John's business had turned out to be unsuccessful. Within two years, he found himself in debt to his suppliers and unable to pay them back. Debt in the 19th century could be disastrous. Those who were unable to pay back their debts could choose to make themselves insolvent, or they could wait to be made bankrupt by their creditors. Either way, debtors were subject to debtors' prison.

For his debts, John Spurgeon was sent to the gaol at Chelmsford from January 30, 1837.<sup>18</sup> The February 1837 article stated that creditors intending “to oppose a prisoner's discharge” must submit a notice in writing.<sup>19</sup> As John was sent to debtors' prison and creditors seized his home, Eliza (who was pregnant) took her one-year-old daughter to Braintree, where perhaps she had friends or relatives to help her.

Rather than be subject to the public humiliation of bankruptcy, John chose to make himself insolvent, selling his business and all his household possessions.<sup>20</sup> The auction began on January 25, 1837. The sale catalog included the inventory from the store and household furniture like a “child's wicker chair” and a “mahogany framed child's cot,” pieces that once likely held his son Charles. The sale took two days and included over 400 auction lots. John Spurgeon's case was heard on March 10, 1837. The auctioneer reported a sales total of £120, 14s, 9d, minus expenses, plus an additional £80 worth of fixtures in Spurgeon's house. This sum was turned over to the court “for the purpose of their being given up to the creditors” and “the Insolvent was discharged.”<sup>21</sup> John was released from Chelmsford gaol on March 14, 1837.<sup>22</sup>

John Spurgeon was once again a free man, but this freedom had cost him nearly everything. All that remained were the clothes on his back and a few personal belongings amounting to £3, 11s. John Spurgeon likely joined his wife in Braintree after his release, and they welcomed the arrival of James

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<sup>15</sup> *The Essex Herald* contains an advertisement of the sale of a “Grocery, Linen Drapery and General Shop-keeping” business in Kelvedon by a T. Spurgeon (the “T” instead of a “J” is likely a typo). *Essex Herald*, 18 August 1835, 1. One month later, in September of 1835, there is another advertisement for “a stout active LAD, as an APPRENTICE to the Grocery, Linen Drapery, and General Shopkeeping Businesses, in a Dissenting family.” *Essex Herald*, 8 September 1835, 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 6 January 1837.

<sup>17</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 17 February 1837, 1. James Spurgeon's inclusion in the suit indicates that he had likely backed John in this venture.

<sup>18</sup> *Indenture Papers*, 14 March 1837, Essex Record Office.

<sup>19</sup> *Indenture Papers*, 14 March 1837, Essex Record Office.

<sup>20</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 25–26 January 1837.

<sup>21</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 17 March 1837.

<sup>22</sup> *Indenture Papers*, 14 March 1837, Essex Record Office.

Archer three months later. The final notice related to this case is found in September 1837, where a meeting for creditors of John Spurgeon was called “to declare and pay a Dividend on his Estate.”<sup>23</sup>

From Braintree, the family moved to Colchester, likely by late 1837. The first reference of the family’s move to Colchester comes from the birth of Emily Jarvis Spurgeon in April 1839. Her middle name was likely a tribute to Eliza’s older brother, Charles Parker Jarvis, a coal merchant and prominent leader in Colchester. After the disaster in Raleigh, Charles Jarvis hired John to work for him in the respectable job of a merchant clerk, a position that John would hold for 26 years. He also provided a home for the Spurgeon family on Hythe Street in Colchester. Charles Jarvis would prove to be a benefactor to the family, providing generously for Eliza in his will, following his death in November 1839. Charles rejoined the family in Colchester sometime around early 1840.

With so much going on in the Spurgeon family, it is no wonder that Charles lived with his grandparents for five years. There is no indication that John and Eliza Spurgeon ever intended their first-born son to be gone for so long. Perhaps they imagined that the grocery business would be up and going in a few months, and then Charles would return to live with them. As it turned out, this would not be the case.

Given the painful memory of these events, it makes sense why this is a story that has not been told. Early biographers tend to conflate Kelvedon and Colchester, leaving out the years at Raleigh. When interviewed, John Spurgeon was never asked explicitly about Raleigh, and so he never talked about it. As Tervet says, “If any early biographers were aware they sensitively chose not to mention ... as a result many details of Charles Spurgeon’s early life in Colchester are obscured.”<sup>24</sup>

This turn of events proved significant in Spurgeon’s life. His experience of growing up in his grandfather’s home shaped his outlook and his theological development. When Charles rejoined his siblings in Colchester, he would lead them in playing “church,” rather than “grocery.” Of course, Charles, like his grandfather, was the pastor. As a result of these first five years, Charles and his grandfather grew very close. Charles spent subsequent school holidays in Stambourne, learning from his grandfather, sitting under his preaching, and exploring his Puritan library.

These events also shed new light on one of Spurgeon’s clearest memories from his childhood in Colchester. On one occasion, he wanted “a stick of slate pencil” but had no money. So, he went into the shop and purchased one on credit. He was in debt, and somehow his father found out about it. Spurgeon recalls,

He was very soon down upon me in right earnest. God bless him for it; he was a sensible man, and none of your children-spoilers; he did not intend to bring his children to speculate, and play at what big rogues call financing, and therefore he knocked my getting into debt on the head at once, and no mistake. He gave me a very powerful lecture upon getting into debt, and how like it was to stealing, and upon the way in which people were ruined by it; and how a boy who would owe a farthing, might one day owe a hundred pounds, and get into prison, and bring his family into disgrace. It was a lecture, indeed; I think I can hear it now, and can feel my ears tingling at the recollection of it.... How did my little heart vow and declare that nothing should ever

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<sup>23</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 8 September 1837.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Tervet, “Spurgeon’s Family—A Tale of Ruin and Rescue,” *SBHS Newsletter*, June 2019, 5–9.



tempt me into debt again! It was a fine lesson, and I have never forgotten it.... Ever since that early sickening, I have hated debt as Luther hated the Pope.<sup>25</sup>

Fathers lecture their sons all the time, but not all lectures make an impression.<sup>26</sup> But for young Spurgeon, this lecture changed his life. Something about his father's tone convinced the young boy of the deadliness of debt. Perhaps John Spurgeon's earnestness was compounded by the fact that this incident involved his oldest son, from whom he was separated for five years because of his debts.

Spurgeon would repudiate debt for the rest of his life. Though he would attempt enormous financial projects like the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the Stockwell Orphanages, the Pastors' College, numerous church plants, the support of missionaries all over the world, and much more, Spurgeon never went into debt for any of those ventures. He believed debt to be a sin and an act of faithlessness. Spurgeon traces these convictions back to his experience as a young boy, which can be traced back to his father's ordeal.

## *2. The Ministry of T. W. Davids at Lion Walk Congregational Church, Colchester*

After arriving in Colchester in 1837, the Spurgeon family, being Congregationalists, attended an Independent chapel. There were two Congregational chapels in Colchester: Lion Walk Chapel and Stockwell Street Chapel.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, John and Eliza would join Lion Walk, but they did not join right away. The church was undergoing transition, and a young new pastor, T. W. Davids, arrived at Lion Walk in 1841. Perhaps the Spurgeons wanted to evaluate the new pastor before joining the church.

Davids was not the only new pastor in town. Eld Lane Baptist Church called Robert Langford the following year. James Spurgeon participated in Langford's ordination service by giving the closing prayer.<sup>28</sup> Given that connection, it is likely that the Spurgeons, including young Charles, were in attendance for at least one of the ordination services, if not both. The record of these lengthy ordination services and dinners remain.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that Spurgeon's own aversion to ordination began during this time.<sup>30</sup>

Davids early years at Lion Walk proved tumultuous, and a group from the church left to start their own congregation in 1844. But by summer 1843, the church minute books show that John and Eliza had decided to stay at Lion Walk and join the church.<sup>31</sup> Young Spurgeon, however, was not impressed with Davids's preaching. It appears that at one point, Spurgeon admired Davids's preaching from a

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<sup>25</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 1:40.

<sup>26</sup> The author can verify this from personal experience.

<sup>27</sup> Janet Cooper, *A History of the County of Essex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 9:345–46.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Spyvee, *Colchester Baptist Church—The First 300 Years, 1689–1989* (Colchester: Technique House, 1989), 53.

<sup>29</sup> For an account of Davids's ordination service, see James A. Tabor, *A Brief History of the Independent Church Assembling in the Lion Walk Colchester from 1641 to 1861* (Colchester, 1861), 55. For an account of Langford's ordination service, see Spyvee, *Colchester Baptist Church—The First 300 Years*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:357.

<sup>31</sup> Eliza joined first on June 30, 1843. John joined on September 1, 1843. See *Lion Walk Minute Books*, 30 June 1843 and 1 September 1843, Essex Record Office.

rhetorical standpoint.<sup>32</sup> But this would change as he began to experience the conviction of sin. Some of this conviction was due to Davids's preaching.<sup>33</sup> But Spurgeon claims he never experienced any relief from his guilt. Instead, his conversion would take place at a Primitive Methodist chapel in January 1850. After his conversion, Spurgeon wondered how it was that nobody had preached the gospel to him.<sup>34</sup>

In 1857, Spurgeon would publish these biting words:

A ministry devoid of gospel grace is a frequent cause of long delay in finding the Saviour. Some of us in the days of our sorrow for sin were compelled by circumstances to sit under a legal preacher who did but increase our pain, and aggravate our woe. Destitute of all savour and unction, but most of all wanting in a clear view of Jesus the Mediator, the sermons we heard were wells without water, and clouds without rain. Elegant in diction, admirable style, and faultless in composition, they fell on our ears even as the beautiful crystals of snow fall upon the surface of a brook, and only tend to swell its floods.<sup>35</sup>

Spurgeon never mentions Davids by name, but it appears some people connected these words to his time at Lion Walk. This, perhaps, explains why in 1858, a committee at Lion Walk refused John Spurgeon's request to have Charles preach at the church for a fundraiser for the Independent chapel at Tollesbury.<sup>36</sup> It would take the more mature reflection of later years for Spurgeon to admit that he likely did hear the gospel before 1850, but the Spirit had not yet granted illumination.<sup>37</sup>

Though Spurgeon criticized Davids's preaching, a closer look at the ministry at Lion Walk shows that Davids was a gifted administrator with a pastoral heart. The church thrived under Davids. One evidence of Davids's pastoral gifts is that John and Eliza did not leave Lion Walk, despite their son's critiques. Accounts of Lion Walk during Davids's tenure highlight his concern to know and shepherd his people.

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<sup>32</sup> A professor from Spurgeon's early years recalls, "He had a wonderful memory for passages of oratory which he admired, and used to pour forth to me with great gusto, in our walks, long screeds from open-air addresses of a very rousing description, which he had heard delivered at Colchester Fair, by the Congregational minister, Mr. Davids." *Autobiography*, 1:54.

<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon would later describe the experience of sitting "under a legal preacher who did but increase our pain, and aggravate our woe." C. H. Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970), 100.

<sup>34</sup> "When, for the first time, I received the gospel to my soul's salvation, I thought that I had never really heard it before, and I began to think that the preachers to whom I had listened had not truly preached it." *Autobiography*, 1:102.

<sup>35</sup> Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> "In September the question was raised in a Church Meeting as to why the use of the pulpit had been denied to Mr. John Spurgeon, a member of the Church, who had asked for it in order that his son, the Rev Charles Spurgeon, might preach on behalf of the Independent Church at Tollesbury. A Committee was appointed and reported that they could not elicit who was responsible for the refusal, but expressed their regret that such a course was adopted." E. Alec Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church, Colchester* (Colchester: Benham & Company, 1938), 42. See also *Lion Walk Meeting Minutes*, 29 September 1858, Essex Record Office.

<sup>37</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:102–3.

Dauids had a rigorous membership process. One historian observes that “church membership was looked upon as a serious matter in those days.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to an interview with the pastor, the congregation voted to send a disputation of members “to interview personally each candidate for church fellowship and report on their suitability and their experience in the faith.”<sup>39</sup> The minute books show that John and Eliza went through this process of joining the church. Dauids was also concerned with keeping membership meaningful. Dauids tracked his members’ attendance at communion services. If a member were absent for more than three communion services in a row, they would be visited by two brothers in the church and encouraged to return. Those who refused would eventually be erased from the membership rolls.<sup>40</sup> Finally, Dauids divided the church into twelve districts “with arrangement that those in each district should meet periodically in one another’s houses, for tea if possible, to be followed by a meeting for prayer and fellowship.” Additionally, the pastor committed to visiting a different district every two weeks, so that he would have personal contact with every member of the church every six months.<sup>41</sup>

It appears that Spurgeon learned something about pastoral ministry from Dauids. After his conversion, Spurgeon expressed his disappointment over how anemic the membership process was at the Congregational chapel in Newmarket.<sup>42</sup> At St. Andrew’s Baptist Church, he challenged a fellow communicant on the Table being a sign of true fellowship.<sup>43</sup> Even as a new Christian, Spurgeon had a high view of church membership and the sacraments. Lion Walk likely contributed to that. As the pastor of New Park Street Chapel, Spurgeon would implement many of the same tools as Dauids: a rigorous membership process involving messengers, tracking members through their participation at the Lord’s Supper, and dividing the church into districts to aid with pastoral care.<sup>44</sup> These tools would be crucial for Spurgeon’s ministry, making it possible for him to pastor thousands meaningfully.

Beyond pastoral care, Dauids organized numerous evangelistic and benevolent ministries. Congregationalists in the early 19th century were marked by a growing activism, and this was no different in Colchester.<sup>45</sup> In September 1844, Dauids established a Lay Preachers’ Association, with John Spurgeon as a founding member. Their object was “to provide supplies for evenings of the Lord’s Day” at four preaching stations: Shrub End, Greenstead, the Hythe, and West Bergholt.<sup>46</sup> Itinerant lay preaching was a growing feature of Dissenting churches from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, especially in rural locations.<sup>47</sup> However, being in a larger town like Colchester meant that a lay preacher’s

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<sup>38</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Blaxill, *The History of Lion Walk Congregational Church*, 185.

<sup>44</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel; A Record of Combat with Sin & Labour for the Lord* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1869): 49–57. Hereafter, this work will be referenced to as *S&T*.

<sup>45</sup> R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), 188–94.

<sup>46</sup> Tabor, *A Brief History*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.

association was more controversial, becoming “an object of derision to some and censure to others.”<sup>48</sup> Davids experienced opposition not only from the Established Church, but even from “Nonconformists of various denominations.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite opposition, this association proved to be the starting point for John Spurgeon’s preaching ministry. During the week, he would work as a merchant clerk, and on Sunday evenings, he would travel to a preaching station and lead services. When he began, Charles was ten years old. John regretted not being home to lead in family worship on Sunday evenings, but he was reassured to find his wife faithfully praying for their young children.<sup>50</sup> Charles had the opportunity to watch his father grow as a preacher and accompanied him on some occasions.<sup>51</sup> In March 1850, after a few months as pulpit supply, the congregation at Tollesbury Independent chapel called John to serve as their bi-vocational pastor.<sup>52</sup> For the next fourteen years, John would continue living and working in Colchester while driving over on Sunday mornings to Tollesbury to lead the services as their pastor. Eliza would be responsible for bringing the children to the services at Lion Walk.

Besides the Lay Preachers’ Association, Davids established numerous other institutions at Lion Walk. There were Sunday Schools, a Sunday School Library, Clothing Club, Sick and Destitute Scholars’ Benefit Society, Old Scholars’ Tea Meeting, Benevolent Society, Congregational Library, Circulating Book Society, and various Bible, Greek, and Psalmody classes.<sup>53</sup> Members of the church participated in these institutions. In addition to John’s lay preaching, Charles and his siblings were all involved in the Sunday Schools. In 1852, Eliza Rebecca, Charles’s sister, would become a Sunday School teacher at Lion Walk.<sup>54</sup>

Being part of an active church like Lion Walk left an impression on young Spurgeon. In addition to all the above societies, Lion Walk had one more: the “Home Juvenile Society,” founded by Spurgeon when he was 11. This society had a handwritten magazine, the “Juvenile Magazine,” and held business meetings.<sup>55</sup> Spurgeon also organized a home library (making one of his sisters the librarian) and edited another magazine entitled, “Scraps of Missionary News.”<sup>56</sup> Playing “church” for young Spurgeon involved much more than just a worship service. It involved publications and community involvement. But this activism continued beyond Colchester. After his conversion in January 1850, Spurgeon joined the Congregational chapel in Newmarket and immediately began to look for ways to serve. He distributed tracts and visited sick members. He became a Sunday School teacher. And by January 1851, Spurgeon preached his first sermon in a cottage at Teversham, as part of the Lay Preachers’ Association at St.

<sup>48</sup> Tabor, *A Brief History*, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Tabor, *A Brief History*, 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:69.

<sup>51</sup> “I have a distinct remembrance of a mission-room, where my father frequently preached.” *Autobiography*, 1:43.

<sup>52</sup> Tollesbury Independent Chapel Minute Book, 1 March 1850, Essex Record Office.

<sup>53</sup> Tabor, *A Brief History*, 60–67.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes from Sunday-School Teachers’ Quarterly Meeting, Lion Walk, 6 April 1852, Essex Record Office.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 24.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Ray, *The Life of Spurgeon* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 27, 36.

Andrew's in Cambridge.<sup>57</sup> The sight of such a 16-year-old preacher was unusual in those days. As one aged voice cried out after the sermon, "Bless your dear heart, how old are you?"<sup>58</sup> Unusual as it was, John Spurgeon's lay-preaching ministry at Lion Walk likely prepared the way for Charles to begin his preaching career.

In 1854, Spurgeon would be called to pastor in London. His activism as the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle is well-known.<sup>59</sup> It would be saying too much to imply that Spurgeon was imply imitating what he saw at Lion Walk. Still, Spurgeon's natural activism and vision for a working church can be traced back to his family's involvement in the ministries at Lion Walk. Spurgeon built on (and surpassed) what he had seen at Lion Walk in his later ministry.

### *3. Gleanings from the Lost Sermons*

Charles's first sermon in January 1851 was delivered extemporaneously without any notes. It seems that he preached at least two more sermons in the same way.<sup>60</sup> But by February 1851, he felt the need to prepare his sermons ahead of time. He purchased a writing notebook and began to write down sermon outlines.<sup>61</sup> Their simplicity shows that he was still committed to a largely extemporaneous delivery. But now, with his preaching notebook, Spurgeon could bring more of his study with him into the pulpit. Not only that but he could reuse his sermon notes, and so be called upon to preach at a moment's notice.

Throughout spring 1851, Spurgeon worked as a tutor and preached two or three times a month. By summer 1851, Spurgeon's ministry picked up, preaching twenty-one sermons between June and August. On October 3, 1851, Spurgeon preached his first sermon at Waterbeach chapel, "Salvation from Sin," his fifty-first preaching occasion.<sup>62</sup> Before the month was up, the congregation called seventeen-year-old Spurgeon to be their pastor. Naturally, he was thrilled. He had to continue working as a tutor in Cambridge to make ends meet, but he was eager to begin pastoring.

Amid all this, John Spurgeon was concerned for his son. It was one thing to be an itinerant preacher at the age of sixteen. But now, he was pastoring a church! Perhaps Charles saw himself following in his father's footsteps, first as a lay preacher and then a bi-vocational pastor. But in fact, John knew his situation was quite different. He had preached for six years before being called as a bi-vocational pastor.

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<sup>57</sup> There is no record of the date of Spurgeon's first sermon. Christian George believes it took place in August 1850. This is unlikely given that he had only arrived in Cambridge in August 1850 (*Autobiography*, 1:186), and he did not join the St. Andrew's until October. After joining the church, it would have taken some time for James Vinter to notice young Spurgeon's teaching abilities and "invite" him to preach. Since the first sermon that we have in the *Lost Sermons* takes place on February 9, 1851, it seems more likely that Spurgeon began to preach in January 1851. *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, ed. Christian George, Jason Duesing, and Geoffrey Chang (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016–2021), 1:xxxvi. Hereafter this work will be referenced as *LS*. Also, see *Autobiography*, 1:38. Spurgeon dates the beginning of his preaching at the age of "sixteen and a half years old."

<sup>58</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:201.

<sup>59</sup> During an anniversary celebration, one deacon listed 66 evangelistic and benevolent institutions connected with the ministry of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. See C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History and Work* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 2:7–8.

<sup>60</sup> The first written sermon outline we have from Spurgeon is the fourth sermon he preached. *LS* 1:77.

<sup>61</sup> *LS* 1:64–65.

<sup>62</sup> *LS* 1:231.

He also had an established career as a merchant clerk to provide for his family. But in the case of Charles, John did not want him to neglect his education and end up pastoring a church that could not afford to support him. So, he urged his son to apply for college and sought to make the proper arrangements.<sup>63</sup>

Charles, however, saw his situation quite differently. He did not feel the need to go to college right away because his ministry at Waterbeach *was* his education. In response to his father's pleas for him to go to college, Spurgeon responded, "I have many opportunities of improvement now; all I want is more time.... I have plenty of practice; and do we not learn to preach by preaching?... I hope you will excuse my scrawl, for, believe me, I am fully employed. Last night, I thought of writing; but was called out to see a dying man, and I thought I dare not refuse."<sup>64</sup>

With the publication of *The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon*, historians now have a glimpse into the three years of Spurgeon's pastoral training, which, in his mind, took the place of a college education. These sermons should not be viewed as the finished product of an experienced preacher.<sup>65</sup> Instead, they reveal Spurgeon to be a work-in-progress. Though he has natural giftings, these sermons also reveal a human Spurgeon, making mistakes, borrowing from others, and learning to preach.

A complete analysis of the *Lost Sermons* is beyond the scope of this paper. With 399 sermons written across 1,127 pages of sermon text, this will be a significant undertaking for future Spurgeon scholars. In summary, however, what can we glean about Spurgeon's pastoral training from the *Lost Sermons*?

### 3.1. The Practice of Preaching

Perhaps what stands out most about these three years is the sheer volume of sermons that Spurgeon preached. In later years, he would criticize college graduates who preached their very first sermon when applying for a ministerial position.<sup>66</sup> Rather, he encouraged his students to take or create preaching opportunities for themselves whenever they could. This was Spurgeon's approach during these years. From February 9, 1851, the first recorded sermon in the *Lost Sermons*, to December 18, 1853, his first time preaching at New Park Street, Spurgeon preached 670 sermons, an average of nearly twenty a month. More than half of those sermons were original compositions.

To put this into perspective, if a pastor were to preach fifty sermons a year (one sermon per week with two weeks off), he would need more than thirteen years to match the number of sermons Spurgeon had preached by age 19. The "boy preacher" may have been young, but by the time he arrived in London, he had the experience of a pastor who had been preaching for over a decade.

### 3.2. Biblical and Theological Training

A survey of these early sermons reveals Spurgeon's biblical and theological training within the Protestant and Reformed tradition. In the first three volumes of the *Lost Sermons*, Christian George has detected the influence of figures like John Gill, Richard Baxter, Matthew Henry, Stephen Charnock, John Bunyan, Thomas Manton, Philip Doddridge, Augustine, Athanasius, Martin Luther, John Calvin,

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<sup>63</sup> As it turned out, those arrangements fell through. *Autobiography*, 1:241–42.

<sup>64</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:244–45.

<sup>65</sup> Christian George's claim that these sermons are, in his opinion, "his best sermons yet" is, in my opinion, a stretch. "The Story Behind the Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon," *Challies*, 13 March 2017, <https://www.challies.com/sponsored/the-story-behind-the-lost-sermons-of-c-h-spurgeon/>.

<sup>66</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970–2006), 12:412–13. Hereafter, this will be referenced as *MTP*.

Jonathan Edwards, John Newton, John Ryland, Charles Simeon, George Whitfield, John Wesley, Isaac Watts, and many others.<sup>67</sup> These outlines show that Spurgeon was not only preaching during these years, but he was also studying deeply and widely.

In later years, reporters would commend Spurgeon as “quite an original preacher.”<sup>68</sup> At this stage, however, he is still clearly relying on others for help. His earliest sermon outlines draw heavily from his sources, using outlines found in commentaries, volumes of sermons, preaching guides, and more. At times, Spurgeon wrote to his father asking him for some of his sermon “skeletons” to help him in his preaching.<sup>69</sup> Some have wondered if young Spurgeon is guilty of plagiarism in these early years. Considering his high view of preaching, his sensitive conscience, and his future denunciation of “borrowed sermons,”<sup>70</sup> it is unlikely that he preached these outlines without properly attributing any borrowed material and first making them his own.<sup>71</sup> Still, there is no question that Spurgeon was learning how to put sermons together by depending on others in these early years.

These earliest sermons also reveal Spurgeon's willingness to engage in theological controversy. Waterbeach was located in East Anglia, where “the most successful Strict and Particular Baptist Association was established in this period.”<sup>72</sup> Despite the influence of Hyper-Calvinism among the Baptists, Spurgeon did not hesitate to confront antinomianism in his sermons while still upholding God's sovereignty in salvation. These sermons reveal Spurgeon's evangelical Calvinism in the tradition of Andrew Fuller, stressing God's election and the duty of faith in the Christian life. Beyond soteriology, his sermons also work through theological topics like the incarnation, eternal judgment, the sovereignty of God over suffering, eschatology, and more. And yet, these sermons were never abstracted from everyday life but were applied to the concerns and challenges of his rural congregation. These early years were a training ground for Spurgeon in applied theology.

At the heart of Spurgeon's study was the Bible. These sermons reveal a remarkable breadth of preaching texts. Out of 395 sermons in the *Lost Sermons*, 201 are from the New Testament, and 194 are from the Old Testament. He preached from nearly every book of the Bible and covered every genre of Scripture. Spurgeon's commitment to expositional preaching from the whole counsel of Scripture would continue into his ministry in London.

### 3.3. The Work of a Pastor

Though he started as an itinerant preacher, these sermons reveal that Spurgeon also learned to be a pastor. In them, we find Spurgeon officiating the Lord's Table, administering baptism, shepherding his people through painful cases of church discipline, comforting his people after the death of a founding member of the church, inviting visitors to join the church, and much more. In one sermon, Spurgeon

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<sup>67</sup> A survey of the indices of the *Lost Sermons* shows the many theological influences that Christian George has detected in Spurgeon's early sermons.

<sup>68</sup> “Pen and Ink Sketches; No. IV.—The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon,” *The Baptist Messenger* (1855): 53–54.

<sup>69</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:247.

<sup>70</sup> *MTP* 45:270–71. See also C. H. Spurgeon, “A Brief Note About Plagiarism,” *S&T* (1891): 178.

<sup>71</sup> “Borrowed sermons—pages of other people's experience—fragments pulled from old or new divines—nothing of their own, nothing that God ever said to them, nothing that ever thrilled their hearts or swayed their souls,—God will not own such teaching as this.” *MTP* 42:180.

<sup>72</sup> Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771–1892* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), 313.

compares the local church with the House Beautiful in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, where pilgrims were graciously admitted, cared for, instructed, and equipped for battle.<sup>73</sup> So much of his vision for pastoral ministry began in these early years of caring for his village congregation, "leading those poor pilgrims on the road to the Celestial City."<sup>74</sup>

Notably missing in Bunyan's allegory, however, is any symbolism for baptism prior to membership in the church. On this point, Spurgeon disagreed with Bunyan's open membership.<sup>75</sup> His sermons consistently show his conviction that believer's baptism must precede church membership.<sup>76</sup> In later years, Spurgeon saw a diminishing ecclesiology among Baptists evidenced by the push for open membership by leaders like John Clifford,<sup>77</sup> and he would advocate for a commitment to Baptist principles and closed membership. This commitment was put into practice beginning at Waterbeach. What the *Lost Sermons* reveal is that as a 19-year-old, Spurgeon arrived in London not only as a seasoned preacher but as one who had solid ecclesiological convictions and two years of pastoral ministry under his belt.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the examination of new primary sources, this paper has highlighted three previously unnoticed aspects of Spurgeon's development: John Spurgeon's years in Raleigh, the active ministry of T. W. Davids at Lion Walk, and his pastoral training at Waterbeach from 1851 to 1854. The story of John Spurgeon's debt and imprisonment was nearly lost. Yet it provides an explanation for why Spurgeon lived with his grandfather for five years, which played a crucial role in him eventually becoming a pastor. His time at Lion Walk in Colchester reveals that despite his criticisms of Davids's preaching, Spurgeon was disciplined in the ministry and activism of the church. And finally, the *Lost Sermons* highlight Spurgeon's remarkable theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral training in Waterbeach, preparing him for his ministry in London.

These three aspects of Spurgeon's early development are a reminder that so many of the beloved stories of Spurgeon lore do not tell the full story. Because the *Autobiography* and other early biographies are dependent on Spurgeon's own account, they are inevitably limited. Understandably, sensitive stories like John Spurgeon's imprisonment were naturally left out. Other events, like his time at Lion Walk, were at times presented in a one-sided fashion to emphasize a pastoral lesson, namely the dramatic nature of his conversion. And, given his tremendous success in London, it was important for Spurgeon to attribute it to a movement of the Holy Spirit, rather than the tireless labors of his preparatory years as a village pastor.

In other words, Spurgeon told his story primarily for the person in the pew, not for the historian. His concern was first and foremost pastoral. And his early biographers reflected their admiration of the pastor in re-telling the familiar stories of his life as he told them. For Spurgeon scholarship to advance, it will require building on the existing stories and uncovering the untold ones.

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<sup>73</sup> *LS* 6:509–13.

<sup>74</sup> *Autobiography*, 1:240.

<sup>75</sup> The Baptist position of open membership allows those who have a credible profession of faith to join the church even if they have only received an infant baptism. A closed membership position, on the other hand, would require all members to be baptized as believers prior to joining the church.

<sup>76</sup> For two examples, see *LS* 5:95–99, 377–86.

<sup>77</sup> J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the 19th Century* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 22–30.



# The Young J. I. Packer as a ‘New Warfield’? A Chapter in the Post-1930 Revival of Reformed Theology

— Kenneth J. Stewart —

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**Abstract:** J. I. Packer (1926–2020) first came to the attention of the reading public with a 1953 essay in the second printing of the *New Bible Commentary*. His essay, ‘Revelation and Inspiration’, replaced Daniel Lamont’s essay on the same subject, in the first printing issued earlier that year. It had been in certain respects unsatisfactory. Packer’s 1953 essay, his controversial 1955 *Evangelical Quarterly* article on the Keswick movement, and his 1958 book, *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God* illustrated his growing affinity with the writings of Princeton theologian, B. B. Warfield (d. 1921). In all this, Packer was a leading voice in the post-WWII reassertion of Reformed theology. But Packer, rather than being the pioneer of this movement, was in fact building on the legacy of others who had pointed in this direction: Douglas Johnson of British Inter-Varsity, Alan Stibbs of Oak Hill College, and T. C. Hammond—formerly of Dublin and from 1936, principal of Moore College, Sydney. This movement, closely associated with Inter-Varsity, was itself part of a larger post-1929 resurgence of orthodox Reformed theology.

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The release of the long-awaited *New Bible Commentary* (Inter-Varsity Press [UK]) in early 1953 was met with a welcome that surpassed all expectation. The initial press-run was for 30,000 copies, with 20,000 coming to the USA where distribution was handled both by InterVarsity Press [US] and Eerdmans. A reprinting was authorized immediately; subsequently, a book club ordered an additional 5,000 copies. The phenomenal publishing success of this commentary in effect ‘floated the boat’ of the fledgling Inter-Varsity Press for years to come, furnishing it with badly-needed capital to commission many new titles in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> With such wind in the sails, who would recommend any

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Inchley, ‘The Inter-Varsity Press’, in Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 323. Further light on the origination of the *New Bible Commentary* and its subsequent companion, the *New Bible Dictionary*, is also provided by Inchley and in the accounts of Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain 1935–1995: A Personal Sketch*

tweaking of a commentary that evidently ticked all the boxes?

And yet, by the following year, the *New Bible Commentary* was indeed altered. One of its eleven introductory essays on topics ranging from ‘The Authority of Scripture’ to ‘The Primitive Church’ was withdrawn, and a replacement substituted. The withdrawn essay, on ‘Revelation and Inspiration’ had been contributed by a revered senior evangelical figure, Daniel Lamont, professor of practical theology in New College, Edinburgh. Until his death in 1950, Lamont had been one of the few evangelical Christians teaching in a British university theology faculty to identify openly with Inter-Varsity. He had served as the chairman of British Inter-Varsity in 1945–1946 and was a frequent and popular speaker in Inter-Varsity student gatherings at the university and national levels. He was a well-published author in the realm of philosophy of religion and apologetics.<sup>2</sup> Yet, notwithstanding the author’s profile, the *New Bible Commentary* editors withdrew Lamont’s essay on ‘Revelation and Inspiration’.<sup>3</sup> In the 1954 second edition, its place was taken by a new essay of the same name by J. I. Packer, a 28-year-old Church of England evangelical then serving as a curate in Birmingham. While there had been no open criticism of the late Daniel Lamont or of his essay, here was a ‘fait accompli’ which must have raised some eyebrows. What had gone on behind closed doors to bring about this substitution? The *New Bible Commentary* editors, Alan Stibbs (vice principal of Oak Hill College) and Ernest F. Kevan (principal of the London Bible College [now London School of Theology]), simply indicated that they were “taking the opportunity to avail themselves of some of the constructive criticisms sent to them.”<sup>4</sup> It may have been pointed out by some correspondent that Lamont’s article was less robust than an earlier essay on biblical inspiration which had appeared in the earlier *New Bible Handbook* (1947).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in the same months as those constructive criticisms were being digested, Kevan—as London Bible College principal—was dealing with a prickly situation generated by his college’s Old Testament lecturer, H. L. Ellison. Ellison’s published views on biblical inspiration contravened the college’s stated position and—to a considerable degree—approximated the views of Lamont.<sup>6</sup>

Something comparable happened the next year (1955). Packer submitted to the *Evangelical Quarterly* an extended review of the book *So Great Salvation* by Wheaton College professor, Steven Barabas. This volume provided both a history and an apologetic for Keswick teaching, i.e., the teaching on Christian holiness by surrender which had been closely associated with annual summer conferences

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(Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 63–64; T. A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: Research for the Academy and the Church: The First Sixty Years* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 87; and Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 98–100.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain*, 19, 29; F. F. Bruce, ‘Lamont, Daniel’, in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 470.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas the first edition had been edited by Francis Davidson, Alan Stibbs and Ernest Kevan, the passing of Davidson in that year mean that revision was in the hands of his two former colleagues.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Stibbs and Ernest Kevan, ed., *New Bible Commentary*, revised ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1954), vi.

<sup>5</sup> G. T. Manley, ed., *New Bible Handbook* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1947). Its essay ‘Inspiration and Authority’ was unsigned.

<sup>6</sup> Paul E. Brown, *Ernest Kevan: Leader in Twentieth Century British Evangelicalism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012), 150–51. Ellison’s resignation was requested and accepted in the aftermath of the publication of his article, ‘Some Thoughts on Inspiration’, *EvQ* 26 (1954): 210–17.

held in the English Lake District.<sup>7</sup> By 1955, Packer was in his first year of teaching at Tyndale Hall, Bristol, the theological college of the conservative Church of England Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society. Within this college and its constituency, the Keswick teaching had long found ample support. It soon became clear that, as with the revised *New Bible Commentary*, Packer had advanced a view which aimed at displacing what had earlier been deemed acceptable. In the first case (with the *New Bible Commentary*) we may at least suppose that the initiative for the substitute article came from someone *other* than Packer himself; in the second case (the *EvQ* review), we have no alternative but to suppose that he was the originator.

### *1. The Trajectory of Young J. I. Packer*

What trajectory was the young J. I. Packer travelling at 28 or 29 years that led to outcomes like these?

#### **1.1. The Strong Influence of the Early Inter-Varsity Movement**

When J. I. Packer began his studies at Oxford University in 1944, he arrived as a young man who—while recently confirmed in the Church of England parish of his family—had no clear ideas of personal faith in Christ or of the assurance of salvation. He was an interested person, ‘looking on from the outside,’ as he put it.<sup>8</sup> Inter-Varsity had been recommended to him by a recently converted friend who was studying at Bristol University; he had urged that Packer should seek out the ‘Christian Union’ within Oxford.<sup>9</sup> The Christian Union at Oxford (as at Cambridge) had differentiated itself from the theologically ambivalent Student Christian Movement as long before as 1909–1910; it had subsequently been re-energized after the hiatus of the Great War.<sup>10</sup> The Christian Union (which became known as Inter-Varsity) was self-consciously conservative evangelical. It was in a Sunday evening Christian Union student evangelistic rally that Packer consciously committed himself to Christ. Packer was in league with a definitely evangelical movement, with an evangelical Christianity generally in a disadvantaged position in the universities as in the nation. The Christian Unions, gradually affiliating with one another through the fledgling Inter-Varsity Fellowship, with offices in London’s Bedford Square, were steadily attempting to strengthen students in the Christian faith, to evangelize the uncommitted, and to provide a strong orientation to world missions.

#### **1.2. The Dearth of Contemporary, Conservative Systematic Theology**

Inter-Varsity in the pre-1950 period shared the weaknesses as well as the strengths of British conservative evangelicalism of that era. A particular weakness was the relative lack of dogmatic certainty.

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952). The Packer review article was, “Keswick” and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification, *EvQ* 27.3 (1955): 153–67. It is evident that the Barabas book was a re-working of a doctoral dissertation that he had recently defended at Princeton Theological Seminary. This detail is furnished through the Wheaton College archives: [https://archives.wheaton.edu/repositories/2/top\\_containers/8172](https://archives.wheaton.edu/repositories/2/top_containers/8172).

<sup>8</sup> Alister McGrath, *J. I. Packer: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 17.

<sup>9</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 11, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Contending for the Faith*, 76, 77, 89; McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 16.

It is not that biblical doctrines had been surrendered; it is that they were no longer forcefully enunciated and taught. Oliver Barclay, former secretary of the British IVE, writes,

There were no recommended conservative theological books. Conservative students had to scour the second-hand bookshops for copies of Dale on *The Atonement*, Denney's *The Death of Christ*, and commentaries by Lightfoot, Ryle, Ellicott, Handley Moule and others.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, there *was* fervent prayer for and encouragement of foreign missionary involvement. The Christian Unions were helped to advance the missionary cause by the missionary emphasis of the annual Keswick conventions in the English Lake District (which university students attended in considerable numbers); scores of promising university graduates went on to missionary careers in the still-remaining British Empire. But that same annual Keswick convention kept alive both in British evangelical churches and university Christian Unions a kind of 'higher life' teaching on the Christian life, which led to a kind of quietism, with its talk of 'full surrender' and 'letting go'.

Beginning in 1944, the Oxford Christian Union had its own library heavily stocked with old Puritan authors. This library compensated to some degree for the dearth of contemporary conservative theology and the muddled Keswick emphasis. Packer, having been appointed student librarian, soon encountered the Puritan theologian John Owen. Unsatisfied with 'higher life' Keswick teaching, Packer benefited greatly from Owen's works, *On Indwelling Sin in Believers* and *The Mortification of Sin in Believers*.<sup>12</sup> All in all, Packer was exposed to the weaknesses as well as the strengths of this kind of evangelicalism in his Oxford university days.

### 1.3. The Influence of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In the Christian Union at Oxford, Packer became familiar with Elizabeth Lloyd-Jones, daughter of Martyn Lloyd-Jones; the latter had come to London's Westminster Chapel first as assistant to and then (from 1943) as successor to G. Campbell Morgan (d. 1945). Lloyd-Jones himself was a frequent invited guest speaker to university Christian Unions; Packer heard him at Oxford in December 1946.<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones's involvement with Inter-Varsity was extensive. In the years 1939–1942, he was the president of the governing council of Inter-Varsity.<sup>14</sup> But Packer's extensive dealings with Lloyd-Jones seem to begin in 1948–1949, during his one-year appointment to Oak Hill College as lecturer in Latin and Greek. Packer sometimes attended evening services at Westminster Chapel. Their friendly relationship continued in connection with a theme which was dear to them both.

As early as 1938, Inter-Varsity had convened discussions which led to the creation of a 'Biblical Research Committee'. Out of this discussion would grow various initiatives such as the encouragement of evangelical theological writing (with a view to publication) and the establishing of a residential research

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<sup>11</sup> Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain*, 19. James Denney had passed in 1917 and Handley Moule in 1920. Barclay's point was that evangelical scholarship had fallen decades behind in addressing current questions. David F. Wright, 'Soundings in the Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture', *TynB* 31 (1980): 105, claims that 'between the Wars, evangelical theology and scholarship rarely reached levels of distinction...; [it was] a dark age of evangelical thought.'

<sup>12</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 24–25

<sup>13</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 38

<sup>14</sup> He would serve in this capacity again in 1951–1952. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship*, 69,70.

library, which became a reality at Tyndale House in Cambridge in 1945.<sup>15</sup> With these initiatives now underway, Packer—by 1949 temporary lecturer at Oak Hill College—was drawn into discussions about what the program objectives of the new Tyndale House should be. Not surprisingly, Packer advocated that Tyndale House might host conferences on Puritan theology. As this would have worked contrary to the plan to have Tyndale House's reputation hang on excellence in biblical research, the alternate proposal was made that Packer, with Oxford friend and fellow graduate, O. R. Johnson, pursue the idea of a Puritan studies conference with Lloyd-Jones. Lloyd-Jones enthusiastically welcomed this Tyndale House-sponsored conference in Westminster Chapel, where it met annually without interruption until 1961.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1.4. The Rediscovery of the Late B. B. Warfield

The argument of this article is that Packer's early theological writing in the revised *New Bible Commentary* (1954), his attack on Keswick's theology of sanctification (1955), and his '*Fundamentalism and the Word of God*' (1958), all bore the marks of the teaching of the late B. B. Warfield. This is not itself a new argument; the Warfield indebtedness was remarked upon in 1997 by Alistair McGrath, and two decades earlier by David F. Wright.<sup>17</sup> What has gone unexplored, to this point, is the question of how the views of the late Warfield (d. 1921) were accessible to Packer when writing his *New Bible Commentary* article. In 1954 he was completing his two-year curacy (pastoral internship) in Birmingham, he had just been married, and was completing and defending his Oxford DPhil dissertation. The answer to the question of Packer's access to Warfield goes some distance towards explaining how British evangelicalism was then in process of embracing a more vigorous doctrinal Christianity, informed by the Reformed tradition, in the period after 1930.

Vigorous doctrinal evangelicalism had fallen on hard times in early 20th century Britain. Preferred texts such as Bishop Handley Moule's *Outlines of Christian Doctrine* and James Denney's *Studies in Theology* had been issued late in the previous century.<sup>18</sup> Only the work of the evangelical Anglican W. H. Griffiths Thomas, *Principles of Theology* (1930), had been issued in the post-1918 era. In the English university faculties of theology, systematic theology had suffered the effects of a hostile biblical criticism which tended to cut the nerve of theologizing. In the Scottish faculties of divinity as well as in Nonconformist English theological colleges, systematic theology remained important, but the tendency was towards the approximation of German theological thought. Thus C. H. Dodd (1884–1973), the rising NT scholar could reflect on how the Welsh Nonconformity in which he was raised represented an 'etiolated Calvinism, Calvinism drained of the good red blood of its dogmatic theology.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain*, 47

<sup>16</sup> Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain*, 73; Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship*, 72–73; McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 37–38

<sup>17</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, ch. 6 (note especially pp. 84, 85); Wright, 'Soundings in the Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture', 102.

<sup>18</sup> Handley Moule, *Outlines of Christian Doctrine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889); James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in F. W. Dillistone, *C. H. Dodd: Interpreter of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 33.

But the rising Inter-Varsity movement, led by its general secretary from 1928, Douglas Johnson, was determined to alter this situation.<sup>20</sup> Trained in medicine and having acquired a diploma in theology from the University of London, Johnson prioritized the production of printed materials that would strengthen Christian university students in Bible, theology and apologetics. By 1935, Johnson was known to be an admirer of the Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield.<sup>21</sup> It was at his initiative that the Irish writer, T. C. Hammond hurriedly dictated the text of the theological handbook, *In Understanding Be Men* (1936), shortly before embarking for a new post in Moore College in Sydney.<sup>22</sup> In his work on the themes of revelation and inspiration, Hammond drew on the writings of Warfield and his Scottish contemporary, James Orr.<sup>23</sup> But this was only a start. By 1941, with war underway, Johnson and the now-publications secretary, Ronald Inchley, undertook a new initiative. Assisted by the editorial labors of Alan Stibbs of Oak Hill College, Inter-Varsity determined to introduce British student readers to the writings of B. B. Warfield on biblical inspiration. A soft-cover pamphlet, *Revelation and Inspiration*, was produced for sale; it provided a summary of the first four essays earlier published in Warfield's collected works.<sup>24</sup>

In 1941, Warfield was not widely known in the UK. His material, originally published in journals and reference works, would of course have been available to those with access to theological libraries. So also with his gathered writings, produced 1927–1932 by the American branch of Oxford University Press. Accordingly, it was on a visit to Toronto in summer, 1932, that Martyn Lloyd-Jones had encountered Warfield's *Works* while visiting a theological library.<sup>25</sup> We can only theorize as to how Douglas Johnson and Ronald Inchley had come to their own high estimate of the late Princeton theologian. It is evident that Alan Stibbs of Oak Hill shared this appreciation.

With Packer encountering the Christian Union at Oxford in the fall of 1944, he would at least have had ready access to Hammond's *In Understanding Be Men* (which utilized Warfield) and the four essays in *Revelation and Inspiration*. At this time, Packer would have been able to familiarize himself with Warfield's conception of inspiration (one testified to by a wide range of Scriptures within the canonical books), entailing the need to clarify that it was only original manuscripts that were inspired in the fullest sense, and with important stress upon the concursive action of the Holy Spirit, who employed the efforts of numerous human authors. While fuller access to Warfield was not yet available, Douglas Johnson did something else to augment what had begun with the 1941 Warfield reprint: he committed the British Inter-Varsity Press to sharing a print edition of the important 1946 volume of essays, *The Infallible*

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<sup>20</sup> D. J. Goodhew, 'Johnson, Douglas', in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 333–34.

<sup>21</sup> Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship*, 71

<sup>22</sup> John Wenham recounts the fascinating story of how this book began with an outline provided by Douglas Johnson and was written by Hammond in three intense days (assisted by a stenographer). See *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 77. See also the account in Warren Nelson, *T. C. Hammond: His Life and Legacy in Ireland and Australia* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 88–89.

<sup>23</sup> T. C. Hammond, *In Understanding Be Men*, 2nd ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1936), 42.

<sup>24</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Volume 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927).

<sup>25</sup> Iain Murray, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 1:285.

*Word*, a symposium of the Westminster Theological Seminary faculty.<sup>26</sup> This volume emphasized the Bible’s claims regarding its own supernatural origin.<sup>27</sup> Then beginning in 1948, the reprint edition of Warfield’s writings issued by Samuel G. Craig and the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company began to circulate quite freely in the UK, in significant part because of the efforts of the Evangelical Bookshop of Belfast, Northern Ireland.<sup>28</sup> By 1951, London publisher, Marshall, Morgan and Scott issued their own edition of Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, Inter-Varsity itself reprinted a collection of Warfield’s writings on Scripture as *Biblical Foundations* in 1958.<sup>30</sup>

We can go beyond the bare assertion that Warfield’s writings were beginning to find an audience among UK evangelicals after the Second World War. As regards Packer’s own access to Warfield, we know that this access improved markedly in autumn, 1954. It was then that he began to commute from Birmingham to Bristol to teach two days per week in Tyndale Hall.<sup>31</sup> That college’s well-stocked library contained a good variety of Warfield’s writings, ranging from parts of the collected *Works* published by Oxford University Press between 1927 and 1932, to reprints of some of his major works issued in the late 1940s, as well as some of his occasional volumes.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that if young Packer did not own a range of Warfield titles himself, he had access to a good variety by 1954.

## 2. Evidence of the Need for a Post-War Evangelical Theological Renaissance

Having gained some insight into the formative influences at work in the shaping of the young J. I. Packer in the period following 1944, we can consider the type of contribution he would now begin to make.

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<sup>26</sup> Inchley, ‘The Inter-Varsity Press’, 321. *The Infallible Word* symposium was first printed in 1946 by the Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Company.

<sup>27</sup> This emphasis is emphatically sounded by John Murray, ‘The Self-Attestation of Scripture’, in *The Infallible Word*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (London: Tyndale, 1946). Evidence of the influence in the UK of the circulation of *The Infallible Word* may be seen in Inter-Varsity Press’s release the following year of *The New Bible Handbook*. That volume’s opening essay (like all included essays, unsigned) on ‘Inspiration and Authority’ drew attention to the American volume at p. 15, n. 2.

<sup>28</sup> This important activity at Belfast was directed by W. J. Grier, a Presbyterian minister who had himself studied in the old Princeton Seminary. See John J. Murray, *Catch the Vision: Roots of the Reformed Recovery* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 40–43.

<sup>29</sup> This was a reprint of the 1948 Presbyterian and Reformed volume.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Biblical Foundations* (London: Tyndale, 1958).

<sup>31</sup> The part-time teaching lasted only until the end of calendar 1954, whereafter, with his Birmingham curacy completed. Packer and his wife moved to reside in Bristol at Tyndale Hall.

<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Su Brown, the current librarian of Trinity College, Bristol (into which Tyndale Hall was absorbed) for verifying the library’s range of Warfield holdings. Among these we find, most notably, the 1948 reprint of Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (an abbreviated version of the larger, 1927 Oxford University Press volume); two original Oxford University Press volumes (*Biblical Doctrines* and *Studies in Theology*); *Studies in Perfectionism*; and the 1953 Eerdmans reprint, *Miracles: Yesterday and Today* (originally issued in 1918).

## 2.1. The Revision of the 1953 *New Bible Commentary*

British conservative evangelicalism had persisted for some decades without a dogmatic theologian, oriented to the older orthodoxy. What was it that called for a changing of the guard in post-war Britain? We have seen that there was perceived to be a dearth of clear doctrinal definition; systematic theology had been neglected. This concerned some evangelicals one generation older than Packer, and they were ready to give him a ‘stage call’ as they contemplated the revision of the best-selling *New Bible Commentary* in late 1953 and early 1954.

### 2.1.1. *The Perceived Weakness of Daniel Lamont’s ‘Revelation and Inspiration’ Essay*

The quarrel with what the revered Daniel Lamont had written for the 1953 *New Bible Commentary* was not with his concept of divine revelation. He had quite adequately maintained God’s action in communicating his saving will to fallen humans, which necessarily involved words. He took the Old Testament prophets as a paradigm of what this saving communication had been like. His concept of revelation (i.e., special revelation) was also Christocentric. Old Testament revelation was preparatory to Christ’s incarnation and work; the revelation embodied in Christ’s incarnation became the subject matter interpreted for us by the chosen apostles. This kind of treatment seems to have been generally acceptable, though perhaps lacking an adequate anchoring in the actual flow of redemptive history.

However, Lamont’s treatment of divine inspiration of the Bible was thin. That the biblical writings were inspired, he allowed. But Lamont understood the biblical record to be somewhat subsidiary to the saving revelation displayed in the earthly career of Christ. The Christ-event was the “high tide” of revelation; the biblical record was secondary. Lamont urged that the failure to draw this distinction would leave open the prospect of bibliolatry.<sup>33</sup> He then went on to insist that a kind of inspiration was also needed, by the Spirit, for profitable hearing and reading (generally treated as the concept of divine illumination).<sup>34</sup> He further allowed that biblical inspiration existed on a continuum which included what he called ‘general inspiration’, i.e., that given to persons at large in society to assist them to paint or to compose skillfully. Given what Lamont wrote—and what he *failed* to say and *failed* to distinguish—it is easy to imagine how readers of his ‘Revelation and Inspiration’ article would find themselves asking, ‘Is this *all*?’ Lamont’s treatment of revelation and inspiration seemed tethered; one could surmise that his academic coexistence with biblical higher criticism and crisis theology had constrained his theological affirmation. One could also draw analogies between his views and the less than satisfactory views of his former mentor, James Denney.<sup>35</sup> Otherwise an orthodox evangelical Christian, Lamont was prone to understate matters regarding revelation and inspiration. His approach might be called ‘hedging’<sup>36</sup> As

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Lamont, ‘Revelation and Inspiration’, in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis Davidson, Ernest Kevan and Alan Stibbs (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1953), 29.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 100–101, draws attention to the fact that Geoffrey Bromiley, author of the companion introductory essay on ‘The Authority of Scripture’ in the 1953 *New Bible Commentary* had explicitly disavowed (p. 22) the notion (embraced by Lamont) that inspiration is necessary within the reader or hearer of Scripture. This viewpoint, displayed alongside Lamont’s essay of 1953, opens up at least the possibility that Bromiley himself had offered some critique of Lamont’s article to the volume’s editors.

<sup>35</sup> F. F. Bruce, ‘Daniel Lamont’, in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 470

<sup>36</sup> Lamont, ‘Revelation and Inspiration’, 24–30.



such, his essay fell below the standard of a similarly-named essay in the earlier volume of 1947, the *New Bible Handbook*.

The publications committee of Inter-Varsity Press and the editors of the *New Bible Commentary* concluded that something had to be done. As it was, Lamont—the author of the underwhelming article—had passed away in 1950, prior to publication of the 1953 edition. Alan Stibbs, co-editor of *The New Bible Commentary*, may well have been the one to put forward Packer’s name. Stibbs had assisted in the preparation of *Revelation and Inspiration* in 1941, presenting a summary of Warfield’s views for British students. As vice principal, Stibbs had enjoyed the company of and observed the classroom teaching of Packer at Oak Hill College in 1948–1949, after which the young Packer had gone directly into doctoral studies at Oxford. What could Packer offer the revised *New Bible Commentary* in time for November 1954?<sup>37</sup>

### 2.1.2. Packer’s Different ‘Tack’ on *Revelation and Inspiration*

Packer’s lucid treatment of revelation and inspiration was first of all strong on what we today call the ‘redemptive-historical’ approach. Quoting Scripture regularly, he did not appeal to biblical passages willy-nilly, but in the sequence of biblical history. Thus, the divine disclosures at the burning bush (Exodus 6) and at Sinai (Exodus 20) were highlighted, sequentially, as instances of divine revelatory action. Packer regularly stressed the sovereignty of God in the granting of special revelation, in providing humans to record it, and in allowing the writers full exercise of their individuality. It was the overarching sovereignty of God which also ensured the accuracy of the written accounts and their utter reliability. Packer did not hesitate to affirm that these inspired Scriptures were without error.<sup>38</sup>

In at least two ways, Packer explicitly targeted concepts set out by Lamont, his predecessor. He first questioned the adequacy of terming (as Lamont had done) Scripture as only a ‘record of Revelation’: ‘It is not merely a report of what God said; it is what He says here and now.’ He would not either allow that biblical inspiration stood on a continuum with artistic inspiration: ‘The inspiration which secured the infallible communication of revealed truth is something distinct from the “inspiration” of the creative artist.’

