EDITORIAL: Announcing the Carson Center for Theological Renewal
Brian J. Tabb and Benjamin L. Gladd

The Spiritual Utility of Calvin’s Correspondence during the Strasbourg Years
Christopher Osterbrock

A Change in Kind, Not Degree: Labels, Identity, and an Evaluation of “Baptistic Congregationalists”
Nathan Sherman

What Republicanism Is This? An Introduction to Christian Republicanism (1776–1865)
Obbie Tyler Todd

John Wesley and Faith at Aldersgate
Roger W. Fay

The House Divided: An Assessment of the American Neo-Evangelicals’ Doctrine of Scripture
Ryan Reed

Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World
Robert Golding

“Salvation Without Spin”: How the Gospel of Christ Subversively Fulfills the Prayer Wheels of Tibetan Buddhism
Luke Johnson

Book Reviews

The Ancient Pedigree of Homosexuality as the Sin of Sodom
Melvin L. Otey

Pedagogy and Biblical Theology: Tracing the Intertextuality of the Book of Proverbs
Dan Martin

Filial Revelation and Filial Responsibility: (Dis)obedient Sonship and The Religious Leaders in Matthew 11–16
Adam Friend

The Divine Identity in 1 Peter: The Father, Christ, and the Spirit in Relation
Garrett S. Craig

Gender in Bible Translation: A Crucial Issue Still Mired in Misunderstanding
Dave Brunn

Strange Times: Baggy Trousers: Approaching Theological Study
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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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ARTICLES

Themelios typically publishes articles that are 4,000 to 9,000 words (including footnotes). Prospective contributors should submit articles by email to the managing editor in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). Submissions should not include the author’s name or institutional affiliation for blind peer-review. Articles should use clear, concise English and should consistently adopt either UK or USA spelling and punctuation conventions. Special characters (such as Greek and Hebrew) require a Unicode font. Abbreviations and bibliographic references should conform to The SBL Handbook of Style (2nd ed.), supplemented by The Chicago Manual of Style (17th ed.). For examples of the the journal's style, consult the most recent issues and the contributor guidelines.

REVIEWS

The book review editors generally select individuals for book reviews, but potential reviewers may contact them about reviewing specific books. As part of arranging book reviews, the book review editors will supply book review guidelines to reviewers.
Donald A. Carson is well-known for his many academic and popular writings, including noted commentaries on Matthew and John, a standard introduction to the New Testament, and the popular devotional work, For the Love of God. Carson served with distinction for decades at Trinity Evangelical Divinity, where he is now emeritus professor of New Testament. And he co-founded The Gospel Coalition with Pastor Timothy Keller. He has been called “one of the last great Renaissance men in evangelical biblical scholarship.” Two collections of essays (Festschriften) have been published to commemorate Carson’s noteworthy contributions to New Testament scholarship and to the strengthening of the global church, and the recent volume The Gospel and the Modern World features thirty-four short writings by Carson that originally appeared in Themelios. Additionally, Carson’s election as the seventy-third president of the Evangelical Theological Society reflects his influence as an evangelical scholar and leader.


Carson also served for ten years as general editor of *Themelios* (2008–2018). He wrote this in his initial editorial column: “The new *Themelios* aims to serve both theological/religious studies students and pastors” while seeking to “become increasingly international in representation.” Indeed, for over sixty years *Themelios* has sought to be an international theological journal committed to expounding and defending the foundational commitments of the historic Christian faith. The name *Themelios* derives from the Greek θεμέλιος (“foundation”) used in 1 Corinthians 3:11 (“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”) and Ephesians 2:20 (“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”). The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students launched *Themelios* in October 1962, and editor Andrew F. Walls introduced *Themelios* as an international and interdenominational journal “addressed to theological students, and all who are preparing for the Christian ministry, throughout the world.” In 1975, the Religious & Theological Students Fellowship, part of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship in the UK, took over *Themelios* and merged it with *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*. In 2008, The Gospel Coalition relaunched *Themelios* and made it freely accessible online under Carson’s leadership, which dramatically expanded its global influence. The journal’s website now has around two million page views annually with readers from well over 200 countries.

Henceforth, *Themelios* will serve as the flagship theological journal of the new Carson Center for Theological Renewal, named for TGC’s founding president and longtime *Themelios* editor Donald A. Carson. The Carson Center broadly exists for two reasons: (1) to explain the richness of the Bible in an accessible yet responsible manner and (2) to equip church leaders with the tools to generate their own content for preaching and teaching. We will explain both goals in turn.

First, the Bible lies at the heart of TGC. This is no mere platitude; the Bible shapes, directs, and invigorates the whole of TGC. And The Carson Center in particular functions as the platform for delivering the content of the Bible to the church. Two elements oddly characterize our day: the accessibility of the Bible yet our illiteracy of it. How can both be true? The steady stream of evangelical books, articles, essays, blogs, and videos is staggering. There is also no shortage of publishers producing solid Bible translations and compelling study Bibles. In short, the church has never had such resources at its fingertips. It’s all just a click away. But the availability of resources has not translated into their consumption. The church’s literacy of the Bible is in freefall. As seminary professors, we can attest that each new crop of students knows the Bible a bit less than the previous class. Pastors are preaching fewer expositional sermons, parents are failing to study the Bible with their children, and believers are spending less time in the Scriptures. The overwhelming majority of pastors outside of the western church have scant theological education. Yet, these same leaders are all connected to the internet, and TCC is uniquely positioned to bridge this chasm of ignorance. We could go on and on, but the point is clear: on the whole, the modern church knows less about the Bible than previous generations.

So, The Carson Center attempts to remedy such biblical illiteracy by providing rich, evangelical content about the Bible to the worldwide church. At present, TCC has about four hundred and fifty

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Editorial: Announcing the Carson Center for Theological Renewal

courses, two hundred and sixty-six essays, over six thousand sermons, a commentary on the Bible, and one hundred and forty-three issues of *Themelios*. We are excited to see what God has in store for TCC, as many exciting projects are already under various stages of development.

Second, we are burdened for international pastors, teachers, and church leaders. Preaching and teaching the Bible requires a solid grasp of the Bible's storyline and how the gospel forms the centerpiece of that storyline. Robust preaching and teaching are also predicated on one's ability to interpret and communicate the Bible's storyline. In a word, pastors and teachers need to learn the content of the Bible, and they must become adept at interpreting it. Content and interpretation are the best of friends. TCC, therefore, endeavors to furnish church leaders with the tools to exegete Scripture. For example, the TGC course, “Mining God’s Word,” is a terrific way to learn the nuts and bolts of exegesis, and the class on “Arcing Scripture” explains how one can trace the logical flow of texts.10 These two courses fill a gap, a rather large gap, in online resources. But substantial work remains, and TCC must generate resources that equip global church leaders with the tools to interpret Scripture.

The future is bright for TGC and TCC, as millions from all over the world continue to engage our resources. As we turn to the next chapter, pray that God would raise up a new generation of scholars to produce solid evangelical content and Christians to engage it.

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Strange Times
Baggy Trousers: Approaching Theological Study
— Daniel Strange —

Daniel Strange is director of Crosslands Forum, a centre for cultural engagement and missional innovation, and contributing editor of *Themelios*. He is a fellow of The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics.

Considering theological students and pastors are the primary audience of *Themelios* (though scholars read it as well), I make no apologies in returning to some elementary A, B, Cs of approaching theological study and offering a few observations.¹ These observations should be obvious, but as I know in my own life, they are often assumed and easily forgotten. Perhaps you are looking at doing some formal theological study and have providentially stumbled upon this editorial. Perhaps you are currently engaged in formal theological study and weren’t able to do the preparation you wanted to. Perhaps you know of people in your life and ministry who are thinking of theological study. Hopefully, we recognize that, informally at least, all Christian disciples are constantly involved in theological learning and teaching.

There are a number of recommended texts and ‘classics’ when it comes to approaching theological study. We all have our favourites, of course, so forgive me if I don’t mention yours. Top of my pile, and top for many others, is Helmut Thielicke’s 1962 address, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*.² Yes, it is little but it packs an almighty punch. Assuming the place and privilege of theological study, Thielicke focuses on the pathology, perils and pitfalls of what he calls ‘theological puberty’³ particularly in the local church. The chapter titles say is all: ‘The Shock of Infatuation with Theological Concepts’; ‘Pathology of the Young Theologian’s Conceit’; ‘The Hazard of the Aesthetic’; and ‘The Study of Dogmatics with Prayer’. Often Thielicke is both comical and cutting. For example,

There is a hiatus between the arena of the young theologian’s actual spiritual growth and what he already knows intellectually about this arena. So to speak, he has been fitted, like a country boy, with breeches that are too big, into which he must still grow up in the same way that one who is to be confirmed must also still grow into the long trousers of


³ Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, 36.
Strange Times Baggy Trousers

the Catechism. Meanwhile, they hang loosely around his body, and this ludicrous sight of course is not beautiful.4

The result is that the student lives ‘second hand’ and ‘lapses into an illegitimate identification’5 with the mature theologian. This demands the community around the student to wait patiently for the adolescent to move into adulthood, and Thielicke adds a bold and, one might even say, brutal application: ‘During the period when the voice is changing we do not sing, and during this formative period in the life of the theological student he does not preach.’6

Then there is the vanity and ‘gnostic pride’7 in the young theologian, where truth and love are not combined:

Truth seduces us very easily into a kind of joy of possession: I have comprehended this and that, learned that, understood it. Knowledge is power. I am therefore more than the other man who does not know this and that. I have greater possibilities and also great temptations. Anyone who deals with the truth—as we theologians certainly do—succumbs all too easily to the psychology of the possessor. But love is the opposite of the will to possess. It is self-giving. It boasteth not itself, but humbleth itself.8

And in possession of this truth, he despises—of course, in the most sublime way—the people who as simple Christians pray to this Saviour of sinners.... This disdain is a real spiritual disease. It lies in the conflict of truth and love. This conflict is precisely the disease of theologians.9

Elsewhere, and I note it here because it seems to be at best unfashionable and at worst a dying discipline, Thielicke gives an apology for the ‘lofty and difficult’ art of dogmatics.10 True dogmatics doesn’t just ‘rehash’ Reformation and orthodox texts: ‘Living dogmatics never allows its problems to be self-originated as by a virgin birth, but it is always being fertilized achieving its productive impulse through the questions of the time. It exists in living tension.’11 Great stuff. In the UK cars must be tested each year to make sure they pass road safety and environmental considerations. It’s called an MOT.12 For

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4 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 29.
5 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 30.
6 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 31–32.
7 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 37.
8 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 37–38.
9 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 39 (emphasis original).
10 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 53. While we are on the subject of dogmatics, indulge me shoe-horning in John Webster’s wonderful definition of the discipline which I just couldn’t leave out: ‘Dogmatics is often caricatured as the unholy science that reduces the practices of piety to lifeless propositions. But far from it: dogmatics is that delightful activity in which the Church praises God by ordering its thinking towards the gospel of Christ. Set in the midst of the praise, repentance, witness and service of God’s holy people, dogmatics—like all Christian theology—directs the Church’s attention to the realities which the gospel declares and attempts responsibly to make those realities a matter of thought.’ John Webster, Holiness (London: SCM, 2003), 8.
11 Thielicke, A Little Exercise for Young Theologians, 54.
12 ‘Ministry of Transport’ Test.
pastors and teachers, reading Thielicke’s *Little Exercise* should be our annual and mandatory MOT, and if we can’t pass it, we need to make some urgent repairs.

Inspired by Thielicke, and written as something of an update, is Kelly Kapic’s 2012, *A Little Book for New Theologians*. Kapic has refined this material over many years of teaching doctrine at Covenant College. What is distinctive about this introduction is that Kapic captures some of the best and most quotable statements on the study of theology across church history, while saying something fresh himself with chapters on ‘Suffering, Justice and Knowing God’ and ‘Tradition and Community’.

Spoiler alert—I particularly appreciated his definition of theology which closes the book and sums up the themes he covers throughout:

> In its most fundamental form, Christian theology is an active response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, whereby the believer, in the power of the Holy Spirit, subordinate to the testimonies of the prophets and apostles as recorded in the Scriptures and in communion with the saints, wrestles with and rests in the mysteries of God, his work and his world.

Herman Witsius’s older work *On the Character of a True Theologian* (written in 1675) focuses on the portrayal of the theologian as student, teacher and human being: ‘For no one teaches well unless he has first learned well; no one learns well unless he learns in order to teach. And both learning and teaching are vain and unprofitable unless accompanied by practice.’ There are two features of this short work to which I have been particularly drawn. The first is his lovely definition of a theologian:

> By a theologian, I mean one who, imbued with a substantial knowledge of divine things derived from the teaching of God himself, declares and extols, not in words only, but by the whole course of his life, the wonderful excellencies of God and thus lives entirely for his glory.

He who is a student in this heavenly school not only knows and believes, but has also sensible experience of, the forgiveness of sins and the privilege of adoption and intimate communion with God and the grace of the indwelling Spirit and the hidden manna and the sweet love of Christ—the earnest and pledge, in short, of perfect happiness.

Second, he insists that ‘a true theologian is a humble disciple of the Scriptures’:

> Whatever is not drawn from the Scriptures, whatever is not built upon them, whatever does not exactly accord with them—however much it may recommend itself by assuming

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14 In his chapter on the inseparability of life and theology, Kapic advocates an ‘anthroposensitive’ theology, ‘a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns’ (*A Little Book for New Theologians*, 32).


the guise of superior wisdom or be upheld by ancient tradition, by the consent of the learned, or by dint of plausible arguments—is vain, futile, in short, a mere falsehood. To THE LAW AND TO THE TESTIMONY: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. Let the theologian be ravished with these heavenly oracles—let him be occupied with them day and night, let him meditate in them, let him live in them, let him draw his wisdom from them, let him compare all his thoughts with them, let him embrace nothing in religion which he does not find there.20

However, this affirmation of sola scriptura is not to be regarded as nuda scriptura. ‘I am not, however, to be regarded as wishing our theologian to throw aside the commentaries of erudite men, that he may learn from himself—that is, from presumption, the very worst of teachers, all the while retaining the Scriptures, whose words, ill understood, may serve as a screen to his errors.’21

These works by Thielicke, Kapic and Witsius are well worth the small investment in money and time for big reward. They are all short reads but vitally act as rudders as one begins navigating the endless ocean of theological study. There are other works worth mentioning. B. B. Warfield’s ‘The Religious Life of Theological Students’ is another classic dealing with the false dichotomy set up between being learned or godly.22 For those aspiring for a professional career as a theologian, Kevin Vanhoozer’s ‘Letter to an Aspiring Theologian’ is salutary.23 The late Mike Ovey’s 2008 GAFCON addresses in Jerusalem on the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of theological education are quite dazzling.24 Keith E. Johnson’s Theology as Discipleship argues precisely that, ‘Theological learning is pursued rightly when it occurs within the context of a life of discipleship, because the practices of discipleship enable and enrich our pursuit of theological knowledge.’25 In How to Stay Christian in Seminary, David Mathis & Jonathan Parnell’s pithy conclusion is that ‘the key to staying Christian in seminary, and in every season and avenue of life, is being one.’26 Finally, and at the much more practical and mundane end, is H. Daniel Zacharias and Benjamin K. Forrest’s Surviving and Thriving in Seminary, which, as well as covering preparation of mind and heart, also deals with managing time and energy, and study skills and tools.27 A neat little one-stop-shop.28

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27 Daniel Zacharias and Benjamin K. Forrest, Surviving and Thriving in Seminary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017).
28 I could also mention three other volumes edited by Philip Duce and Daniel Strange which are aimed at those studying theology in more mainstream university settings: Keeping Your Balance: Approaching Theological Studies (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Getting Your Bearings: Engaging with Contemporary Theologians (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003); and Encountering God’s Word: Beginning Biblical Studies (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
Any contributions I add now are footnotes to the above, but there are a few observations I would like to make particularly for those embarking on theological study with a view to being called to some form of leadership in the local church. In our desire to study theology as defined above, and to become theologians as characterised above, I realise I have not commented upon the mode of theological study which is best suited to these ends. I recognise that people have strong opinions. Here, and frustratingly for some, I am going to sit on the fence. Whether it’s residential, in-context, mixed-mode, full-time or part time, I’ve been involved with all of these modes over the last twenty years and they all have their merits and demerits, which means that at the moment I think this varied economy of modes of provision is to be welcomed. A little late to the party, I’ve recently finished Justo L. González’s 2015 *The History of Theological Education*, which has been revealing in giving a historical horizon to this ongoing debate and is well worth reading and reflecting upon. In general, González does a very good descriptive job, and while towards the end of the book his own preferences start to peep through, his starting premises on which the book is built are worth restating. First, ‘theological education is part of the essence of the church,’ ‘an act of devotion and obedience to God’ and communally ‘for the benefit of others’. Second, ‘traditional’ theological education is in a state of crisis. Third, ‘lay’ theological education is not in crisis. Finally, ‘the study of the history of theological education—particularly of theological education in the wider sense—is one of the best tools we can use for guidance into the future’. Wherever you place yourself on the subject of mode, I trust the following are relevant to all.

First, the New Testament descriptions of the pastor/teacher/leader show the privilege and responsibility of such a calling. They are the gift of Jesus to his Church (Eph 4:11–13); they are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). They are those who have the Word of God applied in their lives: in their lifestyle, in their thinking and in their teaching (Titus 1:6–10). Any appropriate theological study must be about formation and the cultivation of character, conviction, competence and chemistry, and this must be done in close partnership with the churches who not only know (or should know) their student best, but who have pastoral oversight and authority over them. Ecclesiological differences notwithstanding, theological training providers have to see themselves as supporting the local church in its training of its people.

Second, any theological learning and teaching must have the aim of making us, by the work of the Spirit, more like the Lord Jesus, and giving us a bigger—not smaller—view of God and his Word, than on day one of our study. ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (John 3:30). Remember Lucy’s return to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*:

‘Aslan,’ said Lucy, ‘you’re bigger.’

‘That is because you are older, little one,’ answered he.

‘Not because you are?’

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31 González, *The History of Theological Education*, xi.

32 I have expounded this passage in much greater detail in ‘Afterword: Mike Ovey—the Best Possible Gift’ in Green, *Goldilocks Zone*, 285–93.
Strange Times Baggy Trousers

‘I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.’