Perhaps sensing that his more elevated views would raise the eyebrows of some readers, Packer sought to disarm potential critics by offering two key qualifiers. First, he addressed the question of the sense in which all Scripture may be called ‘God’s Word’. ‘It is not the Word of God in the sense that every sentence, including the words of evil men, expresses His mind or reflects His will.... God’s Word written is the Bible as a whole, or more accurately the theology of the Bible.’ Second he clarified the matter of whether a comprehensive inspiration (such as he advocated) led to the conclusion that all biblical writers were guided identically in their writing. In denying this, he wrote, ‘Inspiration does not

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<sup>37</sup> This was the month of the release of the 2nd edition.

<sup>38</sup> J. I. Packer, ‘Revelation and Inspiration’, in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. Ernest Kevan and Alan Stibbs, revised ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1954), 24–30. The treatment of this essay by Paul R. House, ‘God Has Spoken: The Primacy of Scripture in J. I. Packer’s Ministry’ in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of his Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 73, does not investigate the significance of Packer’s essay being substituted for that of Lamont. Having said this, House does provide a very capable overview of Packer’s extended writing on Scripture. Similarly, Roger Nicole, while noting the importance of Packer’s *New Bible Commentary* essay, draws no comparisons with the essay which was withdrawn. See his ‘J. I. Packer’s Contribution to the Doctrine of the Inerrancy of Scripture’, in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 176.

imply an abnormal state of mind in the writer ... nor does it imply the obliteration of his personality. God in His providence prepared the human vehicles for their task and caused them, in many, perhaps most cases, to perform it through the normal exercise of powers He had given them.’<sup>39</sup> Here, the lucidity of expression is entirely Packer’s, but again and again the concepts are those earlier set out by Warfield.

The significance of the shift exemplified in this updated article inserted in the revision of the *Commentary* in 1954 was quite momentous. Conservative evangelical leaders a generation older than Packer had found in him the articulate champion of robust views which they hoped could replace the dogmatic uncertainty which had plagued the evangelical movement for too long.<sup>40</sup> In the young Packer, it appeared they had found their man. The unforeseen reality, however, was that Packer, in addition to helping to advance the agenda of persons like Douglas Johnson, Alan Stibbs, Ernest Kevan and John Wenham, had an agenda of his own to press. What that was became clearer in mid-1955.

### 2.1.3. *The Keswick ‘Brouhaha’*

As noted earlier, the release of the 1955 *Evangelical Quarterly* essay, “Keswick” and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification, proved controversial. Packer’s new employer, Tyndale Hall, had been allied with the annual Keswick conventions in past years. His predecessor at Tyndale, Geoffrey Bromiley, was more sympathetic than he and said so in articles published in another magazine.<sup>41</sup> For our purposes, we draw attention to certain features in this writing that demonstrated that Packer was moving in a decided direction.

First, whereas Packer’s ‘Revelation and Inspiration’ article of 1954 was definitely a piece of dogmatic theology, it did not summon the Protestant Reformation or any published authors in its support. Packer had tried to make his appeal directly to Scripture’s own statements (though we can admit that he did so informed by theological reading). In the summer of 1955, Packer’s stance was one of setting ‘Reformed’ theology *against* Keswick teaching. This was a fairly confrontational thing to do for several reasons. (1) He recognized that certain prominent Keswick supporters (he used the examples of the late bishop of Durham, H. C. G. Moule, and theologian W. H. Griffiths Thomas) had *themselves* identified with the Reformed theological tradition. Stephen Barabas, the Wheaton College professor whose book on the Keswick movement provided the basis for Packer’s withering attack, had done the doctoral research behind it at Princeton Seminary. (2) In the *Evangelical Quarterly* article, as he critiqued the Keswick teaching, Packer now used footnotes to indicate what he had been reading. We will not be surprised to learn that he had been reading J. C. Ryle’s classic, *Holiness* (1877).<sup>42</sup> We ought not to be surprised either

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<sup>39</sup> Packer, ‘Revelation and Inspiration,’ 29

<sup>40</sup> On the significance of this shift, David F. Wright perceptively wrote, ‘In this regard the arguments deployed after the Second World War by writers like Dr. J. I. Packer appear to represent a development in twentieth-century evangelical thought—a shift backwards, to the views of nineteenth-century writers like Bannerman, Lee and Gaussen, or a shift westwards, to the constructions of American dogmatists like Charles Hodge and Warfield, that apparently failed to captivate mainstream evangelical theologians of the earlier part of the century in Britain’ (‘Soundings in the Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture,’ 102).

<sup>41</sup> Details of these ‘shock waves’ unleashed by the Packer article are described in McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 78–79. Andrew Atherstone has recently provided elaboration on how Packer’s published views were clearly at variance with those of W. H. Griffiths Thomas. See T. A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton, ed., *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century: An Enduring Legacy* (London: Apollos, 2022), ch. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ryle’s classic, *Holiness*, had been reprinted in 1952 at the instigation of D. M. Lloyd-Jones. See McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 79.

to find him quoting repeatedly from B. B. Warfield's essays, published in 1931 as *Perfectionism*. Packer quotes both Warfield's essay on 'The Higher Life Movement' (in which the Princeton theologian named names such as W. E. Boardman, Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith) and its counterpart, 'The Victorious Life' (in which he took aim at Charles G. Trumbull, the influential editor of the *Sunday School Times*).<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Packer extensively drew from Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* (1938). He also quoted from Abraham Kuyper's *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (published in English in 1900), from Calvin's *Institutes*, and from the recent translation of Calvin's *Instruction in the Faith* (1537).<sup>44</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find three quotations from John Owen as well.

Repeatedly, Packer charged that Keswick teaching was tinged with Pelagianism, both in terms of its notion that fallen creatures maintain the undiminished power of free choice (it is the Christian's role to 'will' the necessary ongoing surrender and full consecration) and in relation to its insistence that the Spirit's freedom to advance holiness in the Christian is contingent on the consent of the believer. It is not an exaggeration to say that Packer wrote with relish! He was not 'jousting at windmills'; he was tackling a misleading teaching that had caused him real anguish early in his Christian walk, while an Oxford undergraduate.<sup>45</sup>

Standing back from the crater which Packer's broadside against Keswick created, we are entitled to wonder whether he had not just done the equivalent of falling on his sword. His 'star' had been on the ascent in light of his lucid writing, the previous year, in the *New Bible Commentary*. Was he now to be marginalized as extreme, abrasive and angular?<sup>46</sup>

## 2.2. Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism

While British evangelical Christians were still thinking about this matter, they were overtaken by events set in motion by the proliferation of the Billy Graham Crusades in various British cities, beginning in 1954. Many leaders of the mainstream Protestant churches spoke dismissively of Graham and of his Crusades. From a learned Anglo-Catholic, Gabriel Hebert, there came a book which "threw down the gloves" at the prospect of vigorous evangelical expansion riding on Graham's coat-tails: *Fundamentalism and the Church of God*.<sup>47</sup> Packer had already given addresses on the question of the distinction between fundamentalism and evangelicalism; Inter-Varsity Press asked him for a pamphlet-length treatment of 7,000 words on this subject. Shortly this pamphlet project expanded into a manuscript of 55,000 words. The ensuing '*Fundamentalism*' and *the Word of God* was Packer's first book-length project.<sup>48</sup>

For our purposes, the concern is purely to draw attention to the fact that Packer was, by and large, setting out a position on Scripture that was extensively informed by the writings of Warfield, the late

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<sup>43</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism, Part 1*, Works of Benjamin B. Warfield 8 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931). See note 32 above for the Warfield volumes available to Packer in the Tyndale Hall library at Bristol.

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Instruction in the Faith*, trans. Paul Fuhrmann (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949).

<sup>45</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 22–24.

<sup>46</sup> It is significant that Packer was *not* a solo voice in challenging traditional Keswick teaching in this period. The biographer of Ernest F. Kevan, first principal of London Bible College, indicates that Kevan was beginning to do this in the same years from the speaker's podium at Keswick. Brown, *Ernest Kevan*, 217–18.

<sup>47</sup> Hebert's *Fundamentalism and the Church of God* was published simultaneously in 1957 by both SCM (London) and Westminster Press (Philadelphia).

<sup>48</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 82. In this section of the paper, I am utilizing the London: Inter-Varsity edition of 1958, reprinted 1970.

Princeton theologian. Of the authors quoted, none is cited in support more often than Warfield (7 times), an honor he shared with J. Gresham Machen and John Calvin. We also learn that the edition of Warfield from which he cites (in this instance) is the 1951 UK reprint by Marshall, Morgan, and Scott of the 1948 American volume of *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. If we compare this new book's fourth chapter ('Scripture') with the brief *New Bible Commentary* essay of 1954, we see that here Packer offered a fuller elaboration of the same viewpoint, only now with citations present. Though it is not our purpose to look beyond 1958, it is worth mentioning that Packer elaborated the same position about Scriptural authority and inspiration in a subsequent small paperback, *God Has Spoken* (1965), as well as in later writings.<sup>49</sup>

It is safe to say that, to the extent that his literary attack on Keswick had furrowed brows among British evangelicals who felt that something dear to them was being lampooned, the publication of '*Fundamentalism*' and the Word of God at a time when there was such public hostility being shown towards evangelical Christianity served to eclipse those earlier concerns. The UK edition alone soon sold 20,000 copies; it was soon reprinted by Eerdmans in the U.S.A.<sup>50</sup> In 1958, Packer would turn 32; with the publication of the *Fundamentalism* volume, he began to be recognized as one of the leading voices in British evangelical theology. We must now ask what was the larger significance of Packer's activity in the 1950s.

### 3. The Larger Significance of Packer's Utilization of Warfield

It would be possible to assay Packer's activity and to draw inferences like those drawn by the late David F. Wright in a Tyndale House lecture of 1978. By his accounting, Packer's vigorous writing on Scripture illustrated either 'a shift backwards, to the views of nineteenth-century writers like Bannerman, Lee and Gaussen, or a shift westwards, to the constructions of American dogmatists like Charles Hodge and Warfield, that apparently failed to captivate mainstream evangelical theologians of the earlier part of the century in Britain.'<sup>51</sup> Both of these are interesting hypotheses, even though they rely on a questionable chronology of development.<sup>52</sup> Without ruling either possibility out, I would suggest at the same time that there was a larger drama unfolding in the 1950s and that drama was the international resurgence of Reformed theology—a movement underway since at least 1929, and marked initially by the inauguration of the *Evangelical Quarterly*.<sup>53</sup> That periodical had begun in Edinburgh, just as the *Princeton Theological Review* was expiring. Meanwhile, this same resurgence was underway in France,

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<sup>49</sup> I have consulted the American edition, published under the revised title *God Speaks to Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>50</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, 'Soundings in the Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture', 102. It seems odd that Wright did not draw attention to Hammond's use of Warfield in his *In Understanding Be Men* (1936), especially since Wright revised Hammond for a fresh edition in 1968.

<sup>52</sup> A comparison of the unsigned article on "Inspiration and Authority" in the 1947 *New Bible Handbook* and the 1954 Packer essay in the revised *New Bible Commentary* shows that Packer stands in continuity with that 1947 essay as well as with T. C. Hammond's *In Understanding Be Men* (1936). From this perspective, the Lamont essay of 1953 represented a departure from the Inter-Varsity Fellowship's earlier stance.

<sup>53</sup> It is noteworthy that Professor Robert Morton gave a highly favorable review of the first volume of Warfield's *Works* (*Revelation and Inspiration* [1927]) in the inaugural issue of *EvQ* 1.1 (1929): 84–87.

in Hungary, in the Netherlands, in Britain, in North America and in the Antipodes. It was a multi-directional resurgence, from all these regions to all these regions. Douglas Johnson of Inter-Varsity had been central to this resurgence. T. C. Hammond, Alan Stibbs and Ernest Kevan had all sought to advance it by their own publication work.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, a former student of B. B. Warfield, Samuel G. Craig, a mainline Presbyterian minister operating a small New Jersey publishing company, had taken it upon himself to republish major segments of the collected works of Warfield’s writing, twenty years after Oxford University Press had first released the ten-volume *Works*. Craig thus made Warfield accessible to those beyond major theological libraries. His editions were imported into Britain and reprinted there in time. Packer, for his own part, drew on the example of T. C. Hammond’s writing, the Warfield pamphlet edited by Stibbs (1941), and Craig’s re-issue of Warfield (1948). Packer drew attention not only to Warfield, but to his student Louis Berkhof, to Abraham Kuyper and to the views of the Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) faculty reflected in their 1946 volume, *The Infallible Word*.<sup>54</sup> All this is to say that in and through Packer, the senior theological minds of British Inter-Varsity had linked themselves with a resurgence of Reformed theology which is still with us today.

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<sup>54</sup> The expansion of the interest in Reformed theology among British evangelicals in this period is illustrated by the participation of evangelical Anglicans—Packer, Gervase Duffield, P. E. Hughes, Herbert Carson, Leon Morris, and Donald Robinson—in an August 1961 meeting of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action at Cambridge. These gatherings had begun in the pre-war period as “International Calvinist Congresses” in London (1932), Amsterdam (1934), Geneva (1936) and Edinburgh (1938). See *Christianity Today* 5.24 (11 September 1961): 19–23 and McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 85.

# J. I. Packer and the Next Wave of Evangelicalism: Foundations for Renewal

— Paul R. House —

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**Abstract:** This article surveys the life and ministry of James Innell Packer (1926–2020), evangelical Anglican, theologian, author, Bible translator, and church renewal advocate. It suggests that Packer’s ministry is especially informative because it had roots in pre-war evangelical circles and extended through the growth of the evangelical movement from the 1950s to the 1990s and the movement’s ebbing afterwards. It asserts that Packer’s efforts to aid theological and church restoration provide principles for much-needed biblical renewal in current evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup>

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James Innell Packer was born in 1926 to nominal Anglican parents.<sup>2</sup> The family had modest means. His father was employed by the British railway, and his mother was a homemaker.<sup>3</sup> Packer became a studious boy, in part because a skull injury made it too dangerous for him to participate in sports. On his twelfth birthday, he hoped for a bicycle, but his parents, concerned for his safety, gave him a typewriter instead.<sup>4</sup> This gift led to a life-long passion for writing circumscribed by that device. He went to the best school in his area, where, like many English young people of this era, he learned Latin and Greek. In fact, he learned them well enough to receive a scholarship to study Classics in Corpus Christi College at Oxford University.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of Packer and several “waves” of post-war evangelicalism came from a conversation with Lane Dennis. A shorter version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Leland Ryken, *J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 26.

<sup>3</sup> On the family’s employment and financial situation, see Alister McGrath, *J. I. Packer: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> On the injury and its ramifications, see Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 22–26 and McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 3–7. Packer often mentioned the accident when introducing himself.

<sup>5</sup> On Packer’s school studies and his receiving of the scholarship, see Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 29–31 and McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 9–12. In a personal conversation with Paul House, Lane Dennis recalled someone asking Packer when

In a conversation with Paul and Heather House in 2015, Packer recalled vividly his entry into the Oxford University community in the autumn of 1944. He noted how small the numbers were due to the war and how dark the university stayed at night due to air raid precautions. Like so many Oxford students before and since, he remembered how bad college food was. He recalled how he came to be helped by Puritan theology and history. He mentioned that he had read books by Clive Staples Lewis, and he regretted now that he had not taken the time to hear him lecture. Tutors and lessons came to mind, and he acknowledged growth in his academic skills. He recalled friends, such as Elizabeth Lloyd-Jones—later Mrs. Fred Catherwood.<sup>6</sup> Most importantly to him, he recounted coming to Christ at an evangelistic meeting within weeks of his arrival in Oxford.<sup>7</sup>

I mention Packer's recollections of 1944 to highlight the fact that in 2015 the entirety of the post-war evangelical renewal was still part of his living memory. Packer had seen it and been part of it. Indeed, he was still actively involved in it, for we had this conversation the night before a meeting of the English Standard Version Translation Oversight Committee.

Packer's death in 2020 left post-war evangelicalism with very few remaining representatives of its early days. Thus, it is a milestone worth noting. Yet it was a milestone that marked an end of a life, not the end of what that life stood for. Having lived through three previous waves of evangelical ecclesiology and scholarship, he had also helped launch a fourth. This article will outline the first three of these waves and Packer's place in them before focusing on the fourth. It will then offer some foundations for future renewal based on Packer's life. My goal is to suggest how Packer's life bears witness to enduring foundations for renewal within evangelicalism in a possible next wave.

Why renewal *within* evangelicalism? Timothy George has defined "evangelicalism" as "a living tradition within the world Christian movement."<sup>8</sup> This is the sense in which theologically-conservative Anglicans and Presbyterians used the term when Packer was growing up.<sup>9</sup> Writing in 1958, Packer defined the term as "fidelity to the doctrinal content of the gospel."<sup>10</sup> In the past, this renewal movement has united believers from various faith traditions in the following biblical beliefs and practices: (1) the virgin birth, sinless life, death, bodily resurrection, and lordship of Christ; (2) the sole authority of Scripture to define Christian life and practice; (3) the necessity of cross-bearing discipleship and ethics; (4) the beauty of meaningful Trinitarian congregational and individual worship; and (5) the responsibility and joy of engaging in world missionary activity. It can do so again. However, it is evident

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he learned to read hard New Testament Greek passages. "In school," Packer replied.

<sup>6</sup> Packer dedicated his volume *A Passion for Faithfulness: Wisdom from the Book of Nehemiah* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995) to the Catherwoods.

<sup>7</sup> See the accounts of Packer's conversion in J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1996), 99; Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 36–39; and McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 17–22. Packer notes that he recognized the Bible as God's authoritative word soon after his conversion (Packer, *Truth and Power*, 99).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, "Preface," in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George, Beeson Divinity Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 9.

<sup>9</sup> On Anglicans, see G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, new ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), v. On Presbyterians, in this case the Free Church of Scotland, see John Macleod, ed., *Our Evangelical Heritage: The Work and Witness of the Free Church* (Edinburgh: Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1938), 9–10.

<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 38.

to many today that evangelicalism itself once again needs renewal before it will be or be seen by others as a renewing force.

### *1. First Wave: Rekindling the UK Evangelical Heritage (1944–1954)*

Packer entered Oxford at a moment in the UK when others had already begun to stir the waters of conservative theology for the renewal of theological education, evangelism, discipleship, ecclesiology, and missiology. For example, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was preaching vibrant biblical messages in rubble-strewn London to what remained of the congregation of Westminster Chapel. Lloyd-Jones had been the better-known G. Campbell Morgan's associate minister until the older man's death in 1943.<sup>11</sup> Morgan represented the previous generation of Bible-believing independent churchmen. Wycliffe Hall, an Anglican permanent hall of Oxford University founded in 1877 with the help of J. C. Ryle,<sup>12</sup> was seeking to retain at least some of its conservative roots.<sup>13</sup> Evangelizing of university students continued. As was noted above, Packer was converted at one of these meetings. Led by Douglas Johnson, Inter-Varsity Fellowship evangelized and disciplined university students and initiated a thoughtful publishing program. F. F. Bruce, who eventually wrote extensively on topics in biblical studies and supervised numerous American doctoral students at the University of Manchester, was teaching at the University of Leeds.<sup>14</sup> Tyndale House, an evangelical study center in Cambridge, had been envisioned and its fruitful ministry begun.<sup>15</sup>

As noted above, Packer studied Classics at Corpus Christi and gained a strong interest in the history and theology of the Puritans during 1944–1948. He prepared for Christian ministry by studying Theology while living in Wycliffe Hall (1949–1950). He then did research towards his doctorate (1950–1952), also while living in Wycliffe Hall.<sup>16</sup> He completed his dissertation on the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter in July 1954,<sup>17</sup> a few days before he married Kit Mullet.<sup>18</sup> Given his studies, then, Packer was

<sup>11</sup> On Lloyd-Jones's ministry with G. Campbell Morgan during the war, see Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Why Does God Allow War? A General Justification of the Ways of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), and Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 3–54.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus Loane, *Makers of Our Heritage: A Study of Four Evangelical Leaders* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 39–40 and Paul R. House, "Standing Firm in the Faith: John Charles Ryle," *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry* 4.1 (2010): 47–49. On the first years of Wycliffe Hall's history, see J. B. Lancelot, *Francis James Chavasse, Bishop of Liverpool* (London: The Church Book Room, 1928), 103–50.

<sup>13</sup> Compare McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 40–41, and Marcia Cameron, *An Enigmatic Life: Broughton Knox, Father of Contemporary Sydney Anglicanism* (Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2006), 112–14.

<sup>14</sup> See Tim Grass, *F. F. Bruce: A Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 32–49 and 101–41.

<sup>15</sup> See Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979); Thomas A. Noble, *Tyndale House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006); Grass, F. F. Bruce, 41–43; Cameron, *Broughton Knox*, 71–72; and Marcus Loane, "Introduction: David Broughton Knox," in *David Broughton Knox: Selected Works, Volume 1: The Doctrine of God*, ed. Tony Payne (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2000), 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> On Packer's student years, consult McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 13–58, and Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 32–67.

<sup>17</sup> The volume was published over four decades later. See J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 64–65; McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 65–69.



prepared to contribute to biblical exegesis, biblical theology, church history, and systematic theology—the four subjects he thereafter considered foundational for all other theological disciplines.

In 1948–1949, Packer taught Latin and Greek at Oak Hill College in London. Close colleagues included R. Alan Cole and Alan Stibbs,<sup>19</sup> both of whom were excellent biblical scholars.<sup>20</sup> This experience led him to believe that perhaps God was calling him to teaching as his vocation. His interest in the Puritans resulted in Packer working with Martyn Lloyd-Jones and O. Raymond Johnston to establish an annual conference on that tradition starting in 1950.<sup>21</sup> During 1952–1954 Packer served as a curate at St. John's, Harborne, in Birmingham. He was ordained in December 1952.<sup>22</sup> When Stibbs and Johnson decided that the article on “Revelation and Inspiration” in *The New Bible Commentary* needed updating, they turned to Packer to write the piece.<sup>23</sup>

Other young evangelicals were also beginning significant ministries in the UK. For example, John Stott had finished his studies in Modern Languages at Cambridge University and commenced his life-long service at London's All Souls Langham Place in 1945.<sup>24</sup> Billy Graham had first preached in the UK in 1946 as a Youth for Christ evangelist,<sup>25</sup> and in 1954 he led the famous three-month evangelistic campaign in London's Haringay Arena. Many of the students in Anglican theological colleges in the next decade were direct descendants of the London Crusade. In Scotland, William Still started a pastorate in Aberdeen in 1945 that lasted five decades.<sup>26</sup> In 1949, James Philip began a powerful expository ministry in Gardenstown that he continued at Holyrood Abbey, Edinburgh beginning in 1958.<sup>27</sup> Each man influenced generations of university students in their respective cities.

In 1944–1954, Packer completed his formal education and began to pursue the areas of thought and practice he emphasized thereafter. First, he used his considerable language skills as a tutor at Oak Hill College. Second, having been nourished by Puritan writers from the early days after his conversion, he worked alongside Lloyd-Jones and others in the annual Puritan Conference. Third, he began writing articles for publication. His article on revelation and the inspiration of Scripture showed that he already recognized that a robust view of the authority and inspiration of the Bible must undergird his theology and ministry. Fourth, he decided to focus on education as his vocation. Fifth, he served as a ministry team member in an Anglican parish. He never separated writing, teaching, and church ministry—the three areas in which evangelicalism made the most strides during the first wave.

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<sup>19</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 34–35.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), and Alan M. Stibbs, *Search the Scriptures*, 6th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 54–56; McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 37–38; and Murray, *Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, 226–27.

<sup>22</sup> On Packer's curacy, consult McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 59–65; Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 68–75.

<sup>23</sup> J. I. Packer, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. Ernest Kevan and Alan Stibbs, revised ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1954), 24–30.

<sup>24</sup> See Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader, the Early Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 117–246.

<sup>25</sup> On this visit, see the interesting descriptions in William Still, *Dying to Live* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1991), 87–88 and Dudley-Smith, *Stott*, 294.

<sup>26</sup> Still, *Dying to Live*, 75–190.

<sup>27</sup> David Wright and David Stay, eds., *Serving the Word of God: Celebrating the Life and Ministry of James Philip* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002), 9–97.

## *2. Second Wave: Expansion and Limits of UK Evangelicalism and Its Institutions (1954–1979)*

During 1954–1979, Packer’s writing flourished. He published some of his best works, including *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God* (1958), *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (1961), *God Has Spoken* (1965), *Knowing God* (1973), and *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (1978). These years also found Packer helping build Anglican evangelical institutions. He served as instructor at Tyndale Hall in Bristol (1955–1961), warden of Latimer House in Oxford (1961–1970), principal of Tyndale Hall in Bristol (1970–1972), and instructor of theology at Trinity College in Bristol (1972–1979).

Theologically driven institutions can be personal or impersonal, formal or informal, large or small, temporary or permanent. They can be funded and governed by a donor, a group, a denomination, a government, or a combination of all four. As a teacher at Tyndale Hall, Packer ministered to a student body of 55–60 alongside strong staff members, including John Wenham, an outstanding Greek scholar. At the time, there were two other approved Anglican colleges in Bristol. The Packers lived in a residence hall among the students, and he often ate breakfast with them.<sup>28</sup> This was an example of strong viable personal theological education.

Between Packer’s leaving in 1961 and return as Principal in 1970, Tyndale had suffered through organizational strife and had fallen to 28 students, but the college had an outstanding staff.<sup>29</sup> The college was, as Packer put it later, “in low water,”<sup>30</sup> but Packer had plans for a stronger curriculum and a better organizational structure. He thought that 45–50 students would be sufficient going forward.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, a denominational committee on theological education thought that only colleges with 80–120 students were desirable. Thus, eventually the decision was made to consolidate the three Bristol colleges into one. This new college was named Trinity. As is often true when academic institutions merge, the early years at Trinity were bright. Faculty members included Packer, J. A. Motyer, Colin Brown, and Joyce Baldwin.<sup>32</sup> The combined enrollment was higher than any one of the three had been. Nonetheless, one college remained where three evangelical ones had been, and that one had fewer opportunities for teacher-student interaction than its predecessors. Maintaining a high-quality teaching staff and sustaining higher enrollment proved challenging.

Between his times in Bristol, Packer went back to Oxford to lead Latimer House, an Anglican study center aimed at “defusing liberal theology.”<sup>33</sup> In this capacity, Packer was able to make a significant contribution to major meetings and conferences, including the National Evangelical Anglican Congress (1967).<sup>34</sup> Packer engaged in theological journalism for the sake of expressing the evangelical Anglican viewpoint in intellectually respectable ways. Thus, he penned numerous articles for religious newspapers

<sup>28</sup> On Packer’s personal work at Tyndale Hall, see McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 70–73.

<sup>29</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 140–51.

<sup>30</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> On the circumstances surrounding the consolidation of the colleges, see McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 141, 151–54, 161–79.

<sup>33</sup> Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent introduction to this conference and its importance, see Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry, the Later Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 77–103.

and magazines.<sup>35</sup> He also sought grounds for common Anglican union despite serious theological and liturgical differences,<sup>36</sup> an effort that put Martyn Lloyd Jones at odds with him and ended Packer's participation in the Puritan Conference in 1970.<sup>37</sup> To be fair to Lloyd-Jones, he wondered why Anglican evangelicals preferred to stay with Anglican liberals rather than leave the national church behind to be with other evangelicals. To be fair to Packer, he had never indicated a desire to leave the Anglican church. He desired to reform from within while standing alongside evangelicals from other denominations.

Latimer House made a strong contribution to evangelical Anglicanism during Packer's tenure. Packer told Leland Ryken that he considered his time at Latimer successful in two ways. First, it "corrected a public perception of evangelicals as being isolated from the Anglican Church and lacking in intellectual sophistication."<sup>38</sup> Second, it laid a foundation for reform within the church.<sup>39</sup> Packer continued to press these two points the rest of his life.

Packer's time in Bristol and Oxford yielded many solid articles and books. Three stand out for their immediate and ongoing value. *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958) expressed Packer's view of biblical authority and inspiration as clearly as any work he produced. He told me in 2015 that he was pleased that the book held up remarkably well over time. Its durability partly rests in its close connection to biblical theology rather than to current controversy. Packer separates his theology from fundamentalism and liberalism, thus dealing with a pressing issue in the mid-1950s. Yet he does so while expounding a historic Christian orthodoxy that stands the test of time.<sup>40</sup>

*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (1961) also holds up well, and for the same reason. Packer seeks to explain how God's sovereignty and human responsibility are friends in the Bible, not opponents.<sup>41</sup> He makes a significant contribution to proper pastoral work by denying that numerical growth defines biblical evangelism, for, he writes, "The results of preaching depend, not on the wishes and intentions of men, but on the will of God Almighty."<sup>42</sup> He adds, "But the way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the gospel message."<sup>43</sup> These assertions place evangelism in proper perspective.

*Knowing God* (1973) is by far Packer's best-selling volume. It encapsulates the Bible's teaching about God in twenty-two tightly written chapters.<sup>44</sup> There is hardly a wasted word. Packer treats God as a person, not a concept. He writes about God as one might about a trusted mentor who is also a family

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<sup>35</sup> See Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 105–7.

<sup>36</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 393–96.

<sup>37</sup> See McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 116–28; Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 108–12; and Murray, *Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, 495–567.

<sup>38</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 119.

<sup>39</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 119.

<sup>40</sup> For a summary of Packer's argument, see Paul R. House, "God Has Spoken: The Primacy of Scripture in J. I. Packer's Ministry," in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George, Beeson Divinity Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 76–77.

<sup>41</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 35–36.

<sup>42</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

friend. God's truthful word and unimaginable love for his imperfect people constitute the heart of the work.<sup>45</sup>

It is possible to see now that Packer participated in the largest post-war expansion of UK evangelicalism thus far. We do not know what the future will hold. The scholarly output of evangelical writers like Packer, J. A. Motyer, Joyce Baldwin, Colin Brown, Geoffrey Grogan, John Wenham, Anthony Thiselton, and others built a strong foundation for further work by subsequent generations. Many of the institutions in which these scholars worked, however, have struggled or closed. This wave in UK evangelicalism shows that institutions can contribute to evangelical flourishing. If evangelicalism is dependent on them, however, the future could be a troubled one.

On the other hand, if evangelicalism is dependent on embracing the truthful and loving God, living by the trustworthy word of God, and sharing the good news about God regardless of numerical success, then evangelicalism has a viable future. Evangelicalism ought to examine its theology of institutions and make corrections. It should not, however, make corrections to healthy belief in God, Scripture, and evangelism.

### *3. Third Wave: Expansion and Limits of North American Evangelicalism (1979–1999)*

When Packer moved to Vancouver in 1979, North American evangelicalism was experiencing the sort of expansion that UK evangelicalism had enjoyed from 1944–1979. Billy Graham's ministry spanned North America and extended around the world. Graham, Charles Fuller, Harold Ockenga, Kenneth Kantzer, and James Houston contributed to the founding or flourishing of interdenominational evangelical seminaries.<sup>46</sup> Likeminded denominational seminary leaders likewise initiated or bolstered theological education. Church attendance had increased dramatically during the Baby Boom years in conservative and liberal denominations alike. Young people came to faith in record numbers, many through efforts such as Bill Bright's Campus Crusade ministry and Francis and Edith Schaeffer's L'Abri community and associated books. The Eerdmans, Baker, and Zondervan families published evangelical works from their base in Grand Rapids, Michigan, while Moody, InterVarsity Press, Tyndale House, and the fledgling Crossway Books were based in the Chicago area. Carl Henry, Millard Erickson, R. K. Harrison, Clark Pinnock, and Merrill Tenney were making their mark as theologians and Bible interpreters. Younger scholars, such as the New Testament scholars D. A. Carson and N. T. Wright, would soon do the same.<sup>47</sup> Evangelical and conservative denominational mission boards, such as the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, expanded. Some evangelicals spoke of reaching the world for Christ by century's end.

Packer participated in and contributed to this growth. The years 1979–1999 were among the happiest and most productive of his life. Regent College proved a tremendous blessing to evangelical scholarship, pastoral formation, and forwarding discipleship among lay people. Packer had able colleagues who left

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<sup>45</sup> On the origins, writing, and contents of the book, see McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 186–95.

<sup>46</sup> Graham and Ockenga were crucial to Gordon-Conwell Seminary; Fuller and Ockenga were important in the founding and development of Fuller Theological Seminary; Kantzer was the key leader in the shaping of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and Houston was the founding leader of Regent College.

<sup>47</sup> Carson joined the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1978, and he is now emeritus professor of New Testament. Wright taught at McGill University from 1981 to 1986.

their own mark on scholarship: Gordon Fee (New Testament), Bruce Waltke (Old Testament), and Eugene Peterson (Pastoral Theology).<sup>48</sup>

Packer also contributed greatly to the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, as I will discuss below. He published serious and significant articles on biblical hermeneutics.<sup>49</sup> He tried to explain the essentials of biblical inerrancy to Southern Baptist conservatives and moderates in 1988.<sup>50</sup> He published several books, including my personal favorite, *Hot Tub Religion* (1987), and the widely read *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Spiritual Life* (1990). He participated in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* in the mid-1990s, a commitment that led to the sort of criticism he received when engaging in discussions of Anglican union in the 1960s.<sup>51</sup> He retired from full-time teaching at Regent in 1996, but he continued to offer courses there and at other seminaries for many years afterwards.

#### *4. Fourth Wave: Seeds for Renewal (1999–2020)*

As I noted above, evangelical hopes were very high when Packer moved to Vancouver in 1979. Forty years later, North American evangelicals, especially those in the US, have reason to be chastened. The Baby Boom is long over, though many colleges, churches, denominations, and seminaries have not planned accordingly. Post-Christian culture is as alive and well as it was in the 1960s, though it now takes different forms. Evangelicalism's emphasis on numbers and large institutions has continued, perpetuating an industrial model of education instead of a personal one. Institutional and ecclesiastical fissures and fractures continue, as they have since the 1930s. Racial tensions have ebbed and flowed without Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic conservatives finding ways to overcome barriers and work together consistently. Political entanglements and how they have been reported have endangered the constructive use of the term "evangelical." Carl Henry's 1971 call for an "evangelical demonstration" of unity in ministry still waits to be answered.<sup>52</sup> His 1976 warnings about "a newly aggressive far right" that "echoes a religious jingoism that merely ignores or rebukes multiplying nuclei of discontent" and a "restrictive social vision" that "can only have doleful consequences for evangelical conscience and national life" have not been heeded.<sup>53</sup> Nor has his admonition that even if evangelicals "are motivated by a legitimate defense of capitalism and democratic processes against socialist and totalitarian assaults, the failure of establishment evangelicals to criticize incisively the American politico-cultural context, including secular capitalism and seamy governmental trends, has often dampened the younger generations for these structural forms."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 158–66; McGrath, *J. I. Packer*, 223–48.

<sup>49</sup> For a good selection of Packer's articles on hermeneutics and interpretation during this period, see J. I. Packer, *Honouring the Written Word of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer, Volume Three* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 23–49; 137–83.

<sup>50</sup> Packer, *Honouring the Written Word of God*, 161–212.

<sup>51</sup> See Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 404–8. For the contributions of Packer and other members of the conference, see Charles Colson and Richard J. Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *An Evangelical Demonstration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

<sup>53</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 65–66, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*, 69–70.

Amid these fourth wave developments, Packer's work in the last twenty years of his life planted seeds for renewal within a chastened evangelicalism. These seeds include: (1) a Bible translation anchored in a high view of Scripture that is useful for preaching, worship, and scholarship; (2) biblically saturated resources for personal, familial, congregational, and denominational renewal; and (3) a life that exhibited faithfulness unto death.

#### **4.1. Seed One, Translating God's Word: Packer and the English Standard Version**

In 1998 or 1999, Packer agreed to participate in the making of the English Standard Version. He was a member of the Translation Oversight Committee, which ultimately decided the text's wording.<sup>55</sup> Thus, during 1999–2001 he met in person with eleven other committee members in work sessions held in Cambridge (UK), Orlando, Hereford (UK), and Nashville. The team and support staff met together in person for a total of about 100 days leading up to the translation's publication in 2001. Significant preparation time was required between meetings. Packer missed one set of meetings due to illness, but he was in contact with the committee even then. Subsequent Translation Oversight Committee meetings occurred at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, in 2005, and at Tyndale House in Cambridge in 2010 and 2015.

Packer had many roles on the committee. First, he was expected to contribute linguistic insights. His fluency in Greek was a great asset. By his own admission, his Hebrew skills were weak. Thus, on Old Testament matters he deferred to others, especially OT Committee members Gordon Wenham and Jack Collins, yet often asked relevant questions that sharpened discussion. Second, he was expected to offer theological insight based on his knowledge of church history and Christian doctrine. He was particularly apt at noting how one theological tradition or the other might hear a particular rendering. Third, he was expected to summarize the arguments for and against a proposed reading and render his judgment before the whole committee voted on an issue. This expectation recognized his role as a veteran linguist, theologian, minister, and leader. Fourth, he offered informal instruction on a variety of subjects as members walked back and forth to work. For example, he spoke with me about Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, J. C. Ryle, and Charles Simeon. Fifth, he and Lane Dennis collaborated on the final version of ESV Preface, having sought and received excellent suggestions from others along the way.

The Preface situates the ESV in the formal equivalence school of English Bible translations. This means that as far as possible the translation seeks to preserve the order of sentences. It seeks to translate one word for one word wherever it can. It tries to preserve concordance of wording, even though English writers typically use synonyms rather than repeat a word. It continues to translate traditional theological terms, such as "justification," "sanctification," and "atonement." The list could be extended, but the point is that formal equivalence translations seek textual "transparency" of the original text. Perhaps the best explanation of formal equivalence translation practices appears in Robert Alter's recent volume *The Art of Biblical Translation*.<sup>56</sup>

The Preface also states that the ESV strives to use language suitable for private and public reading and worship. This may lead translators to use a word higher or lower on the vocabulary register, depending on the text. Packer wanted the ESV to follow in the footsteps of the KJV, in the sense that the

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<sup>55</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the author of this article is the source of the information on the work of the ESV Translation Oversight Committee.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

text has dignity when read aloud and memorability when read privately. He did not want to offer stilted wording and outdated syntax.

It is important to note that Packer praised other types of translations as supplements to formal equivalent translations. He did not take an all or nothing view of translation theory.

Packer's Bible translation work came after his participation in the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy from 1978 to 1987. I have heard Packer quip that his involvement made the council "international," since the other participants were from the US. The group did important work, including issuing careful statements on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978, Biblical Hermeneutics in 1982, and the Biblical Canon in 1987.<sup>57</sup> The Council provided clear definitions, hermeneutical principles, and applicational details that remain viable. While Packer often voiced his preference for the positive phrase "true and trustworthy" to the negative words "inerrant" and "infallible," he was clearly satisfied to own "inerrancy" as his view.

I am not aware of Packer ever drawing specific parallels between his dedication to formal equivalence translation and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. However, the two are in accord.<sup>58</sup> For example, Article IV of the Chicago Statement reads, "We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration."<sup>59</sup> Article VI adds, "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration."<sup>60</sup> Articles X and XI of the Hermeneutics Statement assert,

We affirm that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of human literary forms. We deny that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message. We affirm that translations of the text of Scripture can communicate knowledge of God across all temporal and cultural boundaries. We deny that the meaning of biblical texts is so tied to the culture out of which they came that understanding of the same meaning in other cultures is impossible.<sup>61</sup>

Packer's work on the ESV demonstrated the value of his linguistic training. Greek skills gained in school, furthered at Oxford University, and honed by teaching at Oak Hill College stayed with him. This was a deep training, not a passing nod to bygone curriculum days or to gaining "tools" to read English texts. Facility was the goal. Packer and the rest of the members of the Translation Oversight Committee believed that formal equivalence translation aids expository preaching and affirms the work of biblical language teachers.

If exegesis is the foundation of all theology, as Packer's writings repeatedly affirmed, then the future of biblical Christianity will require a high level of expertise in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and related subjects. Packer's work on the ESV came, arguably, at the end of a great era of Bible translations. The curricula that produced the committee members for these translations will need to be cultivated, not assumed.

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<sup>57</sup> See J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), 134–70.

<sup>58</sup> Lane Dennis pointed out to me this possible connection in a private conversation.

<sup>59</sup> Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 159.

<sup>61</sup> Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 174.

It is worth asking where this expertise will be gained. Frankly, it will not come from one or two obligatory courses in Greek or Hebrew in MA or MDiv studies. It will not come from PhD programs in Old or New Testament that require little or no language study, as is the case in many places now in the UK and US. It will not come from simply producing more PhDs taking weaker curricula through online or hybrid “delivery systems.” It will not come from depending on secular or secularized university programs to do the heavy academic lifting, for many of those are shrinking or dying.

It could begin in Christian schools offering years of graded language studies. It could grow through parents and pastors stressing serious language study in colleges as a major or second major. It will depend heavily on seminaries and universities setting and holding standards that may hamper enrollment increases. It will require committed giving from churches who have learned the necessity of quality biblical teaching.

The future of biblical Christianity will also require careful scholarship anchored in appropriate understandings of revelation and inspiration. Packer often claimed that he was a theologian for the church, not for the academy. While this is true, he deserves credit for his serious scholarly work on the doctrine of Scripture. As this article has shown, much of this work appeared in articles and book chapters. Historians will need to examine and assess these articles, weighing them alongside his popular works.

#### **4.2. Seed Two, Resources for Renewed Pastoral Witness: Packer and Anglicanism**

Packer lived and died an Anglican, an Anglican who loved and longed for union with other believers, but an Anglican to the last. Ordained in 1954, he was suspended by his Canadian bishop in 2008, and taken up by the bishop of the Southern Cone and then by the Anglican Church in North America.<sup>62</sup> He loved Anglicanism’s prayer book, its Book of Homilies, its global communion, its evangelical heritage, and its connection to other Reformation bodies. He believed Anglican theology, prayer, and practice constituted healthy doctrine. Anglicanism was his Christian home. In the last years of his life, Packer paid tribute to this heritage by working with others to produce essential resources to bolster biblical faith found in the Anglican tradition.

Michael Garrett’s careful bibliography of Packer’s works from 1952 to 2008 indicates Packer’s numerous earlier contributions to Anglican theology.<sup>63</sup> Since then, Packer served on committees that revised the Prayer Book and released a thorough catechism.<sup>64</sup> Packer viewed events in the last decade of his life as an opportunity to contribute to the reformation of a great Reformation tradition.

Packer’s final volume *The Heritage of Anglican Theology* (2021) makes this point plain. Packer stresses that ideal Anglicanism fits squarely in the mainstream of truly Christian faith and practice. He thinks so because at its best Anglicanism is properly biblical, liturgical, evangelical, pastoral, episcopal, national, and ecumenical. It is biblical in that it insists that “your principles of interpretation come from within Scripture and are validated by Scripture, not imposed on Scripture by external, arbitrary means.”<sup>65</sup> It is

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<sup>62</sup> Ryken, *J. I. Packer*, 408–9.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Garrett, “Bibliography of the Works of J. I. Packer,” in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. Timothy George, Beeson Divinity Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 187–230.

<sup>64</sup> See *The Book of Common Prayer* (2019) (Huntington Beach, CA: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019); J. I. Packer and Joel Scandrett, ed., *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>65</sup> J. I. Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 29.



liturgical and evangelical in that “our worship and thinking about Christian life, testimony, and influence center always on the gospel, a full-orbed gospel, which includes the incarnation, atonement, bodily resurrection, present reign, and forthcoming return of Jesus Christ.”<sup>66</sup> It is pastoral in that it focuses on the pastor walking with and feeding the sheep, not on becoming a “preacher or controversialist.”<sup>67</sup> It is ecumenical in that it learns from and works with others. For example, he ends the book by stating that he longs to see Protestants and Catholics walk together in a two-year program of basic discipleship that postpones matters that divide us.<sup>68</sup>

In 1999 or 2000, Packer told me that it would not make much sense for a man of his age to change denominations. He added that, unless he was very much mistaken, denominations would not mean much in the years ahead. He seems to be mistaken about denominations not meaning much, at least so far. As pastors can attest, it may be a post-denomination world for lay people, but it is not so for ministers. Thus, healthy books written from a denominational perspective are still valuable. Furthermore, they are also reminders that healthy denominations can fuel wider renewal, just as unhealthy ones can stymie renewal.

#### 4.3. Seed Three: Faithfulness unto Death

Packer accepted the infirmities age brought, as his *Weakness Is the Way* and *Finishing Our Course with Joy* indicate.<sup>69</sup> He worked while his strength lasted, even after he hardly had eyesight left. Like Carl Henry, Billy Graham, John Stott, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones before him, Packer lived a long time and left a clean witness when he died. These witnesses and their family and friends took up the cross and followed Jesus. Their witness endures for all who wish to learn from it.

### 5. Foundation Stones for the Next Wave of Evangelicalism

If there is to be a healthy fifth wave of evangelicalism, foundation stones will need to be set in place, or perhaps simply cleared and used again. Packer has left at least four of these stones. Each one is biblical. Each one is often overlooked.

First, he left the foundation stone of a strong family. Packer was married for 65 years to Kit. They raised three children. They made a home in Vancouver, following their sense of God’s call at a time in life when many people will not make such a change. Having earned little money in England, they trusted God to provide in a new and expensive setting. Kit managed the household alone during Jim’s many absences. Their partnership honored God and served his people.

Second, Packer modeled the foundation stone of humble service. He taught in small colleges that boasted no international scholarly reputation. Every one of those colleges needed building up or rebuilding. He and his colleagues shared a vision of evangelical theology, formation of shepherds for God’s people, and high-quality scholarly and popular writing. Many of his colleagues are remembered,

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<sup>66</sup> Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> Packer, *The Heritage of Anglican Theology*, 344–45.

<sup>69</sup> J. I. Packer, *Weakness Is the Way* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); *Finishing Our Course with Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

but most are not. Packer's willingness to serve in such places and in such ways shows a commitment to doing what he believed God asked, no matter the circumstances.

Third, Packer wrote books and articles that came his way. He did not calculate, scheme, or dream about what was "strategic" for his career or "the evangelical cause." Rather, he stressed sound theology and its pastoral implications. He wrote because he believed God had extended to him a "call to authorship."<sup>70</sup> While he eventually had a favorable teaching load, he still wrote in odd hours taken from sleep and companionship. Packer knew that his writing was not, ultimately, his own. The same was true of his sales. He once told me that he understood that the extraordinary sales numbers of *Knowing God* were a once-in-a-lifetime gift from God.

Fourth, Packer imitated the English Reformers he admired. He believed that they planted seeds of renewal that he ought to cultivate. William Tyndale translated the Bible into English. Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and others left the Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Homilies. Packer wanted to be like them, and he was. Moreover, he tried to develop fellowship with liberal Anglicans, a wide swath of Protestants, and Roman Catholics, and he accepted the heat that came with trying to rebuild these long-broken relationships.

## 6. Conclusion

Evangelicalism's first wave proved that seeds of a renewed evangelicalism do not lie in achieving large numbers, building impressive institutions, controlling perceived centers of influence, or holding political power. They do not lie in book sales, internet notoriety, prestigious speaking engagements, or new educational delivery systems. Some of these things have their place, but they are not primary.

Evangelicalism's second and third waves showed that renewal lies in the seeds of absolute commitment to Christ the Lord, to the word of God, to the people of God, to the ministry of God, for the glory of God and the benefit of those created in God's image. It lies in a life of worship with others that forms people for service of God and others.

Evangelicalism's fourth wave demonstrated that there can be faithful work done amidst circumstances that should humble evangelicalism. Commitment to the Bible and to sound theology in a denominational or inter-denominational setting can leave seeds for future renewal. Faithfulness unto death remains the primary testimony for succeeding generations.

Packer's life shows that renewal begins in building homes and doing personal work in small places. Renewal requires a bedrock belief in God's trustworthy word and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Renewal requires accepting costly vocational discipleship and manifesting character. If evangelicalism is to again help renew persons, places, churches, and communities, it must regain commitment to these small, marginal means, not for a movement's sake,<sup>71</sup> but because these are the right things to do, according to Scripture.

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<sup>70</sup> Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> On the dangers of perpetuating movements for their own sake, see Wendell Berry, "In Distrust of Movements," in *Wendell Berry: Essays 1993–2017*, ed. Jack Shoemaker, reprint ed. (New York: Library of America, 2019), 271–79.

# The Explicit and Implicit Theological Method of J. I. Packer

— Don J. Payne —

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**Abstract:** J. I. Packer's theological works have wielded remarkable influence on the landscape of North American evangelicalism. His hallmark theological emphases reflect both explicit methodological commitments and implicit methodological traits. Packer's theological method is marked by a commitment to the inerrancy and authority of the biblical text, as interpreted within a covenantal, canonical, and Christo-centric framework. His method also reflects assumptions about the nature of divine and human rationality, the capacity of human rationality to access the formal meaning of the text, the nature of meaning in the text, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process.

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I'll take my place in the line of those who have been gratefully impacted by J. I. Packer, beginning in my life with his monumental work *Knowing God*.<sup>1</sup> Though published relatively early in his writing career, that work strikes me as somewhat paradigmatic of his overall theological method. The impact of that book can be assessed from numerous angles, but it brings to mind Marshall McLuhan's observation that the medium is the message. Similarly, the method is the message.

Only in recent years has theological method become a prominent point of research and conversation amongst evangelical theologians. Roman Catholic and some mainline Protestant theologians had quite a head start on the subject. Evangelical scholars have for a long time attended to hermeneutics but it appears that hermeneutics has often been generally treated as synonymous with exegesis. Many evangelical Bible colleges and seminaries have required courses in biblical hermeneutics which center on the practice of biblical exegesis, but which do not attend to the layers of interpretive questions and issues underlying the canons and practice of historical, grammatical exegesis.

J. I. Packer was arguably in the vanguard of evangelicals who began to pay attention to the field of hermeneutics in that broader sense. Over time he saw the connection between that hermeneutical conversation and theological method. Packer considered all theology to be spiritual theology and refused to let the work of theology be divorced from the life of faithful obedience. Thus, he sought to bring his reflections on theological method into the service of that enterprise.

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

In 1991 Packer published the book entitled *Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*.<sup>2</sup> He can now be placed among those giants and in an effort to expand and inform our appreciation of his contributions, this article will provide an overview and summary of his theological method, that is, how he understood theological method; his explicit methodological commitments; and his actual practice of theological method, both explicit and implicit. These observations will be deeply appreciative, even as I seek to point out some places where, in the style of critical realism, we can stand on Packer's broad theological shoulders and maybe stretch just a bit further toward apprehension of God's truth.

### *1. Packer's Definition and Understanding of Theological Method*

Packer's own definition of theological method was straightforward. It is, he said, the procedures by which theology is done and the justification for those procedures.<sup>3</sup> He observed that theological method generally functions on one of two sets of premises. One set prioritizes the Bible as "the revealed Word of God" that functions authoritatively and may be illuminated through research and the Holy Spirit's illumination. The other set prioritizes "the historical institutional church" as the infallible guide for interpreting the Bible.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, even though Packer had a high ecclesiology and regard for the historic Creeds, he contended for the methodological priority of the first set, both in his commitment to the Word of God as the source of authority and the Holy Spirit as the adjudicator of that authority.

I must add that a diagnostic of any theological method must include attention to the substructure of one's theology, for example, starting points, the ordering and internal relations posited between theological loci, how assumptions about some loci function in relation to other loci, and how other factors such as those in Outler's familiar Quadrilateral affect our theological conclusions.

In Packer's overall understanding of the nature and task of theology, his approach to theological method was intricately connected to his understanding of hermeneutics. So, we can gain insight into his theological method through his approach to hermeneutics. I asked him once whether his theology had changed over the years and he told me it had not. He was probably thinking specifically of the explicit content of his theology and of his primary commitments. However, his methodological commitments did indeed change or at least mature over time, as evidenced in the shifts of his thinking about hermeneutics.

Early on he was quite suspicious about this "new" emphasis on hermeneutics. When Anthony Thiselton addressed the National Evangelical Anglican Congress on the subject in 1977, Packer left disappointed by the lack of clear biblical answers to the questions that were raised. Alister McGrath recounts that while Packer "never discounted the importance of hermeneutical questions," he feared that Thiselton's approach was risky and bordered on relativism.<sup>5</sup> Since then, however, he wrote appreciatively

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<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991), 86–87.

<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, "Method, Theological," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 425.

<sup>4</sup> Packer, "Method, Theological," 425.

<sup>5</sup> Alister McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Life of James I. Packer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 218.

of Thiselton's contributions as well as those by other contributors such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>6</sup> Of course this shift may well have reflected Packer's sense that Thiselton's views had matured, or it may simply have reflected Packer's deepened grasp of what Thiselton and others were saying. At any rate it suggested movement in his understanding of and engagement with the field, which showed up in his later attempts to integrate some of those hermeneutical insights into his model for reading, interpreting, and responding to God's authoritative Word.

## *2. Assumptions of Packer's Theological Method*

From his 1953 essay on "Revelation and Inspiration"<sup>7</sup> through to his mature writings of the ensuing decades, the inerrancy and authority of Scripture were crucial assumptions that shaped Packer's theological practice. Further light is shed on his theological method by examining how he understood inerrancy, its relationship to the Incarnation, and the ways in which inerrancy constitutes an epistemological link between divine and human rationality.

### **2.1. Inerrancy**

Packer considered biblical inerrancy the cornerstone of his theological method.<sup>8</sup> As a Brit, he was comfortable using the word "infallible," but he actually preferred "inerrant" because he felt it had more clarity and force.<sup>9</sup> Inerrancy was, for Packer, "a methodological commitment that is perceived as part of a Christian's discipleship."<sup>10</sup> It underpinned Christian discipleship because in order for the human will to be renewed and the image of God restored, God's mind must be accurately conveyed to the human mind. Here we can see the Augustinian contours of his anthropology. Biblical inerrancy was for Packer coextensive with biblical authority, which he considered "as methodologically the most basic of theological issues."<sup>11</sup>

Yet Packer was admirably careful not to over-define the notion of inerrancy in overly rigid or technical ways even if he felt, as we'll see in a bit, that the function of inerrancy was quite precise. Rather, he qualified the notion to affirm, first, underlying consistency of and not conflict between all that the biblical writers affirm even though that consistency was not always immediately evident and

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<sup>6</sup> J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 346. See also J. I. Packer, "Understanding the Bible: Evangelical Hermeneutics," in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 158.

<sup>7</sup> J. I. Packer, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. Ernest Kevan and Alan Stibbs, revised ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1954), 24–30.

<sup>8</sup> J. I. Packer, "Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today," in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 141.

<sup>9</sup> J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture," 349–50. See also J. I. Packer, "Encountering Present Day Views of Scripture," in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, "Inerrancy and the Divinity and Humanity of the Bible," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987*, ed. J. Gregory (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 138.

<sup>11</sup> J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Shaw, 1996), 98.

demanded ongoing study to unearth it, and second, his commitment to give Scripture the benefit of the doubt when there appears to be material internal contradiction.<sup>12</sup>

For Packer, the possibility of divine and sinless human nature coexisting fully and without compromise in Jesus Christ made possible a fully human yet inerrant communication from God in Scripture as God's written Word.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, since biblical authority derives from the mind of God and is validated by the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ, Jesus constitutes both the plausibility of inerrancy and the content of inerrancy as the supreme expression of God's verbal revelation. This linkage of authoritative divine content with the mind of God through Jesus, expressed propositionally in Jesus' teachings, displays the rational orientation of Packer's hermeneutics and theological method.

Here we can see a bit deeper into the substructure of Packer's theological method as it relies on his assumptions about the nature of the rationality shared by God and human beings. Human rationality is analogically related to divine relationality by being made in God's image. Packer did not explicitly define the *imago Dei* in rationalistic terms as did so many in the history of theological anthropology, but in his view rationality still occupied a space shared by God and humans (or shared by God with humans) and is essential to the realization of the *imago Dei*.

That raises the crucial question of what Packer meant by rationality and how that rationality functions methodologically in revelation's divinely intended purpose. Packer advocated a theological method that was rational without being rationalistic. He advocated a more wholistic understanding of rationality that involves commitment/obedience. One can hear notes of Michael Polanyi in the type of rationality found in Packer's epistemology. It could be described as an epistemology of engagement that makes commitment to and experience of the object of one's knowledge prerequisite to the possibility of genuine knowledge. He acknowledged a tension between a rationality that insists on unprejudiced scientific inquiry, on one hand, and "the churchly requirements that method be faithful and obedient, confessional and doxological."<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. Authority

The connection Packer made between inerrancy and authority has already been mentioned. Yet it's far easier to assert biblical authority in principle than it is to discern how the variegated modalities or literary genres of the biblical text function to mediate God's authority. Packer was keenly aware that proper biblical interpretation must take literary genre into account and that, for example, we cannot assume that the OT historical books or every statement in the Psalter offers straightforward instruction, either didactic or hortatory. He readily acknowledged the challenges of discerning God's mind and will as revealed through Scripture.

Yet drawing upon the example of select Puritans, Packer argued that God's will is communicated to the human conscience with precision and can be discerned with the aid of the Holy Spirit. He stated,

Certainly, seeing the relevant principles and applying them correctly in each case is in practice an arduous task; ignorance of Scripture, and misjudgment of situations, constantly lead us astray, and to be patient and humble enough to receive the Spirit's help is not easy either. But it remains true nonetheless that in principle Scripture

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<sup>12</sup> Packer, *Truth and Power*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Packer, *Truth and Power*, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Packer, "Method, Theological," 424–25.

provides clear and exact guidance for every detail and department of life, and if we come to Scripture teachably and expectantly God Himself will seal on our minds and hearts a clear certainty as to how we should behave in each situation that faces us.<sup>15</sup>

A precise God—a God, that is, who has made a precise disclosure of his mind and will in Scripture, and who expects from His servants a corresponding preciseness of belief and behaviour—it was this view of God that created and controlled the historic Puritan outlook. The Bible itself led them to it. And we who share the Puritan estimate of Holy Scripture cannot excuse ourselves if we fail to show a diligence and conscientiousness equal to theirs in ordering our going according to God's written Word.<sup>16</sup>

In his understanding of divine/biblical authority we also see something of how his views of human personhood and piety converge. He refers to “the biblical position that God's speaking and God's image in man imply a human capacity to grasp and respond to his verbal address.”<sup>17</sup> The rational faculties necessary for recognition and response to that message are essential to the realization of the restored image. Thus, holiness, for Packer, depends upon an inerrant Scripture communicating God's Law with precision to the rational faculties. Precise knowledge of God's will and obedience to God's will is possible, and only possible, through this precise, rational formula.

### *3. Structure of Packer's Theological Method*

Packer's theological method was explicitly covenantal, canonical, and Christo-centric. These commitments provided Packer with an overarching framework, the assumption of internal coherence, and a controlling focal point for how he interpreted the biblical text in the work of theology.

#### **3.1. Covenantal**

It's no surprise that Packer adopted an overtly covenantal framework for interpreting Scripture and doing theology. He described covenant theology as a hermeneutic—a framework for reading the entire Bible.<sup>18</sup> He claimed that the gospel, God's Word as a whole, and even the reality of God cannot be “properly understood” unless “viewed within a covenantal frame.”<sup>19</sup>

Two specific features of his covenantal theology help illuminate his theological method. First, he argued that “the Old Testament should be read through the hermeneutical spectacles that Paul (Romans and Galatians), Luke (Gospel and Acts), Matthew, and the writer to the Hebrews provide.”<sup>20</sup> Second, he followed the expression of covenant theology laid out in the Westminster Confession, despite stating

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<sup>15</sup> J. I. Packer, “The Puritan Conscience,” in *Faith and a Good Conscience* (London: The Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Packer, “The Puritan Conscience,” 24.

<sup>17</sup> J. I. Packer, “The Adequacy of Human Language,” in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 27.

<sup>18</sup> J. I. Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” in *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 1 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” 12, 13, 15.

<sup>20</sup> J. I. Packer, “In Quest of Canonical Interpretation,” in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998), 217.

some misgivings about later developments in Calvinism that modified Calvin's own structure and were codified in the Westminster Confession.<sup>21</sup> His most notable misgiving affords a glimpse into the substructure of his theological method, though he never overtly connected this feature with his own theological method. That feature was Theodore Beza's shift of the doctrine of predestination from where Calvin had it in the *Institutes*. He notes that Beza

removed predestination back from where Calvin put it in his final (1559) revision of the *Institutes*—in book III, after the gospel and the Christian life, so that it appears as undergirding a known salvation, as in Romans 8:29–38—and subsumed it once more under the doctrine of God and providence, as the medievals had done: which was an invitation to study the gospel promises in the light of predestination, rather than vice versa (an invitation also given—regrettably, it may be thought—by the Westminster Confession).<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2. Canonical

Packer also embraced a canonical approach to hermeneutics and reflected on the task of systematic theology from this perspective. "Canonical," to Packer, denoted the nature of the theological task as it articulates God's message through the ages so as to evoke obedient response. To Packer, a canonical approach shared with a covenantal framework the assumption of biblical coherence, but moved a step further in fulfilling the purpose of God's revelation by making that coherence more evident.

### 3.3. Christo-centric

Jesus Christ, for Packer, was the innermost principle of Scripture's internal coherence. Jesus Christ is the focal point and the interpretive criterion for Scripture. He stated,

The person and place of the Christ of space-time history is the interpretative key to all Scripture; the Old Testament is to be read in the light of its New Testament fulfillment in and by him, just as the New Testament is to be read in the light of its Old Testament foundations on which that fulfillment rested.<sup>23</sup>

A specific focus on the redemption provided by Jesus Christ on the cross was Packer's way of presenting Jesus Christ as the comprehensive criterion for interpreting and applying Scripture. Packer enjoined the preacher to "never let his exposition of anything in Scripture get detached from, and so appear unrelated to, Calvary's cross and the redemption that was wrought there."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J. I. Packer, "Arminianisms," in *Honouring the People of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 4 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 305.

<sup>22</sup> Packer, "Arminianisms," vol. 4, 305.

<sup>23</sup> Packer, *Truth and Power*, 192.

<sup>24</sup> J. I. Packer, "Why Preach?," in *Honouring the Written Word of God*, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer 3 (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1999), 252–53.



#### *4. Function of Packer's Theological Method*

All who are reasonably acquainted with Packer's work will know of his commitment to the Church and to the lived Christian experience. Thus, he aimed to serve those concerns in his treatment of theological method just as he did in all other theological concerns. The pastoral function of theology would also have served as a methodological criterion, or at least an aim, for Packer.

In the year 2000 he put forward "five principles that should guide our practice of theology in the twenty-first century."<sup>25</sup> The first is to "maintain the trajectories," that is, keep a central focus on the pietistic concerns of godliness. Second, resist the tendency of specialization to fragment the focus of theology and thus create an imbalanced spirituality. Third, remain anchored in the Bible as God's Word. Fourth, stay in dialogue with the culture for the sake of meaningful, persuasive encounter. Fifth, continue to dialogue with nonevangelical traditions in order to learn from all who belong to Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Parenthetically, this fifth exhortation exhibits Packer's longstanding theological generosity even within his unapologetic and thoroughgoing Calvinism.

Packer's theological method had a decidedly pastoral orientation. One of Packer's most well-known commitments was his love for the Puritans. Though they did not use the nomenclature that we use these days for theological method, Packer found methodological insights in how they wove together theology, pastoral ministry, and Christian ethics, particularly through their commitment to how preaching is a theological act and how theological preaching should function pastorally. Alongside John Calvin, he gives particular credit to John Owen as "models for my kind of Bible-based theologising."<sup>27</sup> Packer specifically credits the Puritans with influencing his theological method. For the Puritans, he contends,

The key is justification by faith, and the door (as we should expect) is the Epistle to the Romans.... These principles of exegesis were handed on to the Puritan brotherhood by Perkins, who laid it down that if one began one's study with Romans, and followed it with John's Gospel, one had the key to the entire Bible; analysis shows that these principles have virtually axiomatic status in all Puritan exegesis.<sup>28</sup>

So, for Packer as for the Puritans "justification by faith" functions in his theological method as the definitive, controlling hermeneutical motif for Scripture.<sup>29</sup>

#### *5. Features, Tensions, and Curiosities within Packer's Theological Method*

No theological method can perfectly represent the exhaustive nature of God's revelation. Like all methods, Packer's method reflects features and invites questions that can lead to greater methodological faithfulness in the overall field of theological method.

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<sup>25</sup> J. I. Packer, "Maintaining Evangelical Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 186.

<sup>26</sup> Packer, "Maintaining Evangelical Theology," 186–88.

<sup>27</sup> Packer, "In Quest of Canonical Interpretation," 221.

<sup>28</sup> Packer, *Among God's Giants*, 86–87.

<sup>29</sup> Packer, *Among God's Giants*, 86–87.

### 5.1. Christological

Did Packer's Christocentric method go far enough? He went to great lengths to show Jesus Christ and his redemptive work as the telos of the whole Bible. Yet, his canonical approach animates the theological task with more general references to theism or the person and nature of God, without specific reference to Jesus Christ in the framework of theology itself. Stephen Neill observed about Packer's methodological approach in *Knowing God*, "To be fair to Dr. Packer, Jesus Christ always does come in somewhere in his presentation of each theme, but sometimes at the end of an argument, where we would bring him in at the beginning."<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, Christocentrism is a highly debated subject, and Packer had a right to his own approach to the subject. This does at least resurface that question so we can ask what it means to be properly Christological in our theological method. Packer's Christocentrism was of a particular sort, which some would consider not as thoroughgoing as he thought it was.

### 5.2. Pneumatological

The methodological relevance of experience moves a bit further into the spotlight for Packer with respect to how his own experience with the Keswick movement played some role in the formation of his doctrine of sanctification. To be fair, this is intended neither to overestimate nor underestimate the role of experience in theological formation; only to admit that it does play a role (as Albert Outler famously insisted,<sup>31</sup> though Packer was certainly no Wesleyan), whether or not we recognize it. What drew my attention to this feature originally was the rather jarring and curious contrast between Packer's experience moving away from the Keswick spirituality in which he had been discipled as a young Oxford undergrad to a Reformed Puritan model for the Christian life as he found articulated in John Owen, and Hannah Whitall Smith's move in the opposite direction from her experience of some emphases found in Reformed spirituality to a more lifegiving experience in the Spirit as she helped popularize in the Keswick conferences.<sup>32</sup> This particular case study suggests that each may have picked up on particular biblical motifs related to spiritual experience and transformation, while experiencing other motifs of emphasis through the grid of their own personalities, backgrounds, tacit assumptions, and who knows how many other inscrutable variables. All these came together to form in each an experiential hermeneutical template that was lifegiving, though in quite contrasting directions.

It is intriguing and commendable how over time he contributed to a *Festschrift* for his Pentecostal colleague Gordon Fee (though arguing *against* Fee for an Augustinian interpretation of indwelling sin from Romans 7)<sup>33</sup> and also endorsed Craig Keener's book on the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> This may signal a shift of some sorts, or at least a broadening or balancing of his pneumatology over time. He was always reticent

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen Neill, Review of *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer, *Churchman* 88.1 (1974): 77.

<sup>31</sup> Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20.1 (1985): 7–18.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1952).

<sup>33</sup> J. I. Packer, "The 'Wretched Man' Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:13–25," in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 81.

<sup>34</sup> Craig S. Keener, *3 Crucial Questions about the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996). Packer commends Keener's work by saying, "The level-headed, anecdotally enriched exegesis that Craig Keener offers in this book broadens the categories of Spirit-baptism, ongoing charismata, and current manifestations of the Spirit in a way that is pacifying, unifying, and edifying, and neatly rounds off a good deal of recent debate. Disciplined schol-

about allowing experience to dictate theology—a familiar and wise safeguard. At the same time, it seems that he reflected in his own theological thinking, if not tacitly acknowledged that while experience is never a stand-alone criterion for theology, it most definitely factors into our theological understanding as one influential hermeneutical lens through which we read and understand God’s Word. As Packer engaged with both the thoughtful work of Charismatic/Pentecostal scholars and developed in his own life in the Spirit, his views on the gifts of the Spirit acquired nuance without overall shifts.

This clearly interlocks with his insistence on an “epistemology of engagement.” Yet his hermeneutical method seems ambiguous at best in how the concept of understanding is understood. In upholding the notion that Scripture can be understood through normal practices of human rationality, he does not clearly distinguish between reading and understanding, thus his emphasis that the *interpretation* of Scripture rests on nothing more than proper mastery of grammatical, historical exegetical principles. Assuming that such reading constitutes understanding then allows him to adopt and to need a second conventional step known as application, which is where he says the Holy Spirit is involved. When reading/understanding is so cleanly distinguished from application, the impression is given and as much as admitted that the Holy Spirit is not necessary in that first essential step of biblical interpretation. The Holy Spirit’s role is focused on, if not restricted to, the application step. John 5:39 is hermeneutically instructive in this regard. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders who challenged him, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (NIV). This statement would seem to question whether the reading of Scripture should be characterized as interpretation when it is so easy to read it and *not* understand and when understanding is somehow linked to willfulness rather than simple or formal cognition.

In Packer’s hermeneutical schema the act of biblical interpretation is not complete without personal application, yet his division of the process into two distinct steps in this manner reflects a more rationalistic epistemology in which understanding can exist without response; the Holy Spirit’s role being necessary to illumine the response step. Thus, Packer refers to what Scripture “meant,” which can be discerned through proper exegetical technique, and what Scripture “means” for the individual believer.

Understanding of what Scripture means when applied to us—that is, of what God in Scripture is saying to and about us—comes only through the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit, who alone enables us to apprehend what God is and see what we are in His eyes.... (The empathy of which I spoke enables us to grasp what Scripture *meant*, but it takes the Spirit’s enlightenment to show us what it *means*.)<sup>35</sup>

To be fair, Packer intends his emphasis on the Spirit’s role in hermeneutics as defense against accusations of overly rationalistic hermeneutics. He refers to “the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, who enables our sin-darkened minds to draw and accept these correct conclusions as from God.”<sup>36</sup> In this regard Packer disagrees with the assumption found in Common Sense Realism and iterated in the

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arship and pastoral concern blend here most fruitfully, in lines of argument that have real importance for church life today and tomorrow.”

<sup>35</sup> Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” 337 (emphasis original).

<sup>36</sup> Packer, “Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,” 347.

Old Princeton theology that truth is discernable from an epistemologically neutral posture.<sup>37</sup> He sees “the witness of the Spirit to the divine authority of Scripture” and “the illumination of the Spirit whereby the theological contents of Scripture are understood” as joined together.<sup>38</sup>

### 5.3. Anthropological

Theological anthropology may not be generally recognized as one of Packer’s dominant theological focal points, but he actually devoted considerable attention to it. He defined the image of God in terms of “relational righteousness,” developing and building on that notion in multiple places over the years. Insisting that considerations of the image of God must begin with and be ever oriented toward God, he sought to de-anthropocentrize theological anthropology.

At this point it is at least worth raising the question whether the anthropological assumptions he makes about human rational capacity, combined with his placement of the Spirit’s role in his hermeneutical model, assume more about our capacity to apprehend divine revelation than can be substantiated in light of the noetic effects of the Fall.

### 5.4. Starting Points

Curiously, in the closest Packer ever came to a systematic theology, *Concise Theology*, the organization and sequence of his themes (one key indicator of theological method) is in some of the very ways he criticizes.<sup>39</sup> Predestination, for example, is treated under the divine attributes and prior to the Trinity.

## 6. Conclusion

I forget whether Packer himself said this, but it has been observed about him that if he had been an American he would have been a Presbyterian. His Reformed theology in the primary mold of the 17th century English Puritans increasingly distanced him from younger Anglicans, contributing to his move to North America. Yet the rigor of his Calvinism ran along the rails not only of the doctrine of God’s grace but on rails of graciousness of spirit. As he insisted in a brief 1982 article entitled “Knowing Notions or Knowing God?” what justifies us before God is Jesus Christ, not the accuracy of our notions about that justification.<sup>40</sup> Only rarely have we in the evangelical world had modeled for us such commitment to clarity and precision when talking about God and God’s ways, wrapped in such pastoral commitment, and delivered with such humility, groundedness, and practicality.

In his theological method, Packer tenaciously sought to let the reality of God and God’s way, as mediated to us through Holy Scripture, drive our epistemology. Many of us could afford to ingest a huge dose of that epistemological medicine, in my view. That lesson has benefited me immeasurably as I hope for even a fraction of the type of progress Packer made. I have in my library a cassette recording of a course he taught at Regent College entitled “Thinking Clearly About God.” That sums up a lot about the trajectory of his theological legacy. Whatever curiosities may be spotted in Packer’s theological

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<sup>37</sup> Packer stated this to the author in a personal conversation.

<sup>38</sup> Packer, “Maintaining Evangelical Theology,” 187.

<sup>39</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> J. I. Packer, “Knowing Notions or Knowing God?,” *Pastoral Renewal* 6.9 (1982): 65–68.

method, he at least thought about his method and sought to embody his methodological commitments. In addition to all the other theological virtues and contributions that may receive more attention, he was methodologically self-aware, which only added to his integrity. He not only helped countless numbers of us think more clearly about God, but he helped us know *how* to think clearly about God. That's method at its simplest and amidst all that we grateful celebrate about what he taught us, I hope we don't overlook his methodological model, because it was a captivating model of embodied theology.

# Is the Holy Spirit Really a “Person”— with a Distinct Personality?

— John Jefferson Davis —

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to help the reader conceptualize and imagine the Holy Spirit as a real person with a distinct and knowable personality—a person of the Trinity more accessible to our faith, reading of Scripture, and worship. Factors in church history tending to marginalize the Holy Spirit in the life of the church are identified. Biblical texts dealing with the names, images, words, and actions of the Holy Spirit are expounded to put the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit into sharper focus.

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“God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me; and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur.” This statement by a seminary student to his professor<sup>1</sup> expresses a difficulty felt by many Christians throughout history. We believe, or at least try to believe in the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—but the *personality* of the third person of the Trinity often seems like a “gray, oblong blur.”

Part of this problem seems to be built into biblical revelation itself. Unlike father and son, which are familiar to us in our human experience, and which are easy to visualize, “spirit” or “Spirit” seems more abstract and vaguer. Human fathers and sons—our analogies for Father and Son in the Trinity—have physical bodies, and concrete appearances and behaviors that we can see. The Holy Spirit—unlike Jesus—never assumed a human body. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is revealed in the images of light, water, wind, fire, and dove that are impersonal rather than personal.

This article’s purpose is to help make the Holy Spirit seem less like a “gray, oblong blur” and more like a real person with a distinct and knowable personality—a person of the Trinity more accessible to our faith, our reading of Scripture, and our worship. First, I identify various factors in church history tending to marginalize the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Then I present biblical texts dealing with the names, images, words, and actions of the Holy Spirit to put the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit into sharper focus.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5–6.

### *1. Barriers to Appreciating the Personality of the Spirit: Church History*

The first factor to be considered is the Arian controversy and the long and fierce battles in the fourth century over the deity of Christ. The defense of the deity of Christ was a watershed in the life of the church and vital to its very identity, but unfortunately, the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit were overshadowed, becoming virtual afterthoughts in Christian faith. The original creed of Nicea of 325 strongly affirms the deity of Christ as “God from God, Light from Light ... begotten not created, of the same essence (*homoousion*) as the Father ... Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human.”

The only mention of the Holy Spirit is the single line, “And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit,” with no reference to the deity, personality, or work of the Spirit. Only in the expanded form of the creed of 381, which is now generally known as the Nicene Creed, is more attention given to the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity is here confessed as “the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets.”<sup>2</sup> Even with this addition, the creed speaks more clearly about the Spirit’s work in the past (“spoke by the prophets”) than about the Spirit’s present work in the believer’s Christian experience. The creed points to correct belief, not to spiritual experience, as the essential mark of Christian identity.

The second factor is the growth of the practice of infant baptism in the post-Constantinian church. By about AD 600, there were fewer adult conversions in Western Europe, and fewer people joining the church through adult baptism.<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, the predominant way a person became a Christian was through a conscious conversion experience. The convert heard a message that included the promise of receiving the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) after repenting and being baptized. In the New Testament and early Christian church, receiving the gift was a conscious experience. Adult converts were consciously aware of receiving a “gift”; they felt something. The disciples on the day of Pentecost (2:4), the apostle Paul after his conversion (9:17–18), the household of Cornelius (10:45–46), and the disciples in Ephesus (19:2–6) all had some form of conscious awareness that they had received the promised gift. In the very nature of the case, infants receiving water baptism are unlikely to experience or remember such experiences of the Spirit.

Another aspect of infant baptism tending to inhibit awareness of the Spirit was the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, common teaching of both Catholic and Orthodox churches. The baptized infant was believed to be born again or regenerated by the act of water baptism performed by the priest. The stain of original sin was presumably washed away. For an adult like Nicodemus in conversation with Jesus (John 3), the language of being born again could be connected with conscious experiences later experienced in conversion—but not so for an infant. The baptized infant, having been “made a Christian” by this ritual act, did not yet show evidence of conversion or life change. The growing practice of infant baptism produced a generally diminished awareness of the Holy Spirit among baptized Christians. Diminished experience fostered diminished expectations of such experiences, and diminished expectations in turn reinforced diminished personal experiences of the Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> Cited from John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, revised ed. (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1973), 31, 33.

<sup>3</sup> On historical developments regarding infant baptism, see Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate*, 2 vols. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), and J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London: SPCK, 1965).

The third and fourth contributing factors to the diminishing awareness of the Holy Spirit were the related trends of *clericalism* and *cessationism*. Beginning in the third and later centuries, the leadership of worship was increasingly under the control of the ordained clergy, who alone could consecrate the sacred elements in the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. The laity's exercise of spiritual gifts in worship (1 Cor 12, 14) was declining. Gifts such as tongues and prophecy, so prominent in the Montanist movement in the latter half of the second century, were perceived by many bishops as divisive and possibly heretical, and their use was discouraged.<sup>4</sup>

This reaction to the Montanist movement reinforced the trend toward clerical control of the worship services, and also contributed to cessationism—the belief that manifestations of the Spirit such as prophecy, tongues, and miracles were limited to the apostolic age, and were no longer to be expected as a continuing part of church life. The manifestation of such charismatic gifts did in fact appear to diminish in many churches beginning in the fourth century, but were documented as late as the eighth century.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, cessationist beliefs were dominant throughout the medieval and early modern periods, not being effectively challenged until the remarkable Pentecostal revivals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>6</sup> These cessationist beliefs lowered expectations of conscious experiences of the Holy Spirit, and for centuries functioned as self-fulfilling prophecies.

Fifth, the modern Pentecostal revivals have raised awareness of the Spirit but unfortunately have also contributed to negative perceptions of the Spirit. Pentecostal teachings concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit have been the source of much controversy and church division.<sup>7</sup> Some believers have been discouraged from seeking further encounters with the Holy Spirit by emotional excesses they may have witnessed at Pentecostal gatherings. Jonathan Edwards offers wise counsel based on his observations during the Great Awakening: to “distinguish the good from the bad, and not judge the

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<sup>4</sup> On the Montanist movement, see David F. Wright, “Why Were the Montanists Condemned?” *Themelios* 2 (1976): 15–22; W. H. C. Frend, “Montanism: a Movement of Prophecy and Regional Identity in the Early Church,” *BJRL* 70.3 (1988): 25–34; for primary sources, see Ronald Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> On the history of cessationism, see Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 189–201. In their important study of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the early church, Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), demonstrate that conscious experiences of the reception of the Holy Spirit in the baptism of adults, including experiences of speaking in tongues and prophecy, were still present in the post-Constantinian churches, and in the Syrian Orthodox churches, as late as the eighth century.

<sup>6</sup> In the last one hundred years, movements associated with the Pentecostal revivals have been the most rapidly growing segments of global Christianity. Over the period 1910–2010 the various renewal groups (classical Pentecostals, charismatics in various denominations, and independent Pentecostal churches) grew at nearly four times the growth rate of both Christianity and the world's population; and between 2010 and 2025 are projected to grow twice as fast as both. Todd M. Johnson, “Counting Pentecostals Worldwide,” *Pneuma* 36 (2014): 280.

<sup>7</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the exegetical and theological issues related to the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” For a Pentecostal view, see Ralph M. Riggs, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit ... Initial Physical Evidence,” in *The Spirit Himself* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1949), 79–89; for the view that the “baptism” is an initial experience at conversion, see F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 290–94, on 1 Cor 12:13.



whole by a part.”<sup>8</sup> Edwards was saying, so to speak, “Don’t throw the baby (the Holy Spirit) out with the bath water (works of the flesh).”

Sixth, one could mention the linguistic baggage that has accumulated around the Holy Spirit. Archaic language such as the “Holy Ghost” can conjure up images of Casper the Ghost or Halloween spirits rather than the biblical heavenly dove. Even the word “holy” for some might trigger negative associations of “holy rollers” and the excesses of exuberant piety. The word “spirit” itself may for some have associations with Eastern and New Age religions, or with being “spiritual but not religious.” And sadly, a common way of misreferring to the Holy Spirit as “it” rather than the personal “he” can be heard in the churches as well as the general culture. This need to refocus and clarify the full and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit is the task of the following section.

## *2. Sharpening Our Focus: The Holy Spirit’s Distinct Personality*

In addition to the historical factors identified above, there are two important obstacles to understanding the Holy Spirit in personal terms. (1) Unlike the Father and the Son, the Spirit does not seem to appear in Scripture with a human face. (2) The images associated with the Spirit—water, wind, fire, light, dove—are impersonal or subpersonal. Such images do not obviously suggest the attributes of self-awareness, intelligence, emotion, and will that we normally associate with persons. Each of these obstacles needs to be examined in turn.

As to the first, it does not seem that the Scriptures encourage us to imagine the Holy Spirit with a human face. In our relationships with others, a person’s face is the most distinct expression of their identity and personality. Father and Son we can easily imagine with human faces, because we are familiar with the faces of human fathers and sons. Scripture speaks of God’s “face” shining on us in the Aaronic benediction (Num 6:25–26). On the other hand, creatures such as lobsters or insects that do not have human-like faces, are very difficult to see as human or to imagine as the partners in an emotionally satisfying personal relationship. Animals such as dogs (“Lassie”), cats (“Felix”), and monkeys (“Curious George”), whose faces are more similar to human faces, are easier to imagine as having human-like emotions. We can more easily form personal attachments to them. In forming a lasting relationship to a person, we need to “put a name and a face together,” and our problem with the Holy Spirit is that both the name and the face of the Spirit seem vague and abstract.

With the Son, to imagine a human face for Jesus is even possible, because the eternal Son took on a human face and a human body in the miracle of the incarnation. Even though the Gospels do not give us a description of Jesus’s physical appearance, they do emphatically teach his full humanity; consequently we can know without doubt that God did reveal himself through the human face of Jesus. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). But in the case of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity did not become incarnate, did not have a human body, and could not be seen in the form of a visible face.

A contemporary analogy and a biblical resource can help us deal with this obstacle. Two are worth exploring: (1) the analogy of the voices of our electronic personal assistants that do manifest intelligence, dynamic interaction, and conjure up human faces in our imagination; and (2) the implications of the

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, reprint ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:371.

particular name of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Gospel of John, the *Paraclete*—the Defense Attorney and Helper sent to us by Jesus and the Father (John 14:16–27; 16:5–15).

As to the first, consider Siri or Echo or some other personal assistant, or the GPS apps on our smartphones that can tell us “turn right in 100 feet.” Siri does not have a human body, but we hear a human voice, and on that basis we can imagine a human face with that voice. Siri is a form of artificial intelligence, created by human agents, embodied, so to speak, not in carbon-based biological bodies like ours, but in code and algorithms stored on servers. Siri not only has a distinctive voice that we recognize, but also seems to have a distinct personality we can relate to over time, and which can learn about us through our continuing interactions. The point here is that personality is not necessarily limited to human bodies like ours; the key is intelligence, voice, and interactivity. To that extent, our electronic assistants are helpers like the Holy Spirit, imparting wisdom and guidance. We are led by our GPS software, as we are led by the Spirit. In both cases we are justified in imagining our helpers having human-like faces and distinct personalities.

The most important reason for seeing the Holy Spirit with a human face is the name of the Holy Spirit found only in the Gospel and First Epistle of John: the Paraclete (ὁ παράκλητος). The related verbal form παρακαλέω means “to call [καλέω] alongside’ [παρά], to be at someone’s side to help them. This Greek word has a variety of connotations and has been translated variously in English versions of the Bible as “Counselor,” “Comforter,” “Advocate,” or “Helper.”<sup>9</sup> No single word expresses the variety of the activities that the Spirit is said to do. But whether Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, Helper, or something else is the best translation, all these terms are *personal* and evoke the human faces of the people who come alongside us to help us in our times of need.

In the Johannine farewell addresses, Jesus teaches his disciples that after his departure he will send them *another* Counselor (or Comforter/Advocate/Helper) to be with them forever (John 14:16). The implication of *another* is that Jesus was the first Paraclete to his disciples; the coming Holy Spirit will be the successor. The Paraclete will live with them and be in them (14:17). In fact, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—all three persons of the Trinity—will come and make their home in them (14:23). The implication here is clearly that of *companionship*: just as Jesus was present physically with his close disciples during his earthly ministry as their close companion and friend, so Jesus will continue to be their companion and friend, through the mediation of the Paraclete/Spirit.

The Paraclete will teach them and remind them of the truths that Jesus taught (John 14:26). Again, the presence of Jesus as teacher will be continued by the Spirit in a different form when Jesus is no longer physically present. By the Spirit Jesus will give the disciples peace and comfort (14:27) when they are experiencing fear and persecution for their witness to him. The Paraclete will testify about the true identity of Jesus (15:26), continuing the disciples’ witness to Jesus begun during his earthly ministry, giving them the words to say when they are called to stand before governors and kings (cf. Matt 10:20). The Paraclete/Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, empowering the disciple’s witness to produce repentance from sin and true conversion (John 16:8; cf. Acts 2:37, “they were cut to the heart”; 1 Thess 1:5, “our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with *deep conviction*”).

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<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the variety of scholarly interpretations of παράκλητος, see “Additional Note F: The Paraclete,” in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 662–66. Johannes Behm writes, “No single word can provide an adequate rendering.... ‘Helper’ is perhaps the best, though the basic concept and sustaining religious idea is that of ‘advocate’” (“παράκλητος,” in *TDNT* 5:814).

In his first epistle, John writes that if a believer sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). What Jesus does—interceding with God for believers—the Spirit/Paraclete also does. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us with wisdom and deep emotion, with groans that words cannot express (Rom 8:26). The Paraclete is heard by the Father, for the Spirit intercedes for us in agreement with the will of God (Rom 8:27).

Jesus’s teaching about the personality of the Spirit as Paraclete can be summarized by saying that the Holy Spirit/Paraclete is the continuing Representative or Deputy of the *presence, peace, pedagogy, and power* of the face and person of Jesus. The Spirit is like the alter ego or a twin brother of Jesus. He represents Jesus and makes him spiritually present to us. The disciples literally saw the human face of Christ when they were with him during the days of his earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit continues to make the face and presence of Christ real and vivid in their memory and experience: Jesus is still with them by his Spirit. The actions of the earthly Jesus with a human face are now continued by the Holy Spirit with the spiritual face of the Helper sent by Jesus to be his continuing presence with them. The terms that best encompass the variety of ministries performed by the Spirit/Paraclete are Advocate, Helper, Comforter, and Counselor, explored below.

The second major obstacle to thinking of the Spirit in personal terms is the nature of the images of the Spirit found in Scripture itself. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the images of *water, wind, fire, and dove*. Unlike *father* and *son*, these images seem to imply that the third person of the Trinity is impersonal or subpersonal. Water, wind, fire, and doves do not have the traits of (human) intelligence, self-consciousness, emotions, and will that we associate with human persons.

Two sets of distinctions can help to overcome this obstacle: (1) a distinction between personal *status* and personal *actions*; and (2) a distinction between *intrinsic* (or essential) qualities and *accidental* (or non-essential) qualities. Let us consider each of these in turn.

First of all, terms such as wind, fire, water, and dove are statements not about the personal status of the Holy Spirit, but rather about the personal actions and qualities of the Holy Spirit. The same is the case for the Father and the Son. When God is described as a “rock” or as a “consuming fire,” this does not mean that God is impersonal, but rather that God is a solid foundation for the believer (rock) and a holy God whose nature is antithetical to all sin (consuming fire). And when Jesus, the incarnate Son, is pictured as “Lion of Judah” or “Lamb of God” or “true Vine,” this does not mean that Jesus the Son is impersonal. Rather, Christ is portrayed with the strength and kingliness of a lion, the gentleness and purity of a sacrificial lamb, and the life-giving fruitfulness of the vine.

This understanding of wind, fire, water, and dove as personal action descriptors rather than personal status descriptors is consistent with the variety of biblical statements that clearly attribute personal status to the Spirit: mind, emotion, and will.<sup>10</sup> The Holy Spirit calls and commissions Paul and Barnabas to missionary service. As the church at Antioch was worshipping, the Holy Spirit says, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). The Holy Spirit gives power and conviction to Paul’s preaching of the gospel (1 Thess 1:5) and specifically directs Paul and his companions on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:7: “they tried to enter Bithynia, but the

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<sup>10</sup> On the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, see John Jefferson Davis, *Handbook of Basic Bible Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 38–39; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 95–98; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 784–86, “The Personality of the Holy Spirit.”

Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to”). The Holy Spirit reminds the disciples of Jesus’s teachings and illuminates these teachings with deeper understanding (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit guides believers, who as sons (and daughters) of God are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14) in their daily lives. The Holy Spirit inspires sincere verbal confessions of “Jesus is Lord” in genuine conversion experiences (1 Cor 12:3). The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to believers as *he* determines (1 Cor 12:11). The Spirit prays for and with believers, in accordance with the will of God, who knows the *mind* of the Spirit (Rom 8:27). The Holy Spirit has emotions and can be grieved by the sins of believers (Eph 4:30). The Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts (Rom 5:5) and imparts joy (Luke 10:21; Rom 14:17), which is intrinsic to the being of God and a mark of God’s favor and presence (Ps 16:11).

The images of wind, fire, water, and dove, then, are properly understood to refer to the actions and qualities of the person of the Holy Spirit/Paraclete. Like wind, the Spirit is invisible, but has powerful effects; like wind, the Spirit is mysterious, unpredictable, and uncontainable; like wind, the Spirit is a source of renewable energy and can bring a sense of refreshment and renewal. Like fire, the Spirit imparts the warmth of God’s love, the purity of God’s holiness, and the light and understanding of God’s truth. The Spirit is like refreshing, life-giving water, which Christ gives his people to drink (1 Cor 12:13: “we were all given the one Spirit to drink”; cf. John 7:37–39). Like a dove,<sup>11</sup> the Spirit/Paraclete is harmless, life-affirming, and a sign of God’s covenant of peace and new creation (cf. Gen 8:8–12, after the Flood; Matt 3:16–17, Jesus’s baptism as beloved Son/Second Adam).

Next, consider examples of the second set of distinctions between *intrinsic* (or essential) and *accidental* qualities. The images of God as “rock” or “fire” convey essential qualities of God’s personal character. God is by very nature like a rock in his eternal self-existence, stability, and unwavering faithfulness to his covenant promises and people. God is by very nature like fire in his immutable sin-burning holiness and in the warmth of his love. On the other hand, some images or emblems of human organizations or sports teams are arbitrary and conventional, with no intrinsic connection to the people on that team. For example, the emblem of the NFL football team the Chicago Bears does not imply that the players are not persons or human beings—they just happen to have a strong and aggressive animal for a mascot! Their team name is an identity marker that makes it easier to distinguish one team among others in its class.

By contrast, the images of the Holy Spirit are not arbitrary or accidental. The Holy Spirit/Paraclete is intrinsically powerful, energetic, unpredictable, refreshing, warm, life-giving, and illuminator and teacher of God’s truth. The biblical images of the Spirit are both identity markers of the Spirit, and descriptors of the Spirit’s personal qualities and redemptive work.

As we draw this article toward a conclusion, consider a thought experiment to make the images of the Holy Spirit more personal. First, recall various ways that Paraclete has been translated in the English versions of the Bible: “Advocate” (NIV, NLT); “Counselor” (CSB, RSV); “Helper” (ESV, NASB); and “Comforter” (KJV, ASV).<sup>12</sup> These could be seen as job descriptions of the Spirit/Paraclete. These

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<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the Spirit is manifested in the form of a *dove*—not as a predatory bird like a hawk or eagle that lives by hunting and killing other animals, or as a vulture that feeds on the dead. A dove is gentle and does not inspire fear; we have no fear of being attacked by a dove!

<sup>12</sup> Some scholars have questioned whether “Comforter” as a translation of παράκλητος is well supported in the biblical and extrabiblical literature. However, the related verb παρακαλέω, which can mean “comfort” or “encourage” is used in 2 Cor 1:4b, 7:6b, and 1 Thess 3:2 in connection with Paul’s ministry. See also the use of Παρακαλεῖτε

actions—advocating or interceding, counseling, helping, comforting or encouraging—are all actions of a personal agent, not some impersonal force. These are all actions of Jesus on earth. Now the Spirit, the Alter Ego or Envoy or Deputy who represents Jesus, is sent by Jesus from heaven to continue his ministry on earth. These actions of the Spirit are very positive, caring, and helpful, and so should reinforce positive associations and images in our mind when we think about the Holy Spirit.

Next recall images of the Spirit and the personal actions and qualities they represent: *wind* (new energy, sense of refreshment); *fire* (warmth of God’s love, comfort); *water* (life, fruitfulness, growth); *dove* (peacefulness, harmlessness). Remember that these are not statements about personal status, but rather statements about personal actions and qualities. The personal Spirit/Paraclete in his role as Advocate, Counselor, Helper, or Comforter acts not only with competence, but also with a bedside manner that brings new strength and refreshment, the warmth of God’s love, and peace to those who are being helped.

In thinking about the Holy Spirit, the images of tongues of fire at Pentecost and the dove descending at Jesus’s baptism tend to fill our imagination; and the Johannine Paraclete is at the margins. The point of this thought experiment is to place the Holy Spirit as *Helper* (or Advocate/Counselor/Comforter) at the center of our biblically informed imagination, with the personal qualities around that center. Our imaginations need to be retrained to see, spiritually, the Holy Spirit/Paraclete with a very personal, human-like face.<sup>13</sup>

The final step is to connect these biblical job descriptions of the Spirit/Paraclete with vocations or professions in our modern world. As an example of *Advocate*, think of the best lawyer that has ever served you—one not only highly competent in the law but very personable in manner. For *Counselor*, think of the best counselor or therapist you ever have experienced: knowledgeable, wise, patient, highly empathic, a good listener. For *Helper*, take as an example the best nurse who has ever helped you.<sup>14</sup> This

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in Isaiah 40:1 LXX: “Comfort, comfort my people,” says God.” In Isaiah 61:1, quoted by Jesus in his sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18), the Servant of the Lord is anointed by the Spirit to preach good news to the poor. This good news includes speaking *comfort* to those who mourn (Isa 61:2). Jesus, as the Servant of the Lord, fulfills this promise and brings comfort to his disciples (“Let not your hearts be troubled,” John 14:1) who are troubled and saddened by the prospect of his departure from them. Jesus promises to send *another* Comforter (John 14:16) who will continue to do as a spiritual presence what Jesus did in his physical presence. We could conclude that the ministry of the Spirit to bring comfort to those who are sad, depressed, or mourning losses is an essential aspect of pastoral ministry.

<sup>13</sup> In Ezekiel’s vision of God’s heavenly throne, the prophet sees a figure high above the throne, “a figure like that of a man,” who appeared from the waist up “like glowing metal ... like fire, and brilliant light surrounded him” (Ezek 1:26–28). God is portrayed in very guarded terms as “like that of a man” with a “waist”—i.e., as having a bodily form, and hence, by implication, a face—though this is not stated explicitly. In John’s vision of the heavenly throne, he sees Christ the Lamb standing in the center of the throne, sharing it with God (Rev 5:6). Since the Spirit/Paraclete is a co-equal and co-eternal person of the Trinity, might we not be justified in believing that the Spirit also is sharing the heavenly throne with the Father and the Son? And that the radiant light that Ezekiel sees surrounding the throne is the glory and light of the Holy Spirit? And to push even further—might we be justified in seeing, through the eyes of faith, the enthroned Holy Spirit/Paraclete with a form “like that of a man”—with a face—surrounded by the (Pentecostal) tongues of fire, with outstretched arms sending upon us the dove that enables us to cry out “Abba, Father!” as beloved sons and daughters?!

<sup>14</sup> Significantly, for nineteen years in a row, the Gallup Poll has found that nurses are the most trusted professional in the United States: “Nurses Top List of Most Honest and Ethical Professionals: Gallup,” *Staffing Industry Analysts*, 13 January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2p3dfjbf>.

nurse is well-trained medically; attentive, patient, and kind; a good listener; constantly at your bedside, even helping you with your medications; and advocating for your best interests with the doctor and hospital staff. Can you remember such a nurse? Can you still see the nurse's face in your mind's eye, and perhaps even remember their name? Then, by way of analogy, begin a new way of seeing the Holy Spirit: a real person; a real Helper and Friend, with a smiling "face" that brings us encouragement and hope in our times of weakness and distress!

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you....

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Num 6:25–26)

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)

### 3. *Postscript*

The argument that there is biblical justification for thinking of the Holy Spirit as having a human-like face may seem contrary to the commandment against making graven images (Exod 20:4). Several replies can be offered to this objection. First of all, the biblical teaching that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27) implies that human beings reflect the nature of God. There is real correspondence and analogy between the natures of God and man. This correspondence does not exclude the body and visible form. In the Old Testament, the God of Israel never becomes incarnate in a human body, but the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision of the heavenly throne room, sees seated above the throne *a figure like that of a man* (Ezek 1:26). Human forms have distinct faces. And though the God of the Old Testament did not manifest during the Old Covenant in a physical body, his favorable presence is signified, as previously discussed, in facial imagery: "The Lord make *his face* shine upon you ... and give you peace" (Num 6:25–26).

The second and perhaps most powerful theological basis for thinking of God—and by implication, the Holy Spirit—as being revealed through face is the incarnation itself. The Son of God assumed a complete human nature and had a real human body with a recognizable face.<sup>15</sup> Even though the Gospels do not give a description of Jesus's physical appearance, his disciples saw his face throughout his ministry, and surely remembered it after his ascension to heaven. Before his departure Jesus promised the disciples that he would send *another* Counselor/Paraclete to be with them forever (John 14:16). The word "another" implies that this Spirit/Paraclete will be with them as Jesus himself was, continuing his redemptive work, and causing them to remember the face of Jesus and his teachings. The God of both the Old and New Covenants chose to manifest grace and peace through a shining, glorious face. And so it is fitting that we think of the distinct personhood of all three co-equal persons of the Trinity, who all impart grace, comfort and peace to us, with the help of such facial imagery.

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<sup>15</sup> The incarnation was the central theological justification offered by John of Damascus (*On the Divine Images*) for the Orthodox use of icons during the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth century.

# A Biblical-Theological Framework for Human Sexuality: Applications to Private Sexuality

— Trent A. Rogers and John K. Tarwater —

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**Abstract:** What are good sexual acts? It is not that surprising when cultural voices, without reference to God, argue for the inherent goodness of all “unharmful” sexual desires and acts. Regrettably, ethical pragmatism has influenced some Christian sexual ethics, and this influence is particularly evident with the issue of masturbation. What God defines as good sexual acts are those that fulfill his unitive and procreative purposes for sex within marriage. Given God’s unitive and procreative purposes for sex within the context of marriage, we argue that masturbation is a categorically impermissible act because it fulfills neither of these purposes, and we counter Christian arguments for its permissibility. God calls Christians to deal with sexual desires, including good sexual desires, through either marital sexual expression or Spirit-enabled self-control.

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With prevailing cultural narratives defining pleasure as the ultimate good, sexual activity as essential to identity, and the self as the locus of authority, it is no surprise that we encounter individuals in our local church ministries and Christian university campus who are confused about what are good sexual desires and acts. In marital and premarital counseling contexts, questions about sexuality and the permissibility of various sexual acts recur. Perhaps the issue that causes the greatest confusion for both singles and marrieds centers on the permissibility or impermissibility of masturbation, by which we mean a personal sexual act for the purpose of self-pleasure, or what is sometimes referred to as self-stimulation. While this article focuses on the topic of masturbation, our intent is broader because the biblical ethics of masturbation provides a window into biblical sexual ethics in general. This biblical-ethical framework begins with the Triune God who, in his goodness, creates the

good physical world. Humans, by God's good, created design, are sexual beings who are commissioned to use their sexuality for the glory of God. But humans are not merely sexual beings, and their identity is not centered on their sexual expression. Moreover, their sexual desires this side of Genesis 3 are not inherently rightly-ordered. So the new-creation Christian joyfully lives in the freedom of Christ, led by the Spirit, pursuing the goodness of God's design. This freedom and being led by the Spirit entails passionate pursuit of God's good physical gifts and joy-preserving restraint from deviations from his created goodness.

Christians experience constant pressure from prevailing cultural narratives arguing that all sexual expression, so long as it does not harm another, is inherently good and that sexual expression is the foundation of one's personhood.<sup>1</sup> Christians, thinking through the ethics of sexual acts such as masturbation, are sometimes confused when cultural narratives collide with biblical ethics. In fact, there is a good deal of ambiguity and misinformation coming from sources claiming to offer a Christian ethic. For example, James Dobson of Focus on the Family states, "Christian people have different opinions about how God views this act. Unfortunately, I can't speak directly for God on this subject, since His Holy Word, the Bible, is silent on this point."<sup>2</sup> In another instance, he exclaims, "This is an area where we have to be careful about laying down hard and fast rules—or making definitive statements about the mind of God (though Scripture does clearly address behaviors that are often related to this activity). There's little to be gained by labeling the act of masturbation itself a sin. In fact, we think that misses the point."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Wayne Grudem argues that belief in the sufficiency of Scripture coupled with Scripture's silence on the issue should lead us to conclude that masturbation is not always wrong, even though he does offer cautions and prohibitions on associated behaviors.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in Dobson's and Grudem's

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<sup>1</sup> For a compelling explanation of how Western culture, particularly in the United States, has adopted these sexual ethics, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> James Dobson, *Preparing for Adolescence: How to Survive the Coming Years of Change* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2006), 69; cf. "Questions and Concerns About Masturbation," *Focus on the Family*, 17 June 2021, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/empathy-and-advice-for-chronic-masturbator>; Stan Jones and Brenna Jones, *Facing the Facts: The Truth about Sex and You* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 111–13.

<sup>3</sup> "Questions and Concerns About Masturbation," *Focus on the Family*, 17 June 2021, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/empathy-and-advice-for-chronic-masturbator/>.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 726–28. Grudem does provide space for Jason DeRouchie to offer a counterargument (725–26; see also Jason DeRouchie, "If Your Right Hand Causes You to Sin: Ten Biblical Reflections on Masturbation," *Desiring God*, 17 June 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/if-your-right-hand-causes-you-to-sin>). Louis McBurney and Melissa McBurney (*Real Questions, Real Answers About Sex: The Complete Guide to Intimacy as God Intended It* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 273) raise the question about the acceptability of masturbation. Their response indicates a certain hermeneutic of Scripture: "There is no scriptural command against masturbation, although there are cautions against its associated behaviors.... To our way of thinking, the Bible is silent on the rightness or wrongness of individual masturbation." For associated behaviors of which one should be cautious, they list lustful fantasies, tendency toward compulsive activity, and the avoidance of marital sex. Later in their argumentation, they seem to leave this to a matter of Christian conscience, "Some would say that a man who is deprived of sex would have a nocturnal emission anyway to relieve the pelvic discomfort of seminal buildup. That's one way of looking at it. You must decide what God requires of you." Similarly, Alex W. Kwee and David C. Hoover ("Theologically-Informed Education about Masturbation: A Male Sexual Health Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* [2008]: 261) argue, "The Bible does not directly address masturbation, leaving Christians to articulate a



arguments is the claim that since the Bible does not explicitly prohibit an act, it is permissible, but one should be cautious in practice. Rarely does an author make a positive case for the Bible's endorsement of masturbation; rather, the argument for permissibility is made on the basis of the Bible's silence, often coupled with data about contemporary practice.<sup>5</sup>

There are few books written explicitly on the topic of masturbation from a Christian perspective, so Steve Gerali's *The Struggle* deserves special mention.<sup>6</sup> It also provides a window into the types of arguments made for the permissibility of masturbation. Gerali's argument can be summarized with following statements. The Bible does not explicitly address the issue of masturbation. Therefore, this is not an issue of absolute moral imperative with a definite right or wrong in every situation—it's a "gray issue." Thus, masturbation is an issue of Christian freedom and wisdom to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

After reading this book you may come to a similar personal conclusion—that masturbation is a wisdom issue and that can be engaged in under certain guidelines of Christian liberty.... Others will come to the conclusion that masturbation is a wisdom issue in which, while all things are lawful, not all things are wise (see 1 Corinthians 6:12), making it a personal sin issue.... It is my prayer that all will come into a new freedom, having the ability to formulate a biblically and culturally informed personal view.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, the view that emerges is more culturally than biblically informed. We take a number of issues with his exegesis of particular texts. For example, he cites 1 Corinthians 6:12 as a foundation for Christian liberty in "gray issues." But the phrase "everything is permissible for me" is widely recognized to be a slogan by Paul's opponents, which Paul cites in order to refute.<sup>8</sup> Most English translations, including the NIV that he cites, even place quotation marks around the phrase to indicate that it is a quotation of a Corinthian slogan.<sup>9</sup> When Paul cites this Corinthian slogan, he does so to

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moral stance from various scriptures that in our view cannot support a deontological prohibition of masturbation."

<sup>5</sup> James R. Johnson ("Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 10 [1982]: 143–44) attempts to make the case for the Bible's endorsement of masturbation on the basis of purity laws in Leviticus 15:16–18, "We are forced to admit that the Bible does specifically include masturbation within its pages, but only in a morally neutral context. The only God-ordained consequence of masturbation in the Old Testament was ceremonial uncleanness. And although the requirements of this law no longer govern behavior in the New Testament era, the law itself is still profitable for our instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16–17). This Leviticus passage implies that God tolerates masturbation when it does not conflict with the moral and ethical principles He has elsewhere revealed."

<sup>6</sup> Steve Gerali, *The Struggle* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003). While we intend to refute the exegetical and ethical argumentation in *The Struggle*, the book does have some helpful content. For example, much of Gerali's refutation of historical pseudo-scientific arguments about the dangers of masturbation is helpful (pp. 33–55).

<sup>7</sup> Gerali, *The Struggle*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of Paul's quotation and refutation of the Corinthians' slogans, see Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20," *BBR* 18 (2008): 99–121; Andrew David Naselli, "Is Every Sin outside the Body except Immoral Sex? Weighing Whether 1 Corinthians 6:18b Is Paul's Statement or a Corinthian Slogan," *JBL* 136 (2017): 969–87.

<sup>9</sup> There, of course, are not quotation marks in the original Greek text. Translators are generally reluctant to indicate an interpretive decision with English punctuation. Their comfortability with adding the quotation marks indicates the firmness of their interpretation that this must be a quotation. Gerali seems to ignore this scholarly consensus that Paul quotes and refutes his opponents in 1 Cor 6. Ironically, he cites 1 Cor 10:13, which describes

prohibit activities, such as sex with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15–16) that are categorically sinful. To assume the Corinthian slogan as one's own ethical reasoning is to endorse the very ethical framework that Paul is refuting. Moreover, Gerali assumes that if something is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible then it is morally ambiguous. The ethical reasoning put forward in this book is culturally and pragmatically determined and subsequently undergirded by inadequate exegesis.