When it comes to our stewarding of the mysteries of God, we should shudder at the thought of ever thinking, ‘I’ve got this or that doctrine,’ or ‘I’ve mastered this or that biblical book.’ Yes, we are to correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), but handling is not taming. Consequently, any appropriate theological study must inculcate the conviction that we will always be students and life-long learners, and that while our formal studies may come to an end, we will always want to be, indeed need to be growing theologically with appropriate time and resources given to that end. In my experience there needs to be a culture shift among church leaders and their churches to see this as a given and not a luxury. It’s understandable but worrying when students I have taught previously come back to a study day and at the end say something like ‘thanks for that, you could have been saying anything, it’s just good to get my brain switched on.’

Third, as I’ve mentioned in a previous Themelios column, the approach of multiperspectivalism might be helpful in a curriculum. We should be looking for theological education with clear confessional boundaries which keep to the pattern of sound teaching and guard the good deposit, but which allows for inquisitiveness and creativity within those boundaries. Such an education also exposes students to other perspectives—biblical, sub-biblical and non-biblical—within a safe environment. We need to do this for a number of reasons in terms of discipleship, ethics, apologetics and mission. We will learn here that error is parasitic on the truth, and that in theological debates, we can preempt others’ strong points. Moreover, when it comes to ‘parts’ and departments of the theological curriculum, while not advocating a disciplinary mess, there will always be something to learn from other disciplinary perspectives. There needs to be a recognition within and between theological and even ‘non-theological’ disciplines of the other’s existence and perspective as we come to all sit under the normative authority of God’s Word. We need the freedom to experiment and be creative as we design our seminary curricula and assessments. In addition, we should be looking for teachers who are interested in Christian pedagogy—what it means to teach Christianly. David Smith’s On Christian Teaching needs to be read and digested by all theological teachers. Finally, the cultural context in which we learn and teach cannot be ignored. In my late modern and post-Christian setting, more than ever before any theological training has to elevate and integrate missiological concerns and insights.

Fourth, if theology and theological learning is best done in community, then we need to develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence. On the one hand you are unique in terms of your

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34 As a pastor friend mentioned to me, it’s also a worry that pastors, in their regular study and preaching of the word, don’t realise (or don’t intentionally make room for): the idea that this is one way the LORD feeds them and engages their minds. A pastor who is so focused on ‘churning out’ a sermon from a text, such that it doesn’t engage their brains and lead them to explore widely and think and pray deeply, has missed one of the privileges of being a pastor—that every week in the study he is (or ought to be) being fed richer food than he himself can offer to his congregants.


experiences, social situation, character and academic ability. Learn about yourself. Do you lean towards perfectionism? How will you address this? Are you a procrastinator? How will you address that? Are you a procrastinating perfectionist? (Seek help!) When is your optimal time for work? In discussions do you understate and inevitably have to proffer more, or do you overstate and then have to rapidly backtrack? All these things are worth reflecting upon and working through now, as they will be relevant in later ministry.

In life we often find comparison sites helpful (British readers know that ‘Go Compare!’ is a particularly annoying catchphrase for one such site). In theological training, while emulation has its place, comparison is a killer. Don’t compare! If only...’If only I had her capacity for work,’ ‘If only I could think on my feet like him,’ ‘If only I didn’t have kids,’ ‘If only I wasn’t married.’ God has made you, remade you in Christ, and placed you where he has placed you sometimes with responsibilities that need attending to alongside your study, responsibilities which some others don’t have. The question is how you may learn and grow to be Christ’s gift for his church. I remember listening to a recording of a preaching workshop that Tim Keller gave at a seminary in the US within the last ten years. The last session is a Q&A where Keller interacts with a member of the teaching staff who is wanting to know the secret of Keller being able to read so much and synthesise so well. What are his tips and tricks? Basically, after some toing and froing, Keller states, without hubris, that he can just do it and some other people can’t. And that’s right. Thank God for the gifts and graces of others and for your own, and go about your business for that audience of One.

Now, if we don’t do this, and continue to compare, comparison leads to insecurity of which theological students are particularly prone. In his address to first year students, a former colleague of mine used to note the awkward transition of students from being the vaunted and pedestalled ‘gifted’ individuals in their own churches, to now being thrown together with a whole load of other vaunted and pedestalled ‘gifted’ individuals. Not only are you no longer the hub and centre of attention, but there are always those who appear to be more gifted than you. Moreover, my colleague also noted that in the ‘body’ language of the New Testament, theological training often gathers together a lot of the same body part in one place: a room full of feet can be quite smelly. In my experience, such insecurity can manifest itself in ungodly ways particularly in terms of an unhealthy and dangerous competitive spirit. I think men are particularly susceptible to this (although women are not immune). I have called this R. S. S: Rutting Stag Syndrome. And the best tactic in coming into contact with a rutting stag? Well, as Dorothy Ireland of the British Deer Society advises (or doesn’t), ‘If you are attacked, climbing a tree is your best bet... because if he’s decided to go for you, he’ll go for you. Run and he’ll chase; curl up and he’ll attack you on the ground. I’m afraid the only real answer is not to be there.’

Fifth, and once again given a communal setting, not only do we need self-awareness but others-awareness. Understand that how you hear and how you are heard is important and affected by cultural, ethnic, class and gender factors. Remember that everyone has an ethne, not just a minority. Diversity

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38 I should note that, from another perspective, it’s comforting to know that you are not unique and that a good theological training provider will have had students like you before, or at least know how to cater for you. Maybe you’ve not had as much formal education as others you know, maybe you’ve got a PhD but have no clue how to write an essay. Theological study can be deskilling but character wise that’s not a bad thing. Don’t suffer in silence but ask for assistance and take advantage of helps that might be offered to you.

39 I have been hunting to find the details, so far without success.

is enriching but also challenging and uncomfortable. We need to learn to be great listeners. Who’s in your community of study? While you will quickly form friendships, you may not know what people have experienced or are struggling with. It can be very easy to assume that a learning community is quite monocultural, because you don’t know what’s under the surface. You will be discussing pastoral issues (and classrooms are like laboratories), and you will need to remember that there will be people in the room for whom these are not theological or theoretical discussions but sources of personal pain. Consider the sensitivity with which you would want your own struggle/besetting sin handled, and assume there is someone listening who needs that consideration. I would be particularly careful with humour for precisely the same reasons. Jokes can be very isolating when poorly aimed. Banter can include but can also exclude and so calls for wisdom. Once again, recommended reading for all students should be C. S Lewis’s ‘The Inner Ring’ and more obviously the apostle’s words: ‘in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others’ (Phil 2:3–4).

Sixth, continue to be involved in a local church. Of course, formal theological study is a particular and often unusual time of life and so make sure you are getting the most out of it, which might mean some self-discipline from you and particularly those employing you, if you are in an in-context setting which combines working for a church and studying. The relationship, trust, commitment and communication between the student, the local church, and the training provider is vitally important. Maximise this season and remember the long game. The dividends in the long run will be worth it. As another former colleague used to say, ‘learn WISNIFG—’when I say “no” I feel good.’ But remember that while you’re placed in a church, that family needs your presence and service, even if you’re just a guest in their home for a few weeks or months. If you are in a mode of training where you are placed in a church, then don’t treat it as a tick-box exercise to fulfil the minimum requirements to pass a course. Get involved—love your adopted church family, turn up, serve, don’t do less than a normal church member with a full-time job would do.

Finally, develop and invest in friendships and connections that will serve you for a lifetime of ministry. Whatever your mode of study, the cultivation and curation of relationships within a student cohort is possible and necessary. It’s a crazy world out there, ministry is a privilege but hard, and to persevere for the long haul, we need each other to help us point to Christ. Over the years you’ll discover that sometimes you’ll rely on your friends, and sometimes they’ll rely on you. See them as a gift from the Lord, and I hope and pray, by that time, theological puberty will be over, your trousers will fit, and the climbing of trees will not be necessary.

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Gender in Bible Translation: A Crucial Issue Still Mired in Misunderstanding

— Dave Brunn —

Dave Brunn is an International Bible Translation Consultant with Ethnos360 (formerly New Tribes Mission) and serves as an adjunct consultant for Wycliffe Bible Translators in Asia and Africa.

Abstract: This article argues that much of the controversy surrounding gender in Bible translation is unnecessary. One reason is that many of the discussions about this issue have focused almost exclusively on the way nonliteral versions translate gender, giving insufficient attention to the way gender is handled in versions that identify as literal. A careful, objective examination of both kinds of versions together will show that the two sides of this discussion are not as far apart as some have supposed. While there are differences between the various versions, this article will demonstrate that the most significant distinction between the way literal and nonliteral versions handle gender in translation lies in the frequency rather than the nature of the adjustments.

In recent decades, the issue of gender in Bible translation has produced a considerable amount of controversy. As a career Bible translator, having served over twenty years in Papua New Guinea, I have seen this issue produce confusion—particularly among English-speaking Bible readers.

Many of the books and articles that have been written about gender in Bible translation focus primarily on abstract philosophical ideals—sometimes presented in generalities. This article will refrain from


2 Dave Brunn, along with a team of target-language speakers, facilitated the translation of the entire Bible into Lamogai, an indigenous language of Papua New Guinea. The Lamogai New Testament was published in 1996. The complete Lamogai Bible (Old and New Testaments in a single volume) is forthcoming.


4 I will cite some of these works and quote some of these generalities later in this article.
from arguing translation philosophy; instead, it will present verifiable evidence that will test the validity and relevance of some of the philosophical ideals that have been proposed.