We argue that this issue of masturbation is part of a larger teaching about human sexuality and self-control, about which the Bible has much to say. Merely asking if an act is explicitly prohibited is a way to avoid asking deeper teleological questions that have explicit answers in Scripture. We should not expect Scripture to prohibit every possible deviant sexual act—that category is nearly infinite and ever-expanding. A better question is: “Does this sexual act fulfill God's good purposes for sex?”<sup>10</sup> With all the writing about this topic, authors' positions can be divided into three main camps: (1) masturbation is a good expression of human sexuality, (2) masturbation in specific situations can be a good expression of human sexuality, and (3) masturbation is never a God-honoring expression of human sexuality. An urgent need remains for biblical and pastoral clarity on the issue of the permissibility or impermissibility of masturbation. Our approach is three-fold: to outline a biblical framework for sex, to make an argument for the categorical impermissibility of masturbation, and to counter popular arguments for the permissibility of masturbation. We will conclude with some pastoral reflections and exhortations.

### *1. Biblical-Ethical Framework for Sex*

In contrast to those who tend to discuss the topic of sexuality from an understanding of humanity grounded in psychology or naturalism, our approach to the topic arises primarily from the text of Scripture and the field of theology with the goal of applying the teaching within the church. We locate the topic of self-stimulation broadly within two major Christian doctrines: the doctrines of God and humanity.

All moral discussions find their genesis in a God who is by nature good. Scripture not only affirms the essential goodness of God (1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; Ps 118:1; 145:9), but it also teaches that God consequently is the standard by which all goodness (moral or otherwise) is measured (Mark 10:18). Because God is the standard by which moral goodness is measured, humanity does not have the freedom to determine what is morally right or wrong apart from God. As Christian ethicist John Frame writes, “Ethics is theology, viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts, and attitudes receive God's blessing and which do not.”<sup>11</sup> God defines what is good—what receives his approval and blessing.

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God delivering Christians from a categorically impermissible activity of idolatry (10:14), as justification for masturbation because it could be God's way of deliverance from sin. For a fuller refutation of this exegesis, see Trent A. Rogers, *God and the Idols: Representations of God in 1 Corinthians 8–10*, WUNT 2/427 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

As an example of the supposed moral relativity of the act, Gerali states, “After all, it's possible that God hasn't given us all the answers... deliberately [ellipsis original]. It's also quite possible that God allows some sin to be relative from person to person.... The relativity of sin regarding wisdom issues doesn't make *all* sin relative. It doesn't give anyone the freedom or right to ignore moral absolutes. Yet God doesn't give us a black-and-white answer to every question we have about an activity's moral quality. In some cases, he creates a ‘gray zone’ that requires us to seek him and his wisdom each day” (*The Struggle*, 140).

<sup>10</sup> See Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 33.

<sup>11</sup> John M Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), 10.

In addition to God's essential goodness, Scripture affirms the fundamental wisdom of "the only wise God" (Rom 16:27; Job 9:4; 12:13). God is the source of all wisdom (Prov 2:6; 9:10; Jas 1:5). More importantly, Paul writes that his wisdom has been active from the beginning, where God planned what was ultimately good for humanity: "for our glory" (1 Cor 2:6–7). Because God is good and wise, what he does and plans is good, and consequently, never needs modifying.<sup>12</sup>

Goodness and wisdom are essential aspects of God's nature; he cannot act without it being good and wise. God displays his goodness and wisdom in all that he does, such as his act of creation. Scripture affirms the presence of God's wisdom—his planning for our good and his glory—in the act of creating all things (Prov 3:19; 8:22–31) and appraises this wise creative work as good (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25). While everything that God made is good, he says that humanity, the crown of creation, is "very good" (Gen 1:31).

The doctrine of humanity, therefore, begins with this truth: God planned and created humanity in his wisdom and goodness. Moreover, he created human beings in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27). Being created in God's image suggests that God made a creature similar to himself. Men and women share the likeness of their Creator. The author of Genesis does not delineate all the ways that humanity shares in God's likeness, but at the least this refers to God creating humanity as moral creatures for interpersonal relationships.

Historically, theologians have referred to God as *personal* to express this capacity for social relationships.<sup>13</sup> As creatures made in God's image and likeness, we too were created for relations. For these relationships to receive God's approval—to be morally good—individuals must relate to one another in the ways that God planned and purposed.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, God's attributes of goodness and wisdom apply not only to God's creation of humanity; they also associate with how God planned for individuals to relate. Because humans are by nature sexual beings—individuals created as male and female—the way that they relate to one another must necessarily include sexuality. That is, it must also deal with how men and women relate to one another.<sup>15</sup> German theologian and ethicist, Helmut Thielicke, locates sexuality in two dimensions: how it relates to being and how it relates to function. For Thielicke, sexuality is part of the essential nature of being human, one's being. "By man in his *being* we mean man as he is related to God, man insofar as he is the bearer of responsibility and an infinite value and insofar as he thus has the dignity of being an 'end in

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of God's wisdom, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 94–99; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 193–95.

<sup>13</sup> See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 269–70.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent discussion of how the trinitarian concept of Person sheds light on the Christian understanding of human personhood, see Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>15</sup> In contemporary culture, the traditional understanding of the terms gender and sex has begun to shift. Historically, the terms gender and sex were often used interchangeably. If one were a male biologically, then one's gender was understood to be male. But this traditional understanding of gender and biological sex is no longer ubiquitous. In this article, we assume that there are only two options for gender: male and female. For a discussion of issues related to gender, sex, and sexuality, see Mark D. Liedebach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2021), ch. 17; and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

himself' (Kant), that is, never to be used as a means to an end."<sup>16</sup> In addition, sexuality also includes one's function, which refers to "man as he actively steps out of himself, accomplishes and effects something, becomes, so to speak, 'productive'—whether it has to do with things or persons."<sup>17</sup> Distinct from being, function locates sexuality in not only who one is, but also in how one acts and relates to others.

What we contend, therefore, is that God's creation of humans as sexual beings includes not only who they are as men and women who bear the image of God, but also to how these image bearers relate to one another as men and women. For humans to relate to one another in a manner that receives God's approval, they must relate as he planned in his wisdom. Scripture delineates two categories for relationships: relationships between persons who are not married to one another and relationships between persons who are married to one another. In his work *True Sexual Morality*, for instance, Christian ethicist Daniel Heimbach highlights these two distinct channels. Moreover, he rightly notes that both channels allow for chaste relations. For individuals not in a marriage relationship, Heimbach notes, "chastity means abstaining from sex altogether."<sup>18</sup> For persons who are married to one another, in contrast, chastity means sexual faithfulness to one's partner. At its most basic level, therefore, the marriage relationship sets the boundaries for moral, sexual activity—it is the relationship in which sex operates as God designed it.

If God purposes that individuals in the marriage relationship relate to one another in sexual relations, then sex is God's idea. Moreover, it must, by nature, be good. Because it is designed to be practiced within covenant marriage, it must also by nature be relational.

Just because sex may transpire between two persons, however, does not make it moral or fulfill the relational aspect. Moral sex must correspond to how God designed it. When Jesus (e.g., Matt 19:3–9; Mark 10:6–8) and Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31) talk about sex and its purpose, they point us back to God's good design in creation. Theologians have attempted to capture Scripture's teaching on the purpose of sex under two main headings: unitive and procreative.<sup>19</sup>

The book of Genesis captures this unitive or bonding purpose this way: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This "one flesh" union requires that the marriage partners "hold fast to" or "cling to" one another, which involves a deep commitment. To be sure, Jesus emphasized this devotion and loyalty when he said, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). Far from being a casual encounter, moral sex occurs within the context of deep and lasting commitment. Accordingly, the prophet Malachi

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<sup>16</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. J. Doberstein (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1964), 21.

<sup>17</sup> Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 135.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis P. Hollinger (*The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 95) argues for four purposes of human sexuality: consummation of marriage, procreation, love, and pleasure. Hollinger's proposal subdivides the unitive aspect of marriage into the three purposes of consummation, love, and pleasure. This fourfold approach is adopted by Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?*, 34–39. In this article, we use only two headings, believing that the other divisions are subsets of these two. For example, we too believe that moral sex is meant to be pleasurable but reason that this pleasure aspect fits within the unitive purpose. Stated differently, God designed sex so that couples enjoy their efforts at bonding and uniting. Moreover, this pleasure is not meant to be non-existent in efforts at procreation as well.

warns marriage partners, “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless” (Mal 2:16).<sup>20</sup> Thus, any form of sexual activity that consciously rejects this relational aspect of sex and treats it casually or mechanically does not receive God’s blessing or approval. Such an approach is immoral.

The author of Genesis also captures the procreative purpose of sex. After the creation of humanity in God’s image, God immediately commanded couples to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). God designed sex so that couples could use it to “multiply and fill the earth” and build families and communities. God approves of this purpose for sex within the marriage relationship. Nevertheless, Scripture also has examples of couples for whom moral sexual activity did not always produce children. Indeed, Abraham and Sarah struggled for years before God provided them with a child (Gen 15–21). The point we are stressing here is that sex is not *merely* a private matter. Again, Heimbach writes, “If sex generates nothing good for others, something must be wrong with how it is practiced.”<sup>21</sup> It must be open to the possibility of childbearing.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, the author of Genesis hints that God approves the purpose of pleasure in sex when he captures Adam’s response at first seeing Eve: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23). Likewise, Paul’s admonition to engage regularly in sexual relations with one’s spouse suggests that sex was meant for more than just procreation (1 Cor 7:3–4). However, God did not plan for this unitive purpose to be something that was merely endured, but rather, it was to be pleasurable. Moreover, the focus of this sexual pleasure is on one’s spouse and not self. Moral sex is other-oriented and focuses on pleasing one’s spouse.

The entire book of Song of Solomon seems to capture this divine perspective on the gift of sex within the marriage relationship. To be sure, it beautifully depicts the pleasures experienced in sexual relations. Solomon, for example, expresses how much he anticipates and enjoys kissing his bride: “Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely” (Song 4:3). He continues, “Your lips drip nectar, my bride: honey and milk are under your tongue” (4:11). He does not limit his praise to her lips and the act of kissing however. He also delights in caressing her breasts (7:7–8; cf., Prov 5:19). Likewise, Solomon’s wife invites her husband to come and enjoy the pleasures of sex with quite explicit language: “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits” (Song 4:16).

Because this is how God in his good wisdom planned for humans to relate to one another, any other form of sexual expression, whether relational or non-relational, necessarily rejects God’s plan and thus does not receive his blessing or approval. God in his goodness and wisdom, therefore, created sex. He designed sex for meeting the unitive and procreative purposes, as well as designing it in a manner that allows couples to enjoy it while fulfilling these purposes. We conclude that ethical sexual acts occur exclusively within marriage, aimed at unity, typically open to procreativity.<sup>23</sup> By stating that ethical sexual acts are “aimed at unity,” we mean that pleasure is an aspect of unity. The exclusivity of shared

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<sup>20</sup> The NASB translation states, “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (Mal 2:16). This idea of “taking heed of your life” is a strong warning against unfaithfulness in one’s commitment.

<sup>21</sup> Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Hollinger (*The Meaning of Sex*, 102) explains, “Though couples engaging in sex need not intend to have children through a given act, they must always be open to the possibility, for sex is by nature procreative. It is part of its essential meaning.”

<sup>23</sup> We do not address certain issues such as homosexual sexual acts because they cannot exist within the context of biblical marriage.

pleasure makes the act unifying. That a spouse reserves this pleasure exclusively for his or her covenant marriage partner as an act of self-giving necessarily unites two in the act. Moreover, ethical sexual acts are “typically open to procreativity.” The married couple might not intend for a certain sexual act to result in the production of children, but they must have a disposition that is open to procreativity if it should result. These purposes recur repeatedly throughout the biblical storyline. Because God designed sex according to his own goodness and wisdom, it is by nature good.

## ***2. Biblical and Theological Arguments for Impermissibility***

Having laid the biblical and theological foundation for understanding sex, we now turn to addressing explicitly one form of sexual activity: self-stimulation. Our intent in this section is to provide a compelling biblical pastoral argument that the best rubric for Christian ethical decisions about sex is not merely “Does the Bible forbid it?” but rather “Does the act fulfill the explicit purposes for which God created sex?” When the biblical evidence is considered, we argue that self-stimulation (also called masturbation) is never a God-honoring act.

In contrast to those who evaluate the morality of masturbation within the context of psychological and human development,<sup>24</sup> we approach the question within the framework of how God in his wisdom designed it. We consider, for example, the following questions: How does masturbation fit within the covenantal nature of marriage? How does masturbation fulfill the purposes for which God created sex? And, how does masturbation relate to God’s command to be holy as he is holy?<sup>25</sup>

### **2.1. How Does Masturbation Fit within the Covenantal Nature of Marriage?**

God created sex as a means for individuals within the marriage relationship to relate to one another. Masturbation, in contrast, is a sexual act that is overtly non-relational. Moreover, where sex within the marriage relationship is altruistic and other-focused, masturbation by nature focuses only on self. Scripture repeatedly warns against a heart that is selfish. Paul commands believers to “do nothing from selfish ambition” (Phil 2:3), while James warns that the presence of selfishness in one’s heart leads to “disorder and every vile practice” (Jas 3:16). With such a negative view of acting from selfish motives presented in Scripture, it is impossible to imagine how masturbation does not fall short of God’s design for marriage. Because masturbation focuses a sexual desire on someone other than one’s spouse, one might rightly argue that it is a form of adultery—giving to another what alone should be given to one’s spouse. For these reasons, masturbation cannot fit within God’s design for covenantal marriage.

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<sup>24</sup> See Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 138–42; and Richard F. Hettinger, *Growing Up with Sex* (Edinburgh: R&R Clark, 1970), 33–43.

<sup>25</sup> Heimbach (*True Sexual Morality*, 223) advances a similar argument for the impermissibility of masturbation: “God made sex to be *relational*, but solitary, self-stimulated sex is never relational. God made sex to be something *exclusive*, but while solitary self-stimulated sex is exclusive physically, it is not exclusive to another person and it encourages thoughts to wander in ways that are not exclusive at all. God made sex to be *profound*, but solitary self-stimulation is shallow. God made sex to be *fruitful*, but solitary self-stimulation treats sex like a commodity rather than capacity for production. God made sex to be *selflessly* God-centered, but solitary self-stimulation is self-centered and self-satisfying. God made sex to be *multidimensional*, but solitary self-stimulation separates physical sex from everything else. Perhaps most seriously, God made sex to be a joining of *complementary* sexual differences, but solitary, self-stimulated sex never involves corresponding sexual union” (original emphasis).

## 2.2. How Does Masturbation Fulfill the Purposes for Which God Created Sex?

In addition, masturbation does not fulfil the three main purposes of sex. For example, masturbation obviously is not procreative. The inclination to legitimize masturbation is part of a larger cultural denial of the purpose of sex. Todd Wilson comments, “Our culture has separated the act of sex from the purpose of sex. We have severed the connection between sex and its power to unite lives and create life, so that now, virtually everywhere we look, sex is separated from its uniting and procreating purposes.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, masturbation is not unitive because it privatizes sexual activity that is designed to be shared. Matthew Anderson notes the inability of masturbation to fulfill God’s good design: “Human sexuality is inherently social, and masturbation is not. In that sense, it represents a failure to fulfill the nature of Christian sexuality as God designed it.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, while it is true that self-stimulation may bring intense pleasure, it does not achieve moral sexual pleasure as God designed it when it is practiced in isolation from one’s spouse.

## 2.3. How Does Masturbation Relate to God’s Command to Be Holy as He Is Holy?

Lastly, masturbation falls short of God’s call for believers to “be holy, for [God is] holy” (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). God calls believers to be certain kinds of people—individuals formed according to the image of Jesus Christ. As we become new creations in Christ through the work of the Spirit, we correspondingly re-order our disordered loves.<sup>28</sup> Before our loves are completely reordered, however, we find that at times our flesh is driving our conduct. Paul captures this idea in his letter to the church at Philippi when he describes the “enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly” (Phil 3:18–19). Apart from Christ and the power of the gospel, persons are controlled by physical desires. In contrast, there is a repeated call for Christians to be characterized by self-control, regardless of one’s marital status: single, marrieds, or widows.

Paul similarly exhorts his readers to be imitators of God (Eph 5:1). Those who attempt to make “Christian” arguments for the permissibility of masturbation do so on the grounds that it is possible to separate masturbation from activities that are clearly prohibited, such as lust and pornography. We argue that even if the activities are divisible, masturbation is still categorically impermissible because it still runs contrary to the moral purity of God’s holy nature. It is impossible to imitate God’s self-giving nature while focusing solely on oneself. We further acknowledge that in the vast majority of cases masturbation involves lustful thoughts. Moreover, masturbation creates ungodly sexual tendencies and expectations in which a person assumes that sexual fulfillment should be on demand to meet one’s own immediate needs. Consequently, masturbation also falls short of the character and holiness to which

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<sup>26</sup> Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 97–98. Ironically, Stan and Brenna Jones (*Facing the Facts*, 112) argue ultimately that masturbation may be permissible even though they acknowledge its incompleteness: “Maybe one reason so many people have confused feelings about masturbation is that it falls short of what God intended our bodies and sexual feelings to be used for, because it is something a person does alone rather than with a spouse. It can be selfish rather than loving. So even though masturbation may sometimes feel physically good, it will never feel complete.”

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 135.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent discussion on the relationship of what we love and ethics, see Augustine, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* 3 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 4:42). An important contemporary treatment is found in David K. Naugle, *Reordered Loves, Reordered Lives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 37–45.

God calls everyone to walk. For these reasons—it cannot meet any of God’s purposes for sex or for marriage and it runs contrary to God’s moral character—we conclude that masturbation can never be a God-honoring behavior.

### ***3. Countering Christian Arguments for Permissibility***

Having put forward a biblical-theological sexual ethic and having made a case for the impermissibility of masturbation, we will briefly address some of the common arguments made for permissibility by those claiming a Christian worldview. These will be only brief comments on the outworking of the more robust biblical sexual ethic described above. We also do not intend the minimal references to be proof-texting; rather, the biblical references are representative of a larger stream of biblical thought, and space constraints demand brevity. The reader will note that there is a pattern in these arguments for the permissibility of masturbation: they begin by noting the Bible’s silence and then proceed quickly to pragmatic considerations.

#### **3.1. Healthy Sexual Expression**

Some argue that God created us with sexual capacities and sexual needs, and a legitimate means of fulfilling these desires is through personal self-stimulation. Balswick and Balswick, for example, state, “Masturbation can allow one to explore the pleasures of the body without guilt or shame.”<sup>29</sup> And further, they state, “Since God has created humans as sexual beings, masturbation provides a way for individuals to experience their sexuality and meet their sexual needs.”<sup>30</sup> Their assumption is threefold: (1) masturbation is a legitimate Christian practice because sexuality is merely individual, (2) sexual desires are needs, and (3) sexual acts are merely physical. As we have outlined above, the biblical picture of human sexuality runs counter to each of these assumptions. We have already made the case that masturbation is a categorically impermissible action. We also take issue with the supposition that sexual desires are needs that must be fulfilled. Not all desires are needs. Many sexual desires, even good marital sexual desires, are not fulfilled in the Christian life. Moreover, sex is not merely physical, so the simplistic solution of masturbation meeting a basic sexual desire is categorically incorrect because sexual acts, by design, are never merely physical (e.g., 1 Cor 6:12–20). Rather, sex is a gift from God to a married couple as an emblematic act of their one-flesh union (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5; Mark 10:8; Eph 5:31).

#### **3.2. Preparatory for Marital Intimacy**

Some argue that masturbation is helpful preparation for future sexual expression. Frequently authors argue that self-stimulation is a normal part of the maturation of adolescents getting to know their bodies.<sup>31</sup> For example, James Dobson states,

It is my *opinion* that masturbation is not much of an issue with God. It is a normal part of adolescence which involves no one else. It does not cause disease, it does not produce babies, and Jesus did not mention it in the Bible. I’m not telling you to masturbate, and

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<sup>29</sup> Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 289.

<sup>30</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 290.

<sup>31</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 290; Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 139–40.



I hope you won't feel the need for it. But if you do, it is my opinion that you should not struggle with guilt over it.<sup>32</sup>

That this form of sexual expression “involves no one else” is the problem. Sexual expression, by God's good and wise design, must include someone else, namely one's spouse. Some even argue that masturbation focused on another person, such as one's future spouse, could be a healthy practice: “Fantasies about future possibilities are usually benign, and masturbating with one's spouse or future spouse in mind can be a way of creating a more personal context for an otherwise solitary act.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, it can be argued that masturbation can be a clinical exercise within marriage to prepare or train a couple to achieve mutual orgasm.<sup>34</sup> The assumption is that a person requires a certain level of self-experience in order to be prepared to engage meaningfully with his or her spouse in a sexual context. Of course, another option is that a husband and wife mutually explore their bodies within the context of marriage. This moves the sexual learning experience within the context of the relational covenant of marriage and keeps the marriage bed pure/undefiled by making it the exclusive locus of sexual expression (Heb 13:4). Masturbation as a preparatory practice has the façade of making masturbation inter-personal, but the reality is that there is still only one person in the room. Moreover, this practice potentially creates unrealistic fantasies and expectations that will be unmet by a future or current spouse. Fantasy and personal sexual stimulation on demand will always be more “efficient” than godly mutual self-giving. Masturbation as a preparatory practice has the façade of training people to interact rightly with their spouses, but, in reality, it tends to train them toward their own touch instead of another's.

### 3.3. Permissible Release within Marriage

Even within marriage, every sexual desire is not satisfied because a married couple's schedules and desires rarely align perfectly. Some argue that masturbation is a solution to different sex drives among

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<sup>32</sup> Dobson, *Preparing for Adolescence*, 69 (emphasis his). Stan and Brenna Jones (*Facing the Facts*, 113) give similar counsel to adolescents, “Masturbation is usually not such a big issue that people should be overwhelmed with worry about it. Masturbation can become sinful if a person fills his or her imagination with immoral thoughts. But occasional masturbation that focuses on the pleasure of your body and not on lustful images may not be much of an issue with God. There may be more harm done by people punishing themselves with guilt than by the masturbation itself. We do not think God wants that.”

<sup>33</sup> Balwick and Balwick, *Authentic Human Sexuality*, 291. So also Johnson, “Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation,” 138: “The sexual drive is achieving its divinely intended purpose when masturbation is merely a side-effect of developing sexual maturity and the person is motivated for marriage.” And later, he states, “But fantasies involving a legitimate marital relationship with a potential or imaginary partner need not involve wrongful coveting. Such fantasies may quite appropriately express the affective-social dimension of the sex drive” (p. 142). Ironically, in his explanation, he admits that there is a danger of these fantasies being misapplied. His counsel is that it merely takes Christian maturity expressed in self-control: “One rightly concludes that sexual fantasies may serve an appropriate function in sexual development and that their content should be deliberately limited to activities and relationships consistent with the will of God, such as when one fantasizes relations with an imaginary marriage partner. This may require self-discipline, but that is a mark of Christian maturity” (p. 142).

<sup>34</sup> See for example, Mark A. Yarhouse and Erica S. N. Tan, *Sexuality and Sex Therapy: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 180, 229–33. They indicate being influenced by Geralsi, whose hermeneutic we discussed above.

spouses,<sup>35</sup> circumstantial impediments,<sup>36</sup> or even the death of one's spouse.<sup>37</sup> The assumptions again are that (1) sexual release is a need, and (2) sexual release is merely a physical need. We have already addressed that sexual release is a desire rather than a need. Masturbation as a cure for different sex drives among spouses assumes that sexual release is a merely physical desire and that one's spouse can be replaced with self. Instead of sex being an act of self-giving love, masturbation makes sexual desire to be an act of self-seeking substitution of one's spouse. Again, God intends sexuality to be shared by spouses. Paradoxically, one's own body belongs sexually to one's spouse (1 Cor 7:3–5). The consistent biblical call is not to indulge in every physical desire, but rather to exercise godly self-control by the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; 1 Thess 4:3–7; 2 Tim 1:7). This type of utilitarian ethic assumes that the only options for someone with a sexual desire are fulfillment within the marriage (i.e., sex with one's spouse), illicit sexual acts (e.g., adultery), or masturbation. But the two God-designed means for dealing with sexual desires are sexual expression with one's spouse and Spirit-enabled self-control.

### 3.4. Lesser Evil or Enabling Self-Control

Some argue that masturbation is a God-given means to combat extramarital sexual expression, whether that be prior to marriage or adultery during marriage. Gerali, for example, lists several reasons that masturbation is acceptable: “The *first* [his emphasis] is that masturbation may be God's way of offering escape from greater sexual temptation and sin. As a way out, masturbation becomes beneficial.”<sup>38</sup> Johnson argues that masturbation is a legitimate way to deal with sexual desires when there is a delay between sexual maturity and marriage, “Accordingly, it would be unreasonable to expect complete sexual self-control in the unmarried with this gift [i.e., the gift of marriage], and masturbation should be

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<sup>35</sup> McBurney and McBurney (*Real Questions, Real Answers About Sex*, 274) state, “It [i.e., masturbation] relieves sexual tension when a man and his wife have very different sex drives.” So also Balwick and Balwick (*Authentic Human Sexuality*, 291) state, “When married partners have different desires regarding the frequency of intercourse, masturbation can be a helpful and loving way for dealing with different needs.”

<sup>36</sup> McBurney and McBurney (*Real Questions, Real Answers About Sex*, 273) state, “When a husband and wife are separated by distance, sickness, disability, or pregnancy, masturbation is an option.” So also Hollinger (*The Meaning of Sex*, 160) comments, “When a couple is apart for a period of time, masturbation can be used if the act is directed toward the other and is clearly an expression of their loving, one-flesh union.” So also Johnson, “Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation,” 139.

<sup>37</sup> Hollinger (*The Meaning of Sex*, 160) states, “Some individuals may even use it [i.e., masturbation] legitimately for a time after their spouse dies, as part of the loving memory of their loved one. While it is no longer directly in the context of procreation, it is by memory still in the context of the one-flesh, procreative union.”

<sup>38</sup> Gerali, *The Struggle*, 132, cf. 126, 169. In an earlier section, he describes the reasoning: “If we're honest we'd have to agree that the sexual thoughts, desires, arousal, and even lust *precede* the need to masturbate. Once orgasm occurs, all that is gone. Masturbation is the end of lust, not the beginning of lust. Masturbation isn't lust nor does it feed lust. It ends lustful episodes. I continued to explain that there are many godly men and women who believe that because masturbation follows the lust and shuts down the process, it becomes the way out that many people pray for. For these people, this deliverance from lust makes masturbation a gift from God” (p. 103). Gerali makes a pragmatic argument that does not account for the biblical argument that masturbation itself is a sin, and thus it would not be a gift from God but rather the deceit of the flesh and Satan. Even from a pragmatic standpoint, his argument is not compelling. He presents lustful desires as being able to be quickly and resolutely dispatched by a mere physical release. But he does not consider that these “lustful episodes” are likely to become reinforced by the practice of self-stimulated orgasm with the result that the person's experience is not that of a singular episode but rather a sinful pattern.

expected in many cases where marriage is delayed and fornication is avoided.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, some argue that even within marriage, masturbation can be a means of keeping oneself faithful to the marriage: “It [i.e., masturbation] is a hedge against unfaithfulness when a man’s wife is unavailable and temptation presents itself.”<sup>40</sup> This line of reasoning is tantamount to saying “let us do [a lesser] evil that good may come” (Rom 3:8). Masturbation is not a hedge against extramarital sexual expression; masturbation itself is sexual expression outside of the marriage. The God-given means for dealing with sexual desire are marriage and self-control (1 Cor 7:1–5, 36). Rather than engaging in so-called lesser sinful pleasures, Christians are called to make *no* provision for ungodly sexual expression. “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:13–14).

#### *4. Pastoral Reflections*

In God’s goodness, he designed the goodness of marriage and the goodness of sex within marriage. Both of these realities are good, God-glorifying gifts to humanity. God intends for marital sex to draw a husband and wife together in mutual love and self-giving, thereby reinforcing their exclusive affections for one another. In the first marriage, Adam recognizes in Eve someone in whom he can delight and fulfill his commission, and he is to “hold fast” to her with care and devotion (Gen 2:24; cf., Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph 5:31). In this marriage relationship, they enjoy the mutual sexual satisfaction of giving themselves to “one another” (1 Cor 7:5). From that mutual love, God intends the generation of new life. As with all of God’s good gifts, evil is eager to corrupt, distort, and defile God’s design. Thus, it takes careful biblical thinking and Spirit-empowered self-control to enjoy and uphold God’s good design. The church collectively supports the purity of marriage (Heb 13:4), and a primary way that the church guards marriage and sex is by teaching about it rightly (1 Tim 4:1–10). Additionally, churches exercise corrective discipline to train their members toward God’s way (1 Cor 5:1–13).

But the Christian virtue of self-control, being led by the Spirit, is directly at odds with prevailing cultural narratives. Culture prizes license to do what one wants without constraints, particularly any biblical constraint. The Bible, however, prescribes restraints that promote our flourishing because those restraints are in line with how God designed us to flourish. So biblical morality is aligning our actions with their intended and God-oriented design for our good. On the one hand, we want to say that sexual expression is less than culture makes it—sexual expression is not our identity or essential humanity. And on the other hand, we want to say that sexual expression is more than what our culture makes it—sexual acts are not merely biochemical hormonal release; rather, sex is divinely designed to glorify God himself. A prevailing cultural lie is that one’s identity is his/her sexual expression; thus, the inability or prohibition to act sexually makes someone less than human, robbing them of personhood. But, in

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, “Toward a Biblical Approach to Masturbation,” 140. Kwee and Hoover seem to imply a similar justification of masturbation in the case of a dating couple: “Do all instances of masturbation reflect such grave moral failures? The intentions behind masturbation are varied and, arguably, not always of a lustful nature. A contrast of scenarios commonly encountered in the counseling office may help to illustrate this. In the first scenario, a young man and his girlfriend make out during a date but, out of respect for their shared Christian value system, they abstain from intercourse. The young man is nevertheless sexually aroused and on returning home, he masturbates to alleviate his pent-up sexual tension” (“Theologically-Informed Education about Masturbation,” 262).

<sup>40</sup> McBurney and McBurney, *Real Questions, Real Answers About Sex*, 274.

reality, everyone experiences unfulfilled sexual desires. The non-fulfillment of sexual desire, even good sexual desire, does not reduce a person's humanity, virility, masculinity, or femininity. On the contrary, the non-fulfillment of good desires can orient us properly to the consummation of all things for which we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

While we await our adoptions as sons and the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:18–25), we are indwelt and led by the Spirit of God as sons of God (Rom 8:9–15). Being indwelt by the Spirit transforms our minds, so that "those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5). Christians walk by the Spirit and "do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). The desires of the flesh produce the works of the flesh: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality..." (Gal 5:19). In contrast to the desires and works of the flesh, the Spirit produces a radically unique way of living: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:22–24). And this Spirit-led way of life contrasts the flesh-led way of life particularly in the way that Christians act on sexual desires: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:3–5). Walking by the Spirit in our sexual desires and expressions means that we enact God's good design.<sup>41</sup> We recognize that this side of heaven, many desires, even good desires, remain unfulfilled. We affirm that sex is designed to be social (in the smallest social unit of husband and wife), not secretive and secluded. We affirm that sex is designed to be selfless self-giving rather than self-serving. As singles and as marrieds, we keep the marriage bed pure by reserving the emblematic marriage act for the mutual self-giving of spouses.

In the midst of swirling cultural narratives urging the inherent goodness of every sexual impulse, it might be hard to believe that God's way is best. It might be hard to believe that living out our faith in God through the blood of Christ and the empowering of the Spirit is really the most joy-filled course of life. But God is wise. His way is best. And his plan is for our good. Marrieds rejoice in the goodness and God-glorification of marital sex, and treasure Christ as all-satisfying in the midst of unfulfilled desires. Unmarrieds rejoice in the goodness and God-glorification of seeing Christ as all-satisfying in every desire. John Piper memorably summarizes the satisfying joy in the Christian life, "The fight for joy is the fight to see and believe Christ as more to be desired than the promises of sin. This faith and sight come by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."<sup>42</sup> Using our bodies rightly begins by thinking rightly about God and humanity (2 Cor 10:5–6). With the hope of the near return of Christ, let us walk by the Spirit not in the flesh: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:14).

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<sup>41</sup> "Purity" is another word that can describe this Spirit-led walk in regard to our sexual desires. While the word is often criticized along with aspects of "purity culture," rightly understood "purity" communicates an orientation of the heart rather than the mere absence of prohibited activity. Garrett Kell (*Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021], 26) helpfully defines purity: "Purity is an orientation of the faith-filled heart that flees the pleasures of sin and pursues the pleasures of God by the power of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>42</sup> John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 105.

# “The Sanctification of Our Speech”: The Theological Function of Truth and Falsehood in John Webster’s “Sins of Speech”

— Robb Torseth —

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**Abstract:** The contemporary debate concerning truth and falsehood has become distinctly conspicuous in light of recent global events. The increasing great divorce between diverging worldviews has resulted in what Susan Harding has coined the “repugnant cultural other,” where each group has retreated into itself, stigmatized the other, and thus neglects a genuine exchange of words and ideas. Here, the writings of the late John Webster help shed light on foundational conceptions of the purpose, use, and ethics of human language as primarily both theologically-oriented and theologically-originated. This article will consider Webster’s 2015 article “Sins of Speech,” first in relation to his broader thought, and second as it applies to the contemporary problem of speech, public or private, in the information age.

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Within the contemporary arena of public discourse, the consensus on what constitutes appropriate speech, and even the nature of speech itself, has been a controverted subject. Contemporary issues surrounding the polarization of ideology and worldview abound; symptomatic of this is a September 2020 Gallup Poll that shows that half of those United States citizens polled trust the mainstream media either “not very much” or “none at all.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, where social media censorship and fact-checking over issues like conspiracy theory, misinformation, and hate speech abound, greater polarization seems to ensue as a result.<sup>2</sup> This polarization of popular opinion and speech

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Brennan, “Americans Remain Distrustful of Mass Media,” *Gallup*, 30 September 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/321116/americans-remain-distrustful-mass-media.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> See the article, “The Social Media Fact-Check Farce,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-social-media-fact-check-farce-11606519380>, which points to a study that suggested social media’s fact-checking efforts during the 2020 US Presidential election simply drove more conservative voters to further believe the claims in question. In particular, the role of so-called “confirmation bias” is present on

can be seen leading to various instances of *ad hominem*, such as the claim that those opposed to one's own views are "liars," or the assertion of a deceitful mass coordinated conspiracy.<sup>3</sup> Such behaviors have, at their root, a common pathology that underscores a fundamental misunderstanding and misordering of how one social sphere views the other, not relegated simply to one or the other, but a universal phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> This invokes the social dynamic of Susan Harding's "repugnant cultural other." In her 1991 article "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," Harding considers the case of American Christian fundamentalism, both the term itself—which has taken on a pejorative connotation over the last century—as well as the history behind it via the paradigmatic event of the 1925 Scopes trial, in order to better understand how this particular ideological subculture became stigmatized and thus shunned by those affixing the title of "modern" to their thought.<sup>5</sup> For Harding, the point is not necessarily to endorse a fairer treatment of fundamentalists *per se*—that is too narrow an application of this principle for her purposes; rather, the point is to open up genuine engagement with cultural "others," whatever form they might take, so that critical and authentic dialogue is produced between both parties as opposed to further marginalization based on false characterizations. This, in turn, is meant to help militate against the "us" versus "them" mentality present in assumptions about repugnant cultural others.

The point of this article is not to endorse or defend any one perspective or another, or even to get particularly political in general, but rather, to draw attention to the need for exactly what Harding is calling for: a genuine constructive dialogue between differing perspectives. In particular, what the present author would like to highlight is that, from a theological perspective, there is an element in the

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either side of these debates, where critics of online fact-checking often believe the fact-checkers themselves to be biased (Neal Conan, "Political Fact-Checking Under Fire," *Talk of the Nation*, National Public Radio, 10 January 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/01/10/144974110/political-fact-checking-under-fire?t=1630939531230>). This brings to mind conversations in epistemology regarding the role of schematic biases in content interpretation: "Since concepts are subject to our manipulation while the evidential given is not, it becomes imperative to anchor scheme in content. Without the sort of justification which arises when scheme is confronted by content, our whole system of belief will end up losing its tie to the world, and we will no longer be able to tell the difference between true belief and mere invention" (Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 83). For social media censorship, see Peter Suci, "Do Social Media Companies Have the Right to Silence the Masses—And Is This Censoring the Government?" *Forbes*, 11 January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/44drctjy>.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Henley and Niamh McIntyre, "Survey Uncovers Widespread Belief in 'Dangerous' Covid Conspiracy Theories," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/26/survey-uncovers-widespread-belief-dangerous-covid-conspiracy-theories>. The fallacy of the *ad hominem* charge of lying has been seen irrespective of ideology or perspective. See Sina Blassnig, Florin Büchel, Nicole Ernst, and Sven Engesser, "Populism and Informal Fallacies: An Analysis of Right-Wing Populist Rhetoric in Election Campaigns," *Argumentation* 33 (2019): 107–36; David Leonhardt and Stuart A. Thompson, "Trump's Lies," *The New York Times*, 14 December 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/23/opinion/trumps-lies.html>. Douglas Walton notes that, although an *ad hominem* attack on integrity of speech might prove pragmatically effective, in many instances it is "a weak kind of argument based on plausible presumptions that cannot be too strongly transferred to another area" (Douglas Walton, *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 173).

<sup>4</sup> See the fascinating article by Myles Lennon, "Revisiting 'the Repugnant Other' in the Era of Trump," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (2018): 439–54.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, Harding notes the role the mainstream media played in this false characterization, often resorting to *ad hominem* attacks against fundamentalists. Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism," *Social Research* 58 (1991): 373–93 (see esp. 382–85).

equation of holistic public discourse missing: the theological element of speech. Questions concerning the integrity of speech, truth and falsehood, bias, hate, and more all speak to the need for a reconciliation of our speech, what John Webster refers to as “the sanctification of our speech”—a reality that be afforded only by the activity of the gospel of Christ and its twofold ethic of loving God and loving neighbor. This was a part of the larger, life-long project on moral theology embarked on by John Webster, whose 2015 article “Sins of Speech,” published in the journal *Studies in Christian Ethics*, exemplifies his conviction that moral theology is a locus “distributed across the corpus of dogmatics,” animated and given life by the life-giving principles of the gospel.<sup>6</sup> This article will first unpack Webster’s “Sins of Speech,” then weigh that against the bulk of his corpus and his broader concerns over the role of theology in the public sphere; finally, it will conclude with reflections on potential avenues of applications salient to the current schematic divide in the information age, avenues that aid in avoiding either isolationist and separationist behaviors characteristic of “repugnant cultural other” mentality on the one hand, and relativism of perspectives on the other.

### *1. Reordering Disordered Speech*

In “Sins of Speech,” Webster begins with what initially appears to be a digression on the knowledge of sin. Echoing both Calvin and Aquinas, he says that “Knowledge of sin is doubly derived, from knowledge of God and knowledge of created nature.”<sup>7</sup> Sin itself is only a negation or “privation”: it preys on God’s revealed goodness in creation, deforms it, and diminishes its function.<sup>8</sup> This applies to a theology of speech inasmuch as any other theological inquiry: just as human reasoning has become corrupted and depreciates with the fall and the entrance of sin and evil, so too does the human capacity of speech, where “an ethics of sinful speech is an integral part of hamartiology.”<sup>9</sup> Such an inquiry thus fits within the created imperative to know and love God and serve him in a way consistent with created origins and ends—an inquiry of created finitude—as well as the humbling of the intellect in the operation of mortification and vivification, actualized by the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

As such, Webster fronts the dogmatic inquiry of speech before considering speech in its anthropological capacities, asking the question, “What might theology say about the speech of creatures?” He draws four sequential points: (1) “Humans are creatures.” We have given nature derived from the communication of God’s *a se* goodness, and in that nature, we are (a) teleological, (b) rational,

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<sup>6</sup> See John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 2:2 (hereafter abbreviated *GWM*). Note that the present author holds the distinction between Christian ethics and moral theology; in this sense, Webster was primarily a “moral theologian,” i.e., one who “focuses on the practical living out of Christian doctrine” and who “addresses primarily the church” (Duane Stephen Long, “Moral Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 456–57).

<sup>7</sup> *GWM* 2:123.

<sup>8</sup> *GWM* 2:123–24. The language of privation invokes Augustine and Aquinas (e.g., Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson [London: Penguin, 2003], 12.7; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, eds. John Martensen and Enrique Alarcon, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote [Landers, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012], Ia–IIae, Q. 71, 75, 82).

<sup>9</sup> *GWM* 2:124.

<sup>10</sup> *GWM* 2:124–25.

(c) social, and (d) communicative, which itself has two aspects: the exchanging of goods that pertain to perfection and the verbal “communication of goods by which we are sustained in life,” which “takes place either through linguistic signs or with the accompaniment of such signs.” (2) “Human speech is creaturely and so not *a se*.” Speech itself is a quality of God’s creative speech, a “silent language” which is nonetheless generative: “Because God speaks, creatures speak.” (3) “Human speech is directed to God and to neighbors.” This invokes both the logic and the ethic of the first and foremost commandment: well-ordered speech is thus first “governed by the requirements of religion,” which Webster believes is a natural implication of the first commandment of the Decalogue, and second, “human speech is governed by the requirements of justice,” where it must further the good of human society. (4) The governing of human speech by justice calls attention to both “its causal power and its irrevocability.” Speech is effective and thus “potentially harmful,” exposing the inner affections, and “proposing a view of the world.” As such, it “establishes a ‘real’ relation between the speaker and the one addressed.” This means that words are, quite literally, *irrevocable*: even though one may recant of a statement, this cannot erase what is a product of the verbal “generative power”: “What is said may not be unsaid,” to which Webster adds Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”<sup>11</sup>

This is all by way of table-dressing. From here, Webster, turns to address the positive question, “How is speech to be ordered so that created goods are fittingly communicated and common life caused to flourish?” He draws five characteristics of good human speech: it is characterized by (1) integrity and transparency, revealing genuinely good intentions (citing Prov 37:30–31; 15:2, 7); (2) “there is a right relation of sign to thing signified, which sets up truth in human communication,” i.e., it is “trustworthy” and “non-manipulative”; (3) governed by justice, it honors the hearer as a neighbor equally as valid as the speaker; (4) it is prudent, moderate, and takes into account circumstances and context; and (5) it conforms to a sense of justice that is “animated by religion.” This fifth characteristic ties the discussion back to his antecedent dogmatic by citing 1 Cor 10:31, Col 3:17, Isa 65:16, and Jer 5:3 to demonstrate the teleological orientation of all things to God’s glory and the relationship between God as truth and the pursuit of truth in speech.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Webster begins to consider sin as a disordering of human speech, quoting at length James 3:5–11 to demonstrate the biblical teaching on the severity and effect of the fallen tongue. Although sin cannot wholly eradicate the communicative nature and reality of speech—sin cannot uncreate nature—it nonetheless directs itself against every facet of the goodness of God manifest in the foremost commandment: against God, sins of commission in blasphemy and cursing, and sins of omission in neglecting to give God the praise due to him as God; and against neighbor, either in a legal/judicial context (“false accusations, bearing false witness or pronouncing an unjust judgment”) or in common speech, which itself can be divided into reputation (“defamation, detraction, gossip, ridicule”) or deceit (“lying, hypocrisy, boasting and flattery; and those which are quarrelsome and sow discord”).<sup>13</sup>

Webster then begins to measure these sins by origin and effect. In terms of origin, evil speech originates as an expression of the inner person and evil intentions, his proof text being the *locus classicus* that is Matthew 15:18, along with Proverbs 15:2. This is important for assessing the careful distinction between lying and error: quoting Augustine’s *De Mendacio*, he notes that lying implies will and thus

<sup>11</sup> GWM 2:125–27. The discussion of speech in its causal capacity is drawn from Aquinas, Webster citing the *respondeo* of *Summa Theologiae* IIae Q. 72 A. 2.

<sup>12</sup> GWM 2:127–28. For the first characteristic Webster directly quotes Augustine, *Contra Mendacium* 7.17.

<sup>13</sup> GWM 2:128–29.



necessitates an assessment of character, motive, and intent. In other words, “The principle here is that appraisal of acts of verbal communication must include inquiry into and assessment of the speaker’s intention.” Yet, in terms of effect, disordered speech produces disordered results: conflict and damages inflicted not only upon the hearer, but also the one speaking, instilling vicious habits and a skewed view of words and the relationship between the self and reality.<sup>14</sup>

To make things more concrete, Webster then considers two examples of sins of speech: blasphemy against God, which preys on the primary mode of language as intended for praise, and defamation of neighbor, wherein sin contends against the good of one’s neighbor’s reputation and thus against justice and a love of justice. The prescription, in Webster’s estimation, is the reorientation of human speech and the reinstitution of human vocation in moral service to God. This requires God’s grace, where “the first cause of good works is God the Holy Spirit.” As such, although even the speech of the regenerate falls prey to the present “‘mixed’ condition” (i.e., *simul justus et peccator*), this also means that any and all “good speech is *ex gratia*,” where, in the process of mortification and vivification, old forms of speech may be “put off” and new forms of speech “put on” (Col 3:5–10). Speech may be renewed in relation to God in the form of thanksgiving, reordered to the new reality of the saints in the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. In relation to neighbor, speech may be changed concurrent with the change of new social relations, i.e., “the social sphere of regeneration,” wherein each member is equal to the other in dignity and unity.<sup>15</sup>

What does this new mode of verbal communication look like in the Christian society? For Webster, this involves the two pillars of edification and moderation. Quoting Ephesians 4:29, Webster explains that reordered speech should communicate the character of the gospel and bring both speaker and hearer to partake in grace. Likewise, speech should be moderate in that it should be lucid and not “distorted by excess or defect.” In moderation of speech, the speaker should be “quick to hear, slow to speak” (Jas 1:19), inasmuch as attention should be given to the appropriateness of language in a given situation and to a particular hearer. This places the use of words below the needs and dignity of the hearer and thus militates against what he calls “the anxious need to assert ourselves over others by words.” Webster closes the section with a quotation from Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule* and ends the article with a quote from Calvin demonstrating the continual need to invoke God in pursuit of “the sanctification of our speech.”<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Reordered Speech in the Public Arena

In order to extend the implications of Webster’s “Sins of Speech” into the present perspectival divide in the information age, a helpful key will be Webster’s broader considerations of the role of theology in the realm of public discourse. Here, the most pertinent examples are Webster’s writings

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<sup>14</sup> GWM 2:130–31. He has alluded to the nature of false representation in speech as revolving around an assertion of a false reality earlier (p. 127). He further explains the psychology of lies in a sermon on Matt 21:33–39: “Why do we tell lies? We lie to evade reality; we lie because the truth is too painful or too shameful for us to face, or because the truth is simply inconvenient and has to be suppressed before it’s allowed to disturb us. We invent lies because, for whatever reason, we want to invent reality” (John Webster, *Confronted by Grace: Meditations of a Theologian* [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014], 5).

<sup>15</sup> GWM 2:131–38.

<sup>16</sup> GWM 2:138–40.

in *The Culture of Theology*—a seminal work on theological method, originally delivered as the Thomas Burns Memorial Lectures at the University of Otago in 1998 and published posthumously—as well as two articles, “God, Theology, Universities” (2014) and “*Regina artium*: Theology and the Humanities” (2011).<sup>17</sup> Starting with the lattermost, Webster’s point is that theology imparts meaning to the humanities, which are otherwise variegated and directionless: whereas “contemporary higher education” is prone toward “flimsiness and ignobility of its understanding of what it is about,” often effervescent in the light of cultural shifts, theology provides an orientation of the humanities toward God, originally in regards to the motion of the mind, and teleologically as ordered toward God’s wisdom and glory.<sup>18</sup> Although theology can flourish without the academy, the academy cannot flourish without theology.<sup>19</sup> A similar focus on the origin and end of the movement of the mind is found in “God, Theology, Universities”: where theology is the queen of the sciences, this informs the university that “the primary end of study—all study—is contemplation of the creator of all.”<sup>20</sup> This militates against attrition of meaning between the disciplines of the academy that concern itself with phenomenalism: once again, the university is not necessary for theology to flourish, but theology is necessary for the university to flourish.<sup>21</sup>

Even more pointed is Webster’s language in the chapter “Conversations” in *The Culture of Theology*: theology must not compromise by “knocking off the rough edges” in order to make it respectable; it must, instead, keep its stance as one of “*nonconformity*,” where it “un anxiously” pursues its own subject and resists resigning to conflicting ideas of other faculties, providing a check for the conclusions of those disciplines in the process.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, theology must function as a moral guide for conversation amongst the faculties in general, where it can offer a “better *spirituality* of intellectual exchange.” Interestingly, it is here that Webster cites Stanley Hauerwas on freedom of speech in the university and alludes to the necessity of theology for genuinely free speech, which will allow for “a better politics of intellectual conflict and a deeper and more self-aware inhabitation of specific moral and intellectual cultures”—but only if it retains its “doggedness in the face of those who would persuade it to” lose its distinctiveness and its independent focus.<sup>23</sup>

This last note provides something quite close to what is being aimed at in this article, concurrent with “Sins of Speech”: speech is truly free if it is working according to its original function and purpose, and thus it is most free when one can simply let theology be theological in relation to the public arena.

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<sup>17</sup> Spatial limitations inhibit a broader and more detailed inquiry into Webster’s view of theology and the university. See instead Martin Westerholm, “Webster on the Theology of the University,” in *A Companion to the Theology of John Webster*, ed. Michael Allen and R. David Nelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 88–101. For the significance of *The Culture of Theology* as “a magisterial short treatment of what Christian theology is all about,” see Ivor J. Davidson, “Introduction,” in John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 2.

<sup>18</sup> John Webster, “*Regina artium*: Theology and the Humanities,” in *Domain of the Word* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 171–92. Here, his sources include a lengthy exposition of Bonaventure’s *Reduction* along with Bonaventure’s other works, as well as various works from Augustine; likewise, he cites Abraham Kuyper, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth, among others.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> GWM 2:163–64.

<sup>21</sup> GWM 2:166.

<sup>22</sup> Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 112–13.

This seems to be part of Webster’s contribution to the concept of the integrity of speech in public discourse: it is either oriented to a reality that reflects the nature and works of God, or it constitutes a sort of falsehood or error. Note that this conception of speech does not necessarily escape dichotomy—that was not the purpose of this article. The purpose was, in so considering Webster’s theological model for language, to shift the dichotomy from a polarization of ideologies and worldviews to a dichotomy, yes, between truth and falsehood, but a truth and falsehood more concretely defined theologically. In other words, it is to be rightly ordered in a way that considers its orientation toward God and toward neighbor, toward reality as constituted by God to glorify him, and toward neighbor as a creature with equal dignity and vocation to oneself.

### 3. Conclusion

Considering the above, this means that in navigating the contemporary issues of truth and falsehood there are two lessons that can be taken from Webster, both which require critical introspection. The first revolves around objective theological criterion for truth and falsehood. Within Webster’s exposition, truth in speech is correspondent to reality, yes, but a reality that finds its origin and *telos* in God the creator, with the implications that entails. Spoken language and truth claims must be weighed against the character of God and what is known about his presence and self-revelation in the world and in humanity.<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a deep dogmatic task that requires an equal amount dogmatic legwork, far beyond the extent of this article, but that isn’t the goal here; instead, what is being aimed at is the reordering the logic of inquiry toward God first, with conclusions reached only subsequent to this theological starting point. The second lesson involves character virtues and the role of charity toward neighbor in discourse: where Webster calls for edification and moderation, the latter avoiding certain extremes, one can see an easy application against the sort of *ad hominem* and facultative assumptions noted prior. One could say, part of moderation is giving the other the benefit of the doubt: this helps break down the barrier erected by the repugnant cultural other and may even have greater application to conspiratorial claims as well, although this is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>25</sup> In the words of Rowan Williams, “Having integrity ... is being able to speak in a way which allows of answers.”<sup>26</sup> One could,

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<sup>24</sup> Similarly, see the expansive treatment of Trinitarian worldview in relation to epistemology by Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, passim. The theme is also explored ubiquitously by Herman Bavinck, “The Trinity,” *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:256–334, and elsewhere throughout the work.

<sup>25</sup> The topic of conspiracy theory is itself controversial. Contemporarily, news media has been prone to throw the claim of conspiracy theory toward opinions it deems illegitimate (e.g., Henley and McIntyre, “Survey Uncovers Widespread Belief in ‘Dangerous’ Covid Conspiracy Theories”), but, by definition, this does not seem a consistent application of the term, especially considering its pejorative nature. Hayward advocates the role of a critical reception and appraisal of conspiracy theories in order to better address and determine justifiable versus unjustifiable beliefs: “to discern whether a ‘conspiracy theory’ is worth taking seriously one has to be critically receptive to the possibility of its being so” (Tim Hayward, “‘Conspiracy Theory’: The Case for Being Critically Receptive,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* [2021]: 1–20).

<sup>26</sup> Rowan Williams, “Theological Integrity,” *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 5. This essay has many helpful overlaps with Webster’s thought, including a call for language to “surrender” to God and a desire to avoid ‘totalizing’ assumptions about perspective. Language, its relationship to environment, and its broader relationship to communication of God was the subject of Williams’s 2013 Gifford Lectures, published in 2014 as Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). A more formal

perhaps, see this as a function of both law and gospel: the ninth commandment, i.e., against bearing false witness, in context of the Godward orientation of the Decalogue, calls for the appraisal of speech in this realist capacity, whereas the gospel imperative of love helps to understand the vast limitations of not only one's neighbor's speech and understanding, but of the self as well—a universal reality that must take into account the effects of both finitude and sinfulness. To borrow a turn of phrase from Calvin, the chief virtue needs to be threefold: humility, humility, and humility.<sup>27</sup> In this way—to extend the concept from Webster—although theology may flourish without public discourse, public discourse cannot flourish without theology.