The goal of this article is not to add fuel to the ongoing debate about gender in Bible translation, but rather to help defuse it. The article will attempt to humbly and graciously present well-defined facts that will neutralize misperceptions and create common ground for a unified pursuit of the truth about this crucial issue.

For the record, I am a conservative evangelical with a high view of God’s Holy Scriptures, and I am a complementarian.5 But the demonstrable truths presented in this article will stand on their own merits regardless of my personal doctrinal positions.

The article will begin by reviewing the practice of “gender-neutral” (also called “gender-inclusive” and “gender-accurate”) translation,6 and it will explore why the translators of our English Bibles have been using this technique for over six-hundred years.7 Then the article will examine the difference between grammatical gender and semantic gender—demonstrating that one of the main reasons the gender debate has been so prominent in the English-speaking world is that most native English speakers have a deficient understanding of the distinction between grammatical and semantic gender. This is because their mother tongue, English, is not a gender-based language like Hebrew and Greek are. The article will then use concrete examples to prove that some of the issues at the center of the gender debate in English are not relevant to many languages around the world. Finally, the article will show that in recent years, all of the most popular modern English translations, literal8 as well as nonliteral, have taken major steps toward increased gender inclusiveness.

For the past several years, the discussion about gender in translation has been mostly quiet, but many of the misperceptions have never gone away. In 2022, Vern Poythress revisited this latent debate with an article in the Westminster Theological Journal entitled “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations, Some Twenty Years Later.”9 In his article, Poythress reaffirmed positions he and Wayne Grudem presented more than twenty years ago, when the gender debate was at its peak.10 I will comment on a few points from Poythress’s 2022 article, but first I will review key issues related to gender in Bible translation.


6 See Carson, The Inclusive Language Debate, 16–17, under the heading “Definitions.”

7 Mark L. Strauss, 40 Questions about Bible Translation, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023), 153. Strauss writes, “Every English translation since Wycliffe [translated 1384] has used some inclusive terms for masculine generics.”

8 The term “literal” here, and throughout this article, is used in an informal sense to denote versions that generally prioritize reflecting some semblance of Hebrew and Greek sentence structure and often aim to translate a single Hebrew or Greek word with a single word in English. No version consistently adheres to these goals, even in many instances where the constraints of the target language would allow it. See Brunn, One Bible, Many Versions, 61–70, 129–32.


10 See Poythress and Grudem, The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy; also, Poythress and Grudem, The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy.
1. Gender-Neutral Translation

The discussion about gender in translation focuses on the words “man/men,” “father(s),” “brother(s),” “son(s),” and the masculine pronouns “he,” “him,” “himself,” and “his.” When these terms occur in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture, translators sometimes use corresponding masculine terms to translate them into English and other languages. But in other cases, translators replace masculine Hebrew and Greek terms with gender-neutral terms. A gender-neutral term is one that is neither exclusively masculine nor feminine but includes both genders. Table 1 gives an example of masculine versus gender-neutral translation in Matthew 4:4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Masculine and Gender-Neutral Terms in Matthew 4:4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESV(^{11})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSB(^{12})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV 2011(^{13})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLT(^{14})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GW(^{15})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEV(^{16})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we approach the issue of gender in Bible translation, it is important to keep in mind that the translators of every major English version, including the most literal ones, translated many masculine Hebrew and Greek terms as gender-neutral terms—not only in places where English grammar rules require it, but also in places where the translators simply chose to do so.

Table 2 shows a few places where the ESV translated masculine terms in Hebrew and Greek with gender-neutral words in English. A representation of the common masculine definition of each Hebrew and Greek term is included in parentheses under the ESV gender-neutral terms. This chart is by no means exhaustive; it is a small sampling of the many gender-neutral renderings in the ESV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Gender-Neutral Terms in the ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod 2:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 36:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 1:16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{11}\) The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).
\(^{13}\) Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids: Biblica, 2011).
\(^{14}\) Holy Bible, New Living Translation (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015).
\(^{15}\) GOD’S WORD Translation (Orange Park, FL: God’s Word to the Nations Mission Society, 2020).
Matt 12:31 | Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven **people** (men)
---|---
Jas 3:8 | No **human being** can tame the tongue (man)

Tables 3 and 4 give a sampling of places where the NASB\(^{17}\) and the KJV\(^{18}\) translated masculine terms in Scripture with gender-neutral terms. Again, a representation of each masculine Hebrew and Greek term is included in parentheses under the gender-neutral terms.

| **Table 3: Gender-Neutral Terms in the NASB (1995)** |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **1 Chr 7:5**     | Their **relatives** among all the families (brothers) |
| **Mark 8:27**     | Who do **people** say that I am? (men) |
| **Luke 18:11**    | I thank You that I am not like other **people** (men) |

| **Table 4: Gender-Neutral Terms in the KJV** |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **1 Chr 12:29**   | the **kindred** of Saul (brothers) |
| **Prov 6:12**     | A naughty **person** (man) |
| **Ezek 44:25**    | they shall come at no dead **person** (man) |

### 2. Why Do Translators Use Gender-Neutral Terms?

To correctly understand the gender discussion, we need to know why translators sometimes exchange masculine terms in Hebrew and Greek for gender-neutral terms in English.

Consider the KJV translation of Ezekiel 44:25 in Table 4 above: “they shall come at no dead **person** (דָּם)\(^{19}\) to defile themselves.” What is the rationale for this rendering? Clearly, the seventeenth century KJV translators were not concerned with political correctness\(^{20}\) as it relates to gender. So why did they translate the masculine Hebrew word ʿādām with the gender-neutral English word “person”? The answer is simple. The priests who were mentioned in this chapter were not only supposed to stay

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\(^{18}\) *King James Version*, public domain.

\(^{19}\) *Themelios* generally avoids transliterations of source text words, but in this case, an exception is made for just two words that are central to the message of the article: דם (ʿādām) and ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos). The Hebrew and Greek forms of these words are used at the first mention only, and all subsequent occurrences use the transliterated forms. This will make the article easier to navigate for a broader audience since the transliterated forms ʿādām and anthrōpos are recognizable to virtually all English speakers. All other source text words in this article appear in their Hebrew and Greek forms only without transliterations.

\(^{20}\) See Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 51.
away from dead men, but also from dead women. The reason the KJV translators replaced this masculine word with a gender-neutral term is because the context speaks about men and women collectively—not just men. That is the main reason behind every gender-neutral rendering in nearly all major English versions.

Apparent exceptions among major English Bible translations can be found in the NRSV and the CEV. Mark Strauss wrote: “Some versions, like the NRSV and CEV, tend to introduce inclusive language in a broad and comprehensive manner, sometimes even when the original authors were likely referring to men.” We will see an example of this practice by the NRSV and CEV later in this article.

Poythress and Grudem voiced their agreement with the practice of substituting gender-neutral words for masculine words in the following statement (restated in Poythress's 2022 article): “Of course I agree with removing male-oriented words when there is no male-oriented meaning in the original Greek or Hebrew text.”

Just over a decade ago, when the NIV released its revised 2011 edition, it quickly became a target of criticism by those who opposed various forms of gender-neutral language in Bible translation. In the NIV 2011, the translators changed many masculine words from the NIV 1984 edition to gender-neutral words.

However, an objective analysis will show that the NIV 2011 does not use gender-neutral terms in contexts where men are exclusively in focus. When the NIV translators changed a masculine term to a gender-neutral term, it was because the context applies to both men and women. Consider the following example of a change from the NIV 1984 edition to the NIV 2011 edition:

1 Timothy 2:4

NIV 1984: [God] wants all men to be saved
NIV 2011: [God] wants all people to be saved

Every believer would agree that God wants women as well as men to be saved. With that in mind, it seems reasonable to say that the gender-neutral NIV 2011 wording more closely reflects the intent of the verse, even though Greek uses the masculine term ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos).

The ESV translators agree with the NIV translators on this gender-neutral substitution. The ESV made the same change in this verse (and many others) a decade earlier, replacing the word “men” from the RSV with the gender-neutral word, “people”:

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23 Strauss, 40 Questions, 171.

24 Poythress and Grudem, The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, 1; Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 52–53.

25 For a thorough explanation of the history of criticisms aimed at the NIV, see Carson, The Inclusive Language Debate, 26–38.

26 The ESV is a revision of the RSV 1971 edition, published by the National Council of Churches of Christ.
1 Timothy 2:4

RSV: [God] desires all men to be saved
ESV: [God] desires all people to be saved

Since the ESV and NIV translators agree that “people” is a superior translation for *anthrōpos* in this context, why was it ever translated “men” in the first place in translations like KJV, RSV, and NIV 1984? It seems apparent that when those earlier versions were produced, the English word “man” carried a more inclusive (i.e., gender-neutral) meaning than it does now. At that time, the words “man” and “men” were more commonly used to mean “mankind.” As D. A. Carson observed, “Most translators judge that a number of English words have become more gender-specific in the past few years.”

When the translators of the ESV and the NIV substituted “people” in place of “men” in 1 Timothy 2:4, they were not driven by “pressures to avoid ‘politically incorrect’ expressions.” They simply determined that the word “man” in present-day English no longer communicates the same measure of inclusiveness that it did in the past. This verse is a prime example of the kind of context Poythress had in mind when he mentioned “translating statements that express general truths, applicable to both sexes.”