What does this mean for the average Christian in the pew, the pastor in the pulpit, or the theologian in the academy? The applications in this instance are broad and cover the wide range of speech-based interactions held between image-bearers. When dealing with those with whom there is profound disagreement, truth should be sought, but in a loving manner: this means holding fast to convictions, while still giving one another the benefit of the doubt, not assuming the worst about their intent, but extending charity and humility in genuinely engaging with what they have to say. This is important for building credibility and allowing healthy dialogue, as opposed to alienating one person or group as a “repugnant cultural other.” This, in turn, will allow for all truth claims in a discussion to be heard and considered. Likewise, if the perspective is kept Godward first, this process will help reorient speech toward God in a way that is genuine to his character as truth (Isa 65:16), aiding in dialogue focused on weeding through truth and error in a world that corresponds to its Creator. Again, such a process, with its twofold emphasis on truth and love, is applicable not only between believer and unbeliever, but in disagreements between believers over the various ideological matters that arise in the church's perpetual process of articulating sound theological speech to problems societal, spiritual, and anthropological. In this sense, the speech of the church is further sanctified in accordance with the nature of its Creator, and the character of the gospel of Christ is better clarified and vindicated before God and neighbor.

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and constructive comparison between Webster and Williams would be otherwise helpful, due to both their affinities as well as Williams's influence on Webster as his undergraduate dissertation supervisor at Cambridge.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, reprint ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 2.2.11.

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## — OLD TESTAMENT —

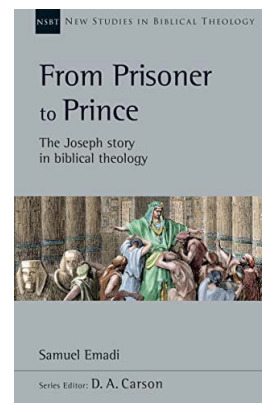
Samuel Emadi. *From Prisoner to Prince: The Joseph Story in Biblical Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 59. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. 188 pp. £16.99/\$24.00.

Christian interpretation has often read Joseph as a type of Christ. Modern scholars have found this interpretation less persuasive and a rigorous defense of it in accordance with scholarly constraints on typological exegesis has not been given (p. 20). Samuel Emadi attempts to give a defense. He contends that Joseph, as Abraham's royal seed, partially fulfills and anticipates further fulfilment of covenantal promises. He contends that Joseph typifies a future Judahite king, that Moses intended for a typological understanding of the narrative, and that the Old Testament and New Testament interpret Joseph in this way.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the typological interpretation of Joseph and modern scholarship's reception of it. The chapter states the problem well and shows what Emadi will argue. Chapter 2 sidesteps debates on the nature of biblical theology and definitions of typology. Emadi proposes to use Gentry and Wellum's criteria for discerning a type—historicity, author-oriented, escalation, textual, and covenantal. Emadi could have said more in this chapter to defend his definition of biblical theology and these criteria, but for the sake of his argument, these criteria provide sufficient controls on typological exegesis. Chapter 3 argues that since the Joseph narrative continues the *tôledôt* pattern that unifies Genesis, the reader should expect the Joseph narrative to continue the book's themes. Emadi emphasizes that the Joseph narrative continues the "covenantal promises" (p. 55).

Chapters 4–6 argue that Joseph fulfills covenantal promises related to kingship, seed, land, and blessing. Chapter 4 contends that Genesis has prepared readers to expect the birth of a "royal seed." Since Joseph dreamed of ruling his brothers, his father favored him, the brothers bowed down to him, and Pharaoh empowered him, Emadi contends that Joseph has "royal status" (p. 73). But Joseph never became an Egyptian king nor joined the royal family. Although prominent in Pharaoh's court, it is doubtful that this would equate with royal status to readers. Genesis does use royal imagery to describe another character—Judah. According to Jacob's blessing, Judah will hold a scepter and ruling staff, have authority over his enemies, and peoples will obey him. Genesis 49:8b says Judah's brothers will bow before him. Emadi suggests that this should bring Joseph's dreams and the brother's bowing before Joseph to mind. Based on this connection, Emadi suggests that the envisioned Judahite ruler will be a "*Joseph redivivus*" (p. 80). From this connection, Emadi justifies reading all of Joseph's narrative typologically (p. 80). However, one wonders what is truly typological, Joseph's rule or the brothers' prostration? A more modest claim, and the consensus view, would be that the tribes will bow before Judahite rulers, as the brothers bowed before Joseph (compare the Genesis commentaries by Victor Hamilton [NICOT], John Goldingay [BCOT]; Gerhard von Rad, [OTL], Gordon Wenham, [WBC], and others). This interpretation does not claim that the recipients of the prostration are analogous. Nor does it require that one read the entire Joseph narrative typologically.

Chapter 5 argues that Joseph provides the context through which God preserves and multiplies his people in Egypt. This chapter's claims are well argued and persuasive. Chapter 6 argues that Joseph progresses the covenantal promises of land and blessing. Emadi admits that the land promises are not as





obvious (p. 104). Allusion to the land promise does appear in Joseph's final words, which look to a future return to Canaan. Emadi also notes the prominence of blessing in Genesis 47–50. Jacob blesses Pharaoh and Emadi contends that Joseph's administration in Genesis 47:13–26 evidences God's mediated blessing to the nations. Although scholars debate the moral nature of Joseph's policies, they preserve both Egypt and Israel during the famine. God blessed through preservation, regardless of debates about the morality of Joseph's policies.

Chapter 7 considers Old Testament passages that allude to the Joseph narrative. Emadi convincingly argues that Psalm 105, Daniel 2 and 5 allude to Joseph in the context of covenantal promises. The comparisons with Esther, Mordecai, and Jehoiachin are less obvious, but may allude to Joseph as an embodiment of exodus hope. Chapter 8 considers New Testament passages. Acts 7 reads Joseph within God's covenantal story. Emadi's exegesis of Acts 7 is some of his most rigorous. Hebrews 11 portrays Joseph's faith in a future exodus as an embodiment of faith in the Abrahamic promises. Whereas the parable of the tenants tells Israel's story in miniature, Emadi's arguments for literary allusions to Joseph's narrative are less conclusive.

Emadi attempts an exegetical defense of a typological reading. He has progressed the discussion forward and provided new areas for scholarly debate. As he recognizes, scholars disagree on most aspects of the Joseph narrative (pp. 58–60). Pastors and students may disagree with some of Emadi's conclusions as well. Pastors will find most helpful the connections between Joseph's narrative and the Abrahamic promises. They will also profit from ruminating on Emadi's exegesis of Old and New Testament passages outside of Genesis. Students of biblical theology likewise will find much to consider, including an extensive bibliography for further research.

Finally, I must recognize Emadi's preface. Rarely has a preface impacted my reading of a book, but the humility, warmth, and gratitude that Emadi evidences in his preface provide a model for other Christian scholars.

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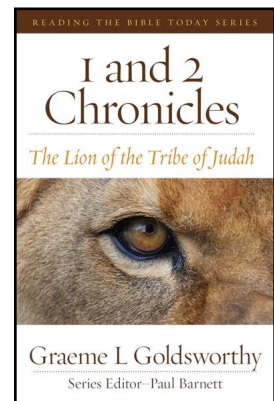
Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malaysia

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Graeme Goldsworthy. *1 and 2 Chronicles: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah*. Reading the Bible Today. Sydney: Aquila Press, 2021. xii + 325 pp. \$24.95.

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Many readers of *Themelios* will be familiar with Graeme Goldsworthy's immense contribution to the study of Biblical Theology. Since publishing *Gospel and Kingdom* in 1981, Goldsworthy has spent an entire career almost with the singular focus on encouraging "Christians to read the Old Testament with understanding, and to read it knowing that it was the Bible used by Jesus and the apostles to proclaim the everlasting gospel" (p. x). In this volume, he turns our attention to the book of Chronicles (1 and 2) with the explicit intention of providing a commentary that shows how Chronicles attests to Jesus Christ. Squarely aimed at "ordinary Bible-readers" (p. 3), it seeks to engage questions which everyday Christians may have. It avoids technical language and skims many of the topics normally covered, such as authorship, date, historical



context, and the relationship between Chronicles and history. Instead, it focuses our attention on the significance of the book when read as a part of the entire story of the Bible.

There is some discussion, even amongst scholars who agree that we should read the Bible as a coherent story of salvation history, on the best way to do this. Roughly, two schools of thought have emerged. The first, to which Goldsworthy belongs, is often labelled *Christocentric*. (We shall return to the second, *Christotelic*, school momentarily.) Goldsworthy reads Chronicles as typologically and prophetically referring directly to Jesus. The commentary often pauses for hermeneutical reflection on how to do this. In one place, he encourages us to ask four questions of each passage: “1. What is this text saying? 2. How does this text relate to David and his dynasty? 3. How does this text testify to Christ? 4. What is the meaning of this text for me, and for all those united to Christ by faith?” (p. 157).

As he moves through Chronicles, he applies this method to each section. He first discusses the key ideas of the passage before exploring a biblical-theological theme that arises from it. Each chapter concludes with some questions for reflection. Some samples will give an idea of how this works.

On David’s sin and forgiveness for the census (1 Chr 21:1–22:1, pp. 117–23), Goldsworthy discusses two issues commonly raised by ordinary readers: whether God or Satan incited David (contrast 2 Sam 24:1 with 1 Chr 21:1); and what was sinful about the act of taking a census in the first place? He gives this discussion four pages, followed by two pages on David’s atonement. Goldsworthy devotes the second part of the chapter to exploring the theme of “Fire from heaven, and the glory of the Lord, in biblical context” picking up on 1 Chronicles 21:25. The discussion moves through the entire Bible, covering other similar texts like Exodus 13:21–22, 40:34–38; Leviticus 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; and 2 Chronicles 7:1. It shows how these relate to the ideas of sacrifice and divine presence, and ultimately God’s glory in Christ (Luke 2:9; John 1:14), who was the sacrifice for sin (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:21). The discussion concludes with a note on how God forgave Old Testament believers such as David on the same basis as New Testament believers, because “those who believe in the shadows [of things to come] are accounted by God as believing in the substance” (p. 123).

On Solomon’s greatness (2 Chr 8–9, pp. 202–9), Goldsworthy pays special attention to the international flavour of incidents such as Solomon’s Egyptian wife, King Hiram of Tyre, and the visiting Queen from Sheba. He observes several times the (often noted) “rather accepting attitude towards Solomon’s behaviour” (p. 203). But he focuses on Solomon’s achievements, wealth, and wisdom. He warns that this is not “like a fairy-tale about a virtuous and rich king” (p. 206). Instead, we are to read it as the “climax of the drama of redemption that provides the structure and content of the Old Testament thus far. For those ... who believed God’s promises and lived to see the glories of Solomon’s reign, this was as close as they could come to heaven on earth” (p. 207). Solomon’s kingdom is to be understood as a foretaste of what is being one day accomplished in Christ, including its international element. Following this six-page discussion, Goldsworthy unpacks the theme of “The Nations and Mission in Biblical Context” over three pages. He reflects on how the Jewish (i.e., the Southern Kingdom) focus of Chronicles demonstrates their priority within salvation history (John 4:22; Rom 1:16) but explores how this anticipated international inclusion (Gen 12:3; 18:17–18; 22:17–18; 26:4; 28:13–14; Isa 2:2–4; 55:3–5; Zech 8:20–23). “The Christian mission takes the new temple, through the preached word about Christ, into all the world. Gentile believers in the gospel come to Jesus and thus, as in the Old Testament, to the temple of God” (p. 209).

Goldsworthy achieves his goal of writing an accessible, Christocentric commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles. He succeeds in identifying the questions ordinary and first-time readers tend to ask. And

the thematic discussions move through an array of topics, never becoming repetitive, helping us to think about how the metanarrative of Scripture unfolds and the place of Chronicles within it. The hermeneutical interludes are non-technical and helpful.

One drawback of his approach is that it can feel, at least to me, that Chronicles is being used as a launch point for a series of biblical-theological reflections. By contrast, a more *Christotelic* approach would have sought to understand the book on its own terms before placing it into the context of the whole Bible. There would have been a more sustained reflection on what the book meant to its original audience, its structure, the way it develops its own themes, and the way it tells its story. This would have highlighted the unique contribution of Chronicles to the Biblical story.

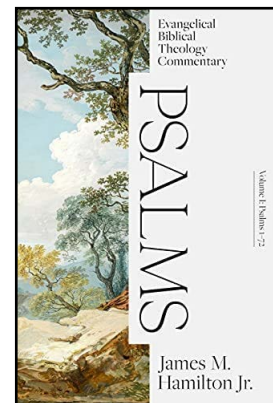
One missed opportunity, for example, is that Goldsworthy does not reflect at any length on the vast array of quotes and allusions that Chronicles makes to other parts of the Old Testament. One might posit that Chronicles is, itself, doing Biblical Theology: it is reading the rest of the Old Testament within an integrated framework that explores God's purposes within Israel's history. I would argue that it does this because it wants to explore the theme of the Kingdom of God within the imperial context of post-exilic Judaism, which, contrary to Goldsworthy's persistent messianic focus, lacked a Davidic king. But Goldsworthy's biblical-theological approach rarely explores the Biblical Theology *within* Chronicles. It favours the larger Biblical Theology *to which Chronicles belongs*. The two perspectives can be complementary, and no commentary can do everything. Whether one judges this as a drawback or a benefit I will leave to the reader.

I would have no hesitation in giving this book to anyone approaching Chronicles for the first time. The uninitiated will find it insightful, stimulating, and encouraging as they tackle a daunting part of the Bible. They should come away having learned much about salvation history and with a good understanding of how they might place the events of Chronicles in that context. It would make a wonderful resource for home groups, especially aided by the study questions at the end of each chapter. Preachers and teachers may also find the book useful, although they will require the use of an additional commentary that is more consistently focussed on Chronicles itself.

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James M. Hamilton Jr. *Psalms*. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021. 2 vols. xxxiii + 677 pp and xxix + 569 pp. £63.99/\$79.99.

Having completed doctoral work on the Psalter, I am frequently asked to recommend a “go-to” commentary on the Psalms. My answer changes frequently and always carries qualifications. Kidner is Christ-centered but too brief (*Psalms*, TOTC 15–16 [London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973–1975]). Goldingay is detailed but too reticent to acknowledge messianic impetus (*Psalms*, BCOTWP [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006–2008]). VanGemeren provides a quality one-volume commentary but is too keen to identify chiasms (*Psalms*, revised ed., EBC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008]). deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner are helpfully provocative but too frequently suggest emending the MT (*Psalms*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015]). Hamilton, however, offers a fresh treatment of the Psalms that maximizes all that is good about the above and minimizes—for the most part—all that is not. This is now the commentary I will recommend.



Lexham’s Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary series endeavors to locate each biblical book within redemptive history and illuminate its unique theological contribution. It claims that the primary contribution of each volume is a “thorough discussion of the most important themes of the biblical book in relation to the canon as a whole” (p. xxvii). Hamilton ably accomplishes this aim. He summarizes the whole commentary this way:

Every individual psalm is a masterpiece, and these individual treasures have been carefully arranged to resonate in relationship to one another, to harmonize when heard together, to echo when their architecture is considered, to reprise and retell as they prophesy and prefigure, and the symphony not only makes its own incomparable music, it sings the story of the rest of the Scriptures as well. (p. xxix)

Four features commend this work. First, Hamilton explicitly treats the Psalter as a carefully organized collection—a unity. He explains, “This commentary seeks to interpret the book of Psalms *as a book*, that is, as a purposefully ordered collection of poems that build on and interpret one another” (p. 3, emphasis original). While this conversation has been ongoing in the academy for four decades, it has not quite filtered down into popular literature on the Psalter—which remains largely consumed with form criticism. These volumes are a significant step towards making the conversation about the canonical shape of the Psalter more accessible. The 88-page introduction further details and defends Hamilton’s approach. Second, Hamilton makes some bold translation choices which, although unconventional, appear justifiable: “Choirmaster” (למנצח) becomes “Preeminent One” (pp. 37–39); “sing praise” (זמר) becomes “psalm”; “offspring” (זרע) becomes “seed”; “anointed one” (משיח) becomes “messiah”; “forever” (עולם) becomes “age”; and “enemy” (אויב) becomes “enmity,” in homage to Genesis 3:15 (pp. 69–70). The purpose of these often-awkward translations is to aid English-only readers to see intertextual links more easily. I think this purpose is achieved. Third, Hamilton has a keen eye for canonical connections, both within the Psalter and across the canon. His instinct to permit Scripture to interpret Scripture and expose for readers the full extent of intertextuality is admirable—and a natural outworking of his high view of Scripture, which in turn results in Hamilton taking the superscriptions seriously. Fourth, each psalm is addressed from several helpful angles:

- I. Overview and Structure
- II. Author's own translation (set in parallel to the Christian Standard Bible)
- III. Context: Verbal and Thematic Links with Surrounding Psalms
- IV. Exposition
- V. Bridge

I found Hamilton's treatment of psalms under these headings satisfactory, although he references scholarship more sparsely here than in the introduction.

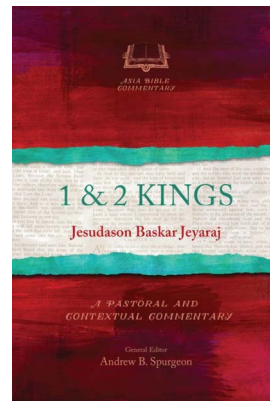
Despite my positivity, I have two reservations. First, there is virtually no discussion on genre or poetic features. Indeed, it is completely absent from the introduction and only sporadically mentioned in the body of the commentary. Commenting on Psalm 1, for example, Hamilton writes: "The psalmist does not say it this way because that is not how concepts are communicated in poetry" (p. 96). The reader, however, is left to turn elsewhere for further explanation of Hebrew poetry. In fairness, Hamilton explicitly states that his focus is the biblical theology of the Psalter—but understanding how Hebrew poetry works is fundamental to understanding the Psalter. To my mind, this is a significant omission and thus weakens the work. Second, Hamilton discerns chiasms in almost every psalm, each book, and the Psalter in its entirety. The chiastic structuring of psalms remains largely unconvincing to me, especially when applied to most psalms, and is perhaps linked to an absence of engaging adequately with poetic features in the expositions.

In sum, Hamilton has produced a landmark commentary on the Psalms. It is by no means the last word, but by placing each psalm in its canonical context Hamilton is introducing the wider Christian community into the conversation concerning the Psalter's shape. (I have a similar aim in my brief article, "Seeing Christ in the Shape of the Psalms," *TGC*, 6 April 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/seeing-christ-shape-psalms/>.) Indeed, Hamilton models what preaching the Psalms in their canonical context might look like. For this distinctive contribution, then, these two volumes should now be the minimum for the preacher's library on the Psalter.

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Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj. *1 & 2 Kings: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*. Asia Bible Commentary. Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2022. xiv + 308 pp. £17.99/\$25.99.

Historical narrative has undergone something of a renaissance on the preaching calendars of many churches in Scotland and elsewhere. Certainly, the wonderful stories are compelling and engaging. However, we suspect that an increasing awareness of the instability characterizing much of the world right now has led some to relearn God's orchestration of history in books such as 1 and 2 Kings. This is something Jeyaraj notes at the outset of the latest volume in the Asia Bible Commentary (ABC) series. He recognizes that the stories of 1 and 2 Kings provide "insights into the socio-political and religious context of Asia today, particularly India" (p. ix), the context out of which he writes this commentary. While this volume is a helpful aid, there are areas it could be developed to assist the reader grasp the narrative flow of Kings.



Jeyaraj begins the commentary with an introductory chapter including details such as book outline, date, and authorship, which he attributes to the Deuteronomist (p. 5). One of the most helpful elements of this introduction is the overview of the various prophets and prophecies which punctuate the narrative of Kings. Although brief, these overviews provide helpful signposts for the reader.

As with other volumes in the series, the author seeks to deal sensitively with the text of Scripture and apply it with nuance and insight from his Asian cultural context. Rather than following a verse-by-verse structure, the commentary proceeds section-by-section. Preceding each section is a brief summation of what is to follow, orientating a reader before they engage with the passage itself. Although at points looking at larger sections can seem hurried, the benefit to the reader is an appreciation of the wider narrative flow.

Many of the spiritual practices of the surrounding nations which are addressed in 1 and 2 Kings seem alien in a secular context. Something Jeyaraj does well is bridge the world of the text to similar practices found across the Indian sub-continent (e.g., fertility cults, pp. 117–18). With the increasing movement of peoples across the world, and the establishment of diaspora communities, these practices also travel. As pastors, church leaders and theologians seek to communicate the gospel of Christ into multi-cultural, pluralistic societies, this will require the acumen of reading OT books such as Kings with an awareness of such practices and their contemporary relevance.

A feature of the ABC series is the short asides, which discuss pastoral or technical details arising from the text. Concerning the healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–27), Jeyaraj pauses to address the matter of “secret Christians” (p. 206). He notes that in many contexts across Asia, following Christ presents the real possibility of open persecution. Since this is just a brief excursus in a commentary on the book of Kings, a lot more can be said. However, we commend the author for not only raising this issue, but also seeking to provide a balanced pastoral response that takes seriously the need to identify with Christ and his church. This is not a distant issue that we can sidestep if we choose to. Coming to a mind about how we disciple and serve contemporary Naamans is a challenge for the church in every corner of the world.

A significant area of weakness we encountered with this work is the lack of engagement with biblical theology. Kings contains several key themes central to the narrative of Scripture, developed and expanded in the NT. For example, the theme of kingship is identified in the introduction (pp. 14–16) but is not fully developed in the commentary proper. Given the prominence of the kingdom



of God in Scripture—detailing God’s rule, his people’s rebellion, and Christ’s redemption—it should be an essential component for interpreting and applying the message of Kings. However, this wider perspective incorporating the role of the kingdom of God does not receive developed consideration. Take, for instance, the final scene of 2 Kings, the release of Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 25:27–30). It would seem to be an odd detail to drop in at the end of the narrative if it is not significant for what is to come. Read canonically, this odd turn of events points to God’s sovereignty over his people. However, this is not explicitly developed in the commentary (p. 305). Greater consideration of the difference Christ makes in interpreting and applying these narratives would enhance this work.

While there are details in this commentary that could be developed or expanded, this volume once again highlights the growing wealth of scholars writing from the Asian context. Jeyaraj’s work on the book of Kings is concise and readable. The inclusion of anecdotes and illustrations from the Indian sub-continent provide helpful contours in reading the text. Pastors, Bible teachers, and seminary students will benefit from incorporating this work into their study and preparation.

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Brent A. Strawn. *Lies My Preacher Told Me: An Honest Look at the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021. xii + 116 pp. £12.00/\$15.99.

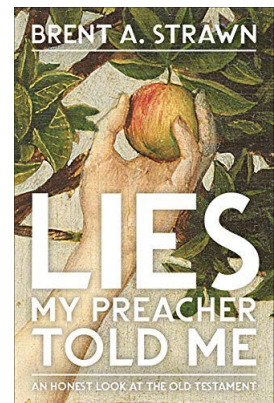
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This book is aimed at laity and addresses several popular misconceptions about the Old Testament. Brent Strawn is a professor at Duke University and the author of many books, including *The Old Testament is Dying* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). Strawn borrows the idea for this book from James Loewen (*Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* [New York: Simon & Schuster], ix), and argues against intentionally propagating erroneous beliefs about the Old Testament. The volume consists of twelve chapters, including the Introduction, Ten Mistruths about the Old Testament (with discussion questions at the end of each chapter), the Conclusion, and suggested reading for further study.

In the Introduction the author points out that erroneous beliefs about the Old Testament come from people’s ignorance or superficial knowledge about the issue. Well-meaning preachers and Sunday School teachers spread “mistruths” about the Old Testament rather than intentionally lying about God’s word as “lying implies intentional misrepresentation of the truth” (p. 1). Yet, these mistruths are hard to expose and get rid of because they are “far more insidious and intractable than a bald-faced lie” (p. 2).

“Mistruth 1” addresses the belief that the OT is “someone else’s mail” (p. 3); that is, these books were not written with Christians in mind, and, therefore, have little to say to contemporary believers. The author debunks this mistruth by pointing out that the New Testament writers saw the OT as “their own mail” and believed that everything said to Israel was appropriate and applicable to Christians (p. 7).

“Mistruth 2” exposes the belief that “the Old Testament is a boring history book” (p. 7), which comes from a lack of familiarity with the OT material. Strawn argues that history writing was different



in the ancient world, and the biblical writers were much more interested in theology—the way God acted in and interacted with the world he created (p. 16). The OT has a lot more to offer than boring history to those who are eager to read and learn.

“Mistruth 3” deals with the idea of the OT as “permanently obsolete” (p. 19). The author addresses several erroneous beliefs contributing to this mistruth and demonstrates how ignorance and/or lack of familiarity with the OT material creates a wrong understanding of the OT’s insignificance for the Christian life. Using examples of Jesus’s words about the OT’s importance and Marcion’s heresy, Strawn demonstrates the OT’s relevance for contemporary believers (pp. 27–28).

“Mistruth 4” examines the idea of the God encountered being “*really* mean” (p. 31) due to instances of God’s wrath. To undermine this mistruth, Strawn proves the continuity of God’s nature and actions in both testaments, which is foundational to the orthodox belief in the unity of the Trinity. Divine wrath is aimed at injustice and sin in the world because God cares about his creatures (p. 37).

“Mistruth 5” addresses the belief that the OT is “hyper-violent” (p. 41). While the OT has instances of graphic human violence, the author avers that they do not make the OT “violent.” The creation story and the visions of the future in the OT portray peace and the absence of conflict. Strawn reframes the issue of violence and human inclination for it in both testaments, acknowledging its presence and encouraging serious wholistic engagement with difficult biblical passages (p. 52).

“Mistruth 6” deals with “unhelpful historical assertions,” like authorship of the biblical books. Examining the attribution of the Psalms to David, the author argues that the meaning of the text does not depend on its authorship but on the text itself. While the historical background is important, it is erroneous to attach too much significance to it (p. 63).

“Mistruth 7” exposes the idea of the OT not being “spiritually enriching” (p. 65). Lack of knowledge of the OT material in comparison to the NT texts results in one’s inability to find spiritual enrichment in those books. Examining the words of the Apostles’ Creed, Strawn brings to the fore the significance of spiritual enrichment found in the OT texts (p. 71).

“Mistruth 8” address the lack of the OT’s practical relevance for Christian life. Lack of familiarity with the OT as compared to the NT contributes to this belief. The practical relevance of NT texts is usually connected to exhortations and admonitions, as found in the words of Jesus and Paul. Strawn debunks this mistruth by providing examples of both, and many other instructions from the OT law, prophecy, and wisdom and thus reframing the concept of biblical relevance for contemporary life (p. 82).

“Mistruth 9” examines the idea of the OT Law being “a burden, impossible to keep” (p. 83). The author exposes this belief by defining the OT Law and the theological considerations of God the lawgiver (p. 85) and providing the testimony of the OT writers, who profess their delight and joy in God’s Law (p. 86). The OT Law is essential as a means of maintaining the right relationship between God and his creation (p. 90).

“Mistruth 10” investigates the idea that the OT is “all about Jesus” (p. 93). Using several NT passages, Strawn demonstrates “the sufficiency of the OT all by itself” and its relevance to Jesus (p. 97). He clarifies that the entire bible includes more material than just “about Jesus” as it also talks about God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the community of the faithful. Strawn states that the OT is “a primary witness to the God that Christians know as Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (p. 103).

The Conclusion reinforces the idea that “truth about Scripture *matters*” (p. 105). Neglect of the OT has led to anti-Semitism, misunderstanding of God’s justice and mercy, and a general watering-down



and over-simplification of the biblical message. Mistruths and “half-truths” hinder the church’s mission of preparing Christians to do God’s work in the world (p. 108).

This book boldly, and with good humor, addresses deep-seated erroneous Christian beliefs about the OT and provides ways to critically engage them. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter make this volume a good option for a group study at home or church, although the closed-ended questions limit the freedom of readers’ reflection on the material as they presuppose what readers should think. Nonetheless, this book provides a healthy corrective to common misconceptions about the OT and offers a good perspective from which to approach the text.

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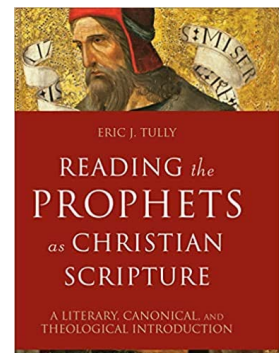
Eric J. Tully. *Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction*. Reading Christian Scripture 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xvi + 416. £44.39/\$49.95.

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Eric Tully, associate professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, focuses his research on the prophets, particularly Hosea. He is thus well equipped to write an introductory textbook on the Latter Prophets. The book serves as a textbook for college or seminary students studying the prophets, and the majority of the work serves up the standard information about each of the books. The author argues from a perspective that is overtly evangelical, sees the unity of the canon, and is biblically conservative in its scholarship.

Tully begins the book with the theological and historical contexts of the prophets. Theologically, the author focuses on the context of the covenants, for they form the “theological backbone of the Prophets” (p. 36). He examines God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and the promise of a new covenant. Tully concludes, “[The prophets] are preachers who *apply* the previous covenants to their listeners or readers, as well as *reveal* the new covenant that God will accomplish in the future” (p. 36; emphasis original). Next, the author examines the historical context of the prophets by focusing on the time of the monarchy through to the post-exilic period. This chapter helpfully shows how the prophets are constantly referring to events relating to Assyria and Babylon. Moreover, a basic knowledge of the division of the kingdom of Israel is necessary to even understand who “Israel,” “Ephraim,” or “Judah” might refer to in a particular book.

The next part of the work explains OT prophets in general. This overview includes what a prophet did, who the non-writing prophets were, what false prophets were, what other ancient Near Eastern nations thought about prophecy, what the prophets’ message was, and their strategies for communication. In terms of the prophetic message, throughout the book Tully uses a helpful grid of five phases the prophets may use (p. 126). These include looking to the past (how the people have sinned), looking to the near future of judgment, looking to the near future of restoration, looking to an eschatological future of judgment, and looking to an eschatological future of restoration.



The third part, making up over half of the work, proceeds through each of the prophetic books. In each book, Tully gives an “orientation,” providing the basic facts and overview of each book. Next is “exploration,” in which he goes through the biblical book section by section, explaining each part’s meaning. He ends with “implementation,” showing how the message of the book applies to Christians today. He also lists several discussion questions for each chapter. In his examination of each prophet, Tully takes a conservative view of the scholarly issues. For example, he believes in the single authorship of Isaiah, the traditional dating of Daniel and Zechariah, and that Jonah was swallowed by a large sea creature. The textbook also contains relevant illustrations and frequent “sidebars” about difficult questions or how a text relates to the NT.

Overall, Tully’s work is interesting, helpful, and useful. The book could have been improved by shortening parts 1–2, which precede the examination of the prophetic books. As a student, it would be difficult to have to wade through 150 pages before getting to the prophets themselves. Though the covenants are important, that section, especially, could have been briefly summarized in a few pages rather than taking up 26 pages.

The subtitle also raises a question with its claim that the book is a “literary, canonical, and theological” introduction. This reader expected that, as a “canonical” study, Tully would examine intertextual links within the prophets and the OT, such as a canonical reading of the twelve, or intertextuality between Ezekiel and Leviticus. Such exploration is absent, notwithstanding a few brief references to the Twelve. Tully succeeds in showing how prophetic texts are fulfilled and quoted in the New Testament, an aspect many readers will appreciate, but that is not exactly “canonical reading.” Moreover, the author does discuss standard issues of dating and authorship, so what was distinct about this work as a “literary” introduction?

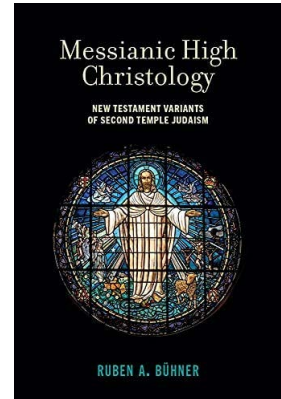
The main difference between this work and the many other OT/Prophet introductions is that Tully writes from an unabashedly evangelical perspective. He examines the prophets in light of Christ (e.g., Hosea, p. 262). He is even evangelistic, ending his chapter on Zephaniah by saying, “seek him now” (p. 350)! In this way, the textbook can be very useful at many colleges, seminaries, and even churches. This is the first textbook to recommend when wanting students to learn about the prophetic books from a biblical viewpoint. Hoffmeier recently published *Prophets of Israel: Walking the Ancient Paths* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), which stands out for its teaching on the historical context. McConville’s work *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), gives a good overview of scholarly issues. This work by Tully provides some of both, yet with a focus on reading the prophets from a Christian perspective. Thus, it is a welcome contribution to the field.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Ruben A. Bühner. *Messianic High Christology: New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021. x + 234 pp. \$54.99.

“All the ideas about Christ are old; the new is Jesus.” It’s Daniel Boyarin’s line, but it could be Bühner’s thesis (cited pp. 93 and 194). Bühner, postdoctoral researcher for NT studies at the Universities of Zurich and Tübingen, argues in this follow-up to his award-winning dissertation *Hohe Messianologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020) that “most of [the] superhuman characteristics that were adopted in the earliest New Testament Christologies cannot be considered genuine ‘Christian’ innovations.” Instead, “we should depict the emerging New Testament high Christologies primarily as variants of Second Temple messianism” (p. 185; see, similarly, pp. 62–63, 121, 142, 170–71, 181). Such a provocative thesis is, of course, out of step with much contemporary scholarship, which says just the opposite, namely that Christian claims about Jesus, especially exalted claims about his divinity, set Christianity and Judaism apart.



To prove his thesis, Bühner shows that early Christianity’s most exalted claims about Jesus parallel messianic claims already made in Jewish literature. He takes five NT texts that include “superhuman” or “high” claims about Jesus—i.e., claims that modern scholars routinely insist distinguish Christology from messianism (p. 20)—and discusses them in the body of his book: Philippians 2:6–11 (ch. 1); Mark 14:61–65 (ch. 2); Luke 1:26–38 (ch. 3); Revelation 4–5 (ch. 4) and John 1:1–18 (ch. 5). For each, Bühner identifies their superhuman claim(s) and then discusses parallels within Jewish messianic discourse—i.e., Jewish texts describing an “eschatological figure of salvation” (p. 6). The results are fascinating. He notes that both discourses—Christian *and* Jewish—describe messiahs who are

1. *exalted above other heavenly beings* (cf. Phil 2:10b and Rev 5:3–5 with 4Q491c 7, 11, in the light of 4Q431 14, and 11QMelch II 14, also II 10);
2. *given the divine name* (cf. Phil 2:9b and John 1:1, 18 [and 20:28] with 11QMelch II 10 and Ps 45 LXX);
3. *understood to be the referent of OT Yahweh-texts* (cf. Phil 2:10a [Isa 45:23] with 4Q431c 8, 14 [Exod 15:11; Isa 44:7; Ps 89:7]; 11QMelch II 9 [Isa 61:2]; and 4 Ezra 13:12 [Isa 66:20]);
4. *of preexistent, heavenly origin* (i.e., existing in heaven before the messianic age; cf. Phil 2:6–8 with 11QMelch II 11 and 4 Ezra 7:27–28; 12:52b; 13:26, 51f; see also the allusion to Ps 109 LXX in Mark 14:62 and, thus, cf. Ps 109:3 LXX with 1 Enoch 48:2f [cf. with Jubilees 2:2–11]);
5. *described in theophanic terms* (cf. Mark 14:62b with 4 Ezra 13:1–13a, including the transference in 13:10 of Dan 7:10a from Yahweh to a messianic figure; see also 1 Enoch 52:6, especially in the light of Ps 97:5 and Micah 1:3ff);
6. *divinely-begotten* (cf. Luke 1:26–38, specifically vv. 32, 35 and 37, with Gen 18:14 and also Gen 21:1ff as interpreted in Philo, *Questions on Genesis* 1.3.18; *Legum allegoriae* 3.219; Jub. 16:12; also 19:12; and Luke 1:27, 31, 33 with Isa 7:13–14, 17 LXX, esp. in the light of

- the recognizably-messianic Ps 109 LXX and, spec., v. 3, and 1QSa II 11–12; see also “son of God” in Pss 2, 89; 4Q246 II 1; also 4Q174; 4Q177; 4 Ezra 7:28–29; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9);
7. *worshipped as divine* (cf. Rev 5:12–13, especially in the light of 4:8, 11 and 19:10; 22:8–9, with 1 Enoch 48:5; 62:9)
  8. *seated on God’s throne* (cf. Rev 5:6, especially in the light of 3:21, 7:17, and 22:1, 3, with 1 Enoch 45:3; 62:2, esp. in the light of 47:3; 60:2; 62:3 and 6); and
  9. *uniquely powerful in speech* (cf. John 1:1, especially in the light of 3:34, 10:43, 15:3, with 1QSb V, 4Q461; 4Q285; Psalms of Solomon 17; 1 Enoch 49:1–4; Testament of Judah 24, which reflect on Isa 11:4).

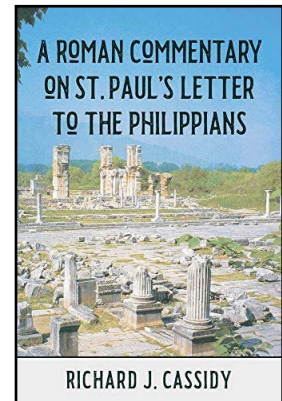
Now, in one sense, overlap like this should not be too surprising, considering the “pressure” exerted on both discourses by the OT itself, as Bühner’s attention to Psalms 45 and 110 and Isaiah 7 and 9 attests. But neither should differences surprise us, and not simply the fact that early Christians claimed *Jesus* was the messiah. As Bühner notes, “all four Gospels within the New Testament present Jesus’ claim of divinity as the reason he is charged with blasphemy” (p. 192). This charge, however, testifies less to Christianity’s radical departure from Judaism and more to debates already-existing within Judaism about what was and was not acceptable messianic discourse (see pp. 171–72; also pp. 75, 119–20, 191–92). What’s more, even Christianity’s real nova should be seen as *developments of* rather than *deviations from* Judaism. That is, while it was only Christians who claimed a messiah who was uncreated, a co-worker in creation, and the incarnation of a fully-divine being (see John 1:1, 3, 14), they made this claim by freshly-combining messianic expectations with other, *already-existing* traditions (i.e., the Jewish wisdom tradition; see pp. 147–72). Thus, as Bühner notes, “even what is probably the most developed Logos Christology of the Johannine prologue must be assessed as only a variant of existing Jewish messianic concepts” (p. 187). After all, “if one labeled an idea ‘part of Jewish messianism’ only where there were clear parallels to *all* of its aspects in earlier models, then no early Jewish messianic expectation would pass such a test” (p. 186).

One need not agree with every exegetical decision Bühner reaches to benefit from his careful, thoroughly-researched, and far-reaching thesis. I can wonder, for example, about his purely functional reading of *μορφή θεοῦ* in Philippians 2:6 (p. 30) or about his failure to mention Psalm 102 [101 LXX], not least its use in Hebrews 1:10–12, in his discussion of the *sui generis* messianism of John’s prologue (see pp. 155–57). The same goes for Bühner’s decision to side-step whether “superhuman” claims about the messiah are meant to put him on the divine side of the register in each and every text (see pp. 10–20). Bühner is correct in noting that such decisions were beyond the purview of his study, turning as they do on the larger and more complicated questions of whether and how each individual text surveyed articulates the difference between God and everyone else. That said, had he taken this step, it would shed light on the even more fundamental question of whether “superhuman” messianic language was used in each discourse *for the same purposes* and *with the same meaning*. Perhaps he will take this up as his next project. I hope he does.

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Richard J. Cassidy. *A Roman Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. New York: Herder & Herder, 2020. viii + 219 pp. £36.69/\$39.95.

Richard Cassidy's name should already be familiar to those invested in studying Paul's letter to the Philippians, since his 2001 monograph on Paul's imprisonments (*Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonments and the Letters of St. Paul* [New York: Herder & Herder, 2001]) treats the letter extensively. Still, a full-scale treatment of the epistle from Cassidy's unique and powerful perspective was something that many scholars have been eagerly awaiting. Unfortunately, Cassidy's *Roman Commentary* doesn't quite rise to meet those expectations. At many points in the work, Cassidy's insights are astute and provocative, so there is much to be admired in the present volume. The problem is that Cassidy's overall treatment of the letter lacks consistent engagement and leaves wide swaths of Paul's statements untouched apart from the slimmest of interaction. Hence, the value of Cassidy's contribution really does remain solely in his fronting of the *Roman* elements of the letter (as is indicated in the title of the volume, where one should pay close attention to the "Roman" adjective modifying what otherwise might be considered a full "Commentary"), particularly the twin issues of the Roman imperial system and the Roman slave system. But if we can get past this lack of a total engagement with Philippians, then we can indeed marvel at the provocative claims offered in Cassidy's volume.



A couple of particularly unique (and one might say radical) claims about the letter emerge early on in the commentary. First of all, Cassidy draws on Philippians 1:14, in conjunction with evidence from Pliny's letters about a neighboring Macedonian town, to claim that the community of Christ-followers at Philippi is growing "in epidemic-like fashion" at the time that Paul writes to them (p. 27). This seems to go against the tide of scholars positing a much more meager and slight depiction of the number of Christ adherents in this community (Richard S. Ascough argues for somewhere around twenty—"Response: Broadening the Socioeconomic and Religious Context at Philippi," in *People Beside Paul*, edited by Joseph A. Marchal [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015], 100). Next, Cassidy intriguingly claims that Paul's intention in "magnifying Christ" through his upcoming Roman trial (Phil 1:20) is to press for *Jesus's* acquittal (from his past, wrongful execution), rather than to push for the apostle's own acquittal from the crime of *maiestas* ("treason") for which he himself is on trial (p. 59). Finally—and this connects to the author's view of the temporal and geographical provenance for the letter, Cassidy believes that Paul's situation in Rome after a long period of imprisonment has given the apostle an inside view, by way of his proximity to the imperial guard, of Nero's atrocious character and also the horrible situation of slaves in the Roman world. This new perspective causes Paul in this last letter he writes to change his stance towards these twin aspects of the Roman world, causing him to fiercely counter the claims of the emperor (even to the extent of refusing to accept financial support in the form of coins that bore the emperor's visage) and to boldly envision slaves as full members of the Christian community. Cassidy nicely argues that what Paul took up for treatment in Philemon at the private level of discussing how one particular Christian slave should be treated, the apostle now takes up at a more universal level in Philippians, discussing how all Christian slaves should be treated and how they all possess heavenly citizenship (p. 51).

Cassidy also makes the interesting claim that Paul intended for the letter to be performed before the Philippian community in a clandestine setting. The setting needed to be clandestine because of

the inherent risks involved in countering the imperial dogma that such a performance would have highlighted. In addition to careful intonation coupled with probable explanation from the bearers of the letter (Epaphroditus, Timothy, etc.), Cassidy envisions the community co-opting Christian actors to perform the letter, even at times chanting sections in a way that would have recognizably lampooned the emperor and glorified Christ in his place (the chanting section is for Phil 3:18–20). This chanting of dispraise in Philippians 3:19, Cassidy claims, is specifically meant to respond to Nero’s sham claims to divinity, such that it is Nero and the officials in his government whom Paul denigrates as “enemies of the cross of Christ” in 3:18.

As I indicated above, despite the problem that much of Philippians is left untreated in the commentary, that which Cassidy does manage to discuss provides ample fodder for fresh engagements with the letter. For instance, while I appreciate the interesting claim that in addition to the apostle’s influence upon his Roman guards Paul may have also been *receiving* information (about Nero) *from* them, I still find it hard to agree that “Nero and his confederates” (p. 64) are the ones over whom Paul weeps as “enemies” of Christ’s cross. It would seem to me that Paul is so emotionally distraught over these individuals (and I think Paul is legitimately sorrowful for them, rather than shedding “tears of frustration” as Cassidy has it, p. 122) because they are somehow connected to the Christian community. I find it hard to see why Paul would be so distraught about a Roman emperor who fails to accept the way of thinking characterized by the cross—why should he? But for a group of believers to claim adherence to Christ but then to shun the very thing that characterizes him most (“even death on a cross,” Phil 2:8), this would understandably be cause for lament.

On the whole, Cassidy provides a host of unique claims that force readers of Philippians to rethink key elements of the epistle. His facility with the Roman background materials (which comes through in the commentary itself as well as in the numerous appendices at the end of the book) allows for him to uncover new and welcome insights into Paul’s ideas in the letter.

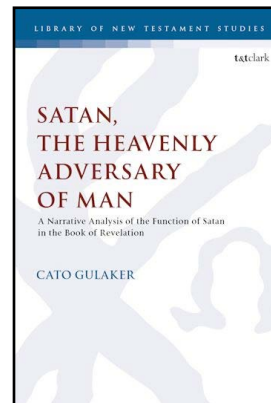
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Cato Gulaker. *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man: A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation*. Library of New Testament Studies 638. London: T&T Clark, 2021. xi + 255 pp. £28.99/\$39.95.

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In this monograph, Gulaker examines the role of Satan in the book of Revelation. Gulaker is most interested in the following questions: What is Satan’s role in relation to God? Is Satan best described as God’s dualistic apocalyptic enemy, a hopeless foil, or God’s heavenly servant? In other words, are Satan’s actions fully in concert with God’s will or opposed to it? Gulaker unsurprisingly concludes that Satan is the heavenly adversary of humanity in the book of Revelation. However, Gulaker also insists that this adversarial work is not opposed to God; rather, Satan is faithfully—for the most part—working in concert with God’s will. This latter conclusion is unlikely, and the below will analyze some of his potential missteps.





In chapter 1, Gulaker reviews the scholarly positions of Satan and his role in the book of Revelation. He also discusses the roles of Satan found in the Old Testament, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Jubilees. Gulaker finds that most scholars view Satan as an apocalyptic and cosmic enemy of God instead of as God's servant. Therefore, Gulaker argues for why Satan should be viewed as God's servant instead of God's enemy. Gulaker's primary evidence for this view is Satan's role in the book of Job, where Satan is allowed to be an adversary against a righteous individual (pp. 4–5). However, it is unlikely that Satan is a "faithful" servant in opposing Job.

Gulaker then describes his method of narrative criticism in chapter 2, and he seeks to do it in a way that foregrounds Satan's activity. This decision may seem sensible, given the topic of his book, but the problem is that Satan is not a primary character. Gulaker recognizes that Satan is a secondary character in theory (p. 44), but Gulaker's analysis emphasizes Satan's activity in practice. In other words, practically speaking, Satan becomes a primary character in Gulaker's narrative of the book of Revelation. This narrative shift leads to Gulaker emphasizing the sifting of humanity as "the overarching narrative plot of the book" (p. 46) instead of the ultimate victory of Jesus. Alternatively, Gulaker views humanity as the primary protagonist in the book of Revelation (p. 230).

Gulaker then focuses on the texts of Revelation 2–3 (ch. 3), Revelation 12–13 (ch. 4), and Revelation 20 (ch. 5), followed by a brief conclusion (ch. 6). Gulaker provides some useful insights on various details while engaging these key texts. For example, he notices that the four beasts of Daniel 7 have a total of seven heads and the fourth beast has ten horns (compare Rev 12:3; 13:1). Moreover, Gulaker supplies helpful summaries of scholarly positions in the footnotes along with concise criticisms; for example, see his assessment of divine passives (p. 112 n. 53). Gulaker also reads Revelation 2–3 as a horizontal perspective of the narrative and Revelation 12–13 as a vertical perspective, which is a welcome invitation for further inquiry.

Nevertheless, Gulaker also makes a couple of key exegetical missteps. Most prominently, he refuses to acknowledge that Satan's moniker "the ancient snake" (Rev 12:9; 20:2) is an allusion to the snake of Genesis 3 (pp. 129–34). Instead, he perplexingly concludes that it is "best interpreted as an implied known allusion to the beasts of Daniel 7 and the dragons/sea serpents of the Hebrew Bible" (pp. 133–34). Gulaker rightly fears that an allusion to Genesis 3 would weaken his argument that Satan is not acting as a cosmological (and primeval) enemy of God in the book of Revelation. However, the weight of evidence against Gulaker's conclusion is overwhelming for several reasons: (1) Gulaker must dismiss the Johannine view (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8) of a more "autonomous" Satan (p. 133) as a later "development" (pp. 14–15) without recognizing that the book of Revelation is considered Johannine by many; (2) Gulaker misses 2 Corinthians 11:3 (compare 11:14)—and too quickly disregards Romans 16:20 in a footnote—when he comments that Paul never refers to Satan as the serpent of Genesis 3 (p. 130); and (3) Revelation 12:9 clearly alludes to Genesis 3:15 because "the ancient snake" expresses enmity towards the woman, her male child, and the rest of "her seed" (Rev 12:4–5, 17). Moreover, on a more technical note, Gulaker does not recognize that "those who dwell upon the earth" refers only to nonbelievers in Revelation 3:10 (pp. 83, 86, 230–31). In some places he acknowledges that "those who dwell upon the earth" are separate from the saints in the book of Revelation (pp. 173, 197, 218), but he then assumes that the saints are included among "those who dwell upon the earth" in 3:10. This passage then mistakenly becomes important for his arguments that the sifting of humanity is an "overarching narrative plot of the book" (p. 46) and that Satan is God's faithful servant for this purpose.

Gulaker's book could prove profitable for those who are studying either the role of Satan in the Bible or the passages of Revelation 2–3, Revelation 12, or Revelation 20. Nevertheless, his above perspectives limit the overall usefulness of this study.

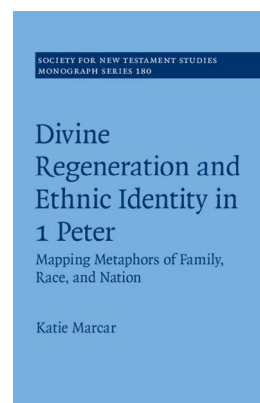
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Katie Marcar. *Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter: Mapping Metaphors of Family, Race, and Nation*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 180. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2022. 321 pp. £75.00/\$99.99.

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In this monograph based on her Durham University doctoral research, Katie Marcar contends that in 1 Peter, “the ascription of believers’ ethnic identity in 2:9–10 is founded on the complex metaphor of divine regeneration and its familial entailments” (p. 1). Her work especially seeks to advance Petrine scholarship past four “pitfalls” that characterized past studies of regeneration in 1 Peter: (1) being too broad in scope; (2) over-harmonizing 1 Peter with the Gospels or Pauline Epistles; (3) speculating about background influences; and (4) “not fully appreciat[ing] the gendered aspects of the Petrine imagery” (pp. 3–4). To accomplish these things, Marcar adopts “a fresh methodology” combining the sociological study of ethnicity with metaphor studies in order to apply them to 1 Peter (p. 6).



The first two chapters situate this book within these two fields, respectively. Applying sociological insights on ethnicity to 1 Peter is appropriate because “within the New Testament, Christians are *explicitly* described as an ethnic group only in 1 Peter” (p. 7). Based on the previous work of sociologist Anthony Smith and its application to 1 Peter by David Horrell, Marcar provides a robust definition of ethnicity so that she may argue, “1 Peter casts Christian identity in terms of ethnicity, and divine descent [regeneration] is the cornerstone on which this construction rests” (p. 14). Marcar’s argument, then, is two-pronged: (1) Christians are of a distinct ethnicity in 1 Peter, and (2) divine regeneration is the source of Christians’ distinct ethnicity. Divine regeneration in 1 Peter is what requires Marcar to use metaphor studies, since spiritual regeneration uses physical generation metaphorically. A metaphor “transfer[s] meaning from a source domain to a target domain” (p. 30). Marcar identifies metaphors related to ethnic identity in 1 Peter by following the Pragglejaz Group’s Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), the first step of which is to “read the entire text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning” (p. 45). She thus provides her interpretation of 1 Peter in chapter 3. Then, in chapters 4–7, she interprets ethnic identity metaphors in 1 Peter “within their textual, linguistic, cultural, and theological context through a robust historical-critical study of Jewish and early Christian traditions” (p. 32).

In chapter 4, Marcar first defends her thesis that divine re-begetting gives Christians a new ethnic identity, based on divine regeneration, which is prominent in 1 Peter 1:3–5. Marcar develops Paul Achtemeier’s insight that “rebirth and rebegetting are different concepts; one is gendered feminine, the other masculine—1 Peter speaks of divine begetting, not divine rebirth” (p. 64). Divine begetting importantly portrays God as Christians’ Father. With God as Father, Christians have an ethnicity distinct from non-Christians, who do not have God as Father. Marcar helpfully points out that divine



regeneration is a concept unique to New Testament documents among Second Temple Jewish texts: “God never re-begets anything in pre-Christian Jewish literature” (p. 65). Within the New Testament, Peter shares a theology of divine regeneration with Johannine literature (pp. 86–100). In 1 Peter 1:3, Jesus’s resurrection is the basis of divine regeneration, whereby God becomes the Father of Christians. The Fatherhood of God gives Christians an incomparable inheritance.

Chapter 5 investigates the importance of God’s seed begetting Christians anew in 1 Peter 1:23–25. The specific term for seed, σπορά, “is unusual,” but may be present because “σπορά makes a theologically loaded pun with διασπορά,” (p. 153). This wordplay reinforces Marcar’s claim that divine regeneration has ethnic implications.

Chapter 6 studies the narratival metaphor of growth in 1 Peter 2:1–3. Having been begotten anew, Christians should “like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Pet 2:2 ESV). These verses illustrate how “some complex metaphors can imply a series of events, or narrative” (p. 41). They also illustrate that the gender of a metaphor’s source domain need not match that of its target domain. God is masculine, but these verses apply feminine imagery to him metaphorically. Marcar shows that the application of feminine imagery to God is not unprecedented in Jewish literature prior to 1 Peter. Furthermore, “the act of breastfeeding had ethnic implications,” so these verses support Marcar’s argument that by divine regeneration, God has given Christians a new ethnic identity (p. 170).

In chapter 7, Marcar’s argument climaxes with the culmination of the first half of 1 Peter in 1 Peter 2:4–10. In these verses, Peter progresses from describing Christians as God’s household, to God’s house (that is, temple), to God’s people. “Christian identity has many of the markers of ethnic identity, but this is a special kind of ethnic identity seen through the prism of election, holiness, and divine relationship” (p. 231). The culminating nature of 1 Peter 2:4–10 leads naturally into the synthesis that Marcar provides in chapter 8. She distills her investigation of metaphors contributing to Christians’ new ethnic identity in 1 Peter into three “systematic metaphors.” First, “Christian membership is belonging to a sojourning nation.” Second, “Christian membership is being begotten anew and growing up in God’s family.” Third, “God’s family is an ethnic group” (p. 263, emphasis removed).

Much commends this monograph. Marcar succeeds in substantiating her primary argument: “the divine regeneration metaphor is at the heart of 1 Peter” (p. 259). She has explicated its prevalence in the letter’s first chapter (1 Pet 1:3–5, 22–25) and the implications of it, which Peter explores in 1 Peter 2:1–10. Her first two chapters on the sociological study of ethnicity and metaphor studies are apt introductions to those vast fields and accessible for her primary audience, New Testament scholars. Her proposed structure for the body of 1 Peter into two “halves,” 1:3–2:10 and 2:11–5:11 is convincing. Her exegesis of texts in 1 Peter is even-handed and erudite.

Despite these strengths, the book does have one pertinent weakness: it neglects the development of ethnic identity metaphors in 1 Peter 2:11–5:11. Such is understandable given Marcar’s focus on divine regeneration as the controlling metaphor (and divine regeneration is most prevalent in 1:3–2:10), but Marcar occasionally suggests that her book’s scope will include 1 Peter 2:11–5:11 (pp. 61, 259). She does include ten family metaphors from 1 Peter 2:11–5:11 in figure 8.1, but she does not develop most of them to any degree (pp. 256–57).

This weakness, nevertheless, does not detract from this book’s value to New Testament scholars. Any future studies of 1 Peter 1:3–5, 22–25; and 2:1–10 must interact with Marcar’s exegesis of these

texts. Similarly, any future work on metaphors in 1 Peter or other New Testament text, which were outside the scope of this monograph, will find it a helpful resource and dialogue partner.

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Steve Walton. *Reading Acts Theologically*. Library of New Testament Studies 661. London: T&T Clark, 2022. viii + 269 pp. £85.00/\$115.00.

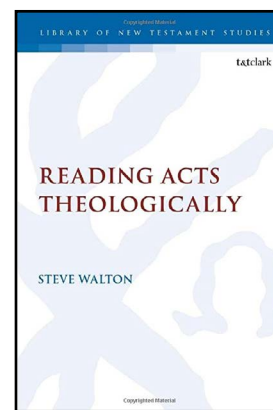
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Steve Walton is a leading scholar on Acts, who is presently writing the Word Biblical Commentary on Luke's second installment. *Reading Acts Theologically* brings together twelve previously published essays that are written from a sympathetic, integrated, "theological" perspective on Acts. Added to this volume is an opening essay, not previously published, on what it means to read Acts theologically.

The book divides into three sections. Part 1 ("Looking at Acts") deals with issues of prolegomena to reading Acts theologically. This includes the opening chapter focusing on what it means to read Acts theologically (and presumably helps explain the book's title). For Walton, to read the Bible theologically means to read the texts as Scripture, and asks about "the central topics of Scripture, namely God, and God's engagement with humanity and the world" (p. 4). This marks a welcome break from the more minimalistic historical-critical approach from the past few hundred years, as Walton himself observes (pp. 4–5). To read the Bible theologically aims for a scriptural worldview and lifestyle that accords with it (p. 5). Further, Walton cautions against allegorical readings of Scripture. He affirms the importance of the Rule of Faith, which is a faithful summary of Scripture, even as it is subject to the Scriptures (pp. 6–7). Walton then applies this approach to Acts, stating that he will read Acts sympathetically with a hermeneutic of love, seeking to listen to the text as carefully as possible (p. 8). This is an approach to applaud. Chapter 2 argues that Acts is primarily about God, which is based in no small measure on the sentence and clause subjects in Acts. Chapter 3 addresses Luke as a narrative theologian; here Walton identifies himself first of all as a theologian and person of Christian faith who happens to be a NT scholar (p. 31). This deserves a hearty "Amen."

Part 2 ("The Believing Communities and Their World") focuses mainly on issues facing the early believers in Acts, such as the role of the Temple, whether they practiced an early form of "communism" (they did not), and the relationship of church and state (esp. chs. 8–9). Part 3 ("Theological Themes in Acts") focuses on issues of Christology, cosmology, and anthropology in Acts. In terms of Christology, Walton appreciatively follows the divine identity Christology espoused by Richard Bauckham. Walton concludes that Acts has a high, divine Christology, while also affirming that Jesus is truly human. Walton also rightly questions those who downplay the reality of the ascension (interacting, e.g., with Strauss, Bultmann, and Dunn; see pp. 163–64).

Walton's collection of essays makes numerous contributions to the study of Acts. The footnotes provide a great deal of help for students or scholars seeking to find the leading voice on a range of topics. Walton also raises awareness of debated issues in the study of Acts, while consistently coming



to exegetically sound conclusions and guiding readers through difficult issues. For example, he provides sane guidance on how to understand the apparently conflicting approaches to the temple in Acts (that is, whether the early followers of the Way did or did not view the Temple positively, seen for example in the different approaches to the question from Stephen and Paul). Walton explains that Acts recounts a salvation-historical shift, and it takes time for this process to be worked out (p. 87).

This volume is a solid work of NT scholarship, revealing a keen awareness of the historical and literary context of Acts. Where it is sometimes less persuasive is when theological claims are made without sufficient interaction with systematic and historical theology. To be clear, Walton defines what it means to read Acts “theologically” in chapter 1, and he does not intend to write a systematic theological work. His theologically-inclined approach is welcome for a work of NT scholarship, but the parameters of his own method limit his ability to engage some of the trickier theological issues he broaches. For example, as important as the Rule of Faith is for reading the Bible, it was not the final word to address later theological controversies, particularly with respect to the divinity of the Son and the relationship of his person and natures (e.g., Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism). We therefore also need to be informed by later theological articulations that addressed even more precisely theological questions pertaining to God and Christ (so, e.g., Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon). In this respect, Walton’s turn-of-phrase “God-in-Jesus” (e.g., pp. 24, 197, 206) seems less than felicitous. Another example that needs more nuance is Walton’s argument that God suffers, noting texts such as Acts 2:23–24; 3:13–15 (pp. 158–59, 175). As it stands, this suggestion is not compelling because it does not clearly distinguish between God’s works in relation to creation and the economy of redemption, and God *ad intra*. At the very least, more nuance is needed, and his argument would have been well-served by interacting with the broader Christian exegetical tradition on impassibility. (Compare also his lack of appreciation for the medieval Scholastics who “stressed clear, analytical thinking about God,” which Walton argues led to philosophy dominating over theology [p. 32]—but this seems a straw man, as Walton offers no specifics.)

Further, while I affirm with Walton that Luke is a narrative theologian and narrative texts “do theology,” I am more circumspect about the ability of narrative texts to clarify controversial or programmatic issues. For example, Walton suggests that Acts hints that Lydia was a leader in the church (p. 208). To be sure Walton seeks to be careful in his conclusions here, but if he means by this that Lydia occupied an ordained leadership role, then we need to be clear that the text does not say this. To address this question requires us to bring Acts into conversation with clearer texts on the matter.

In chapter 2 Walton argues that God is the focus of the speeches in Acts, and not Jesus specifically (pp. 20–22), for God is fulfilling his purposes. I agree with Walton that we should look to God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his promises in Acts—including raising Jesus from the dead (e.g., 2:36; 13:30; 17:30–31; 26:6)—yet I express two cautions here. First, one cannot finally avoid addressing trinitarian questions about the unity of God’s works *ad extra*. Second, it is potentially misleading to highlight the focus on *God* in the speeches, for in the speeches the people are consistently told to look in faith to *Jesus* as the one resurrected from the dead (e.g., 2:38; 3:22–23, 26; 4:11–12; 5:31; 8:35; 10:40–43; 13:38; 15:11; 18:28; 24:24; 26:23; 28:23, 31). My concern is that we not obfuscate the focus on Christ in these speeches, for Christ is consistently the key to which the audience must respond appropriately.

These observations do not diminish the several contributions Walton has made in this helpful volume. But it does remind us that theological readings of texts, as welcome as they are, still need the insights of historical-theological studies, even as the latter need the former. I benefited from this book,

as will all who pick it up. It will be especially useful for professors, scholars, and advanced students of Acts. I look forward to learning more from Walton's deep familiarity with Acts in his forthcoming commentary.

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## — HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

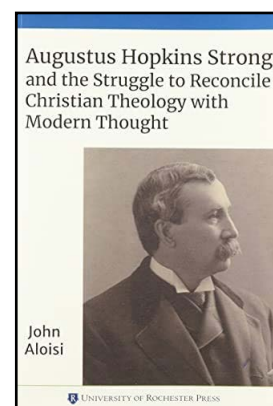
John Aloisi. *Augustus Hopkins Strong and the Struggle to Reconcile Christian Theology with Modern Thought*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2021. 177 pp. £24.99/\$29.95.

Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921) is a towering figure in the Northern Baptist tradition. In the 2001 edition of *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, a chapter on Strong follows the “prince of preachers,” Charles H. Spurgeon. Strong served as the president of Rochester Theological Seminary from 1872 until 1912 and is best known for his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, a standard text for Baptist seminarians until the last quarter of the 20th century.

Strong is arguably the last theologian from the New England tradition whose views could arguably comport with conservative and evangelical readings of Scripture. Strong was neither a modernist nor a fundamentalist. He warmly accepted Darwinian evolution but also defended doctrines such as the virgin birth and bodily resurrection. A 2009 single-volume reprint of the 1907 edition of Strong's *Systematic Theology* by Judson Press features a foreword by noted Baptist church historian Gregory A. Wills. That Strong's work continues to be read in evangelical circles today indicates that attempts to reconcile his own thought to orthodoxy are ongoing.

In *Augustus Hopkins Strong and the Struggle to Reconcile Christian Theology with Modern Thought*, John Aloisi seeks “to examine the role ethical monism played in Strong's theology and ministry” (p. 3). While “ethical monism” has an obtuse and pedantic ring, Aloisi explains the term's meaning for Strong's theology and his wider intellectual project. Aloisi supplies a swift, engaging summary of his life in the book's first chapter. This includes details such as the remarkable fact that Augustus's father, Alvah Strong, was converted under the preaching of Charles G. Finney in 1831 (p. 7), as was Augustus himself in 1856 (p. 14). Strong's pastoral experience prior to becoming Rochester Theological Seminary's president, including stints in Cleveland, Chicago, and Haverhill, Massachusetts (pp. 20–28), reminds readers that Strong did not initially pursue a career in academia.

In the second chapter, Aloisi covers the various intellectual currents and figures whose ideas influenced Strong's thought. This list includes post-Kantian German idealists such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, and G. W. F. Hegel. Lesser-known American idealists such as Josiah Royce and Borden Parker Browne are also named. Aloisi notes that although Strong never cited a single philosophical influence, “references to these men ... in Strong's *Systematic Theology*, suggest that he viewed them as philosophical sparring partners who sharpened his thinking about issues related to



human responsibility, personal existence, and ultimate reality—in short, about what he called ethical monism” (p. 45).

In chapter 3, Aloisi includes Strong’s own definition of ethical monism, written in his *Autobiography* (1908), as “this general doctrine of Christ’s identification with the race because he is the creator, upholder, and life of the universe” (p. 51). The author brings context to this term, noting that trends in science, literature, theology, and philosophy were moving in a monist direction at the end of the 19th century, compelling him to harmonize monism with orthodoxy. He believed that ethical monism could maintain “both the freedom of man and the transcendence of God” (p. 55). In a later defense of ethical monism, Strong wrote, “as the attraction of gravitation and the inductive reasoning of evolution are only other names for Christ, so he is the basis for inductive reasoning and the ground of moral unity in creation” (p. 71).

Chapter 4 explains how Strong’s ethical monism impacted three doctrinal areas: (1) scripture and experience, (2) evolution and miracles, and (3) sin and atonement (p. 72). As to biblical inerrancy, Strong moved from a “more functional and less objective” view of inspiration (p. 78) later in his career. Aloisi cites Strong’s *Autobiography*, in which he claimed to interpret the Bible “from the point of view of the immanence of Christ” (p. 79). As for evolution, the “imminent Christ” likewise constituted the principal cause behind the Darwinian process (p. 83). Strong came to understand miracles as a higher manifestation of natural law. As for the atonement, Strong came to believe that Christ was united to the human race before Adam’s fall. He wrote, “Christ therefore, as incarnate, revealed the atonement rather than made it” (p. 91).

The fifth chapter considers Strong’s contemporaries and their reception of ethical monism. Readers on the right and left were equally displeased with the system (p. 97). Aloisi considers Strong’s acceptance of liberal and conservative faculty members at Rochester as “emblematic” of ethical monism as a whole (p. 109), a non-viable arrangement. He, therefore, concludes that it failed to bring together orthodox theology and modern thought (p. 135).

Notwithstanding Aloisi’s claim, later evangelical theologians continued to engage with Strong. Millard Erickson, for example, cites him thirty-six times in his *Christian Theology*, and Wayne Grudem cites him twelve times in his *Systematic Theology*. No theologian from 1870–1910, Baptist or otherwise, comes close. Alister McGrath, in his *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, considers Strong’s views of inspiration a *via media* between Romantic subjectivity and the Old Princetonian objectivity. These considerations suggest that “failure,” at least in terms of influence, might be too strong a word.

It would be trite to claim that Strong too easily accommodated the prevailing philosophical ideas of his day, for this is arguably what every theologian does to some extent. Augustus Hopkins Strong’s life and thought demonstrate how far a theologian can wade into the waters of contemporary philosophical currents without being swallowed up. The fact that his legacy is debated today proves that the line which separates an innovator from a heretic is quite thin.

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Stephen M. Davis. *The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022. 121 pp. £17.00/\$22.00.

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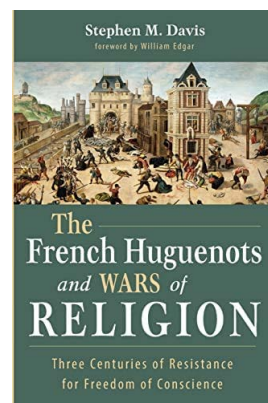
It appears to this reviewer that Stephen Davis's *The French Huguenots* is the first non-technical book on the Huguenots published in English since the release of Janet Glenn Gray's *The Huguenots: Anatomy of Courage* in 1981. In intervening years, there have been more technical books, in English, about the Huguenot experience inside France and in exile by such writers as Robin D. Gwynne. But if we consider overviews of the Huguenots era, we can soon conclude that Davis's volume fills a considerable need. Considering that the record of this movement inside France and beyond has been so memorable, it is a wonder that writers in English have had so little to say about them in recent times.

It is the first great strength of this book that, written by an American author who has lived and worked in France, it draws on a vast range of French twentieth-century literature bearing on Huguenot history. Without in any way detracting from the quality of his work, we can say that he has done a great service by introducing English-speaking readers to a range of important French authors—Bost, Joutard, Encr  v  , to name but a few—who are able to describe developments in Huguenot history as writers standing within this ongoing French tradition.

A second great strength is that it demonstrates the complexity surrounding a storyline which—if known at all by English-speaking readers—is known only in the broadest outline. To give an example, while it may be popularly supposed that organized, large-scale repression of the French Protestant movement commenced in the final decades of the sixteenth century (leading eventually to the issuing of a beneficial edict granting limited toleration in 1595), Davis shows that eight distinguishable phases of armed conflict between Catholic persecutors and Protestant resisters were underway beginning in 1562. Again, while we popularly suppose that the Edict of Toleration promulgated by King Henry IV in 1595 represented an innovative breakthrough, Davis is able to show that this Edict of Nantes largely consolidated terms and benefits which had been granted in earlier phases of the conflict before truces were broken. Like earlier negotiated settlements, this Edict involved trade-offs for both Protestant and Catholic subjects. He goes on to show that the great vulnerability of this movement is that it came to depend for its protection on the will of the monarch, who, while claiming absolute power, could not prevent his successors from reversing his Huguenot accommodation.

A third great strength is his carrying forward the discussion of the underlying issues raised by the Huguenot experience of persecution and marginalization right up to the present day. After having achieved the liberties which had eluded them earlier in the time of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era and having seen at long last a desirable separation of church and state in France by 1905, Davis explains that the religious intolerance which plagued the Protestant movement is definitely on the rise in the France of today. This upsurge has been brought on by the disruptive efforts of revolutionary Islam. The understandable efforts of the modern French state to curb Islamic resistance to cultural assimilation and (by some) the promotion of sectarian violence is, like a dragnet, tending to limit the freedoms of conservative Protestants also. These have their own distinct reasons for resisting full assimilation into secular France.

At the same time, Davis's book could be an even stronger book than it is. In providing a background for the Huguenot saga, Davis depends on writers of generations ago for his basic understanding of the



Reformation era. Roland Bainton and G. R. Elton wrote their popular surveys of the Reformation era in 1952 and 1963, respectively. These authors are foundational to Davis's approach to the Reformation era. What has happened over the last half-century or more (since these titans wrote) is that there has come an emphasis on local or regional Reformation movements. Accordingly, rather than France's Reformation era being a manifestation of what began in Wittenberg in 1517, it is today seen as a movement in its own right. Christian humanists in France, such as Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples (d. 1536), are today seen as influencers of Luther. Not only Marguerite, the sister of the French king Francis I, but that king himself are now better understood as the promoters of the reform movement associated with Lefevre. Marguerite was steadfast in this support, while Francis only reversed himself beginning in 1534. Christian humanism focused on the Scriptures in both Greek and Hebrew, and the church fathers drove this movement in France, as elsewhere in Europe.

Again, the emphasis of this book is on the French Huguenot movement being, in essence, an extension of the Reformation at Geneva (with a nod to Strasbourg). That may have been the eventual orientation. But Lausanne had still earlier been a safe haven for Huguenot refugees, and it was from there that the disruptive posters of 1534, known as "les Placards," originated. Huguenots turned to Lausanne once more in the 18th century after their colleges had been closed. It has also recently been stressed that the Huguenot movement was theologically diverse; those initially influenced by the biblical translation work of Lefevre d'Étaples did not necessarily turn into orthodox Calvinists. Among Calvin's strident Protestant critics were some fellow refugees from mid-sixteenth century France.

The Huguenots movement did have a 'golden era' of sorts in the first decades of toleration following 1595. Its preachers gained international notice, and its theological scholars in four academies were taken with great seriousness. But these attainments are sidelined in a narrative mostly focused on troubles. Finally, the volume could have been made more reader-friendly. In many sections, the paragraphs run to a page or more.

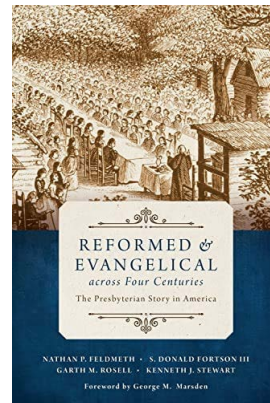
Stephen Davis's *The French Huguenots and the Wars of Religion* has the field largely to itself when it comes to current, accessible books which explain the ordeals and survival of the early French Protestant movement. The reviewer wishes this book a wide readership and, in time, an enlarged second edition.

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Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart. *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. 364 pp. £23.99/\$29.99.

This book starts with a clear thesis in its main title and offers a sustained argument for that thesis, namely that the Presbyterian story in America is one of being both Reformed *and* evangelical. This story is often fraught with tension, embrace, or reserved distance, yet it is nevertheless a reality. The subtitle should be taken in the plural as this story overall is singular yet contains numerous sub-stories. So many aspects are considered in the main plot line, forming scenes in the narrative, whether it be theological controversies, ethical issues, church polity debates, key personalities, and culture. This is a co-authored work by four Presbyterian academics who come from different Presbyterian denominations in America, yet the work hangs together with a wonderful unity of voice. Feldmeth is ECO, Fortson is EPC, Rosell is PC(USA), and Stewart is PCA. Such cooperation brings historical balance. Some will be curious to know who wrote what section of the book. The authors have decided not to identify who authored what, likely for the very purpose of establishing that unity of voice and affirming this work as truly a team product.



There are two essential introductory paragraphs in this work. The first is the opening paragraph of George Marsden's foreword, which sums up so much around four key distinctive strengths of this book: (1) a detailed and trustworthy new historical work; (2) a unique work which gives proper consideration to British backgrounds; (3) a work which sets forth the symbiotic relationships between American Presbyterians and American evangelicals; and (4) a work which takes into account the recent realignments amongst the more evangelically minded Presbyterians (p. ix). In the first paragraph of chapter one, the authors stress "the principle that the heritage of the Reformation came to us by diverse means; some of these were native to the regions from which our forebears came; others crossed national boundaries" (p. 1). Readers would do well to ponder these two paragraphs carefully when taking up this book. Of course, carefully reading the double-authored Fortson and Stewart preface (pp. xvii–xix) will help the journey immensely. They lay out very clearly, and I believe convincingly, the case for this book.

Some readers tempted to skip the first five chapters and begin with America in chapter six should recall Marsden's commendation in the preface. This is one of the clear strengths of this work: the first five chapters build a case which is summarized in one sentence at the end of chapter five: "all points of view just described here as existing in England and Scotland [that is, inclusive of Ulster] had their counterparts in the American colonies" (p. 80). Now one is ready to proceed into chapter six, "New World Immigration and the First Presbytery," and the remaining chapters.

These remaining chapters follow a basic chronological time frame and present a well-thought-out thematic title for each chapter. They are reflective of good planning and team effort, which makes for good readability. Chapters 6–19 provide an excellent overview, survey, and orientation to American Presbyterian history in the late seventeenth through early twenty-first centuries. Too often, there has been a marginalization, especially of the "smaller" branches of American Presbyterianism of the twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries. Readers should approach these chapters under the bridge of chapter five, where the authors effectively nuance the Bebbington quadrilateral on evangelicalism and see it as larger in scope than Bebbington did on dates.



The book does not use a select bibliography approach with each chapter or a final full bibliography. The footnotes are where one will obtain source information. These are helpful and appropriate to the engagement level of this book. There are three appendices, all of which will be helpful to orient readers to several current streams of Presbyterianism in the United States of America. Curiously, the Canadian church planting efforts of several American presbyterian denominations (BPC, RPCES, PCA, OPC, ARP, KPCA, KAPC) are not mentioned in this book, nor are there references to PCA, ARP, or IPC involvements in the UK. Perhaps the explanation is that the work focuses on Presbyterianism in the United States, with noted foreign mission involvements of the older mainline Presbyterians receiving justifiable attention (chapter 17 and the subpoint there “Reassessing Missions and Pearl Buck,” [pp. 267–70]). The book is inclusive of the various American Presbyterian streams, so this will greatly help readers position many of these streams and is a great step forward from dated works that fail to capture these.

The debates will carry on as to what is the truest form of Presbyterianism in history, so this book may unsettle some. However, Feldmeth, Forston, Rosell, and Stewart are well positioned to write on this subject and have surely given us a book that has been needed on the history of evangelical Presbyterians in America. The liberal Presbyterian may not like it, nor the particularist of a romantic strand. There will be critics who reject the evidence of a united ethos and values between American evangelicalism and evangelical Presbyterianism (without ignoring distinctives), but there will also be its champions. The evangelical Presbyterian is Reformed and, at the same time, evangelically ecumenical because of the very nature of the invisible church, which is not defined by or confined to a particular denomination.

This is a book that is needed to bring some counterbalance to American Presbyterian church history. I encourage seminaries to adopt this as a textbook for courses on this subject and foresee excellent discussion arising from assigning select chapters for class exchanges or seminars. It is pitched just right for courses but will also be welcomed by all serious readers. The conclusion (p. 319–29) should be a stirring call for evangelical Presbyterians, not just a pat on the back for some good heritage discussions. Get this book, fellow Presbyterians and fellow evangelicals. Many of the trajectories surveyed here are germane not only to Presbyterians but to other American denominational groups.

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Crawford Gribben and John W. Tweeddale, eds. *T&T Clark Handbook of John Owen*. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022. xxv + 571 pp. £156.15/\$175.00.

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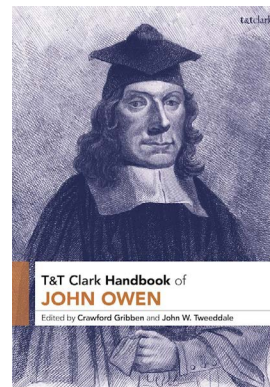
This handbook reflects the increase of scholarly interest in the Puritan divine John Owen. The editors have both authored notable monographs on Owen and have contributed significantly to Owenian scholarship. Gribben and Tweeddale distinguish this handbook from the earlier Ashgate companion (Kelly M. Kopic and Mark Jones, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012]) since its aim is “to become the most obvious reference for teachers and general readers of [Owen's] work” (p. 4). This is accomplished by “combining introductions to some of Owen's most significant publications with considerations of new scholarly themes in his work” (p. 4).

A comparison of the table of contents for the Ashgate companion and the *T&T Clark Handbook* does, in fact, support their claim. The introductions to major works of Owen is a distinctive feature of the *T&T Clark Handbook*. The two volumes feature some of the same authors (including Gribben, Tweeddale, and Kopic) but address different aspects of Owen's life and work.

The handbook is divided into three parts. The first part, consisting of eleven chapters, addresses various contexts which inform our understanding of Owen. Ryan M. McGraw's discussion of Owen as a theologian (ch. 3) stands out in this first part as he describes how Owen moved from his earlier position, in which he affirmed that divine justice was merely hypothetical and thus “relative to creation” (p. 30), to his more developed view in *Dissertation on Divine Justice* (1653), which argues that justice was an absolute attribute of God and as such the atonement of Christ was “an absolute necessity” (p. 30). Additionally, McGraw helpfully discerns occasions when Owen is more beholden to scholastic categories (*Dissertation on Divine Justice* and *Christologia* [1679]) and times when he resists the use of such categories (e.g., *Theologoumena Pantodapa* [1661]).

Crawford Gribben, in chapter five, offers a trenchant discussion of Owen's relationship to the politics of his day. He writes that, while there was some truth to the charge that Owen frequently changed his mind, “he did not change his mind on the underlying commitment ... [to] the toleration of orthodox Protestants” (p. 116). What Owen had in view, according to Gribben, is the protection of religion freedom for the orthodox, whatever “forms of government” (p. 116) would assure this protection. Lee Gatiss (ch. 8) makes the intriguing case that, based on Owen's own writings, he was “far more Anglican than anything else” (p. 188).

The second part, consisting of eight chapters, provides “contextual expositions of specific works” (p. 7). While each chapter in this section provides a summary exposition of the works in question, there is an unevenness of presentation. Some chapters (e.g., Christopher Cleveland's discussion of *Theomachia Autexousiastike, or, A Display of Arminianisme* [1643] in ch. 12) display the level of thoroughness one would expect from a scholarly treatment of a historical writing (i.e., historical context, use of sources) whereas others almost amount to a brief summary of the writing in question without the historical work that one would expect (e.g., the chapter by Andrew M. Leslie on *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* [1674]). However, despite the uneven of presentation, a number of the chapters do move forward our understanding of Owen's writings.



Kelly Kapic offers the sole chapter for the third part. This is likely one of the most important chapters in the volume as Kapic suggests avenues for further historical research. Among these include the need for more work on how “a former chaplain of Cromwell” was ingratiated to “Charles II in the 1660s” (p. 496) as well as more detail on the last two decades of Owen’s life in which he seemed to pass his time in “relative ease” (p. 496). Turning to theological concerns, Kapic argues that “it is legitimate to debate Owen’s ideas themselves” without becoming tangled up “in seventeenth-century politics or historical debates about continuity” (p. 505).

There are a number of strengths that attend this work. Part 1 alone is worth the purchase of the book as both expected (e.g., intellectual context) and unexpected (e.g., scientific revolution) contextual explorations are offered. Also, the abbreviation section lists every work of Owen in chronological order, which will be a significant aid to orient the unfamiliar student to such a large corpus, and the bibliography displays all the Owenian scholarship achieved thus far and the gaps that still exist. Additionally, Kelly Kapic discusses more ways that Owen studies can continue than some may have thought possible. One minor criticism we can offer is that it would have been helpful if the editors gave their rationale for the choice of writings covered in Part 2.

Overall, the editors and the contributors have succeeded in making this *Handbook* a resource that will be accessible, yet thorough enough, for scholars and students alike to turn to and gain insight into the complex man who lived in complex times, serving as a prolific writer, formidable and persistent polemicist, and churchman through and through. Highly recommended.

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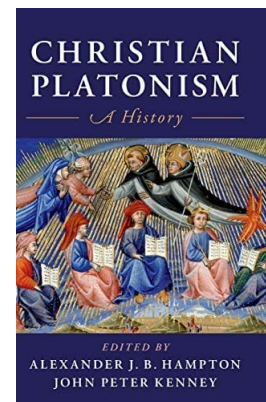
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Alexander J. B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney, eds. *Christian Platonism: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xv + 497 pp. £99.99/\$130.00.

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The Christian appropriation and critique of Platonism is a subject of perpetual interest and contention. As such, this volume is a timely addition to the scholarly literature currently available on the subject. The goal of this book is to provide a systematic survey of Christian interaction with Platonist thought. To accomplish this aim, the editors have assembled an excellent collection of articles by well-known specialists, such as Lloyd P. Gerson, Olivier Boulnois, Rudi A. te Velde and others, organizing them into three main sections that address the main *concepts* used in the Christian appropriation of Platonism, the *history* of the Christian appropriation of Platonism, and contemporary *engagement* with Christian Platonism.

The first section of the book begins with an article by Gerson, in which he provides the reader with a helpful overview of Plato’s Platonism and the development of Platonism after Plato. As helpful as this article is, his summary of the main or core tenets of Platonism is so general that almost anybody but a staunch Materialist would be considered a Platonist. This article should be read in the context of his recent publications on Platonism. Gerson provides a helpful, albeit short, discussion of why Christianity is not just another version of Platonism. Gerson’s views on the Demi-urge should



be read in the context of the next article, “The Ideas as Thoughts of God,” by John Dillon and Daniel J. Tolan. Dillon and Tolan seek to trace the provenance of the idea that the Platonic Forms are ideas in the mind of Plato’s God—the Demi-urge. As they rightly note, it is unclear that Plato actually held this perspective. Philo was possibly the first to articulate this view explicitly, and the Platonic tradition debated this theory to the very end, though Christian Platonists appear to have accepted this view. Their attempt to trace this understanding of the divine ideas beyond Philo, though interesting, is mostly supposition and arguments based on suppositions.

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz seeks to show the positive influence of Platonist philosophy on Nicene and Post-Nicene trinitarian theology, especially in relation to the Platonic notion of participation. Kevin Corrigan’s article discusses the mutual influence between Christian and Neo-Platonist thinkers in relation to Creation ex nihilo, love, inter-trinitarian relations, and a number of other key subjects. His portrayal of Aristotle’s unmoved mover is contestable, at best. Olivier Boulnois seeks to trace the concept of theology from Plato to the high medieval notion of theology as a science of the divine. Rudi A. te Velde provides us with a helpful summary of recent research concerning the concept of participation in relation to the Christian doctrine of creation and in the work of Thomas Aquinas, and its sources in Neo-Platonic thought. He shows that Aquinas not only interacts with Platonist thought but creatively adopts key elements of it to help bolster his articulation of Christian doctrine. It is worth asking, however, in light of the extent of Aquinas’s creativity in appropriating these Platonist doctrines, whether Aquinas can properly be said to be “Platonist.”

The second section of the book moves through the history of Christian theology and considers ways in which it has interacted with Platonism. Mark Edwards looks at early Christian interpretations of Scripture, in interaction with Platonism, arguing that though there was some mutual exchange and a great deal of borrowing, they often saw each other as rivals. This is a helpful analysis, especially when one considers that both Christianity and pagan philosophies portrayed themselves as ways of living, rather than as simply “belief systems.” Areas where agreement between Platonism and early Christianity is most evident include allegorical interpretation and mysticism. I would argue that other areas of agreement would include the necessity of purity in the life of the theologian/philosopher if they are to know God, creation accounts, ascension from the sensible cosmos to the knowledge of the divine, and judgment of works after death. In fact, many early Christian theologians used these similarities, in their apologies, to defend the truth of Christianity. Despite the fact that early Christian theologians used the “logos” doctrine in their apologies, Edwards suggest that similarities in the “logos” doctrines are exaggerated. John Peter Kenney explores the nature of Platonism and its development in the early centuries of our era. He makes some helpful claims concerning the Christian adoption of important doctrines from Plato but asserts the necessity of rejecting Platonism as a “way of life.” Most helpful, in this article, is the author’s explanation of what is meant by the terms “Platonism” and “Christian Platonism,” and the discussion of what it would mean to call an early Christian theologian a “Platonist.” Kenney is certainly right when he suggests that, properly speaking, none of the early Christian theologians were really Platonists. Due to the nature of Kenney’s article, he ends up covering similar ground to that which is covered by Edwards. Lydia Schumacher discusses the early Franciscan use of medieval Arabic authors in their portrayal of the agreement between Aristotle and Augustine’s Platonism. They often read Aristotle through Avicenna’s interpretation, augmenting Augustine with Avicenna. This understanding of Augustine was influential for generations and tainted the way many have understood Christian Platonism. This article is helpful for understanding why so many medieval theologians misread Aristotle, and why Aquinas’s reading of Aristotle was so unique at that time. The six remaining chapters of this second section are primarily

helpful in that they help trace the development of Platonic thought from the Middle Ages to the present time. Due to the number of authors dealt with, some of these articles end up looking like a “Who’s Who” in Christian Platonism.

The final section of this volume contains articles that critically engage Christian Platonism in relation to the natural sciences, environmentalism, art, morality, and eschatology. In his article, Alexander J. B. Hampton presents the Christian Platonist view of the cosmos as the solution to the environmental crisis caused by the “anthropocentric outlook.” Of particular interest is Richard Viladesau’s analysis of the Christian-Platonist understanding of art and meaning in contrast with the modern and post-modern perspective, which is rooted in Nietzsche’s rejection of both Christianity and Platonism. Viladesau’s article is valuable for two key reasons. First of all, he provides a clear and helpful articulation of ten key elements in the Christian-Platonist approach to aesthetics. Second, he brings the Christian-Platonist understanding of beauty and art into discussion with the predominant trends in contemporary aesthetics (notably that “tradition” which is rooted in Nietzsche), revealing the splendor of beauty for the Christian-Platonist theory in contrast to the impoverished devaluation of beauty found in post-modern aesthetics.

Though not all of the articles in this volume are of equal value, this book is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand the various ways in which Platonism has been critically received and modified by Christian theologians throughout the history of Christian thought.

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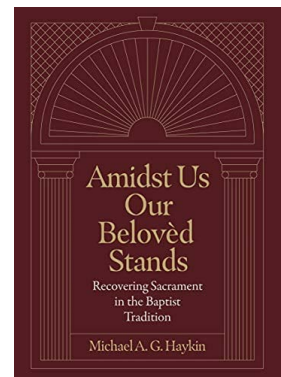
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Michael A. G. Haykin. *Amidst Us Our Belovèd Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022. 153 pp. £15.99/\$24.99.

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Historical theology is often viewed as a specialist’s field, and at times it certainly can be. Debates between theologians long dead and little remembered may seem hardly relevant to contemporary church life. But at its best, rather than delighting in obscurity for obscurity’s sake, historical theology offers us a window and a mirror: a window into the past, to glimpse the biblical and theological priorities and methods of a previous generation of faithful believers; and then a mirror by which to compare our own priorities, methods, and church life. In this way, historical theology provides a vital service to the contemporary church.

Michael Haykin’s book *Amidst Us Our Belovèd Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition* is just this kind of historical theology. In five chapters, Haykin surveys the role of the sacraments in the 17th and 18th century Baptist tradition, considering a number of controversies and debates regarding baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and church membership. While the chapters are short and easily followed, the background research is wide-ranging and thorough, giving evidence of Haykin’s considerable familiarity with the time period and figures involved.



Chapter 1 discusses the role of baptism in the Particular Baptist movement, focusing on the importance of baptism for this tradition and its relationship to church membership and identity. The First London Baptist Confession of 1644 features prominently, but Haykin also considers Baptist hymnody of the period. Quoting the 17th century Baptist Benjamin Keach, Haykin argues for the significance of baptism as “blessed food’ for the soul” (p. 14) for these Baptists.

Chapter 2 moves on to consider the Lord’s Supper in the 18th century, drawing especially on the Second London Confession of Faith to demonstrate that a Calvinistic view of the Supper was widely shared among Baptists of the era. Again, Haykin draws from both theological writings and hymnody to make a persuasive case. He also considers the shift to a Zwinglian view of the Supper that emerged in 19th century Baptists, arguing that “a major shift in British Baptist ecclesiology” (p. 53) lies behind this shift in sacramental theology. As 19th century Baptists became more evangelistic and mission-minded, the Lord’s Table seemed to play “little part in the evangelization of the lost” and so was less and less central in the life of the church (p. 55). Haykin aptly summarizes and evaluates this change in a single sentence: “It was a movement in which much was gained, but also something was lost” (p. 55).

Chapter 3 discusses debates over closed or open communion, focusing especially on the writings of John Bunyan (an advocate of open communion) and William Kiffen (who held to a closed communion position). As Haykin shows, however, this debate continued beyond Bunyan and Kiffen’s lifetimes and was a recurring feature of Baptist discussion in the 18th century. The arguments, while framed with various nuances, center on the question of whether those baptized as infants could be admitted to the Lord’s Table in Baptist churches (the open communion position), or whether such persons needed to undergo believer’s baptism before being welcomed into full fellowship (the closed communion position).

Chapter 4 considers the topic of “eucharistic piety” (p. 91) in the Baptist tradition, especially in hymnody but also in the writings of the Baptist laywoman Anne Dutton. Haykin’s aim is to demonstrate the central role the Lord’s Table played in the affections of these Baptist writers and their congregations. While Haykin does not explicitly make the connection, this chapter provides significant confirmation to his earlier claim that Calvinistic views of the Supper form a vital part of Baptist tradition (ch. 2).

In chapter 5, Haykin shifts from historical survey to summary and contemporary application by providing six theses on the sacraments in the Baptist tradition. The first two deal with the prominence of both sacraments to ecclesial identity and as means of grace, while the next two theses provide brief definitions of each sacrament. While delicately avoiding an explicit affirmation of a Calvinist view over a Zwinglian position, Haykin’s fourth thesis make clear that any view of the Supper in which it becomes incidental to the life of the church puts the believer at odds with historical Baptist tradition.

The fifth and sixth theses move even more directly to contemporary application. In the fifth thesis Haykin singles out the development of the “altar call” as a central part of 20th century Baptist as particular detrimental to an understanding of the sacraments—a fascinating example of historical theology as both window and mirror. His last thesis is worth quoting in full: “In modern Western society, as in the past, joyful participation in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in Baptist communities is a truly revolutionary act” (p. 121).

In an age of expressive individualism and the endless construction of the self, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are indeed revolutionary acts in which the church joyfully confesses that our identity is not a work of our own hands but a gift received in union with Christ, both corporately and individually.



*Amidst Us Our Belovèd Stands* will help all pastors and theologians, whether Baptist or not, to consider our own understanding of the sacraments afresh in light of the past.

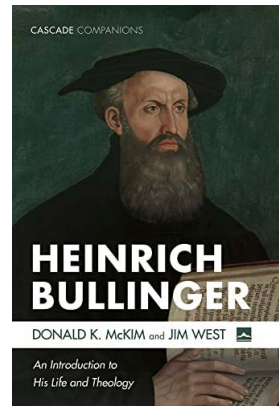
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Donald K. McKim and Jim West. *Heinrich Bullinger: An Introduction to His Life and Theology*. Cascade Companions. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022. 190 pp. £18.00/\$24.00.

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In late 1531, a twenty-seven-year-old Bible teacher suddenly became a refugee as a Catholic army claimed victory over the Zurich forces. The young man fled in the night while his friend, mentor, and soon-to-be predecessor perished on the battlefield. Two months later, that refugee, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), accepted the post of people’s priest (*Leutpriester*) at the Grossmünster in Zurich. He assumed that position after the shocking death of its previous occupant, Huldrych Zwingli. From that office, Bullinger led the Zurich Church for the next forty-four years while also helping to shape the budding Reformed tradition. Bullinger’s life and significance have come into view in the last few decades, but there is more work to be done. Donald K. McKim and Jim West’s work, *Heinrich Bullinger: An Introduction to His Life and Theology*, offers a welcome addition to the historiography.



Neither McKim nor West are strangers to writing on the history of the Reformed tradition, and they enter the genre again to provide a brief sketch of the life and thought of the Zurich reformer. The authors attempt to introduce Bullinger’s “thought as clearly as possible so his views can be understood and considered today as Christians reflect on their faith” (p. 152). While this work provides a welcome introduction to Bullinger’s life, it remains more devotionally and theologically focused and is less concerned about presenting the reformer’s thought in his own context.

The authors aim to situate Bullinger’s importance to the beginning of the Reformed tradition. Because he has been denied attention commensurate with his importance in his own sixteenth century context, McKim and West have done well to broaden the discussion. Through heavy reliance on Bullinger’s own words, the reader gets a better sense of the kind of preacher and writer he was. One hopeful result of this book would be to inspire more focused scholarship on his life and thought.

McKim and West survey Bullinger’s thought through extensive quotes from the reformer’s most well-known works, *The Decades* and *The Second Helvetic Confession*, followed by explanations and exhortations for what the reader should consider for their own faith. The theological categories are ordered mostly through the doctrinal loci Bullinger employed in his own works, beginning with Scripture, God, and Christ. The authors acknowledge Bullinger’s embrace of covenant theology (though without mention of his foundational work on the subject) and delve into his own understanding of election and double predestination, as well as his views on the Supper, Baptism, the role of civil authorities, and eschatology—all important categories for the early reformers. In the final chapter, the authors offer a summary of Bullinger’s enduring significance, prescribing to the reader how his theology may encourage and challenge the faith of Christians today.

Admittedly, this short survey is more devotional and theological prescription of belief than historical analysis. Readers should not expect to find strict focus and clarity on Bullinger's thought alone. Rather one should expect to enter a theological dialogue alongside McKim and West. While the authors aim to give a clear view of Bullinger to the reader, that view is at times unclear when cast as a prescription for contemporary belief. At one point, the authors speak to Bullinger's understanding of sin and disagree with his conception, suggesting it is outdated. At other times, Bullinger's faith is held out as a model for the reader to embrace. The authors discuss the reformer's views of election and work to help the reader who might be questioning whether they are among God's elect. At times, the authors are explicit that theology is the focus. For example, the chapter titled "God" opens, "In this chapter we will investigate, with Bullinger as our guide, the person and work of God" (p. 32). The subject of investigation is, therefore, a theological category rather than the preacher himself. This blurring of theological and historical lines creates an environment in which Bullinger is treated as a mere Zwinglian or lauded at the unnecessary expense of John Calvin. More nuance would be appropriate. While the book does accomplish the intended goal of providing space for readers to consider their own beliefs, it falls short of offering clarity about Bullinger's beliefs in his own context.

The Swiss reformer was pivotal to the success of the Reformed tradition in his own day, and he is worthy of our attention today. The English world, in particular, has lagged in consideration of this crucial reformer, and McKim and West do well to prod readers toward a better look at Bullinger. While this work will be a good resource for Christians considering their own views and will surely spark more historical interest in the reformer, it is not strictly a work of history. It will be most beneficial to the reader who is interested in Heinrich Bullinger and wants to consider their own beliefs in conversation with McKim, West, and the Zurich reformer.

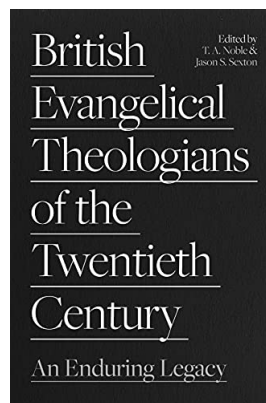
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Thomas A. Noble and Jason S. Sexton, eds. *British Evangelical Theologians of the Twentieth Century: An Enduring Legacy*. London: Apollos, 2022. 288 pp. £21.99/\$29.99.

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Looked at from one perspective, this new volume (hereafter cited as *BET*), edited by Tom Noble and Jason Sexton, constitutes a clear milestone. There is a past century of British evangelical theology to be celebrated and reflected on. Given the general retreat of Christianity in Britain across the last century, the endurance of evangelical theology is no mean achievement. In that period, the dominant approaches to the study of Scripture and Christian theology were determined in the universities. As elsewhere in the Western world, British universities moved from teaching Scripture and theology in keeping with traditional confessional commitments to teaching these disciplines scientifically, i.e., wherever unfettered research might lead. Colleges of theology beyond the universities, even those answerable to Christian denominations with confessional commitments, soon approximated the research model advanced by the universities. Thus, Congregationalist scholar C. H. Dodd (d. 1973) described his own theological education as consisting of "etiolated Calvinism, Calvinism drained of the good red blood of its dogmatic





theology” (Frederick Dillistone, *C. H. Dodd: Interpreter of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 33). The trickle-down effects of this uncertainty proved paralyzing for the churches. Yet, after such a century, British evangelical theology still remains, fostered both in some denominational colleges which have resisted general theological trends and by a growing number of university lecturers who uphold a supernatural Christianity and a definite biblical and theological position.

However, looked at from a second perspective, the reader of *BET* is provoked to ask the question, “What kind of evangelical Christianity has survived the turbulence of the past century?” The volume under review presents us with a quite elastic coalition of Christian thinkers who conform, more or less, to the quadrilateral of evangelical commitments articulated by David Bebbington in 1989.

On the one hand, we have described some theologians whose chief priority was maintaining and propagating the evangelical faith as they had received it. James Orr, W. H. Griffith Thomas, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, James I. Packer, and John Stott, all graduates of distinction, were marked out early on as men of real promise. They were able to freshly articulate, as well as defend, the received evangelical faith in a rapidly changing twentieth century. They did not merely reiterate views from the past; they were thoughtful conservers of the evangelical faith.

But on the other hand, in a second and larger group, we find theologians who, while like the first group in devotion to Christ and his cross and in a general reverence for Scripture, also embraced a critical perspective regarding aspects of the evangelical teaching of their upbringing. These critiques were the outworking of the ‘scientific’ attitude to theological studies, which had taken control when the twentieth century began. They were, to varying degrees, revisionists.

For such reasons, young Lesslie Newbigin, while a definite Christian believer, wanted nothing to do with the Inter-Varsity Christian Union at Cambridge on account of its definiteness in doctrine. James Denney, P. T. Forsyth, W. E. Sangster, and Colin Gunton were all rather evasive as to what biblical inspiration meant and guaranteed. Sangster, facing the colossal mortality of wartime, flirted for a time with universalism; he also explicitly integrated evolutionary themes into his teaching. Forsyth and H. R. MacIntosh both embraced kenotic understandings of the incarnation of Christ. T. F. Torrance (with his brother James), while early supporters of Inter-Varsity in Scotland, eventually became known for their opposition to some major threads of evangelical teaching in the Westminster Confession of Faith (the standard of their Church of Scotland). In sum, this second grouping represented a strong element of discontinuity with what had gone before. They did not self-identify primarily as evangelicals and were, in effect, mediating theologians, standing between received evangelical conviction and modern criticism.

All this to say that *BET* has not adequately treated the question of what constitutes an evangelical theology in the present theological climate. No doubt, all the individuals featured in the volume would have been able to recognize one another as Christian believers. The question is: would they also have recognized one another as evangelicals? The reviewer does not think so unless, for both types, the qualifying adjectives—conservative and liberal—would be employed. But this suggestion will be opposed by many. One may recall that F. F. Bruce (d. 1990) wanted to be identified as an un-hyphenated evangelical.

Now in support of such distinctions, it is worth noting that the fine essay on James Denney by the late Thomas Finley uses the adjective ‘liberal’ to describe the evangelical stance of Denney and a number of his Glasgow colleagues at the turn of the century. Further, in an earlier chapter on James Orr, Andrew McGowan points out that this Glasgow colleague to Denney was clearly *not* of that tendency. In fact, the

adjective 'liberal' was a widely-used term a century ago and was embraced by those to whom it referred. It helped them to distance themselves from views that they considered to be worn out. The term 'liberal evangelical', meaning something like today's term, 'progressive', deserves to be rehabilitated for modern use. The non-disparaging use of such adjectives would help us around an impasse we currently face: the use of the term 'evangelical' by theological conservatives (of which the reviewer is one) as if they alone have the right to the use of it. This view is not in agreement with historical usage across the past century or more.

In short, the volume under review would have been more illuminating if it had more frankly acknowledged the important divergences among these theologians for whom there were, admittedly, substantial agreements. If the adjectives conservative and liberal had been utilized throughout *BET*, a desirable theological 'détente' between two positions might have been better advanced. The two tendencies are an ongoing but under-recognized feature of evangelical theology.

In his admirable telling (elsewhere) of the story of Tyndale House, Cambridge (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), editor Noble demonstrated that this differentiation among British evangelicals was out in the open in the early 1950's at Cambridge. And when, in 1952, Inter-Varsity Press (UK) acquired the publishing rights to James Denney's 1903 classic, *The Death of Christ*, it made editorial changes (subsequently protested against) to guard against views that it considered unsound. Conversely, when J. I. Packer articulated what he considered to be an evangelical doctrine of inspiration in his *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958), he did not speak for the liberal evangelicals (many within the Church of England) who in that decade were still determined to shun any approach to inspiration they considered to be 'mechanical'. What we have in *BET*, therefore, might fairly be called 'Varieties of British Evangelical Theology'.

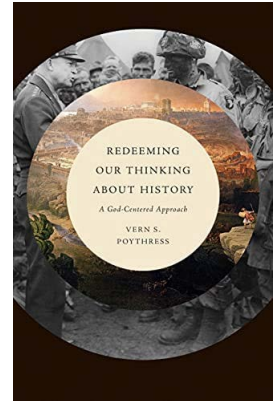
In concluding comments, Jason Sexton correctly points out (pp. 262–63) that compared to a half-century ago, there has been an increase of evangelical representation in British university theology departments. This true fact needs to be tempered by two others. First, the recent ordeals experienced by Union Theological College, resulting in a termination of its relationship with Queens University, Belfast, illustrate how the modern British university can constrain the maintenance of evangelical theology and ethics. Second, in these decades, British university departments of theology have been modified so as to encompass the major world religions. Buddha and Mohammed have been incorporated as subjects of research and teaching alongside Christian theology. While this academic coexistence can bring with it opportunities for mutual understanding, it hardly enhances the hope that such departments will be the means for ensuring a robust future for evangelical theology. Evangelical theology for the future will require principled collaboration, which binds together those in broad agreement with their notable differences named.

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Vern S. Poythress. *Redeeming Our Thinking about History: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 256 pp. £22.99/\$24.99.

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In this volume, Vern Poythress is interested in two commonly used senses of “History.” “First, it can mean the unfolding of past events in time and space. Second, it can mean a human study and recounting of past events.” Historiography, we are told, has three aspects, events, people, and meanings. History concerns events, is studied by persons, and pertains to the meaning of events. Meaning is not a subjective, human imposition, for God has pre-interpreted everything: “The meaning [humans] articulate can reexpress some aspect of meaning that God gives to events and their connections” (p. 35). Poythress stresses that these three aspects or perspectives “cohere, partly because they describe the very same meaningful events and partly because they have intrinsic coherence due to God being the ultimate source of all three” (p. 35).



The book has 26 chapters in five parts, with an introductory chapter on the importance of history for the Christian. Part 1 begins by considering several questions, “What is history? How should we write about it? How should we read about it and experience it?” (p. 23). Considering our involvement in small-scale historical events and their relation to larger pieces of history, Poythress concludes that history is complex, and its study involves choices as to what will be considered or left out. Historiography involves each of the aspects which have God as their source: God crafts events, gives them meanings, and controls the people involved in history (ch. 3). Poythress also recognizes a spiritual component to history in the antithesis of belief and unbelief (ch. 4). Focusing on any one aspect at the expense of the others leads to “reductionistic historiography” (ch. 5). The following three chapters address the complexities of persons, causes, and miracles in historiography.

Part 2 asks what the Bible can teach us about history, with particular attention to the narrative books. Poythress contends, among other things, that the Bible shows us unity in history, providing “a framework for the whole of history” (p. 88). However, this unity is complemented by the diversity of perspectives the Bible gives even to individual events, such as those the Gospels provide. Poythress concludes that the Bible has a unique role among all historical works as God’s infallible account of certain events and the broader framework that unites history’s diversity.

In part 3, Poythress asks, given that God is involved in history, “how do we identify his purposes?” Poythress argues that the Bible presents a two-level causal view of reality, with God acting as the primary cause through secondary causes. The main way the biblical historical books evaluate events is by the norm of prior divine revelation, which Poythress argues is a model for contemporary engagement with history: “In our day, we are supposed to pay attention to divine instruction as we now find it in the completed canon of Scripture” (p. 117). Poythress raises important cautions against overreaching interpretation (viz., Job’s friends) but argues that Psalm 78 commends an attitude that recognizes history as a witness to God’s glory and an opportunity for praise and thankfulness. Because God is active in history, it is legitimate even for an academic to explore primary causality, though we have no guarantee of infallibility. However, recognizing God’s hand in history rules out a “neutral” or presuppositionless approach. Poythress concludes this part with a reflection on the book of Revelation’s role in helping us discern that “this age is permeated with spiritual war” (p. 164).

Part 4 brings the principles of the previous part to bear on several areas of history. Poythress presents several approaches to early church history, arguing that interpreting the early church will involve judgments of right and wrong, especially concerning key doctrinal debates. He looks at the role of Scripture in making such evaluations of right and wrong and identifying God's hand in history. Things get more difficult when we move beyond the church and biblical history. The limits of our knowledge should caution us. Nevertheless, even in the interpretation of foreign civilizations, we have some knowledge of God's blessing and cursing.