In the New Testament, these general, gender-neutral truths often use the masculine Greek word *anthrōpos*. Translations that adopt “a general gender-neutral policy” will normally translate *anthrōpos* as “people” in these contexts. And translations that do not have a general gender-neutral policy often translate *anthrōpos* as “man” or “men.” But no translation is totally consistent in the way it applies its stated goals. Table 5 shows a few places where the gender-inclusive NIV 2011 translated *anthrōpos* as “man,” even though the contexts apply to both sexes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: <em>anthrōpos</em> Translated “Man” in Gender-Neutral Contexts in NIV 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 4:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 19:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 2:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 24:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cor 8:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gal 6:7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the NIV 2011 translated *anthrōpos* as “man” in all six verses in Table 5, the NASB 2020 translated it as “people” in four of them (Matt 19:26, Acts 24:16, 2 Cor 8:21, Gal 6:7), and the ESV replaced the RSV term “man” with the gender-neutral term “one” in Galatians 6:7. So in these cases, the ESV and/or NASB are more gender-neutral than the NIV 2011. We will see more examples of this later in the article. Every fair and balanced treatment of gender in Bible translation should acknowledge...

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30 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53.
instances like these where a nonliteral version reflects a masculine form from the source text while some literal versions do not.

In Table 6, we see a few of the many instances where the ESV translated the masculine Greek term anthrōpos with a gender-neutral term in English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: anthrōpos Translated “Person” in the ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John 3:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 10:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom 10:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 2:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 11:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jas 1:19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Do Gender-Inclusive Bible Versions Blur the Lines Between Men and Women?

When the gender debate was reignited after the release of the NIV 2011, some serious accusations were made which spawned rumors that are still repeated to this day. The NIV translators deserve to be judged fairly, based on real evidence. Were they trying to methodically obscure the differences between men and women in Scripture for the sake of political correctness?31 If so, they did not do a very thorough job of it. Consider the following three examples:

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 (NIV 2011)

34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Titus 1:6–9 (NIV 2011)32

6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Ephesians 5:22–24 (NIV 2011)

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which

31 To my knowledge, Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem have never stated this kind of categorical implication about the NIV 2011.

32 My emphasis is added to highlight the English terms in Titus 1:6–9 that are explicitly masculine.
he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

There are various opinions on how these verses should be interpreted and applied. But the NIV translators did not translate opinion; they faithfully and accurately translated what the Greek text says.

In the example of Titus 1:6–9 above, most English translations that identify as gender inclusive appropriately reflected the Greek masculine forms like the NIV 2011 did, including NLT, GW, NIrV,33 GNT,34 and ERV.35 However, two major versions stepped outside of the norm of gender-accurate translation practice. The NRSV translated about half of the masculine terms in these verses as masculine, and half as gender neutral; the CEV translated all the masculine terms in this passage with gender-neutral terms.

4. Replacing the Generic “He” with the Indefinite “They”

One complaint that has been raised about the NIV 2011 and other gender-inclusive translations is that they often use the pronoun “they”36 to represent a singular antecedent (e.g., “person”). This is done to avoid using the masculine generic “he”37 in contexts that the translators determine are “applicable to both sexes.”38 Consider these examples:

**James 1:14** (NIV 2011)

but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular antecedent</th>
<th>plural pronoun</th>
<th>plural pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Ezekiel 18:21** (NIV 2011)

But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular antecedent</th>
<th>plural pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Many English grammarians tell us this is acceptable usage today and is becoming more widespread.39 But the indefinite “they” is not new to the English language by any means. Wayne Leman (Wycliffe

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36 Also “them,” “theirs,” “their,” and “themselves.”
37 Also “him,” “his,” and “himself.”
38 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 51.
Bible Translators) has compiled a list of examples\(^{40}\) where some of the earliest English translations of the Bible used a typically plural pronoun such as “they,” “them,” “their,” “themselves” to refer to a singular antecedent. Consider the following examples from the *King James Bible* (1611) and the *Tyndale New Testament* (1526):\(^{41}\)

**Philippians 2:3** (KJV 1611)

*let each esteeme other better than themselues*\(^{42}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>antecedent</td>
<td>pronoun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matthew 18:35 (Tyndale 1526)

*except ye forgeve with youre hertes eache one to his brother their*\(^{43}\) treaspases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>antecedent</td>
<td>pronoun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though present-day English often uses the indefinite pronoun “they” to represent a singular antecedent, it still has an unnatural ring to some readers; so I understand why some authors and translators avoid it for stylistic reasons.

Some translators retain the generic “he” to reflect the “individual and personal sense”\(^{44}\) that may be indicated by the singularity of the pronoun. A valid case can be made for implementing this approach on a verse-by-verse basis, in contexts where the individual/personal sense is indeed part of the intended meaning. However, objections to the indefinite “they” based on gender alone seem ill-defined and elusive. I have never heard a clear, compelling explanation of how replacing the generic “he” with the indefinite “they” in contexts that apply to both sexes “suppresses male-oriented meanings in the original.”\(^{45}\) What is the specific “male-oriented meaning” that has been “suppress[ed]” or “erase[d]”?\(^{46}\) If a biblical author uses a masculine grammatical term in a statement that is “applicable to both sexes,”\(^{47}\) does that mean the statement applies slightly more to males than it does to females? This leads us to the next point in our discussion: I am convinced that much of the fog that hangs over the gender discussion arises from a failure to clearly distinguish between *grammatical* gender and *semantic* gender.


\(^{41}\) These examples include the original, archaic spellings for both versions.

\(^{42}\) Greek: ἑαυτῶν (yourselves).

\(^{43}\) Greek: αὐτῶν (their).

\(^{44}\) See “HCSB to CSB,” *Christian Standard Bible*, https://csbible.com/ministry/hcsb-to-csb/ under the heading “Translating Gender into English.”

\(^{45}\) Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53 (italics original).

\(^{46}\) Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53.

\(^{47}\) Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53.
5. Grammatical Gender Versus Semantic Gender

I believe one of the main reasons there is such widespread confusion about the use of gender-neutral forms in Bible translation is that most native English speakers do not have an intuitive sense of how grammatical gender works in Greek and other gender-based languages.

Grammatical gender in Greek is basically a classification system. Every Greek noun falls into one of three classes: masculine, feminine, or neuter. Generally, nouns that are semantically “male” like ἀνήρ (man) are classified as “masculine” grammatically, and semantically “female” nouns like γυνῆ (woman) are classified grammatically as “feminine.” But most Greek nouns that are “masculine” grammatically are not “male” semantically. If this sounds confusing, it is because of our limited English perspective. In English, “masculine” almost always equals “male,” and “feminine” almost always equals “female,” but not so in Greek.

If we were to reflect every masculine and feminine Greek pronoun in our English translations, it would sound a bit odd. Consider these examples:

Matthew 5:29
If your right eye causes you to sin, tear him out

Matthew 5:30
if your right hand causes you to sin, tear her out

Of course, there is nothing inherently “male” about an eye or inherently “female” about a hand. Table 7 gives more examples of Greek nouns listed according to their class. The first three nouns across the top of the table, “man,” “woman,” and “child,” make sense as “masculine,” “feminine,” and “neuter.” But the rest seem arbitrary in their gender classification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man ἀνήρ</td>
<td>Woman γυνῆ</td>
<td>Child παιδίον</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread ἄρτος</td>
<td>Leaven ζύμη</td>
<td>Wheat Flour ἄλευρον</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute ἀὐλός</td>
<td>Harp κιθάρα</td>
<td>Cymbal κύμβαλον</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tooth ὀδούς</td>
<td>Tongue γλῶσσα</td>
<td>Mouth στόμα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English is peculiar among Indo-European (IE) languages in that it does not have a comprehensive gender classification system like Greek. Some IE languages, including German, Russian, Latin, and

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48 In most instances, ἀνήρ is semantically male, but it can be semantically gender-neutral in some contexts.
49 Adapted from the ESV.
50 Hebrew and Aramaic, both Afro-Asiatic languages, also have grammatical gender classification systems.
Greek, have three genders. And some, including French, Spanish, and Italian, have two genders. Native speakers of these languages have an intuitive sense of gender classification that most native English speakers lack. Consider John 1:1–4 in French, along with its semi-literal English translation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: John 1:1–4 in French with a Semi-Literal English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>French</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1(^{51}) <strong>Au commencement, la Parole existait déjà.</strong> La Parole était avec Dieu et la Parole était Dieu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2<em>Elle</em> était au commencement avec Dieu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3Tout a été par <em>elle</em> et rien de ce qui a été fait n’a été fait sans <em>elle</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4<em>En elle</em> il y avait la vie, et cette vie était la lumière des êtres humains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The English translation of these French verses sounds almost blasphemous to the ears of many native English-speaking Christians, because to English speakers, masculine equals male and feminine equals female.\(^{53}\) But that is not how it sounds to the ears of a native French speaker. French grammar requires that the feminine pronoun *elle* (meaning “she” and “her”) be used here since the corresponding noun, *la Parole* (the Word), is classified as feminine.

When I have explained this example in public settings with native French speakers present, their response has always been the same. They have said, *Wow! I never noticed that before. You are right, that is what it says. I have been reading this passage my whole life and I never saw it that way.* That is because native French speakers do not perceive the feminine grammatical pronouns *“she” and “her”* (*elle*) in this passage to be semantically *female*. Since their heart language is a gender-based language (unlike English), they intuitively understand that *masculine* is not the same as *male*, and *feminine* is not the same as *female*.