Jay D. Green's fivefold typology from the book *Christian Historiography* (Waco, TX; Baylor University Press, 2015) is the subject of the final part, along with two additional perspectives discussed in that book. Poythress finds some contribution in all five categories, arguing that they, along with the pursuit of excellence (not meaning conformity to the secular academia), provide compatible perspectives on the Christian historian's task. In addition, he argues that the role of a Christian historian is a special calling from God, a Christian vocation. In Chapters 23, 26, and an appendix on Mark Noll's approach, Poythress focuses on the issue of providence in historiography. He argues that the knowledge of God revealed in Scripture gives us a "sound basis to affirm a humble providentialism" (p. 211). Considering the challenges against providentialism, Poythress argues that the Bible encourages us to read this way but also affirms the dangers of being overly specific in doing so.

There are many insights throughout this work, yet the intended audience is not clear. Poythress addresses issues pertinent to academic historiography, and helpfully so, yet he also lingers in the shallows suitable for the popular reader, particularly in parts 1–2. The student perhaps stands to profit the most, benefiting from both dimensions. I found the discussion in parts 3–5 most stimulating. Poythress's engagement with the issues of providence and discerning God's purposes in history is a valuable contribution.

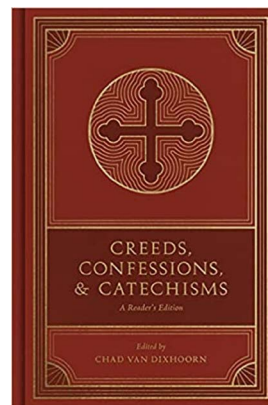
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Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed. *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 479 pp. £21.99/\$29.99.

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Cuban-American historical theologian Justo González has rightly stressed the significance of the past to understand oneself and the Christian faith: "Without understanding the past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we understand the Christian message" (*The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation* [New York: Harper Collins, 2014], 3). Creeds and confessions are vital to this process. Historically, the church has utilized creeds and confessions to summarize and express the essential teachings of Scripture and church practice. These works have helped shape the identity of the church for generations and continue to serve as foundational guides for believers around the world. *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* gathers thirteen of these historic statements of faith—including the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Westminster Catechism*—in one beautifully bound volume. The editor gives a



short introduction to each text, explaining its background and significance for the church. This volume offers the reader the opportunity to delve into these time-honored articles of the faith in a fresh way.

The book is edited by Chad Van Dixhoorn. The Canadian-born church historian, who holds a PhD from Cambridge and ThM and MDiv degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary, currently serves as a professor of church history and the director of the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards at Westminster Theological Seminary. Fittingly, Van Dixhoorn has also published a five-volume work on the Westminster Assembly titled *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

This volume aptly fits with Van Dixhoorn's Reformed interests in its inclusion of four early ecumenical creeds (*The Apostles' Creed*, *Nicene Creed*, *Athanasian Creed*, and *Chalcedonian Definition*) and nine Reformed texts (*Augsburg Confession*, *Belgic Confession*, *The 39 Articles*, *Canons of Dort*, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *London Baptist Confession*). The author acknowledges this bent in his introduction: "The confessions and catechisms that follow are particularly significant texts in Protestant history. These are defining documents for Lutherans, Anglicans, the Dutch Reformed, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Sometimes with slight adjustments, they have been used by any millions of Christians" (p. 9). Van Dixhoorn begins each text with a succinct, well-written introduction that gives an overview of its origin, historical context, and relevance. The reference work has sparse footnotes but includes helpful general and Scripture indexes.

While the title suggests a more general reference work, this volume might be better subtitled *A Reformed Reader's Edition* due to its focus on texts specifically relevant to Protestant Reformed communities. The inclusion of updated English versions of the thirteen statements makes this work very accessible. While it is not always clear what revisions the editor has made to each text, the copyright information includes important details about the sources from which they were drawn. A few of the notable editorial decisions are apparent in the *Apostles' Creed*, *Nicene Creed*, and the *Chalcedonian Definition*. In the first of these, the editor employs a Trinitarian structure, indenting the lines below the broad belief statements regarding the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit and using the updated language of "Holy Spirit" rather than "Holy Ghost." Van Dixhoorn also includes a footnote explaining the meaning of "catholic" as referring to universal but, interestingly enough, does not note the possible meanings of the ambiguous phrase "he descended into hell." Without changing the title of the Nicene Creed to *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, the reference work includes the substantial changes made in 381 to the 325 version regarding the Holy Spirit, particularly the inclusion of the *filioque* clause, which has been a source of division between the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. The text includes the truncated version of the Chalcedonian Definition, which was often used for recitation in services, rather than the full text, which is about five pages longer. These editorial choices make sense for the target audience. If an individual is looking for a more ecumenical reference work, this may not be sufficient; but for a very accessible introduction to significant statements of faith for the Protestant tradition, this is a great place to start. This volume offers a handsome embossed cover, thick pages, easy-to-read font, and even a ribbon to mark your place in the book, making it a wonderful gift for anyone interested in this collection of statements of faith.

*Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* is best suited for Protestant readers, specifically graduate/seminary students, pastors, and churches looking for a manageable reference work covering the foundational statements for the Reformed community. In light of its Reformed focus, it might be better subtitled *A Reformed Edition* since it does not include texts for Catholic or non-

Reformed Protestant communities apart from the four early church creeds and the *Augsburg Confession*. It would be helpful to have a second volume that includes a broader selection of Protestant statements. But Crossway, as they are known to do, has taken care to publish a high-quality resource that will stand the test of time. This volume will help individuals and communities that want to understand the essential teachings and practices of the Protestant faith.

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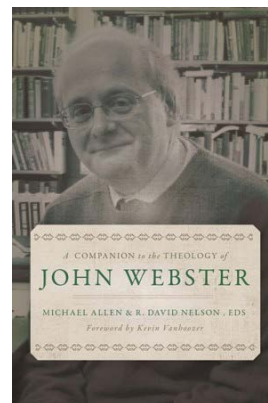
## — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

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Michael Allen and R. David Nelson, eds. *A Companion to the Theology of John Webster*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. xxi + 344 pp. £40.99/\$50.00.

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This *Companion* marks a significant milestone in reflection on the theological contribution of John Webster. In recent years, the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* published a symposium on Webster's *God without Measure* (October 2017) as well as another series of reflections on his work (January 2019). Monographs by Jordan Senner and Zachary Fischer represent the first doctoral theses to detail the contours and development of Webster's theological programme. Ivor J. Davidson, Webster's friend and colleague, has penned several poignant pieces reflecting on Webster the person, companion, and teacher. The present volume represents the most wide-ranging study to date in views of its contents, contributors and goals.



Part 1 guides the reader through Webster's theological development. Chapters 1–3 cover his overall theological project (Allen) and his relationships to Jüngel and Barth (R. David Nelson and Kenneth Oakes). Martin Westerholm details Webster's theology of the university and Matthew Levering explores Webster's practice of theological exegesis (chs. 4–5). The bulk of the anthology collects essays from established scholars introducing and analysing Webster on standard theological topics in part 2. Amongst others, we have Fred Sanders on the Trinity (ch. 9), Justin Stratis on Creation (ch. 11); Katherine Sonderegger on Jesus Christ (ch. 13) and Ivor J. Davidson on Salvation (ch. 14). Other chapters happily cover understudied themes, such as Webster's metaphysics (Tyler Wittman, ch. 16) and his depiction of human reason (Michael Allen, ch. 8). The volume also includes several introductory pieces: a characteristically energetic foreword by Kevin Vanhoozer, a preface by the editors that overviews the project, and a biographical reflection by Davidson in ch. 1. Throughout, the contributors offer penetrating summaries, grateful reflections, and occasional probing questions—a mixture Webster would surely have appreciated.

The reader cannot help but be drawn to ask what it is about Webster's work that animates so many of the great and the good of the theological world? One common refrain throughout is that Webster sought to do theology that would meet the needs of the day not on their own terms but from theology's own bountiful resources. Certainly, Webster's theology represented great scholarly depth and profundity. Like its author, though, it was also unselfconscious and generous. Webster was focussed not on the

games of scholarship and prestige—indeed, he “discerned academic vanity projects at some distance” (p. 12)—but rather he untiringly pursued theology, which in content and approach was rooted in the content of the gospel.

Each contribution to the volume is informative and worthy of attention. Those new to Webster’s work will find here an accessible and wide-ranging introduction. The regular reader of his theology is likely to find both luminous insights and the occasionally unexpected judgment. This is all to the good and what we should expect in a collection of reflections on a theologian of uncommon range. Throughout, the reader is pointed to other important resources on Webster’s work and to unknown or forgotten contributions. As an introduction and summary of Webster’s development and contribution, the volume reminds us just how impressive a theologian he was, and that he resists caricature or domestication. Amongst many striking essays, three points were especially thought-provoking. Davidson’s intimate portrait of Webster is stirring, detailing a man who was persistently unassuming and resolutely cheerful, even in the face of reasons to be otherwise. David Nelson’s epilogue offers a unique window into the development of Webster’s unfinished dogmatics. Martin Westerholm helpfully asks whether Webster’s favoured ‘analysis by elements’ could give disproportionately more weight to creation than to the effects of sin.

The book also presses on us certain questions: in what ways do we best understand his theological development? What measures of continuity and fulfilment are there? Or is his theological career marked by more disruptive growth as he departs from earlier approaches? It offers a range of possible answers. Christopher Holmes, for instance, rightly highlights genuine developments in Webster’s portrait of God. Writing on Webster and Jüngel, Nelson draws attention to themes which animate Webster’s maturity—including the distinction of God from creatures—but appear already in his doctoral thesis. Kenneth Oakes helpfully notes that we should not so much see Webster leaving Barth behind as surrounding him with other voices (p. 87). There are different approaches to how we distinguish various stages of Webster’s development. Vanhoozer places Webster’s inaugural Oxford lecture ‘Theological Theology’ in the ‘late period’ of his career (p. x). Michael Allen, with a greater emphasis on theological development, locates this lecture in Webster’s ‘first phase’ (p. 36).

The reflections on Webster collected here are a reminder of what so many have found compelling about his work: carefully prosecuted theology rooted in the dogmatic and exegetical resources of the church; a contemporary voice for whom retrieval could be charitable without becoming uncritical; sparkling turns of phrase which arrest attention. The volume should attract considerable interest. If its voices are right, though, Webster would be happiest if it stirs interest in contemplating the presence and perfection of the triune God.

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Paul Dirks. *Is There Anything Good About Hell? Our Discomfort About Hell and Its Ultimate Good*. Middletown, DE: Decretum, 2021. xi + 217 pp. £16.99/\$19.99.

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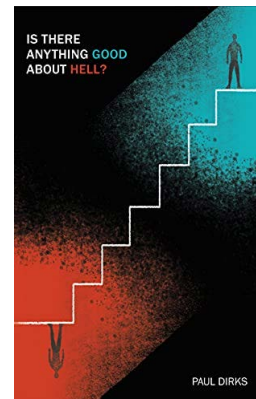
In an age of over-publication filled with eye-grabbing book covers and intriguing yet vacuous book titles, Paul Dirk's *Is There Anything Good About Hell?* enters the scene with honest simplicity. One does not need to guess at what the book is about. So, how does Dirks do in answering the question?

As you probably guessed, he answers the question which the title poses in the affirmative. There are indeed some things that are good about hell. The book is divided into ten chapters with the first four being groundwork for the last six. In the first four chapters, Dirks summarizes the traditional Christian doctrine of hell (ch. 1) and highlights various facets of it that make most people uncomfortable. Regarding this discomfort, Dirks discusses the revulsion humans have to the concept of eternal punishment (ch. 2), the legal-intellectual challenges posed by eternal retribution (ch. 3), and the difficulty in understanding why a good God would allow people who deserve hell into heaven (ch. 4).

It is not until the fifth chapter that Dirks begins to address the question at hand. In it, Dirks gives the first of six reasons why hell is a good thing, which will be enumerated hereafter. First, "hell is good because it is fearful; without the fear the masses go merrily to it" (p. 87). That is, hell prompts people to repent and experience heaven (ch. 5). Second, as punishment for harming other humans, hell "communicates to the victims of evil that their lives matter" (p. 102; ch. 6). Third, hell also communicates that God loves goodness (or, in Dirk's words, "His love for love" p. 120) because without it, he would merely wink at the sin which tears apart the goodness of his creation (ch. 7). Fourth, sins against an infinite Being (i.e., God) justly deserve infinite punishment (appealing to Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo*). This parity of sin and punishment is good in eternity just like it is in our human courtrooms (ch. 8). Fifth, though hell will "send shivers up our spines [it will also] cause us to glorify the power of the King of kings" (p. 163). That is, hell glorifies God (ch. 9). Sixth, and finally, Dirks demonstrates that hell will be ultimate vindication not just for God, but for His people as well (ch. 10).

Dirks's work is very good. Though he says that his aim "is not to defend hell" but is rather to "explore and explain the 'good' of hell" (p. x), it functions very well as a defense of the traditional doctrine of hell by refuting the oft-repeated claim that hell is gratuitous. This book is also commendable as a theological treatise on the doctrine of hell even for those (presumably very few) who do not have emotional or theological problems with this topic. Dirks makes cogent and thoroughly biblical arguments in defense of the traditional doctrine of hell. Each argument is rooted in Scripture and very well researched. Dirks ostensibly operates from a Reformed perspective while appealing to the church fathers as well. Admittedly, Dirks is not providing anything "that has not been previously argued by the likes of Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Brooks, Jonathan Edwards, and W. T. Shedd" (p. xi). What he does offer, however, is a compendium of some of the best articulations of hell that have been offered in the history of the church. For that, we should be thankful.

There is not much to gripe about in this work. I am personally not persuaded by the Eternal Subordination of the Son (ESS or EFS) and do not think Dirk's use of the theory helps make his case (pp. 192–93). Perhaps Dirks is only speaking of Christ's incarnational subordination (a point on which all Reformed Christians agree) but this is not clear, especially as he prefaces his remarks by speaking of





the Father's "primacy *within the Godhead*" (p. 192, emphasis mine). This is related to a second point. Dirks could make his points a little more economically. It's not clear to me, for example, that we need to discuss Jesus's subordination to the Father in order to understand that God will reign over hell and vindicate his people (ch. 10). Some chapters in the book could be trimmed or even combined (chs. 6–7 as well as chs. 9–10 could conceivably be combined for a punchier final product). One might like to see a discussion about how Dirks's point in the last chapter (that the eternal punishment of unbelievers is actually a good thing) squares with our (fallible) perception of many unbelievers as "good people." Dirks discusses this point at the beginning of the book in chapter 3 (p. 45), but there are only a few paragraphs dedicated to the topic and his comments are not tied to the thesis of the last chapter.

These quibbles aside, it should be noted that Dirks has provided a gift to the church by articulating its doctrine of hell in a readable, digestible, and logical way, to the glory of God.

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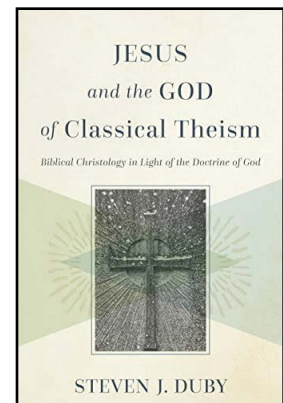
Steven J. Duby. *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xx + 444 pp. £39.99/\$55.00.

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In the past few years, the theological world has put much interest in recovering the doctrine of God. Steven J. Duby—associate professor at Phoenix Seminary—has already made significant contributions to this recovery with his books *Divine Simplicity* (London: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2016) and *God in Himself* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019). To little surprise, he has written another significant contribution in his new book, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism*.

Following the line of Richard Bauckham's book, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Duby aims "to take another step and work on explicating the relationship between biblical Christology and a doctrine of God in which divine attributes like aseity, immutability, impassibility, eternity, and simplicity play a significant role and inform one's Christology" (p. xii). He draws from "the central claims of the catholic Christology and theology proper developed by major figures in patristic, medieval, and Reformed orthodox thought" (p. 375). Such "central claims" of these theologians on Christ and theology proper are often classified as "classical theism"—a "phrase" that "is ... imprecise," but "has been used by many as an expedient designation for an account of the triune God holding that he is simple, immutable, impassible, and eternal" (p. xiii). In this light, Duby shows that the concepts often taught in classical theism are drawn from, fit with, and help us understand the Bible's own teaching about Christ.

Duby, however, is not merely concerned with defending a group called "classical theism." His "goal is ... to set forth the christological teaching of Holy Scripture and to explore the extent to which certain theological resources that do happen to be older can help us to interpret Scripture well" (p. xiii; cf. xiv). In doing so, he keeps "three themes" in focus throughout the book: "the relationship of Christ to the Father and Spirit, the unity of the person of Christ, and the genuineness of Christ's human life and suffering" (p. xv).



The chapters follow a general method: “biblical description,” “concerns,” a constructive “response” (or “dogmatic elaboration”), and then a “conclusion.” Chapter 1 addresses concerns in “how treatments of the Bible’s Christology have called into question older Christian accounts of God and” he offers “a response” (p. 1) as well as gives his reasoning for the usefulness of “philosophical concepts and categories” that are “both warranted and seriously chastened by the uniqueness of the subject matter of Christian theology” (p. 49).

Chapters 2–3 discuss the Son in eternity, wherein the former’s “aim is to examine the Son’s eternal relation to the Father and to explain how that relation coheres with and is illumined by God’s simplicity” (p. 51) and the latter focuses on the decree. Chapters 4–7 have a stronger focus on the Son in the economy: The divine Son and his human nature (ch. 4), the Son’s human obedience (ch. 5), the Son and the Holy Spirit with insights on the indivisibility of the external works of the Trinity (ch. 6), the Son’s suffering and divine impassibility (ch. 7).

Duby’s work has *much* to appreciate and commend as it brings together a thorough account of Christology in relation to theology proper. Space limits me to note two positive observations that deal more with the manner of the book. First, Duby is an excellent theologian who demonstrates that theologians and biblical scholars alike have a priority of reading Scripture. Despite the title’s inclusion of the term “classical theism,” Duby, once again, is not content to defend a group as “an end in itself” (p. xiii). His focus is to see what Scripture says and *means* so that our interpretation results in “understanding the substance of the text in a God-befitting way (θεοπρεπώς [*theoprepōs*]),” which requires us to know “what the whole canon of Scripture teaches us about God in order to avoid drawing conclusions from one statement or text that will end up conflicting with our conclusions from another text” (p. 260). Duby not only commends such reading and interpretation, he also exemplifies it. Duby is clearly well-versed in historical theology, philosophy, and dogmatics while still demonstrating careful exegetical expertise. In so doing, he shows how theological “concepts and patterns of reasoning first emerged from the material content of Scripture’s teaching and can then serve to open up the sense of that teaching” (pp. 376–77).

Second, Duby also models that interpreters of the Bible are to treat others with love. Duby thoroughly offers accounts of others’ concerns with Scripture and Christology before answering them. And not only does he describe their thinking, but at numerous times, he shows that “it is still important to be fair” to other positions (e.g., pp. 177–78, 279). Further, even when people disagree on exegetical points, he shows how they can still come to the same theological conclusion (e.g., see pp. 54, 143–44). Theology, as Duby models it, is a matter of love of God and neighbor, even if our neighbor disagrees with us.

This book is most suitable for those in the academy, especially for scholars and professors who can navigate the deep, technical “issues” and content of Christology, theology proper, and the relation of exegesis and theology. Nonetheless, pastors and students will want to keep this book as a reference, especially for when Christological questions arise from their own studies or from those in their care. We all have much to glean from Duby’s book as it teaches us to read Scripture well, humbles us to learn from those who came before us, models how to love those who differ from us, and moves us to behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

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Richard L. Smith. *Such a Mind as This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022, 581 pp. 39.00/\$51.00.

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I love this book. Don't let the title mislead you. It is indeed about *knowing* and a proper use of the mind, but it is not an abstract philosophical study. Rather, it is a rich, deeply learned, biblical theology of the human understanding and its importance in relation to knowing God and his ways.

In a now famous statement, Mark Noll's book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), opens with the declaration, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Noll has walked back this devastating indictment a bit, partly because evangelicals have begun to respond to his accusation and partly because Noll found certain pockets where evangelicals have made a difference. Analysis such as George Marsden's *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) signaled an awareness of the call for thinking Christians hitherto unknown.

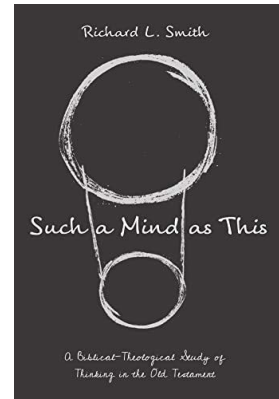
Earlier appeals to responsible thinking must include Harry Blamires's *The Christian Mind* (London: SPCK, 1963), and even Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), which argued that evangelicalism had slipped into easy-going pietism and called for active involvement in every sphere of life. Whatever one may think of Fuller Seminary's saga, Henry (with strong support from Harold J. Ockenga) managed to muster forces of intellectual capability rarely seen. In his own way, the appeals of Francis Schaeffer belong to this company.

Richard Smith has carried things a step further. It has often been remarked that some of the best epistemologists (thinkers about thinking) are not particularly grounded in the text of Scripture. If that is true, then you need to read Richard Smith's excellent study on knowing in the Old Testament to rectify this failing. What may sound to some like an academic diversion turns out to be a first-rate examination of where human knowledge was meant to originate and where it is now. Why is this important? Because we have lost the sense that our understanding matters in order to navigate life. Many people today are either hostile to thinking or (worse) indifferent to it.

This book has many virtues. The first is that it links knowledge to piety. Knowledge should never be severed from its *spiritual* roots, both for weal and for woe. To prove this Smith goes beyond quoting Proverbs 9:10—"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"—fundamental as is this truth. He delves into specific episodes in redemptive history, culling from them the admonition to know, and to know aright. Accordingly, the book begins with an extensive look at how unfallen man would use his mind to explore the wonders of God's world. This may be one of its most original contributions.

The book then moves on to describe how sin has affected knowledge adversely. Particularly engaging is the examination of troubled souls such as Qoheleth and Job, as well as influential figures such as Daniel. Finally, Smith focuses on Jesus Christ and the age of redemption without leaving off the Old Testament emphasis.

The voices of Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, and others in the Reformed tradition echo throughout. But they are embedded in Bible study. Side references abound with great quotes, confirming Smith's insights.



Perhaps one of its unintended consequences is to re-introduce us to the riches of events and persons throughout redemptive history. This could become a devotional book exposing us to the treasure hidden in the biblical story. It is not a book to read rapidly from cover to cover. It is a book to be savored. Like a good wine, it should not be gulped but tasted judiciously.

This is a unique book that will be read profitably for many generations.

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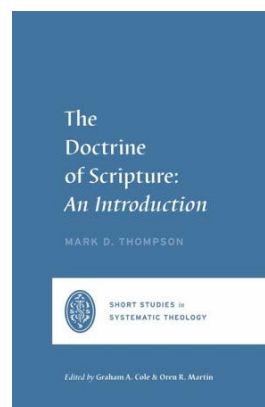
Mark D. Thompson. *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 208 pp. £16.50/\$17.99.

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Mark Thompson is principal of Moore Theological College in Sydney and a seasoned champion of Scripture in the Warfield-Packer tradition. His volume in Crossway's promising new series is a rich, wise, urgent, contemporary account of the classic Protestant doctrine of Scripture. As Thompson makes clear in his introduction, the Christian doctrine of Scripture is no mere exercise in apologetics or epistemology. Rather, it arises from the gospel itself, especially from the way Jesus himself used and understood the Old Testament.

The chapters that follow trace the doctrine of Scripture from its origins in Jesus through systematic formulation to practical response. Chapter 1 is a broad survey of Jesus's own approach to Scripture, including what Jesus has to say that is specifically relevant to the topics of the chapters that follow. Chapter 2 provides a theological framework for the doctrine of Scripture by considering the ways in which God speaks: as a dynamic of the eternal triune life, as he accommodates himself to human understanding, as he delegates his spoken authority to prophets through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately as the Word made flesh. Chapter 3 explains the necessity of written Scripture and then works chronologically through the major historical phases or events in the doctrine of Scripture: inspiration, canonization, and preservation. Chapters 4 and 5 are the theological heart of Thompson's account, addressing two pairs of definitive characteristics of Scripture: its clarity and truthfulness, and its sufficiency and efficacy. Thompson is careful to note that these attributes of Scripture are not static properties of printed Bibles apart from God's gracious presence. Rather, they are "dynamic realities arising from the identity of Scripture as the word of the living God" (p. 121). Chapter 6 is a brief exhortation to the reverent humility and joyful expectancy that should mark our posture toward the word of our heavenly Father.

The virtues of this text are many. Thompson surely succeeds in keeping Jesus "at the center of a Christian doctrine of Scripture" (p. 20). By regular reference to Jesus himself, Thompson conveys the very personal nature of our doctrine of Scripture, namely, that "the Christian disciple adopts the same attitude toward the Bible as Jesus did" (p. 19). Thompson draws deftly from the Christian tradition, especially from Luther, and also from recent authors such as John Webster and Kevin Vanhoozer. At the same time, Thompson always shows how Scripture itself teaches what we systematize as the doctrine of Scripture. Throughout, he gives compelling answers both to traditional Roman Catholic objections to Protestant teaching as well as to more recent criticisms—for example, that "we follow Jesus, not



the Bible” (pp. 21–22). He also rules out common misunderstandings—for example, that the clarity of Scripture somehow entails a “right of private judgment” (p. 138) rather than functioning within the communion of saints. Finally, as a master teacher, Thompson regularly raises intriguing questions that help us clarify and deepen our understanding: If Scripture is sufficient, why do we need theology (pp. 165–69)? What’s the difference between clarity and illumination (pp. 133–36)?

If there are quibbles to be registered, they would be mostly formal. The title of chapter 3, the middle chapter of the book, is “From the Speech of God to ‘the Word of God Written.’” This hints at what some readers might find frustrating: the book is half over before it turns to the doctrine of Scripture. Of course, all along Thompson has been providing vital context for the doctrine of Scripture. For example, chapter 1 describes Jesus’s view of the “double agency” of God and human authors in producing the Old Testament (pp. 43–44), and chapter 2 touches on a general doctrine of divine concursus with human action (pp. 78–79). So, by the time chapter 3 explicitly addresses the doctrine of inspiration (pp. 99–103), the reader can see its roots in Jesus’s own understanding of Scripture and its systematic connections to broader Christian teaching. But how much context is too much? Also, the book could use more signposting. Thompson tends to jump immediately into his line of reasoning. But readers in need of an introduction also need regular help finding and keeping their bearings.

Thompson notes in his preface what Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) wisely observed nearly three centuries ago, that a church’s spiritual vitality is closely correlated with its love for the Bible (p. 14). Thompson has given us a book to help us love the Bible better as our good Father’s sure and life-giving word to us.

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## — ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

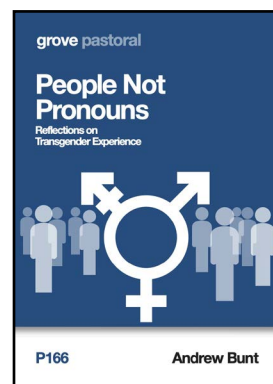
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Andrew Bunt. *People Not Pronouns: Reflections on Transgender Experience*. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2021. 30 pp. £3.95.

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As evangelicals continue to grapple with the challenge of the transgender movement and, in particular, with how to minister faithfully to those who experience gender incongruence, a range of resources is required. Alongside careful exegetical treatments of key biblical texts and detailed theological critiques of trans ideology, there is a need for shorter and more accessible introductions that can impart a clear biblical perspective and encourage a helpful pastoral posture. Andrew Bunt’s *People Not Pronouns: Reflections on Transgender Experience* is of this latter kind.

Beginning with an account of his own experience of childhood gender dysphoria, Bunt’s booklet provides a helpful primer on transgender questions via a simple, three-part framework—a heart response, a head response, and a hope response. While he is aware of the issues that dominate public discussion, his first concern is that we learn to engage with those for whom these issues are personal. For behind the debates “are real



people, people created by God and loved by God, who are wrestling with their sense of self and are often suffering great pain and distress in the process” (p. 5).

To encourage the appropriate *heart response* (ch. 2), Bunt begins by drawing our attention to the fact that Jesus’s treatment of people reveals that “in the heart of God is a deep love for every person he has created, and a deep desire for them to find fullness of life in him” (p. 8). He also urges readers to listen to those whose “feelings of discomfort with their body are so acute that they contemplate cutting off parts of their body” (p. 9) and asks how Jesus would respond in such circumstances. The answer of the Gospels is clear: “when Jesus encounters suffering, whether physical or psychological, he responds with compassion” (p. 9). Consequently, if our response to trans people is something else, “we must examine why this is, and allow the example of Jesus to challenge us and the Holy Spirit to change us” (p. 8). For, at the very least, “Christians are meant to embody the compassion of Jesus” (p. 10).

In addition, Bunt suggests that believers get to know people who experience gender dysphoria. If this is not possible, he suggests “we can gain some level of insight through reading or watching the stories of transgender people” (p. 10). He is clear, however, that committing ourselves to listening well does not mean that we will agree with how a person sees themselves or how they have sought to address their gender concerns. Nonetheless, it will help us “talk about transgender people in the way we would want others to talk about us or our family or close friends, recognizing their full dignity as those created in the image of God” (p. 11).

To assist with the right *head response* (chapter 3), Bunt begins by critiquing the idea “that [our] identity is found in [our] experienced gender, in how we feel internally” (p. 13). The fundamental flaw in this approach, as he insightfully discerns, “is that it answers the question ‘Who am I?’ without first asking the important question, ‘How do I find who I am?’” (p. 13). Moreover, Bunt highlights three reasons why one’s “internal identity” cannot answer the second question:

First, it is *unstable*. An internal identity is based on our feelings and desires, but we all know that these can change. They cannot provide a solid, stable identity. Internal identity is also *ambiguous*. Our feelings and desires can easily conflict. What if we deeply desire two things which cannot be reconciled. Which do we embrace to find our true self? And ultimately, internal identity is *inconsistent*. We all agree that there are desires we might experience which we would not embrace as our identity. (p. 14, emphasis original)

In light of this, a further question emerges: “If there is a conflict between the external body and the internal self, why should we prioritize the internal? When experienced gender and sex conflict, why should we prioritize gender?” (p. 14). The answer is we shouldn’t—neither logically nor biblically. For, as Bunt states: “We receive our God-given identity as male or female through our body” (p. 15). It is, therefore, “not possible to be born in the wrong body” (p. 17).

This anthropological insight provides the basis for the Bible’s expectation that the sex of one’s body will determine one’s gender. Bunt explains as follows:

If our identity as either male or female is given to us by God and communicated to us through our bodies, and if embracing our true identity is the route to fullness of life, it makes sense that the Bible consistently expects males to live as men and females to live as women. It also makes sense that any crossing of gender boundaries is viewed negatively in the Bible (eg Deut 22.5; 1 Cor 11.3–16). (p. 16)

As Bunt rightly espies, Scripture's teaching mean that "transitioning to live in line with [one's] experienced gender is not the right or the best approach when an individual experiences a strong conflict between sex and gender" (p. 17). Otherwise put, the biblical way to resolve a conflict between one's gender identity and one's body is to yield to the body. This may be a hard thing for a gender dysphoric person to hear, especially if they have already transitioned. But Bunt insists that if we know that "what God says about our sex and gender is right and good," we will also know that "he can be trusted" (p. 18).

As for the necessary *hope response* (chapter 4), Bunt contends that Christians are "uniquely equipped to handle suffering well, and to help others to do the same" (p. 19). This is not only because the promises of the gospel enable us to endure trial, but because Scripture teaches us that "things are not as they should be" (p. 20). For this reason, the fact that "some people will, in this lifetime, live with pain and suffering in relation to their gender identity should not be a surprise. All of us will live with pain and suffering of many different types in this life" (p. 20).

Rather than leading to resignation, however, Bunt suggests this should lead to lament. For far from denying the "dissonance between what is and what should be," Scripture encourages us "to express our deep experience of pain, sorrow or loss and, specifically, to express it to God" (p. 20). This is a very potent thing to do. For although lament "does not necessarily change our situation," through it, "God gives us the strength to keep walking through the pain" (p. 20).

Bunt also provides some timely advice for practically supporting those who suffer, and helpfully reminds Christians that it is not our business to explain other people's pain, but to point them "forward to the day when all pain and suffering end, when everything that has been broken is put to rights, and when God himself wipes away our tears" (p. 22). He closes with this salutary insight: "Those who seek to follow Jesus faithfully while living out their sex in the midst of experiencing gender dysphoria are a beautiful example of the sort of costly self-sacrifice to which Jesus calls us all" (p. 23).

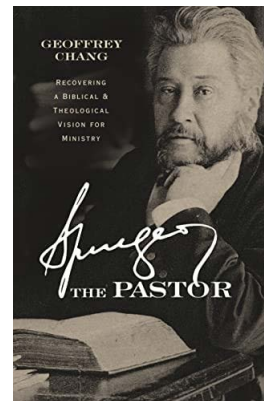
Despite its brevity and the many matters it leaves unaddressed, *People Not Pronouns* is a much needed resource that will help to equip the church for the challenge ahead. I commend it warmly and pray it will be used widely.

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Geoffrey Chang. *Spurgeon the Pastor: Recovering a Biblical and Theological Vision for Ministry*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2022. ix + 258 pp. £16.50/\$17.99.

If, to borrow a phrase, “of the making of many Spurgeon biographies there has been no end,” then, by way of contrast, books specifically examining the famous nineteenth century British pastor’s ecclesiology have been few and far between. The task of recovering this “forgotten”—or at least, underexplored and underappreciated—Spurgeon, is the worthy goal of Geoffrey Chang’s fresh and accessible treatment of his pastoral ministry and commitment to the local church. As a former pastor who now teaches at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and serves as curator for the Spurgeon Library, Chang’s ambitions are more than simply to fill a notable lacuna. His hope is that Spurgeon’s model of eschewing pragmatism and convenience in favor of a principled ecclesiology driven by biblical and theological convictions will rub off on his readers. As he puts it in the introduction, “At the heart of [Spurgeon’s] pastoral strategy was the belief that the Bible is sufficient and speaks to how the church is to be led. So, the best way to think about this book is as a conversation partner to help you consider what faithfulness in ministry looks like” (p. 8).



His mission to commend Spurgeon as an ecclesial mentor covers the breadth of his church-based ministry, with the majority of illustrations drawn from Spurgeon’s 38-year incumbency at London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle. Chang devotes the first two chapters to Spurgeon’s practice of preaching and the shape of corporate worship. The next three chapters focus on the boundaries of membership, including Spurgeon’s theology and practice of the ordinances and his high view of formalized church membership. Chapters 6–7 examine his unwavering commitment to congregational polity—one that emphasized governance by members of the church led by qualified elders and served by qualified deacons. Chapters 8–9 illustrate Spurgeon’s desire to prepare the church to engage the world with the gospel in a variety of ways—ways that included many charitable and evangelistic institutions, church planting and the famous Pastors’ College that quickly grew from its small beginnings in 1855.

While there is much biographical material embedded within these chapters to furnish Spurgeon neophytes with a compelling introduction to the scope and impact of his ministry, Chang’s primary focus is not so much on Spurgeon himself as it is on “the church and pastoral ministry *through* Spurgeon’s ministry” (p. 10, emphasis added). The Spurgeon who appears in these pages is not simply committed to biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism and activism, but also, in a nod to Bebbington’s quadrilateral, an advocate of what Chang styles “ecclesialcentrism” (p. 3).

The many illustrations drawn from Spurgeon’s ministry serve Chang’s aim to set him before readers as an exemplar of principled-ecclesiology-in-practice. For example, while Chang appropriately begins his exploration of Spurgeon’s pastoral activity with a focus on his prolific preaching ministry (what Spurgeon memorably styled “the Thermopylae of Christendom” where the “fight will be lost or won”), he is nonetheless careful to accentuate that “Spurgeon’s pastoral ministry was more than just preaching”: “He did not occupy a preaching station but pastored a church” (pp. 15–16). Further, for all the reach of Spurgeon’s sermons beyond the Metropolitan Tabernacle (in addition to the many visitors who flocked to hear him preach in London, over the course of his lifetime some 3,563 of his sermons were published in sixty-three volumes), Spurgeon’s primary focus was always his own flock. As Chang observes, “The



health and unity of the church”—first and foremost his own local church—“depended on the preaching of the Word” (p. 16).

Elsewhere, Chang highlights Spurgeon’s “convictional approach to the ordinances” as a facet of his pastoral ministry where his principled ecclesiology was on full display (p. 98). So seriously was Spurgeon persuaded that the whole membership should be able to physically gather together for corporate worship, especially to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, that when the congregation’s growing size prevented this from happening, a looming crisis was averted—Spurgeon had resolved to resign his pastorate—only when the congregation quickly approved the construction of the Metropolitan Tabernacle to replace the much smaller New Park Street Chapel (pp. 88–89).

Chang’s repeated, and well-made, point is that the local church was the locus of Spurgeon’s ecclesiology; even parachurch institutions as integral and intrinsic to Spurgeon’s legacy as the Pastors’ College existed to support, not supplant, the local church. “Seminaries alone cannot produce pastors,” Chang infers. “Rather, they work best when they come alongside local church pastors and support them in pastoral training” (p. 244).

In many ways, *Spurgeon the Pastor* functions as a historical-theological companion to Mark Dever’s *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005) or *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). But regardless of whether one subscribes to the precise contours of Spurgeon’s ecclesiological convictions (let alone those emerging out of the 9Marks stable), Chang’s evaluation of the Prince of Preachers’ pastoral ministry has immense value insofar as it offers a counter-cultural corrective to the besetting sin of evangelical ecclesiological pragmatism. Chang is to be commended for recovering this “forgotten Spurgeon” and setting him before a contemporary audience as an exemplar of a full-orbed pastoral ministry shaped by robust biblical and theological convictions.

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Joshua D. Chatraw. *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 227 pp. £12.99/\$18.99.

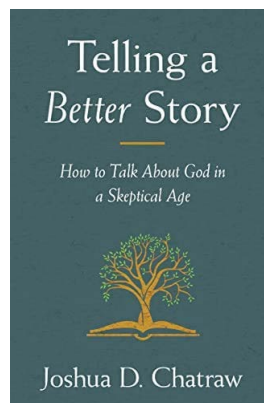
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Having greatly enjoyed Joshua D. Chatraw’s own contribution to his and Karen Swallow Prior’s *Cultural Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), I looked forward to what his latest work, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age*, would bring to the apologetics/evangelism table.

The answer is—a great deal! The structure of the book is clear. Part 1 suggests that there is a better story about apologetics. Part 2 shows us how to offer a better story. And part 3 deals with objections to the story.

There is a depth and intensity to the book, but it is not at all inaccessible, largely because of the quality of Chatraw’s writing, which at times is quite beautiful. For example, in reflecting on the story of a young woman who challenged a pastor’s right to criticize her behavior, we find this in chapter 3:

Rather than a sparring partner who masterfully presents syllogisms and embarrasses her by simply pointing out her inconsistencies, she needed a spiritual doctor with a



bedside manner. She needed a hospital for her soul, a community willing to show her their own wounds while introducing her to the Physician who can mend hers. (p. 38)

Chatraw argues that the cultural narratives have changed so much that “the basic categories assumed in the Christian story are no longer taken for granted. And in many cases, this gospel story is presumed to not only be false, but an oppressive leftover from the past” (p. 1). Consequently, he suggests that we need to be able to tell a better story.

In order to be able to tell a better story we need to listen well to other people’s stories first. As Chatraw writes:

Though you will often hear many of the same objections—such as ones that raise the question of evil or point to the restrictive nature of Christian morality—remember that everyone you speak with possesses a distinct, personal story. Be careful not to assume you know what is at the heart of their objection. Listening well is the first step in an apologetics of love. (p. 170)

At a time when it is becoming fashionable in some evangelical circles to question apologetics, he offers this robust apologetic: “Making persuasive appeals for and answering objections to Christianity is not only modelled and commanded in the Scriptures (Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15), but it is on display as a key feature in the writings of early church leaders (long before the Enlightenment)” (p. 19).

A welcome emphasis is his stress on “communal apologetics”—in which the church seeks to embody both the beauty and truth of the gospel. This is what we might term wholistic, or total, apologetics. “A healthy apologetics uses logic and provides evidences, but it also grounds logic and evidence in genuine human connection that gives credence to and resonates with people’s deeply held aspirations and affections” (p. 45).

It is also essential that those who seek to communicate the good news “seek to understand the context we now find ourselves in” (p. 25). In this regard he points out that many of secularism’s values come from Christianity (see also Tom Holland in *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* [New York: Basic, 2019] and Glen Scrivener in *The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality* [London: Good Book, 2022]).

The key chapter of the book is chapter 5, where Chatraw seeks to develop his “inside out” apologetic methodology. Instead of asking, “What is your worldview?,” it’s better to ask, “What is your story?” After all, the story embodies the worldview. He helpfully divides proposed secular stories into three main categories: the pessimistic secular story; the optimistic secular story; and the story of pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality. He then goes on to give three micro examples—the stories of consumerism, achievement, and romance—and suggests that we need constantly to compare these stories with God’s story.

The whole idea of “inside out” begins by entering a person’s social imagination and engaging their ideas from within it” (p. 63). Offering the better story starts with looking inside the story and then going out to a better story. Chatraw suggests how to do this in terms of identity, morality, beauty, death, justice, happiness, dignity, disappointment, guilt, and love. (I found this the most helpful part of the book—the last paragraph of chapter 7 on love is worth the price of the book alone!)

Alongside its many strengths, *Telling a Better Story* also has a few weaknesses. Sometimes things are stated in overly black and white terms. For example, he talks about Christianity now being perceived

as oppressive (p. 11). True enough. But this is hardly a new phenomenon and there is much we can learn from church history in this regard.

Is it just in the premodern era that people assumed there was a higher meaning to life—a sense of transcendence (p. 27)? Is that not also true today of many communities especially among the working class? Indeed, is that not what the world’s many religions (and even “wokeness”!) attempt to provide?

In chapter 4, “When Talking to Humans,” in responding to the question, “What is your best argument for Christianity?,” Chatraw argues that there is no such thing as a “universal best argument” (p. 40). Strategically, I understand his point. But I trust he would agree that the universal best argument for Christianity is Christ himself. Persuasion through narrative is not just something that Jesus did, but that he embodied. The story of Christ is always the best apologetic.

But these are minor blemishes in what is a stimulating, encouraging and helpful addition to the ever more important discussion of how we communicate the good news today. In that regard, *Telling a Better Story* should be added to the list of go-to apologetic resources—e.g., Paul M. Gould’s *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), Daniel Strange’s *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can’t Stop Talking About ... And How to Connect Them to Christ* (London: Good Book, 2021); Glynn Harrison’s *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017), and Peter Kreeft’s *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal’s Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993).

Chatraw states that his aim “is not to help you tell stories in general but rather to help you be a better communicator of God’s story in a world that no longer takes our plotline too seriously” (p. 73). He succeeds.

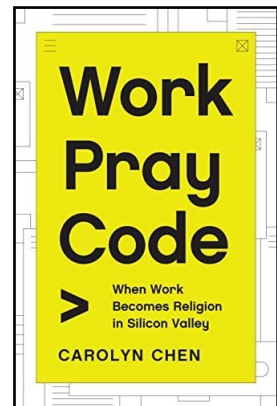
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Carolyn Chen. *Work Pray Code: When Work Becomes Religion in Silicon Valley*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. xi + 254 pp. £22.00/\$27.95.

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Where can we find religion in a place like Silicon Valley, which ranks among the least religious regions of America? When Carolyn Chen, a sociologist and professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Berkeley, sought to study religion in Silicon Valley, she found it in the most unexpected of places: tech companies. Although Silicon Valley is ostensibly one of the least religious places in America, Chen argues that people in the Valley are more religious than we might think. Indeed, the religious needs of tech workers are typically fulfilled by their companies, rather than by institutional religion. In this fascinating book, Chen explains how work has replaced religion in Silicon Valley—and the societal implications of this shift. Although focused on the tech industry, Chen’s findings are broadly applicable to workers in the knowledge economy beyond the Bay Area.



Work Pray Code is the fruit of several years of Chen's research on tech professionals and the companies they work for. The book begins with an introduction, which is followed by five chapters, a conclusion, and two appendices. It is loosely structured in four parts: (1) an overview of work as religion (Introduction and ch. 1); (2) companies as providers of spiritual care (chs. 2–3); (3) popular Buddhism as a tool to maximize employee productivity (chs. 4–5); and (4) the impact on society when work becomes religion (Conclusion).

As a tech worker living in Silicon Valley, I found Chen's insights to be both intriguing and useful for ministry. While writing as a Christian, Chen is not writing explicitly to a Christian audience. Nevertheless, her keen observations are helpful for anyone who ministers in contexts where people tend to find meaning, identity, and purpose in their jobs. Chen presents a convincing case for why rewarding jobs and lavish company perks are insufficient to fulfill the needs of tech workers and their local communities. While past generations tended to find meaning and purpose outside of work in social institutions such as family or church, today's tech workers increasingly find personal and relational fulfillment at work. In Chen's research, the employees who did not treat work as a religion tended to be those who had stronger ties to another social institution outside of work. Throughout the book, I was reminded that the church is uniquely positioned to bring wholeness to individuals and communities in ways that companies cannot.

Chen accurately depicts tech workers' devotion to their jobs under the enabling influence of "corporate maternalism"—a term Chen uses to describe the situation "where companies provide for the personal care of their employees to make them happy, healthy, and (therefore) productive" (p. 60). By tapping into an employee's craving for self-fulfillment at work, companies encourage workers to unlock their "true and limitless self" which is "an infinite source of energy" and productivity (pp. 103–4). Amid aggressive project schedules, companies provide wellness programs (like mindfulness) to help employees focus on work while mitigating burnout. Ironically, while Buddhist mindfulness is meant to cultivate detachment from the world, companies repurpose mindfulness towards an entirely different goal: increased productivity (p. 144). Thus, companies utilize meditation in ways which conflict with Buddhist ideals, while downplaying human finitude and the toilsomeness of work (cf. Gen 3:17–19; Ps 127:1–2; etc.). Although some wellness programs have low rates of employee participation (p. 79), many tech companies still emphasize spiritual care, even if only symbolically, as a way of "keeping up with Google" in their corporate perks (p. 78). Thus, even if many employees do not participate in mindfulness programs, work nevertheless functions as a religion through the symbiotic relationship of employees who are dedicated to their jobs, and companies who attempt to provide for their employees' spiritual needs.

When I first picked up this book, I was expecting to glean insights into how work becomes an idol in individual lives. The book certainly delivered on that expectation, but what I did not expect was that Chen would also powerfully portray the societal impacts of work-as-religion. In my opinion, Chen's concluding essay on "Techtopia" is worth the price of the book. What happens to a society when work increasingly seeks to satisfy all types of human needs—including those meant to be fulfilled by religion—but only for an elite class of workers? What happens to those who are ineligible to receive such perks, and especially those lower-paid workers (like cooks or bus drivers) whose services form the backbone of corporate programs? In Silicon Valley, Chen argues, tech companies have increased social inequality by privatizing public goods and services (like mass transit) into corporate perks (like company buses). Is it any wonder that corporate maternalism has nurtured a generation of tech workers

who are indifferent to the common good of the communities in which they live? As tech companies take care of the elites, who is looking out for everyone else?

To be fair, I would point out that many tech companies (and their workers) are involved in philanthropy. Though charitable giving typically accounts for only a nominal percentage of the total budget, there are exceptions. One Silicon Valley CEO, a prominent Christian, donates over half of his gross income each year and also helped start an organization to facilitate collaboration among local churches and nonprofits. Despite these efforts, Chen's critique of tech companies is still legitimate.

Where tech companies tend to bifurcate society by offering exclusive perks to their workforce, the church freely proclaims the gospel which unites people across socioeconomic classes. To address the issues Chen raises, I would suggest it is imperative for churches to build healthy disciples who have a biblical view of work and are sensitive to the needs of the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church has unique resources to form whole people who care for the common good of society. As the pandemic has meant that many tech workers have shifted to hybrid or fully remote working models, churches have a unique opportunity to fulfill relational and spiritual needs, as they were meant to do all along. To differentiate themselves from tech companies who use religion as a tool for productivity, churches must demonstrate the countercultural message of the crucified and risen Lord as the pattern for the Christian life.

*Work Pray Code* is essential reading for Christians seeking to reach those who work in today's knowledge economy. This book would be a profitable read in discussion groups where it could be studied alongside other resources which provide a biblical perspective on: work (e.g., Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* [New York: Riverhead, 2012]); technology (e.g., Tony Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022]); or the church (e.g., Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recovering Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009]). Although not all readers will be comfortable with two brief vulgarities (pp. 142–43, quoting the words of a tech worker) or agree with the passing comment that "Christ learns who he 'really' is during his forty days in the desert" (p. 120), the book's many strengths far outweigh these issues and should still prove beneficial for discerning readers.

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Rachel Gilson. *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next*. Epsom: Good Book, 2021. 146 pp. £8.99/\$16.99.

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Same-sex attraction is frequently viewed as a contentious, difficult, or, at the very least, sensitive topic. It may truthfully be all of these, but in a time when Christians often feel they need to choose between poking homosexuality with a four-foot pole or embracing it with inclusive zeal, Rachel Gilson has performed a marvelous feat. She has succeeded in writing an understated yet elucidating book on same-sex attraction. *Born Again This Way* never shies away from presenting scriptural truths or engaging with honest objections, but it remains beautifully light in touch. A mix of theology and memoir, this is a book that can be gifted and devoured without the need for copious disclaimers or a theological degree.

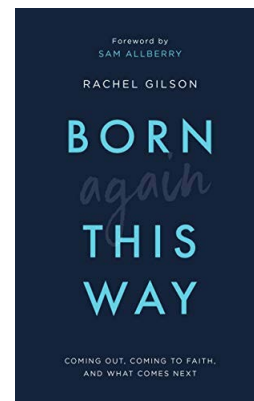
The structure of the book is one of its driving strengths. Part narrative, part scriptural exegesis and reflection, the book never loses momentum. Readers walk with Rachel through her coming to Christ and her struggle with the existence and enticements of her same-sex attraction, take a rest-break to examine Scripture and drink in her reflections, and then cut back to the journey. It's a style which less proficient writers would find all too easy to derail with verbose personal anecdotes or essay-like theological proofs—but Rachel resists the temptation to do either.

While this is a book which will be helpful in a special way to Christians who experience same-sex attraction and to their church communities, it is primarily a book about the all-encompassing goodness of Jesus, the shape of Christian discipleship and service, and the courage it takes to allow our heavenly Father to direct our steps through all of life and love. Gilson notes that Scripture is clear that “the desire for same-gender sexual contact ... is a desire for something sinful” (p. 46). But she also notes that everyone desires sinful things: all Christians experience temptation, and all are called to fight against it. While she is honest about the pleasure and comfort she found in pursuing same-sex relationships, Gilson is just as adamant that she is in no way the loser for choosing to deny herself and follow the way of the cross. None of us are, even when our desires are for good things. She writes,

When we say Jesus is better than these things [sex, romance], we're not trying to shrink *them* but to magnify *him*. If we tried to pretend that these good gifts were actually bad, we wouldn't even believe ourselves.... But the fact was that what Jesus offered me was simply better. (p. 62, emphasis original)

It is this underpinning of gladness that transforms what could have been a literary dirge of self-sacrifice into a rich conversation. It also prevents disintegration into an “us vs. them” rhetoric. All Christians are called to follow Christ, and Gilson proposes that same-sex attracted believers in fact have a unique opportunity to “witness powerfully to the beauty of Jesus over romance,” attest that God's Word is good, even when it contradicts deep and powerful emotions, and “prophetically call the church to honor God and neighbor” (p. 60). They do this by refusing again and again to accept a lesser gospel in the daily tumult of living, even when that lesser gospel is politically correct or feels personally satisfying. Thus, there are distinct and important roles for both same-sex attracted and opposite-sex attracted believers in the body of Christ—and opportunities for all members to grow in holiness and contribute to the holiness of others.

As Gilson's meditations transfer what is often a painfully lonely experience—same-sex attraction—into the arena of Christian community, she wanders into so-called dangerous territory. Who hasn't



been scarred or scared by the responses of other believers when it comes to the complexities of sexual attraction? Again, Gilson steps lightly. Her story is one of almost envious ease: she became a Christian at university, was nurtured by a passionate and compassionate university Bible study, and married a Christian man for whom she came to feel profound respect and affection, despite her persisting same-sex attraction. This seemingly idyllic tale of grace (if there were negative reactions within the Christian community to her sexuality, these are not dwelt upon) might easily be the biggest barrier for potential readers. Nevertheless, Gilson seeks to mitigate this possibility by consistent reminders that hers is one story among thousands, by sharing the different stories of four friends, and by frankly acknowledging both her unique blessings and difficulties.

This proof of eyes wide-open allows readers to accept and grapple with her insights. One such insight is the following: “The culture of unbiblical promises about marriage was created corporately, and together we need to attend to those who are harmed by them” (p. 94). In light of this, she calls Christians to resist offering marriage as the solution to same-sex attraction or seeing it as a reward for obedience; to redeem male-female friendships by refusing to see sexuality everywhere; and to strive for relationships where hard questions can be aired and addressed.

Gilson, although marrying at a young age, has helpful advice for singleness and celibacy—situations that can come with a profound sense of disadvantage in Christian communities which are so often geared towards the married and the propagating. Her reminder that even singles have One Person on their side who sees and knows them no matter what, is both an encouragement and a guardrail against the very real fears of loneliness, insignificance, and ultimate obscurity. Gilson counsels singles:

Find out what most stirs your heart for Jesus and invest there.... No matter what, take the normal means of grace dead seriously; pursue prayer, Scripture, and acts of mercy as you do air, water, and food. You will need a thick, durable relationship with Jesus. (p. 107)

This way of life is an answer to the agonizing grief of not having one person who is *for* you in every season. It is also, as Gilson intuits in conversation with a celibate pastor, a gracious conclusion to what would otherwise be a devouring, never-ending quest to find one friend to be all things for you.