Native speakers of koine Greek in the first century had the same intuitive sense about grammatical gender as present-day native speakers of French and nearly all Indo-European languages other than English. Even English speakers who have studied koine Greek as a dead language from the pages of a book will never have the same intuitive sense that was shared by those in the first century who grew up speaking koine Greek as a living language. Native English speakers who learn koine Greek, including scholars, will gain a cognitive understanding of the distinction between grammatical and semantic gender, but not necessarily an intuitive sense.

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\(^{51}\) *La Bible Segond 21* (Genève: Société Biblique, 2007).

\(^{52}\) My emphasis is added to the feminine pronouns in these verses.

\(^{53}\) Also consider 1 Peter 2:6 in French: “Je mets dans Sion une pierre angulaire, choisie, précieuse. Celui qui croit en *elle* n’en aura jamais honte” (*Segond 21*, 2007). A semi-literal translation of this verse in English is, “I put in Zion a cornerstone, chosen, precious. Whoever believes in *her* will never be ashamed.”
I am convinced that one of the main reasons there is confusion and division over gender in Bible translation among English-speaking Christians is that most native English speakers wrongly perceive Greek and Hebrew “masculine” forms as being equivalent to “male.” Some authors seem to use the terms “masculine” and “male” interchangeably, as if there is no difference between them. And some well-meaning Christians have suggested that reducing the number of masculine grammatical forms in our English translations “eliminates male-specific meaning” from Scripture. This notion results from viewing the Hebrew and Greek texts through English eyes, presuming that “masculine” is equivalent to “male.”

6. Translating Gender in Other Languages

Poythress made the following statement in his 2022 article: “In our book [The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy], Wayne Grudem and I conducted the discussion with examples from English Bible translations, rather than any other language.... But the principles are relevant to any language in the world.”

Based on over forty years’ experience working with many languages all around the world, I must respectfully disagree. An important factor that is often excluded from discussions about Bible translation is the fact that English and koine Greek are both Indo-European languages; they are distant cousins within the same family. As a translator translating the Bible into a non-Indo-European language, the Lamogai language of Papua New Guinea, I faced challenges that translators translating into English would never imagine, because the Lamogai language functions very differently from Greek and English.

There are over 7,000 living languages in the world today, and only 448, or 6%, are classified as Indo-European. That means 94% of the world’s languages are not related to Greek in the way English is. If we base our understanding of New Testament translation entirely on what is involved in translating from Greek to English, or any other Indo-European language, that is a very limited view of the worldwide linguistic landscape.

There is not space here to give a detailed explanation of the challenges involved in translating gender in Lamogai. I will mention just a few points which show that some issues at the center of the gender debate in English are not relevant to the Lamogai language. The issues I will describe briefly are pronouns, man/men, brother(s), and son(s).

1. **Pronouns.** Lamogai has no masculine or feminine pronouns. Every Lamogai pronoun is inherently gender neutral. The Lamogai subject pronoun ye means either “he” or “she.” The object pronoun –e means “him” or “her,” and the possessive pronoun ilo means “his,” “her,” or “hers.”

2. **Man/men.** The English word “man” has two distinct meanings: It can denote a singular male individual (a man), or it can refer to people in general (mankind, humanity). Our English word “man” is semantically similar to the Hebrew word ādēm and the Greek word anthrōpos. Both ādēm and

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56 See Brunn, *One Bible, Many Versions*, 133–46.


anthrōpos can be used to convey the same two meanings as the English word “man”: a singular male individual (a man), or people in general (mankind, humanity). Lamogai does not have a single word that carries both of these meanings. The Lamogai word for a singular male individual is tou (a man). It cannot be used in a general sense for “mankind” like the English, Hebrew, and Greek words, man, ʾādām, and anthrōpos. It always refers to only one man. The Lamogai word used to refer to any group of people, whether mixed or not, is the inherently gender-neutral word oduk (people). This is the only word available in the Lamogai language for translating ʾādām and anthrōpos in contexts where they refer to mankind in general.

3. Brother(s). Lamogai does not have a masculine word for “brother,” nor does it have a feminine word for “sister.” The Lamogai terms for siblings are all gender-neutral—denoting either same-sex siblings, or opposite-sex siblings. The term I would use to refer to my sister is luku, which means “opposite-sex sibling.” She would use the same term to refer to me. The term I would use to refer to my brother is tikino, which means “same-sex sibling.” A woman would use the same term, tikino, to refer to her sister.

4. Son(s). There are many Lamogai nouns that cannot be made plural, and “son” is one of them. The Lamogai word for “son” is always singular. The plural Lamogai word for “children,” is inherently gender neutral. The only way to explicitly talk about plural “sons” in Lamogai is to use the two-word phrase “male children.” This phrase is exclusively male and can never refer to a group of males and females together. A literal translation of Luke 6:35, “you will be sons of the Most High” (ESV), into Lamogai would be, “you will be male children of the Most High.” That would imply that females will be turned into males. When we translated this verse into Lamogai, the only viable option was to use the gender-neutral word for “children.”

Poythress suggests that “using a sex-neutral term like ‘child[ren]’” in place of “son[s]” in this kind of context would “erase a male-oriented meaning in the original text.” If this proposed standard is God’s universal standard, then the Lamogai language is automatically disqualified from ever having a faithful, accurate translation of the Holy Scriptures. That would mean God created Lamogai, along with many other non-Indo-European languages, to be inherently deficient. But I am convinced that when God confounded the languages at Babel, he made sure every language on earth has everything it needs to communicate every truth of his word faithfully and accurately—even though some of those truths will need to be communicated very differently in some languages, especially those that are totally unrelated to Hebrew and Greek.

7. When Is Gender-Neutral Translation Acceptable?

When the NIV translators produced their revised 2011 edition, they did not feel compelled to eliminate every masculine term that refers to men and women collectively. As we noted in Table 5, the NIV 2011 translators even retained masculine terms in some instances where literal translations like the ESV and NASB opted for gender-neutral terms. In the three examples in Table 9, the NIV 2011 translated anthrōpos as “man,” but the ESV and NASB used the gender-neutral words “person” and “people.”

Table 9: Masculine Forms in NIV 2011; Gender-Neutral Forms in ESV and NASB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine Form</th>
<th>Gender Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 10:36 NIV 2011</td>
<td>A man's enemies will be the members of his own household</td>
<td>ESV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:35 NIV 2011</td>
<td>A good man brings good things out of the good stored up</td>
<td>ESV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 19:26 NIV 2011</td>
<td>With man this is impossible</td>
<td>NASB 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these examples, the NIV 2011 retained (and still retains) the masculine word “man” from the NIV 1984 edition. But in Matthew 19:26, the NASB 1995 replaced the masculine word “men” from the 1977 edition with the gender-neutral word “people.” This shows that even as long ago as 1995, the NASB translators recognized that the English word “man” carried a less inclusive meaning than it had in the past. This supports a statement made by Mark Strauss over twenty-five years ago:

Almost every major version that has been prepared or revised over the last decade has adopted the extensive use of [gender-neutral/gender-inclusive] language. The rationale has always been the need to keep up with the changing state of the English language.60

Table 10 shows a few more gender-neutral substitutions that the NASB 1995 made from the 1977 edition.

Table 10: Gender-Neutral Changes in the NASB 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:31</td>
<td>blasphemy shall be forgiven men</td>
<td>blasphemy shall be forgiven people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:36</td>
<td>every careless word that men shall speak</td>
<td>every careless word that people speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 23:13</td>
<td>shut off the kingdom of heaven from men</td>
<td>shut off the kingdom of heaven from people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev 16:2</td>
<td>men who had the mark of the beast</td>
<td>people who had the mark of the beast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Today, the NASB’s shift toward increased gender-inclusiveness is continuing at an accelerated pace. The latest edition of the NASB, released in 2020, removed more than twelve-hundred occurrences of “man/men” from the NASB 1995 text.61 The NASB website provides an explanation of these and other gender-related changes. Here is an excerpt:

60 Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?*, 18.

61 Strauss, *40 Questions*, 159. Strauss writes, “Whereas the NASB (1977) had used ‘man’ or ‘men’ 3896 times throughout the Bible and the 1995 revision just slightly fewer at 3847 times, the 2020 has these masculine terms only 2625 times.” (That is a reduction of well over 1200 times.) “Similarly, whereas the NASB consistently translated adelphoi as ‘brethren,’ the NASB 2020 now frequently renders it as ‘brothers and sisters’ (131 times).”
The NASB 2020 is gender-accurate, meaning the reader will no longer have to try to intuit which genders the biblical authors have in mind. Now the text will clearly communicate gender in modern English, while still remaining true to the context and original languages of the ancient manuscripts. It should not be assumed that everyone will “just know” if both genders are intended when reading gender specific English, and for that reason clarification is critical.... Now, in order to maintain gender accuracy, more occurrences of ‘people’ or ‘person’ [over 1,200] have replaced ‘men’ or ‘man’.... In many cases where the context indicates that the gender is not exclusive to men, the terminology has been changed for accuracy and understanding according to current English.62

Here is another statement from the NASB website: “The NASB 2020 is not gender-neutral because when the original context calls for a specific masculine or feminine term, it does not use a gender-neutral term instead.”63

The wording of this statement is unfortunate and potentially misleading—particularly for those who do not have direct access to the source texts. This statement implies that translations which identify themselves as “gender-neutral” will “use a gender-neutral term” even when “the original context calls for a specific masculine or feminine term.”

It appears that the NASB 2020 website uses the term “gender-neutral” to describe translations that indiscriminately eliminate the distinction between male and female, regardless of the dictates of each context. If we use this NASB 2020 statement as a benchmark, then the NIV 2011, along with several other versions embroiled in the debate, would not be considered “gender-neutral” translations either.

If a translation of Scripture like the NASB can eliminate more than twelve-hundred occurrences of “man/men,” plus other masculine terms, and still explicitly state that it is “not gender neutral,” what does it even mean to say that any given Bible version is a “gender-neutral translation”?64

This is a matter of ideal versus real. When the translators of each Bible version describe their translational goals in their preface or introduction, they are making important statements about their translation philosophy. That is their ideal. But more significantly, they make statements about their philosophy by the real translational renderings they choose throughout Scripture. When translators eliminate hundreds of masculine forms that appeared in previous editions of their translation, they are clearly stating that they have changed their philosophy regarding gender in Bible translation.

The debate about gender-neutral translation has often been hindered by the fact that some authors focus almost exclusively on philosophical ideals, and ignore some of the real pertinent evidence, including the fact that several popular versions that do not explicitly identify as “gender neutral” have eliminated scores of masculine terms in their most recent editions. To fully comprehend the truth about this crucial issue, we must look beyond what translators say about translation (the ideal), and carefully examine what they do in actual translation practice (the real).

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64 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 59.
The CSB, which is a revision of the HCSB, is another translation that has taken significant steps toward increased gender-inclusiveness. Poythress states that “the CSB [has] not adopted a gender-neutral policy.” However, careful analysis will show that the CSB replaced several hundred masculine terms from the HCSB with gender-neutral terms. How many gender-neutral substitutions does a translation need to make before we say it has “adopted a gender-neutral policy”?

The CSB translators explain their approach to translating gender on the CSB website in a document entitled “Changes from HCSB to CSB”:

To improve accuracy, the [CSB] Translation Oversight Committee chose to avoid being unnecessarily specific in passages where the original context did not exclude females. When Scripture presents principles or generic examples that are not restricted to males, the CSB does not use “man,” “he,” or other masculine terms.

I cannot think of a better way to concisely describe a “gender-neutral [translation] policy” than to expressly state that the translators “[do] not use ‘man,’ ‘he,’ or other masculine terms” in statements “that are not restricted to males.”

The CSB translators went on to explain why they made an exception to their practice of gender-inclusive translation by retaining the generic “he” instead of changing it to the indefinite “they”: “The [CSB] translators did not make third person masculine pronouns inclusive by rendering them as plurals (they, them), because they believed it was important to retain the individual and personal sense of these expressions.”

It is clear by this statement that the reason the CSB translators decided not to replace the generic “he” with the indefinite “they” was specifically to retain “the individual and personal sense.” It was not about trying to retain a presumed “male-oriented” meaning that might be indicated by masculine grammatical forms in contexts that apply to both sexes.

Interestingly, both the CSB and the NASB 2020 cited “accuracy” as their primary reason for replacing hundreds of masculine terms with gender-neutral terms. The CSB statement says, “To improve accuracy, the [CSB] Translation Oversight Committee chose to avoid being unnecessarily specific in passages where the original context did not exclude females.” And the NASB 2020 statement says, “In many cases where the context indicates that the gender is not exclusive to men, the terminology has been

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68 Strauss, 40 Questions, 158. Strauss writes, “While the HCSB used the terms ‘man’ or ‘men’ 3097 times, the CSB uses them only 2551 times, a reduction of 546.” Also, “While the HCSB consistently translated adelphoi as “brothers,” the CSB changes this to “brothers and sisters” 145 times.”
70 “HCSB to CSB,” https://csbible.com/ministry/hcsb-to-csb/, under the heading “Translating Gender into English.”
changed for accuracy and understanding according to current English." The NASB 2020 distinguishes itself from previous NASB editions by explicitly identifying as “gender-accurate.” The current NASB and CSB statements on gender accuracy sound remarkably similar to statements that have appeared in the preface and introduction to the NIV and NLT for the past several years.

The ESV is a classic case of a Bible translation that, from its inception, exemplified the shift of modern English toward increased gender inclusiveness. When the ESV was released in 2001, it was not a new Bible translation; it was a revision of the RSV (1971 edition), only “changing the text somewhere between 5 and 8 percent.” In creating the ESV, the translators replaced hundreds of masculine words from the RSV with gender-neutral terms. Mark Strauss writes: “The ESV … moves the RSV in a more gender-inclusive direction, for example, removing the words ‘man’ and ‘men’ almost seven hundred times from the RSV.”

Of course, that does not include other masculine words in the RSV that the ESV translators sometimes replaced with gender-neutral terms as well. Table 11 shows a few examples where the RSV originally translated the singular and plural forms of anthrōpos as “man” and “men,” and the ESV subsequently changed them to the gender-neutral words, “person” and “people”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11: Gender-Neutral Changes in the ESV Revision of the RSV Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RSV</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 16:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 6:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Cor 2:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gal 2:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thess 2:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tim 3:2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is not exhaustive. And of course, anthrōpos is only one of several words for which the ESV translators made this kind of change. If we objectively evaluate the evidence, we can only conclude that when the ESV translators produced their revision of the RSV text in 2001, they took a major step toward increased gender inclusiveness.

Another masculine RSV word that the ESV translators sometimes changed to a gender-neutral word is the word “sons.” Here is an example from the book of Proverbs:

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75 Strauss, 40 Questions, 269.

76 Strauss, 40 Questions, 270.
Proverbs 17:6

RSV: the glory of sons is their fathers
ESV: the glory of children is their fathers

Interestingly, this is one kind of gender adjustment that Poythress specifically mentioned and criticized in his 2022 article:

In general statements, such as we find in the book of Proverbs, the target language may allow a choice between a male-oriented term like “son,” a female-oriented term like “daughter,” or a sex-neutral term like “child.” The issue is then whether we allow a general gender-neutral policy to erase a male-oriented meaning in the original text, by using a sex-neutral term like “child” in the translation.77

Here are two more examples from the book of Proverbs where the ESV replaced the masculine word “sons” in the RSV with the gender-neutral word “children”:

Proverbs 20:7

RSV: blessed are his sons after him
ESV: blessed are his children after him

Proverbs 8:4

RSV: the sons of men
ESV: the children of man

In Poythress’s statement above, he chose his words carefully. He did not categorically condemn the translational practice of replacing masculine terms with gender-neutral terms, because he knows that every major Bible version employs this practice in many contexts, including the ESV, NASB, and KJV. Poythress specifically singled out Bible translations that adopt a “general gender-neutral policy.” So apparently his concern is not with the principle of gender-neutral translation itself, but rather with how often that principle is applied in any given Bible translation.

When Poythress mentioned “general statements ... in the book of Proverbs” where “a sex-neutral term like ‘child’” in place of “son” would “erase a male-oriented meaning in the original text,” he may have had certain verses and versions in mind. If so, he did not tell us which ones they are. Did the ESV translators “erase a male-oriented meaning in the original text”78 when they changed “the glory of sons” to “the glory of children,” and “blessed are his sons” to “blessed are his children”? One could conclude that they did, based on what Poythress said about this kind of change. How are these examples in the ESV different from those in less-literal versions where the translators made the same kind of adjustment?

Who gets to be the arbiter of when it is acceptable to replace “son(s)” with “child(ren)” and when it is not? Who gets to decide which gender-neutral renderings are appropriate and which ones “suppress” or “erase” meaning from the source texts? Is it fair to condemn certain translations simply because

77 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53.
78 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 53.
they have transparently adopted a “general gender-neutral policy” while letting other more-literal translations remain uncriticized, even though they use many of the same gender-neutral terms in the same kinds of contexts, albeit less frequently?

If we criticize major English versions that identify as gender inclusive, such as the NIV and NLT, then fairness and full disclosure demand that we explicitly acknowledge that versions that do not identify as gender inclusive, such as the NASB and ESV, have also eliminated hundreds of masculine forms from previous editions of their translations, replacing them with gender-neutral forms.

In the abstract at the beginning of Poythress’s 2022 article, he summarized his position on gender in translation by asking a question and providing an answer from his perspective:

When we are translating statements that express general truths, applicable to both sexes, should we suppress male meaning nuances in the original languages when we render the meaning in a modern language? The answer is no. Rather, we should try to capture as much meaning from the original as we can, within the constraints of the target language.79

This statement, taken at face value within its context, appears to say that whenever “the constraints of the target language” allow translators to translate a masculine Hebrew or Greek term as masculine in English, they should do so—even in “statements that express general truths, applicable to both sexes.”80 How does this relate to the fact that the ESV, CSB, and NASB translators removed hundreds of masculine forms from previous editions of their translations and replaced them with gender neutral terms? Clearly, “the constraints of the target language,” English, allow for masculine renderings in those hundreds of instances because that is how the RSV, HCSB, and earlier editions of the NASB translated them. Does that mean the ESV, CSB, and NASB translators are guilty of “suppress[ing] male meaning nuances in the original languages”? If we accept Poythress’s summary statement as a benchmark for faithful translation, we must apply it in a uniform fashion to every version. Therefore, if Poythress’s statement stands as an indictment against any English translation, it stands as an indictment against every English translation.