*Born Again This Way* offers much biblical wisdom, gentle guidance, pastoral insight, and personal experience to the subject of same-sex attraction. While some readers might wish for deeper exegesis or even the inclusion of bullet-point takeaways or step-by-step outlines, the uniqueness of this book is that it is less a theological how-to on a difficult topic, and more an extended conversation with a fellow believer on the Way. (Indeed, for me, the only detraction from the reading experience were the bold quotes which at times broke up the flow of the prose.) The beauty of Gilson’s writing is that she is able to offer a biblical worldview, meet and understand (not just counter) objections, all the while holding onto the reality of diverse experience. Everyone’s journey is and looks different, Rachel insists—and this is exactly what allows us to learn and grow from her courageously shared story. At the same time, some things don’t change, and as she holds out the Word of God with clarity, honesty, and warmth, one is reminded that we are all pilgrims on the road, dependent together on our all-sufficient Savior. If the communities and friendships Rachel encountered on her journey seem to spit in the face of bitter



experience, they certainly serve as a reminder of the transforming power of the Spirit and the deep connections and joys that await us in heaven.

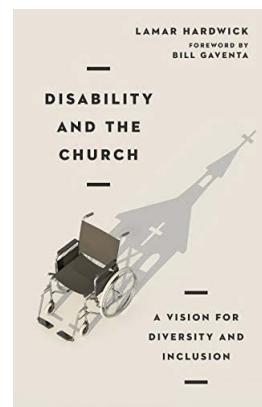
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Lamar Hardwick. *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. 208 pp. £12.99/\$18.00.

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Disabled people make up the largest minority group in our society today (p. 103). However, many churches fail to engage meaningfully with the disabled community, resulting in this group being largely missing from many congregations. Lamar Hardwick—who describes himself as the “autism pastor”—was diagnosed at thirty-six and campaigns for greater awareness and acceptance for people with disabilities in the church. This book is Hardwick’s tough “love letter” (the title of his introduction) to the church for local congregations to ask themselves two questions: “what do people experience when they experience me? What part of what they are saying is true?” (p. 18). Hardwick’s aims are two-fold: to “introduce a vibrant biblical theology of disability” and to offer “actionable steps and strategies” for pastors and congregations (p. 19).



Hardwick’s passion for Christ’s body is evident—unlike some who use the church’s failings to justify their rejection and withdrawal from her—and will commend him to readers of this journal. He has a clear writing style and personable approach that draws the reader in, while his use of personal anecdotes and other people’s stories keeps his points grounded. For example, Sarah’s story of how her autistic son was treated in a Sunday school was painful to read and illustrated the human cost of the prejudice and discrimination many families face (pp. 106–9).

Hardwick is at his best when he speaks with a prophetic voice, and many of his criticisms are cutting but delivered lovingly. For example, he observes that many churches of all sizes quickly built an online presence during the Covid pandemic because of the needs of the majority (p. 49). Why, then, do many churches balk at the challenges of meeting the needs of their disabled members?

What makes Hardwick’s perspective interesting is the intersection between his autism and his race. He draws analogies from his experience of racism and uses that to illuminate the prejudice he has encountered because of his autism. While the parallels he draws are legitimate, this leads Hardwick to reject deficit or medical definition of disability for the social model (pp. 88, 102) and, on several occasions, to quote with approval from Nancey Eiesland’s work, *The Disabled God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). His stance is not without its problems, therefore, but Hardwick does not deserve to be dismissed out of hand solely because of this.

Nevertheless, this reviewer was left with a sense of unease and disappointment at odds with the glowing endorsements that occupied the book’s first four pages. My reasons are three-fold.

First, Hardwick fails to present a robust biblical theology of disability. On occasions—for example, in the parable of the lost sheep (pp. 25–29), and the vast crowd before the throne in heaven (pp. 34, 79–80)—his exposition is imaginative and thought-provoking. Yet, at other times, Hardwick’s exegesis feels



forced and, in a few instances, descends into eisegesis. For example, viewing the types of soil in Jesus's parable of the sower as an analogy of barriers to inclusion (pp. 98–99, 100–62) is simply untenable. This is not to say that the points Hardwick wishes to make are not credible, merely that his attempts to ground them biblically are unconvincing.

Second, Hardwick's use of the terms "inclusive" and "diversity" are potentially confusing. In a time when multinational conglomerates, government departments, charitable organizations, schools, etc., all trumpet their commitment to inclusivity, the suspicion is that the term has lost all meaning and instead is an exercise in virtue signaling. Hardwick is adamant that the church has ceded too much ground and must follow culture wholeheartedly in adopting a posture of inclusivity (p. 24); inclusion is why the church was born (pp. 38–40)! But inclusion is too "thin" a term for what the Church should aim for, as John Swinton has argued ("From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16.2 [2012], 172–90). Instead, the Church should be a place where people belong. Hardwick also argues for the importance of belonging and community (pp. 22–24, 30, 51), which suggests the issue isn't one of substance. Still, his uncritical acceptance of the language of inclusion runs the risk of suggesting that the solution to exclusion is to embrace our culture's, rather than Scripture's, answer to the problem.

Finally, Hardwick's use of the term "disability" is both too broad and yet also not broad enough. To explain: although he aims to address disability generally, many of Hardwick's examples are about autism (understandably, as that is his direct experience). But as Hardwick himself acknowledges (p. 12), the disabled community is large and varied, encompassing physical, intellectual, and developmental conditions. The self-perception and needs of different groups within the disabled community are not identical and, in some instances, are opposed to one another. For example, there is a debate whether some forms of autism are a disability or simply a neurological "difference." The only time the term "disability" can be, and is, applied without distinction is for political purposes. Yet the reader of Hardwick's book will not be made aware of these nuances. This reviewer believes that if he had restricted himself to solely addressing autism, Hardwick would have better met his book's aims.

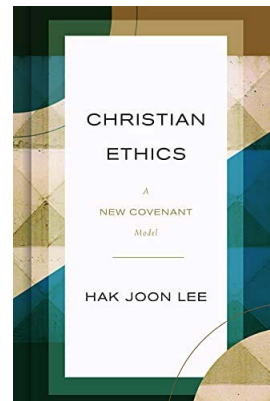
And yet, even in his discussion of autism, Hardwick's treatment feels myopic. The medical definition of autism has expanded considerably in recent years. It now encompasses various conditions, such as Asperger's Syndrome and childhood disintegrative disorder. But, too often, Hardwick appears to address issues associated with the mild to moderate expressions of autism only. But the needs, challenges for pastoral care, and value to the church of profoundly autistic people and their families are considerably different. (For a candid yet hope-filled account of parenting two profoundly autistic children, see Andrew and Rachel Wilson, *The Life You Never Expected: Thriving While Parenting Special Needs Children* [Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015].) By painting autism in such broad strokes, Hardwick fails to serve the very group he wishes to help.

To summarize, this reviewer believes that by attempting to offer both a biblical theology of disability and a practical guide for congregations, *Disability and the Church* falls between these two stools and does neither particularly well. Although pastors and others looking to develop a disability ministry in their church will find some help in this book, especially in the latter half, the issues identified above mean that it can only receive a qualified endorsement.

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Hak Joon Lee. *Christian Ethics: A New Covenant Model*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 572 pp. £38.99/\$47.99.

Producing a textbook on Christian Ethics is no short order. Perhaps it demands more than most disciplines: definition of terms, an organizing principle, engagement with philosophy, theology, scriptural exegesis, history, and contemporary society. Hak Joon Lee, Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, has offered a bold and thorough treatment of Christian Ethics. He endeavors to present what he believes to be a novel approach (p. 9), organizing his ethics around the concept/metaphor of covenant.



The book is organized into two halves, the first focusing on theory (“New Covenant Ethics”) and the second on application (“Social Ethics”). The first half is the most demanding for the reader. In the opening two chapters, the metaphor of “covenant” is introduced and given a biblical and theological justification as the dominant organizing principle for ethics. This exploration establishes the author’s position (broadly) within the Reformed tradition. Chapters 3 and 4 begin to identify what he means by “new covenant” ethics. The author’s approach is Hegelian, specifying three dialectics that he believes are typical of a covenant: unilateral-bilateral, communal-communicative, and memory-hope. This is all subsumed under the overarching covenantal theo-drama of liberation-restoration. Underpinning these dialectics are the triad of justice, love, and power, which are always held in balance, working toward the goal (“cosmic actualization,” p. 55) of shalom. The author contends for four moral practices that characterize “new covenant ethics”—communicative engagement, just peacemaking, grassroots community organization, and nonviolent action—built upon the theological characteristics of trinitarian theology, eschatology, liberation-restoration, the harmony of love-justice-power, just peacemaking, nonviolence, ecumenism, and the eucharist (i.e., sacramentalism). As this paragraph demonstrates, there is an abundance of conceptual material to be held together in the proposed schema. This is done cogently, and perhaps comprehensively, but readers will struggle to discern if it is ideology driving the principles, or the other way around. This is not helped by the descriptive nature of much that is presented.

The final six chapters of the first half explore how the theory presented could be evaluated, compared, and applied. Chapter 8 is strong in demonstrating how the dialectical nature of the model makes room for various ethical “motifs” (modes) to be held together (rather than showing preference) and the way it embraces teleology, deontology, and virtue. Chapter 9, however, is disappointing as the dialectical nature of the method seeks to simultaneously uphold biblical authority while maintaining a biblical-critical posture. Theological justification is given through a Barthian rationale (pp. 197–98), in which the author seeks to distinguish between divine authority and scriptural authority. The concluding chapter of the section (ch. 10) provides a practical model of how the theory will be utilized, while detailing some key characteristics of the model (e.g., the dialectical, analogical, communal, and communicative). The author seeks to demonstrate the capacity of the model for handling real-world problems. Epistemologically, the author contends for a “critical-realist” position, maintaining consistency with his dialects, and denies a purely objectivist or subjectivist approach.

The second half of the book is given to considering social ethics. The author begins his treatment with an overview of social ethics and the “covenantal social imagination.” This chapter (ch. 11) is

foundational for the following exploration of issues as the author demonstrates how spheres and institutions comprise society. He imagines his model possessing a unique capaciousness and plausibility for an increasingly pluralistic society (p. 245). The issues explored in the subsequent chapters include distributive justice (ch. 12), politics (ch. 13), economics (ch. 14), creation care (ch. 15), criminal justice (ch. 16), race (ch. 17), sex and marriage (ch. 18), medical ethics (ch. 19), and war, peace, and just peacemaking (ch. 20). These chapters are much clearer than the first half of the book and demonstrate the value of the comprehensive model offered. Issues are treated systematically, and the model proposed gives fair voice to secular positions while seeking to uphold a Christian ethic for society. However, in trying to strike a balance between a biblical position and one that is livable today in broader society, the results are mixed and confusing. So, with regards to pre-marital sex, the author advocates neither condemning nor condoning immoral behavior (pp. 411–12). Instead, he proposes modeling a better way that will lead to sanctification in others. With regards to same-sex marriage, he upholds the biblical vision of marriage between a man and a woman on grounds of created complementarity (though not necessarily complementarian), and the reiteration of this good design in the ministry of Jesus. However, he also supports the right of homosexuals in the broader community to be joined in marriage. The difference, he believes, is that such unions are more contractual than covenantal, as God has purposed them to be (pp. 423–25).

The strength of this volume is the maturity of thought represented in the model. Hak Joon Lee has been thinking, teaching, and writing on these matters for many years. There is a cogency and practicability to what he offers, as is seen through the second half of the volume. Furthermore, there is an admirable charity in his writing that seeks the common good. The questions he raises in regard to a host of ethical issues are honest and searching, and need to be considered.

The weaknesses of the volume, however, are not insignificant. While the work is comprehensive and sophisticated, most readers will find the first half conceptually cumbersome. The dialectics do not help, as readers are presented with thoughts constantly in tension. The author doesn't dismiss absolute truth or morality, but he doesn't see them as necessarily within reach either. In many ways, this is admirable and appropriate as we await eschatological perfection. However, at many points, this will lead the readers to the conclusion that truth and morality are emerging, rather than real. Although the author tries to mitigate such concerns by advocating a critical realist position, most evangelical readers will find his lack of certainty frustrating.

The work also struggles stylistically. At points, the volume is beautifully poetic, but at other times it is technically verbose. The conceptual difficulty could be mitigated by a few changes. The constant repetition of dialectical phraseology could be left out or replaced by simpler wording. In fact, repetition is a recurring issue. The volume often says the same thing (at times almost verbatim) within a matter of a few paragraphs (e.g., pp. 12, 32, 38–39, 41, 44–45, 78, 82, 201–2, 223, 400, 402–3, etc.).

Theologically, there are several positions stated as a matter of fact that readers will find strange if not unconvincing. One example is the notion of *kenosis* (pp. 67, 68, 102) which is applied not only to the incarnation but also to the person of the Spirit. This is proposed as a measure of respecting human agency. Likewise, social trinitarianism (pp. 69, 78) is assumed as the way trinitarian theology is related to ethics. This includes question-begging statements about “the historical actualization of triune life (*perichōrēsis ad extra*)” as the “purpose of the covenant” (p. 78). Moreover, the claim of biblical contradictions and inconsistencies, along with the encouragement to read Scripture using a “hermeneutics both of trust and suspicion, of yielding and of assertion” (p. 200), is not without issues.

Finally, there are some major lacunae that keep the positions presented from being more persuasive. First, there is little mention of the regenerating work of the Spirit (though the Spirit is present in the volume at several points). Along with this, there is no mention of gospel proclamation or repentance. This is problematic because the new covenant is determined to be universal. But is this in scope or inclusion? The author seems to propose the latter (pp. 250–52), creating confusion around moral ability, the implications of sin, and accountability. At points, there are swipes at evangelicals (p. 197), biblicists (p. 206), fundamentalists (p. 194), postliberals (p. 195), and two-kingdoms theology (p. 245), with no support being offered for his caricatured criticisms. Furthermore, there is little engagement with scholars that would have been important interlocutors on several points—such as Oliver O'Donovan on moral realism and/or justice and political theology; David VanDrunen on covenants or natural law; and Stanley Hauerwas on virtue and community formation. Failure to engage with the work of these scholars means that readers are less likely to be persuaded by the author's conclusions and more likely to view them as novel or inferior alternatives.

Readers of this journal should be encouraged to read this volume if they are looking to engage with a moderate theological treatment of Christian ethics, which offers a robust and comprehensive model. However, I doubt it will become a set text for courses on Christian ethics, as evangelicals will be dissatisfied not only by the conceptual clutter but by the theological shortcomings of the work.

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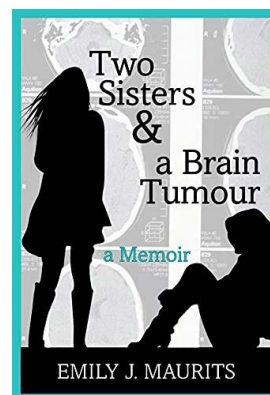
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Emily J. Maurits. *Two Sisters and a Brain Tumour: A Memoir*. Adelaide: Daughters of Love & Light, 2021. 350 pp. £13.99/\$18.99.

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When I think of a memoir, I imagine someone writing from the vantage point of many decades of life experience. And given the way in which *Two Sisters and a Brain Tumour* reads, you could be mistaken for thinking the same. But you'd be wrong. Still in her twenties, Emily Maurits (a radiographer and author with a master's degree in theology) writes with a maturity beyond her years. In recounting the story of her sister Jasmine's battle with a brain tumor, she draws us into every moment, describing and evoking the emotions that were hers and her family's—as they trod this painful path together.

As the title suggests, Maurits's story is written from the perspective of one sibling coming to terms with the life-threatening disease of another sibling. But an underlying theological question lurks throughout the memoir: How can a good God allow things like sick parents and little sisters with brain tumors? On the one hand, Maurits's memoir is all about addressing that weighty question, alongside several other confronting theological issues. But it does so much more. It takes us into the inner thoughts of a young woman who loves God and knows his love for her in Jesus Christ. It takes us into the relationship she has with her younger sister, with all its complexities and mess, as well as the love and affection that deepen as the story unfolds.



The purpose of the book is to provide a real-life account of a Christian searching for the good that God promises to bring out of suffering and how they were enabled to keep going even when they weren't able to see it. Consequently, as the author writes about her own pain and sadness, fear and confusion, she wrestles deeply with the meaning and truthfulness of her conviction that God is good and can be trusted. The reader is implicitly invited to do the same, imagining how we would respond in similar circumstances and to engage with our own pain and sadness, as well as the big questions of life and faith.

The memoir is broken up into four parts, with each part containing five to six short chapters. Within each part the author includes some diary excerpts—"real-time" reflections on what she was thinking in that moment. These grant a glimpse into her mind and heart as she calls out to God. At the end of each part, there is also a reflection page that enables the reader to stop, take a breath and reflect on something connected to the book. For example, at the end of part 1, Maurits provides a reflection on times of hardship. She concludes with this encouragement: "In times of hardship, *reach out your hands*. People are kinder than you believe, and God is greater than you think" (p. 75, emphasis original).

Without wanting to give too much of the plot away, the recurring words, "It's still leaking," made me groan audibly. One can only imagine what it must have been like for Jasmine and Emily and her family as those words were said repeatedly. The diary excerpt from that particular time includes Romans 8:28. The author reflects, "I've never liked that verse, but I do now" (p. 209).

This memoir is more than something you might find in "Sick Lit" genre books (as the author's sister describes it). It is about looking for the good that God promises to bring out of suffering. It is about learning to pray big prayers and learning that God can and does do miracles (pp. 335–36).

The final diary excerpt of the book is especially moving: "HOME ... Oh Lord. What can I say? You answer prayers. In the face of ALL odds You brought Jas home—today" (p. 318).

The memoir concludes with an epilogue that takes us eighteen months down the track, after Jasmine's eventual home coming. It's a conversation between the two sisters as they walk along a path together. And again, we are privy to the inner workings of a mind that loves God and loves her sister. When Jasmine asks Emily for advice, the author reflects: "Where is the girl I both loved and hated with all the ferocity of childhood? Beside me is a woman, and God put her there" (p. 324).

And then there is a present-day conversation between the two sisters about this brain tumor and what they learnt through it all (May 23, 2021—about 5 years after the events of the memoir). Even though "journey" can feel a rather hackneyed word for describing how God works in our lives, the reader cannot miss the amazing journey these two sisters have been on, in terms of their relationship with each other—moving from their sometimes awkward and angst-ridden older sister/younger sister ways of relating to a beautiful, more mature way of expressing their love for each other with humor as well as honesty and affection.

But more than that, there is a journey in their relationship with God. In the context of all that had happened, the author puts it this way: "I choose to pray big prayers, to wait on God, and to dare to hope—even when it doesn't come naturally to me.... He is at work, He is good. And if that is the only thing I write until my dying breath, it will be enough" (p. 336). To that, Jasmine says, "Amen." As do I.

I highly commend this book to readers of all ages and at all stages in their Christian walk. In the midst of the hard and painful stuff of life, it will encourage believers to keep walking by faith and to trust in the God who is truly good.

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Rory Noland. *Transforming Worship: Planning and Leading Sunday Services as if Spiritual Formation Mattered*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021. 205 pp. £14.99/\$18.00.

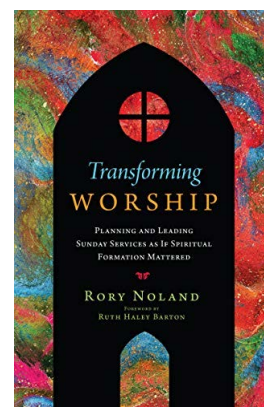
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Rory Noland has been a trusted voice for church musicians and worship leaders for decades. For twenty years, he served on staff at Willow Creek Community Church as the music director and has earned both a master's and doctorate from the Webber Institute for Worship Studies. He is the founder and director of *Heart of the Artist Ministries*, which derives its name from his first and most popular book, now in its second edition. In total, Noland has published four books which explore various aspects of church music and worship topics.

In *Transforming Worship*, Noland addresses the subject of spiritual formation within the weekly worship gathering of the church. While he does not present a concise thesis statement, he does write directly about the theme and purpose of the book. Noland's basic argument is that spiritual formation happens in gathered worship. He highlights the relevance and timeliness of this insight, stating, "I believe that transforming worship can play a pivotal role in stemming the tide of nominal Christianity" (p. 14). Therefore, Noland advocates an approach to gathered worship that cultivates spiritual formation and helps those participating to live as more faithful followers of Christ.

The book begins with a definition of transformational worship. Noland states, "I define *transforming worship* as 'a communal experience that combines classical spiritual practices with a formative encounter with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit'" (p. 11). This definition is followed by a section that reflects on this idea of transformational worship from three different angles: biblical, historical, and theological. Chapter 2, "Updating the Ancient Formula for Sunday Services," is perhaps the most important of the book, as it relates to Noland's primary objective: to present a new worship order that leads to transforming worship. It is here that the author articulates his five-fold model—Call to Worship, Worship Set, Sermon, Table, and Sending—and compares it to three other popular worship orders: historic four-fold, revivalist three-fold, and contemporary binary (pp. 32–46).

Part 2 considers how principles of transforming worship might be applied. Specifically, the author "investigates five distinctive elements of a transforming worship service: prayer, Scripture reading, confession, the Lord's Supper, and baptism" (p. 89). In a two-page epilogue, Noland reminds the reader of the privilege of leading worship. He finishes by stating, "What a wonderful privilege we have every Sunday to invite the people of God to join us as we behold God in Christ, worship him for who he is and all he's done, and then open ourselves up to his transforming working in our lives. Praise God that we get to do this" (p. 176)! Although these final two pages do not advance the author's primary arguments, they provide an encouraging way to conclude the book.



In evaluating Noland's work, the reader can locate many strengths within its pages. The first is found in the author's ability to take a general concept and draw out specific, practical principles so that the reader understands how his arguments apply to ministry practice. This is primarily demonstrated in the second part of the book where Noland seeks to set the five worship elements he has identified within a transforming worship context.

A second strength of the book is the author's argument for sacramentality as a tool for spiritual formation. In chapter 5 specifically, Noland offers a helpful corrective to those who may have swung too far from Catholicism's sacramental abuses. He especially presses this point as it relates to signs and rituals. Sacred symbols, he writes, "are visual aids or physical tools God can use to turn our attention to him, a window into divine reality, like a bridge to the spiritual reality. Sacred symbols, then, are more than merely symbolic, for they enable believers to move from the visible to the invisible world of spiritual reality" (p. 76).

Third, Noland provides a corrective for evaluating personal worship or spiritual progress that is refreshing and convicting. In the context of considering the public and private reading of Scripture, he states, "Another problem is that we've made daily devotions the litmus test for spiritual maturity instead of godly character or the fruits of the Spirit" (p. 122). While perhaps only related to his primary argument in an indirect way, the author here demonstrates his awareness of the heart of modern worshipers and their propensity for embracing false measurements for their faithfulness in worship.

While strengths abound, there is at least one notable weakness to mention. Noland describes his transforming worship order as the best option for allowing spiritual formation in the corporate worship service. However, I question the superiority of the author's contribution. The similarities between the author's five-part pattern and the four-fold historic order are significant. In light of this, it is hard to see what his five-part pattern really adds. Arguably, there are greater benefits to using an order that has historical significance. Whatever the case, Noland fails to fully convince me of the advantages of his worship pattern over those that already exist.

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of Noland's work are easily eclipsed by the book's strengths. *Transforming Worship* will be helpful and encouraging for anyone planning or leading worship services in churches with a strong liturgical tradition. It will also prove helpful for those in free churches because of how the author presses back on many liturgical weaknesses of this tradition. I would also recommend this book to those who faithfully participate in weekly worship from the pew. If you believe corporate worship matters, Noland's book will inspire you to believe it more deeply and practice it more faithfully.

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Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky. *Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Today's Youth*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020. 256 pp. £12.99/\$22.99.

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Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky are Christian psychologists with extensive experience working with youth navigating gender identity questions. They offer “practical wisdom” (p. 76) for parents and church leaders who are similarly engaged with trans youth. (For simplicity, I will use “trans” as the comprehensive description for the range of “emerging gender identities” discussed in by the authors—many of which reject binary notions of gender.)

The book focuses on how to care for trans youth, not on building a case for a particular view of transgender, though the “orthodox” view is apparent throughout the book (see p. 81). It is a timely volume, since “much more has been written on how to think about gender theory as Christians than on how to support people navigating gender identity concerns” (p. 170).

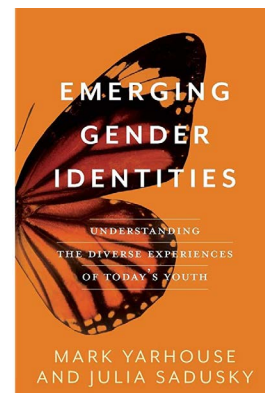
The book’s title reflects the fact that youth culture now includes a wide range of alternative gender identities—transgender, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, nonbinary, etc. The authors comment that tracking the changes can be “like trying to follow the plot of a favorite series by watching it at four times or ten times the normal speed” (p. xi). The first chapter includes a helpful glossary of about thirty relevant terms. (Of course, the vocabulary has moved on since publication.)

Part 1 sets the scene by describing the rise of gender identity questions in Western culture and the debates about how to care for trans youth. Part 2 offers guidance for parents and pastors caring for young people.

Chapter 1 traces how views of trans people moved from a punitive legal approach to a therapeutic psychiatric paradigm to an affirming political position. The “standard” view now rejects any necessary relationship between biological sex and gender identity and sexual orientation, and holds that gender is “a constitutive feature of the psyche that is fundamental, immutable, and not tied to the material of the body” (p. 16, citing Tey Meadow, *Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the Twenty-First Century* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2018], 3). This has promoted diverse “emerging gender identities” which are not always connected to experiences of “gender dysphoria” (pp. 19–20).

Chapter 2, in my view the highlight of the book, asks how to understand the rapid changes in presentations of gender and the growing numbers of young people who are gender diverse. Yarhouse and Sadusky note the common explanations on either side of the culture war: increased acceptance and awareness allow expression of diversity which was always present, or it is the result of a social contagion. Their alternative explanation uses the idea of a “looping effect” developed by philosopher Ian Hacking, according to which a classification or category is applied to people who in turn interact with it. They use it to understand themselves and adapt it. Institutions associated with the classification develop and produce ‘knowledge’ and theories confirmed and used by experts. This social system tends to increase the number of people who are identified with a particular category.

Yarhouse and Sadusky apply this analysis to trans phenomena arguing that “something like gender incongruence has been reported throughout history and across cultures” and “the experience of gender incongruence is understood in evolving ways by society” (pp. 32–36). The looping effect helps to explain how trans experiences have rapidly spread and variegated. This does not invalidate a trans experience but emphasizes that it is shaped by complex factors. A “trans industry” has developed as an extension of





the looping effect. The authors identify four overlapping groups who are subject to this looping effect: those who are transgender; those who are gender dysphoric; those with emerging gender identities; and searching teens.

The discussion of the looping effect invites theological reflection. Humans are self-conscious, embodied and embedded in community and complex social relationships. These factors interact to direct and distort our experience of sex and gender.

The third chapter reviews current models of care for trans youth, building on the discussion in Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). This covers responses to pre-pubescent gender variation, the use of puberty blockers and the rise of rapid onset gender dysphoria. The authors are sympathetic to the experience of trans youth and warn churches and Christian families against doubling down on gender stereotypes. They also critique mainstream approaches that reinforce the looping effect by always affirming the gender identities of young people.

Part 2 suggests ways that parents, youth ministers and others can engage well with trans youth. While part 1 explains that not all trans people experience gender dysphoria, much of the discussion in this part of the book refers to various forms of inner distress. This probably reflects that dysphoria is still a common experience.

Chapter 4 considers some of the theological foundations for ministry to trans people. It considers the three lenses on transgender previously set out by Yarhouse—integrity, disability, and diversity—and how these are applied by three theological stances—ultraconservative/fundamentalist, orthodox, and liberal. Later it uses a Christological pattern of prophet, priest and king to summarize the range of ways in which parents and leaders should minister to trans youth. It encourages carers to develop “an integrated, flexible posture of accompaniment” that “gestures that each person is dignified and worth accompanying by the very nature of their humanity” (p. 108). This discussion offers useful insights and warnings. It does, however, trade on caricatures. No doubt some who are theologically “conservative” deal with trans youth only in terms of sin and repentance. However, there are many who are empathetic, pastorally sensitive and willing to walk alongside young people. It is notable that this chapter, unlike others, lacks a basis in research. It would be valuable to investigate the extent to which pastoral practices correspond with theological stance.

The last five chapters can be summarized briefly. Chapter 5 reminds us that we encounter trans people expressing a political identity, a public identity or a private identity. We should differentiate between these and adopt appropriate strategies for each. The focus is on developing personal relationships which foster productive dialogue. Chapter 6 applies previous research on the narratives of Christian trans youth to help a carer locate where a young person may be on their journey. It suggests productive areas of discussion for different stages and ways in which parents can be supported. Chapter 7 opens with critique of the application of gender theory in psychology (p. 170). Yarhouse and Sadusky then encourage carers to explore the experience of trans youth carefully, recognizing the range of influences on them and seeking to respond to the emotional and spiritual needs which are often below the surface. On the controversial issue of nouns and pronouns, they suggest we can use a person's preferred nouns and pronouns “without feeling as if we are making an anthropological statement” (p. 177).

Chapter 8 stresses the importance of engaging gender identity in youth ministry and suggests how this can be done (p. 188). The authors warn that describing trans identities as “sin” and “disobedience” not only alienates trans youth but limits the range of ways in which a youth ministry can respond to

them (p. 191). They argue that teens should be seen and named as beloved and we should consider how to address the shame which often accompanies adopting a trans identity. They also encourage ministries to avoid rigid gender stereotypes, arguing that it is “more helpful to expand (rather than constrict) what it means to be a man or a woman in terms of gendered interests, activities, and appearance” (p. 197).

The final chapter calls for Christians to live in light of their hope of glorification in Christ, in contrast to the pessimism of our culture. This is relevant to trans teens, their families, and those afraid of and challenged by trans culture.

*Emerging Gender Identities* rightly emphasizes listening, understanding and dialogue as keys to caring for trans people. It recognizes the importance of teaching but has relatively little to say about that. At the start of the final chapter, the authors comment that “there is certainly a place to more deeply explore what sanctification could look like in the lives of Christians navigating gender identity questions” (p. 205). It would have been appropriate for the book to take this up. We should certainly accompany trans youth on their journey, and Yarhouse and Sadusky recognize that the church should, carefully and prayerfully, speak to the nature and goal of that journey. But fuller discussion of the *content* of that teaching is essential.

Similarly, the book warns repeatedly about the risk of excluding trans youth from church but has no discussion of the possible need for discipline. Is there a point at which a person who adopts a trans identity and embraces trans ideology cannot remain in communion with a church with an orthodox view of gender? It would be helpful to have some discussion of this (admittedly difficult) issue.

The goal of *Emerging Gender Identities* is practical wisdom in caring for trans youth. It offers this with a clear orientation to wider issues and a series of chapters with valuable insights and suggestions based on the experience and research of the authors. I recommend the book to everyone in youth ministry. It will be useful for Christian parents of trans youth, although perhaps overwhelming for those at the start of their journey. It will likewise help pastors find their way in difficult terrain and share the journey with youth facing greater challenges.

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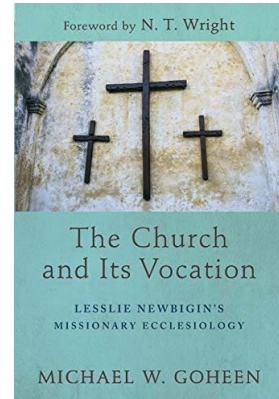
— MISSION AND CULTURE —

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Michael W. Goheen. *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. xv + 220 pp. £25.00/\$25.00.

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To formulate a proper ecclesiology, one must have a clear understanding of what the Bible says about the church and its relationship to God. From there one can get a clear picture of how the church can fulfill its mission. As perhaps the world's leading scholar on Lesslie Newbigin, Michael Goheen has endeavored to speak to the heart of this matter by enumerating Newbigin's ecclesiology. Goheen's first of two books dedicated to this task is titled, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology*, and it seeks to outline Newbigin's ecclesiology in a "relatively brief and systematic way within the context of the central dynamic of his thought" (p. xiv). Goheen accomplishes his goal by highlighting what he calls "the fourfold dynamic that drives Newbigin's thought: the gospel, story (of the Bible), missional people, and missionary encounters with culture" (p. 9). These four elements of Newbigin's thought are not isolated and detached, but intimately related to one another.



The book begins with an outline of how the Bible influences missionary ecclesiology. Beginning with the Gospels, Goheen outlines how Newbigin saw the life of Jesus within the context of the Bible as a whole. First, he emphasized Christ in the context of the entire Bible and also the entire Bible in the context of Christ. This twofold approach to the life of Jesus in the Gospels allows the reader to hold Christ as the focal point of the Bible while simultaneously recognizing his place in the redemptive, historical narrative as described in Scripture.

The Bible is God's story of the redemption of his creation, and the pinnacle of this narrative is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Renewing an understanding of God's purpose in the church not only reconnects those who have been led astray from the gospel message by cultural and other religious influences, but it also reminds believers of the mission in which they are to participate. Goheen clearly states that "for Newbigin, the gospel is an invitation to believe, follow, love, and obey Jesus, and that means entry into his kingdom-community and costly participation in his comprehensive mission" (p. 36).

While Christ tarries, the church has been given a role in God's work of advancing his kingdom. During this time, the church is tasked with urgently communicating the gospel to the nations in an effort to see others repent and believe. Goheen details throughout the book how Newbigin emphasized that the participation in this kingdom permeates the entire life of the believer and defines what it means to be on mission.

Goheen also emphasizes the derivative nature of the church's mission, reminding readers that the church's "missionary existence is rooted in God's mission" (p. 103). This means that as the church joins in life together, it is to communicate the gospel message in both deed and word. Specifically, it is the gospel communicated in word that is of prime importance to the mission of the church. The key to remember, however, is the prime goal of this effort is not reaching the unreached with the gospel but the glorification of God.

As the church functions, it is concerned internally with the spiritual growth of its members and externally in its mobilization into its mission to the world. Newbigin stressed that both are essential aspects of a healthy church, encouraging his readers to view the institutional and organic aspects of the church as important in the fulfillment of its mission. Further, Newbigin was ever concerned for Christians to strive to properly contextualize the gospel so cultural barriers can be bridged in order to bring about faith and repentance—even within their home cultures. This missional ecclesiology is found, according to Newbigin, by returning to the message of Christ as found in the Bible. The implications of cultural engagement are just as relevant today as it was for Newbigin.

One of the real strengths of this book lies in Goheen's effort to allow Newbigin to speak for himself. Including extensive quotes taken directly from Newbigin's writings, Goheen accurately communicates his mentor's thoughts while framing them in such a way as to provide the reader a systematic look of Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology. Because his thinking is biblically based and framed according to a "fourfold dynamic," Newbigin's legacy of calling for a missional ecclesiology can be revisited fruitfully today. Goheen's synthesis of his teaching on this central issue makes it imminently accessible for those familiar with Newbigin's work and for those who might be newly discovering him today.

Perhaps the most apparent shortcoming of this book is the fact that Goheen does not connect Newbigin's ecclesiology with specific contemporary missiological issues. While this is not a main purpose of the book, it would be helpful for Goheen to have provided some examples of how some of Newbigin's thoughts could apply to contemporary issues facing the church. Overall, though, this book is a valuable resource to the missiological conversation as it helps define a biblical ecclesiology for the church and its mission.

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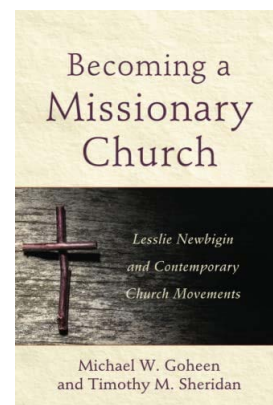
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Michael W. Goheen and Timothy Sheridan. *Becoming a Missionary Church: Lesslie Newbigin and Contemporary Church Movements*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. ix + 277 pp. £20.99/\$28.99.

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In 2018, Michael Goheen published *The Church and Its Vocation* as a distillation of Lesslie Newbigin's missional ecclesiology. *The Church and Its Vocation* was to serve as a fore-runner to another volume that was released this year: *Becoming a Missionary Church*. Whereas the first volume sought to systematically lay out Newbigin's insights regarding the missionary nature of the church, this companion volume, written in conjunction with Timothy Sheridan, attempts to assess contemporary movements that have drawn on Newbigin in various ways.

Both for those familiar with Lesslie Newbigin and those who might be less so, Goheen and Sheridan have provided an exceptional service of distilling his teaching and detangling it from those who have developed approaches that claim to inherit and extend his vision. While written under Baker's Academic imprint, Goheen and Sheridan present a readily accessible treatment of the historical setting surrounding Newbigin and also the contemporary setting in which Newbigin's ideas have been taken up into the strategies and methods of several movements. Whether the reader is a pastor or ministry



leader or a student taking a missions class in a Bible School or a seminary, this book is both accessible and important.

While the table of contents indicates four sections to the book, there are really two parts. First, Goheen and Sheridan provide a helpful sketch of the historical development that fed into and shaped Newbigin's teaching. In the second part, they walk readers through an assessment of three different movements—primarily North American movements—that have appropriated aspects of Newbigin's thinking.

Despite the fact that the subtitle places the emphasis of the book on contemporary trends, the reader should not overlook the value of the first part that traces the history of missions discussions through several important gatherings of the World Council of Churches. Goheen and Sheridan do well to demonstrate the relationship between Newbigin's desire for unity among churches while also acknowledging the tensions that arose as the WCC drifted away from some of the biblical and theological foundations essential to the church. Even beyond the history that directly involved Newbigin, the authors should be commended for the concise and helpful treatment of missions thinking throughout the twentieth century.

Having placed Newbigin's thought in dialogue with his contemporaries, the second section of the book turns its attention to critically engaging recent applications of his missional ecclesiology. The first two sections address the Missional church and the Emerging church.

First, Goheen and Sheridan use the language of Missional Church to describe the vision of groups like the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) who overtly claim to inherit and extend Newbigin's legacy. While they find much to be commended within the GOCN, the authors identify aspects of Newbigin's teaching that have been squeezed out as this network applies Newbigin to contemporary culture. Chief among the critiques is that the church has gotten lost or overshadowed in the process of investigating the intersection of the gospel and our culture. Goheen and Sheridan rightly point out, however, that for Newbigin, "to say 'gospel and culture' is to say 'church'" (p. 137).

Second, the authors identify the Emergent Church as another stream seeking to appropriate Newbigin's thoughts. While the Emergent movement seemed keen to apply Newbigin's thoughts to a postmodern culture, Goheen and Sheridan critique this movement for giving up Newbigin's steady appeal to orthodox, biblical theology. They comment on this movement: "What began as a search for a 'generous orthodoxy' has become, for the most part, simply generous" (p. 143). Thus, while Emergents appeal to Newbigin's sympathy for ecumenism and unity, they abandon his biblical and theological moorings and run headlong into the same theological errors for which he critiqued his peers within the WCC.

Both of these critiques of Newbigin's inheritors are fair and demonstrably justified. The final area of critique focuses not on a movement *per se*, but on an individual who is the fount head of significant influence over several movements: Tim Keller. While the authors regularly note their appreciation for Keller's pioneering work—placing him closer to Newbigin than the previous two streams (p. 187)—they also levy critique against aspects of his appropriation of Newbigin's teaching in his ministry.

Some of their critique focuses on how Keller gleans much from Newbigin while not adequately giving him credit for the shaping influence he has had on Keller's thought (p. 204). They also critique Keller for placing more primacy on biblical truth than biblical story (p. 198). And in other places they protest Keller's critique of Newbigin for his rejection of inerrancy while yet firmly affirming its authority (p. 208; 245).

But their biggest concern with Keller is that he presents what Goheen and Sheridan perceive to be a reduced, individualized vision of the atonement that threatens to eclipse the corporate and cosmic implications that Newbigin held in creative tension (pp. 215–16, 242). Arguing that Newbigin both affirmed substitutionary atonement and had a more robust vision of this multifaceted doctrine, they write, “Everything Keller wants in the substitutionary atonement for each person is [included in Newbigin’s understanding of the atonement], and so much more” (p. 242).

Readers familiar with Keller’s work might find themselves quibbling with some of the particulars of the critique levied against him. However, they do point out some helpful ways that Newbigin’s vision of a missionary encounter might include what Keller advocates for while also exceeding his Center Church model, which presents tensions between binaries instead of richly layered approaches to the biblical story that speaks of cosmic, communal, and personal redemption.

Even if one might take issue with aspects of the critique, Goheen and Sheridan have admirably extended Newbigin’s incredibly helpful contribution to the missionary understanding of the church into the contemporary setting. The remaining step will be for churches to consider their principles, incorporate their thinking into local settings, and bring Newbigin’s vision to life in the everyday activities of the church. These specifics are lacking in *Becoming a Missionary Church*, but the building blocks are certainly there. I believe that this book would benefit every church, elder board, and even denominational entities as they seek to understand and express the missionary nature of Christ’s church.

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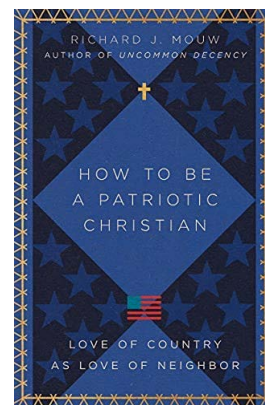
Richard J. Mouw. *How to Be a Patriotic Christian: Love of Country as Love of Neighbor*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. 160 pp. £15.10/\$17.00.

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Richard Mouw is a distinguished American public theologian whose most recent literary contribution, *How to Be a Patriotic Christian*, gives voice to biblically-informed and practically-savvy proposal for our divided nation. The first chapter, “Wrestling Together,” encapsulates Mouw’s intent and previews the chapters to come. In it, he draws upon the image of a wrestling match to communicate his desire for Americans to cease their public brawl and begin wrestling together with the issues that face our society.

Addressing the complicated concept of “patriotism,” Mouw urges American Christians to cordon off a “safe place for focusing on basic Christian thoughts ... about what it means to be citizens in the nation where the Lord has placed us” (p. 2). Within this “safe place” of civil debate, he urges Christians to eschew two extreme positions. On one hand, we must reject the embrace of an unhealthy patriotism that conflates “God and country” and thinks America is uniquely called to be a light to the nations. On the other hand, we must reject the wholesale negative view of patriotism that is self-loathing and harbors a special disdain for citizens who connect their Christian faith to American identity.

Throughout the remainder of the book, Mouw addresses the question of what binds Americans together as a national community (ch. 2) and why our bonds have become so fragile (ch. 3). He draws



upon core biblical passages to make an argument for a healthy love of nation that includes honest critique of its flaws (chs. 4–5). He addresses the proper relationship between religion and politics, calling for a principled pluralism (ch. 6), warns against the errors of ecclesiasticism and statism (ch. 7), and concludes by exploring the ways in which a citizen's greatest hopes and fears are bound up in his or her national context and national identity, and urging Christians to foster a patriotism of humility and compassion rather than of arrogance and vitriol.

The merits of Mouw's proposal are myriad. Significantly, he recognizes the fact that shared history, devotion to ideals, and affection for our shared *terra firma* bind us into a national community. To this aspect of his proposal, the reader should be reminded of a broader Western intellectual current that seeks to drag citizens away from any attachment to strong forms of the nation-state and strong forms of religion. Initiated by French philosopher Auguste Comte, this line of thinking—which imagines that evil is entirely systemic and carried on the back of organized religion and the nation-state arrangement—has captured the imagination of Western elites. This flawed and deeply unbiblical vision for the world afflicts the progressive Left, the Wall Street Right, and other significant factions. Thus, Mouw's call for a healthy patriotism warns citizens of an intellectual riptide that threatens to carry our society into the deep.

Furthermore, Mouw rightly construes the proper relationship between religion and politics. In Mouw's view—expressed most substantially in *Pluralisms and Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) but also with concision in the present volume—the Rawlsian liberal project must be rejected. Unlike Rawls, Mouw recognizes that a person's religion is the most deeply ingressed aspect of that person's being, and thus cannot be cast off when a person enters the public square. Thus, religion and politics cannot be separated. Yet, he further recognizes that religion can be brought into politics in both good and bad ways; thus, we should strive to act upon our religious convictions that respects America's diverse citizenry and strive for the common good. The reader wishes only that Mouw would have explored the way that comprehensive ideologies such as Marxism or Critical Theory function in the same way as religions, and thus should be subjected to the same constraints as organized religions.

Additionally, the author's twin critiques of ecclesiasticism and statism are salient. Consider the example of a local congregation who chooses to sing patriotic hymns on special occasions. On the one hand, Mouw refused to condemn congregations for doing so. On the other hand, he doesn't let churches off the hook for conflating religious devotion and national fervor. Instead, in characteristic Mouwian form, he provides an even-keeled and practically wise approach: he urges churches who choose to sing patriotic hymns to also use those hymns as a teaching moment, reminding congregants that our primary allegiance is to Christ and that our secondary allegiance to nation must be accompanied by loving critique of our nation's flaws.

Finally, Mouw is especially skillful in his empathetic exploration of American fragilization. The human bonds that naturally draw together the diverse members of a nation have begun once again to disintegrate. Thus, Mouw avers, we must heed Scripture's call for Christians to reweave the fabric of our shared life by living as salt and light. Christian citizens must live uprightly as citizens of our earthly kingdom so that we can simultaneously function as previews of the heavenly kingdom. As we love our neighbors—despite social differences or political divisions—we strengthen the national bonds that could cause our national community to flourish.

Richard Mouw is right: a citizen's greatest hopes and fears are, to some extent, bound up in his or her national context and national identity. Americans are no exception. It does us no good—in



fact, it causes great harm—either to hate our nation or to love it inordinately. Instead of gravitating toward either extreme, we must determine to love America not because she is perfect but because she is our God-given home community. We must grieve when our nation falls short of God's ideals and we celebrate when it meets those ideals in an approximate manner. Our patriotism, therefore, must be one of humility and compassion rather than arrogance and vitriol. This is how to be a patriotic *Christian*.

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J. D. Payne. *Theology of Mission: A Concise Biblical Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 172 pp. £19.99/\$24.99.

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What defines the biblical mission of God? In answer to this question, J. D. Payne explores the how the unified story of Scripture testifies to God's intention and desire to be glorified through his work among the nations. Payne emphasizes that God's mission is not dependent on a single text alone; instead, every portion of Scripture is relevant to God's purpose in the world.

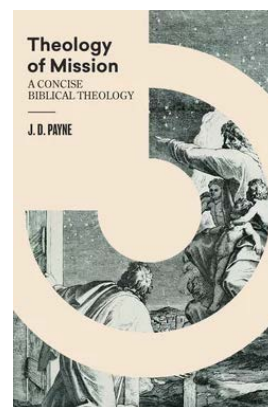
Payne highlights a recurring biblical pattern in relation to God's mission in history: sending to the world, proclaiming hope through judgment, entering relationship, and receiving blessing (p. iii). Payne helps readers sample these beautiful, consistent themes throughout Scripture while admitting he cannot provide an entire feast in this concise introduction to a theology of mission.

Chapter 1 briefly argues for a hermeneutical method that sees the person, work, and mission of Christ as the interpretive key (p. 3). In this chapter, Payne advocates a way of reading that recognizes unifying themes such as God's mission to redeem a lost world and reconcile his relationship with the nations. Therefore, a missional hermeneutic that pays attention to a God who sends is the methodology that Payne utilizes to point out specific themes in the metanarrative of Scripture.

The second chapter emphasizes God as the initiator of missions as he is both the sender and the one who is sent. Payne orients newcomers to a theology of mission with the fact that mission belongs to God; therefore, he owns, directs, sustains, and calls others to join in what he is already doing. Payne shows his readers that the church does not choose or create the mission. Instead, they are co-laborers commissioned by God with specific tasks and goals. Before beginning the journey through the Old Testament, Payne explains how God chooses some in order to bless the many (universality and particularity) and the differences in the movement of the nations to God in the Old and New Testament (centripetal and centrifugal) (pp. 14–15).

Chapters 3–5 sketch the themes of missions, sending, and blessing the nations in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings of the Old Testament. Payne emphasizes that God's mission continues through his people, and often despite those people. God's mission is to have his glory fill the earth, and in the Torah, this is done through a person—Abraham, a people—Israel, and a place—the tabernacle (pp. 19–33).

On the heels of this section, Payne demonstrates that the prophets emphasize the desire for God's blessings to reach the nations, how the nations were historically incorporated into Israel, and how the





prophets look forward to a future ingathering of the nations. Chapter 5 on the Writings, the most concise chapter in the book, acknowledges God's sovereignty and the invitation to the nations to praise the King. Readers wanting to dive into the treasures of the Psalms in relation to a theology of mission may find those desires whetted but not quenched.

As he moves the reader into the New Testament, Payne shows that the four Gospels provide particular clarity about the relationship of the Old and New Testaments regarding mission. Readers will find this section to be one of the clearest strengths of the book. Payne describes the mission of Jesus, his relation to both Jews and Gentiles, and the commissioning of the church as agents of God's mission. Specifically looking at the Gospel of John, Payne walks through the Trinitarian nature of the mission and God's sending of himself and his people. In this chapter, the reader encounters the repetition of themes introduced in earlier chapters about suffering and the target of missions. At the center of this concern is God's desire to bring blessing and restoration to the nations.

Turning to Acts, Payne takes a slightly different approach by summarizing specific sections of the book and emphasizing the realization of God's plan to include the Gentiles. Chapters 9–10 remind readers that the Epistles are not merely doctrinal, but address pastoral and missional issues in the church.

Finally, as Payne addresses the book of Revelation, he demonstrates its cohesive conclusion to the biblical story of mission. Revelation displays the fulfillment and culmination of God's mission to receive the worship of the nations. All the way to the end of Payne's book, he utilizes the common theme and header of "Blessing the Nations." This consistent method reminds readers of the original promises to Abraham and the faithfulness of God to see his mission through to the end.

Undergraduate students, church mission committees, and those wanting a general overview of missions through the whole narrative of Scripture may benefit from time spent in these pages. Payne offers a taste of a theology of mission that serves the church and beginners very well, though admittedly more robust treatments are available for those wanting more. Readers unfamiliar with the subject will be challenged to read Scripture more carefully and notice the themes that have only been introduced. More knowledgeable audiences can fill in the blanks as they interact with familiar themes and references. Those wanting to dive deep into biblical theology should consult the bibliography and other sources. This text pairs well with the book by Edward Smither, *Christian Mission: A Concise History*, also published by Lexham Press.

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Chad Vegas and Alex Kocman. *Missions by the Book: How Theology and Missions Walk Together*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2021. 168 pp. £13.45/\$18.00.

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The work of missions and the realm of theology are too often separated by a rift in today's world. On one side of the chasm, failing to live out our theology too often results in a lack of zeal for missions. On the other side of the chasm, failing to maintain theological depth results in unhealthy missiological strategies.

What is the alternative to this tendency? In a healthy approach to missions, a robust theology and faithful practice are happy friends, not distant acquaintances. Scripture ought to shape and regulate missiological methods.

Chad Vegas and Alex Kocman's work, *Missions by the Book* is based on this fundamental principle. Vegas writes as a pastor and a founding board chairman of Radius International while Kocman serves as Director of Advancement and Communications for ABWE. Together they openly state, "The central contention of this book is that Christian doctrine and missions methodology must *walk together*, hand-in-hand. Our ministry tactics always derive from what we really believe" (p. 5, original emphasis).

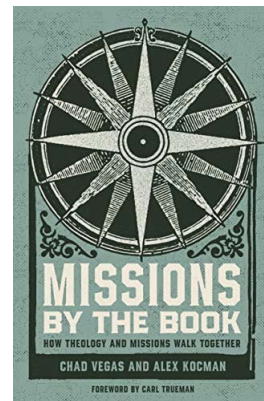
To model this conviction, this book is structured around ten chapters which each briefly survey key loci of systematic theology, drawing connections in each area to missiological strategies. Whether discussing Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, or eschatology, the authors work to connect the dots between a rich dogmatic and the missionary task. The authors make no pretense at being exhaustive, but rather work to merely model the application of Scripture to regulate the work of the Great Commission. The resultant survey of doctrine alternates between expounding on theological foundations and applying these doctrines to current missiological issues.

Readers will find in this work a rich, confessional Reformed theology. Whether quoting theological giants like John Murray or J. Gresham Machen, or quoting from the Belgic Confession and the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession, this work is tethered to a robust theological heritage. Accordingly, the theology is crisp with careful language throughout.

The intended audience for this helpful survey is an interested layperson or a missions practitioner. As such the book is accessible, while still evincing more than a superficial interaction with the doctrines surveyed. Each chapter not only ends with a few pages of potential application, but also offers a set of study questions, making the resource useful for a class or small group discussion.

While the authors excel at their primary goal of modeling "how a Christian may approach an area of theology and derive its necessary missiological implication" (p. 148), some practitioners may walk away from the book wishing for more fully-orbed critiques of the issues raised. At times current missiological topics are raised but only limited space is devoted to addressing them critically. Admittedly, such is the nature of a brief survey with this aim and audience.

One theme of the book which could be strengthened is the application of the Reformed doctrine of the regulative principle as applied to the work of missions. In the introduction the authors make the relatively innovative assertion that the "rule applies to missions as much as it does to worship" (pg. 5). That is, not only does Scripture shape the task of missions through providing *norms*, but it regulates the task itself. While the authors return to reiterate and expand on this assertion in the conclusion, much of the content of the book is spent drawing broader connections to our theology rather than showing what elements and forms the Scripture regulates.



A notable and helpful exception to this critique is found in chapter 8 as Vegas and Kocman helpfully center the missionary task on the primary practice of preaching the word. When discussing the necessity of preaching to those whose minds are darkened, the authors advocate for the centrality of Scripture in a way which is paradigmatic of their entire book. They write,

Therefore, it is not the role of the missionary to find a means of ministry that is more suitable to men of darkened minds and hardened hearts. The missionary has no power in himself to overcome the ultimate problem of his hearer. We cannot arrange our ministry efforts in such a way to overcome or even mitigate this problem. This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone as he applies the proclamation of Christ. (p. 113)

In the world of missions today, our generation needs more voices like Vegas and Kocman's that are so resolutely championing the Word of God above popular pragmatisms. Christians who desire to think theologically about the task of missions will find this a helpful read.

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