8. Conclusion

The discussion of gender in Bible translation does not need to be contentious, and it does not need to be confusing, especially if we come together and acknowledge a few observable realities:

(1) Every major English Bible translation replaces masculine forms with gender-neutral forms in many contexts, not only in places where “the constraints of the target language” require it, but in many other places as well. Often it is simply a judgment call on the part of the translators of both literal and nonliteral versions.

(2) Sometimes a notably nonliteral version reflects a masculine form from the source text, even though some literal versions exchanged it for a gender-neutral term.81

(3) Many of the contexts where literal versions translated a masculine Hebrew or Greek term with a gender-neutral term are comparable to contexts where nonliteral versions employed the same practice, only on a more consistent basis.

79 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 51 (italics mine).

80 Poythress, “Gender-Neutral Bible Translations,” 51.

81 See Tables 5 and 9 in this article.
(4) Every major English translation that has a “general gender-neutral policy” only replaces masculine forms with gender-neutral ones in places where the translators consider the context to apply to males and females collectively.82

(5) Grammatical gender (masculine, feminine) is not the same as semantic gender (male, female). Every first-century native speaker of koine Greek understood this intuitively, but most native English speakers do not—including many who have studied koine Greek as a dead language. Native English speakers who learn Greek gain a cognitive understanding of the distinction between grammatical and semantic gender, but not necessarily an intuitive sense, because their heart language, English, does not have a comprehensive grammatical gender classification system like other Indo-European languages. This is probably the main reason the gender debate has been most prominent in the English-speaking world. Much of the confusion and controversy about gender in Bible translation stem from the fact that most native English speakers assume that grammatical “masculine” is equivalent to semantic “male.”

(6) Some of the strict guidelines that have been proposed for handling gender in Bible translation are not relevant to many languages around the world, particularly those that are far removed from Hebrew and Greek.

(7) In recent years, even literal translations like the ESV and NASB have taken significant steps toward increased gender inclusiveness, using far more gender-neutral terms than their predecessors, the RSV and earlier editions of the NASB. This seems to indicate that the translators of these versions recognize that masculine English words like “father(s),” “brother(s),” “man/men,” and “son(s)” are less inclusive today than they were just a few decades ago, and, by the same token, are less inclusive than the corresponding Hebrew and Greek terms.

English speakers are blessed to have many high-quality Bible translations of various kinds. I pray that God will help us recognize and embrace the benefits of this incredible blessing, especially as we reflect on the fact that there are still thousands of people groups around the world with no Scripture in their heart language.

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82 As previously mentioned, sometimes the NRSV and CEV stand alone, using gender-neutral terms in places where the translators of other major gender-inclusive English translations interpret the context to apply specifically to males.
The Ancient Pedigree of Homosexuality as the Sin of Sodom

— Melvin L. Otey —

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Abstract: Scholars disagree about the precise nature of the sin that provokes God’s wrath in Genesis 19. In fact, multiple transgressions are involved, including fornication, rape, and inhospitality. Christian exegetes traditionally emphasize the apparently homoerotic aspects of the Sodomites’ demand to “know” the angels inside Lot’s home. However, some modern scholars isolate the aggressors’ inhospitality to the exclusion of any potential sexual deviance and allege that the emphasis on fornication, especially homosexual intercourse, is a historically recent phenomenon. This article critiques this assertion by demonstrating that a tradition within Second Temple Judaism and the primitive church attributes sexual sins, including homosexuality, to Sodom and its neighbors.

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Genesis 19 contains one of the most infamous episodes in Scripture. Two angels—appearing in the form of men—visit the city of Sodom one evening to investigate reports of grave sin (Gen 18:20–21; 19:1). Upon their arrival, Abraham’s nephew, Lot, invites them to lodge in his home overnight (Gen 19:2–3). They accept Lot’s offer of hospitality, but all the men of Sodom subsequently surround his home and demand he surrender the visitors so the crowd can “know” (from יָוִדְעַ) them (Gen 19:4–5). Lot discourages his neighbors from carrying out their evil designs and offers his two daughters, who have not “known” (from יָוִדְעַ) men, to the crowd in the angels’ stead (Gen 19:6–8).

Rather than receive Lot’s daughters, though, the Sodomites threaten to harm him and his visitors and attempt to forcibly enter the home (Gen 19:9). The reports of wickedness being confirmed, the angels blind the men of the crowd and permit Lot and his family to escape to nearby Zoar (Gen 19:10–22). The next morning, God rains sulfur and fire from heaven and decimates Sodom, Gomorrah, and the neighboring cities in the valley. He utterly destroys the region and its inhabitants, sparing only Lot, his two virgin daughters, and the city of Zoar (Gen 19:23–25). Lot’s wife is turned into a pillar of salt when she violates the angels’ instruction by looking back toward Sodom during the family’s flight (Gen 19:17, 26).

Despite the episode’s notoriety, scholars offer different understandings about the precise classification of the offense that prompts God’s wrath and the consequent lessons readers are expected
to draw. The traditional Christian view that homosexuality is the chief sin of Sodom is often challenged by modern scholars, who typically posit that either inhospitality or an attempted breach of natural-supernatural boundaries is the crime that ultimately brings fiery ruin for Sodom and its neighbors.

This article does not attempt to settle the classification controversy. Instead, it questions the propriety of an argument that has recently been levied against the traditional Christian view. Whatever the merits or limitations of the contention that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a divine condemnation of homosexual intercourse, the argument is not of historically recent vintage—and ostensibly less credible—as some suppose. The discussion here proceeds in four parts. First, it addresses the use of Sodom and Gomorrah as archetypes of wickedness and divine condemnation. Second, it surveys the principal positions scholars take regarding the sins that precipitate the cities’ destruction. Third, it briefly considers the influence of Second Temple literature and traditions on 2 Peter and Jude, both of which reference the Genesis 19 narrative. Last, it summarizes the antiquity of the traditional Christian view.

1. Sodom and Gomorrah as Archetypes

The fiery destruction of the cities of the valley occupies a prominent place in both Jewish and Christian thought.1 The Hebrew Bible (HB) often uses Sodom and Gomorrah, in particular, as archetypal depictions of evil (see, e.g., Deut 32:32–33; Isa 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14) and presents their fate as an exemplar of consequent divine judgment (see, e.g., Isa 1:9; 13:19–20; Jer 49:17–18; 50:39–40; Lam 4:6; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:8–9).2 Ezekiel 16:46–50, for example, employs this motif in discussing the city of Jerusalem and its wickedness:

And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live, declares the LORD God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.3

Typological references to Sodom also occur in Second Temple literature. For instance, Jubilees—typically dated in the second century BCE—describes the Sodomites as “great sinners” (13:18

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2 Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary, 71. “Subsequent divinely ordered destructions of a city invoke this incident as an illustration of the fury of divine punishment.” Weston W. Fields, Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative, JSOTSup 231 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 137. “Sodom was remembered by Israel as the example for all time of a complete divine judgment on a sinful community.” Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, revised ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 221.

3 Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
and warns, “Just as the sons of Sodom were taken from the earth, so (too) all of those who worship idols shall be taken away” (22:22 [Wintermute]). From the first century BCE, 3 Maccabees says the men of Sodom “acted insolently and became notorious for their crimes,” so God “burned them up with fire and brimstone and made them an example to later generations” (2:5 [Anderson]). Wisdom of Solomon, also dating to the first century BCE, describes Sodom and the surrounding cities, in their continuing state of demise, as “a testimony” and “a memorial of their foolishness” (10:7–8 [Brenton]).

The archetypal use of the judgment narrative continues in first-century CE writings. Consistent with earlier characterizations, Pseudo-Philo calls the Sodomites “very wicked men and great sinners” (Biblical Antiquities 8:2 [Harrington]). Second Esdras invokes the cities of the valley as a warning of future judgment for others: “Woe to you, Assyria, who conceal the unrighteous ones within you! O evil nation, recall what I did to Sodom and Gomorrah, whose land lies prostrate as lumps of pitch and piles of ashes. Just so will I do to those who have not listened to me, says the LORD Almighty” (2:8–9 [Myers]).

The NT presents the cities’ demise as a portent of future judgment as well. For instance, Jesus notes that people who fail to receive his disciples—presumably as the Sodomites fail to receive God’s messengers in Genesis 19—will endure harsher punishment than Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:14–15). His most extended reflections on the narrative are recorded in Luke 17:28–32:

Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife.

Here, Jesus emphasizes that Sodom’s destruction illustrates the sudden and overwhelming nature of God’s judgment on sin and the need for unswerving commitment in escaping it. The authors of Jude and 2 Peter similarly cite the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah as evidence of judgment awaiting ungodly people in their own age (2 Pet 2:6; Jude 7).

2. Common Views of Sodom’s Sins

Sodom, Gomorrah, and the ruined cities of the valley are depicted as quintessentially evil in Jewish and early Christian literature, and their demise is consistently presented as the inevitable consequence of the inhabitants’ grievous sins. Yet, within these broad parameters, modern scholars offer widely divergent interpretations of the Genesis 19 narrative. Among other things, they disagree about the specific nature of the sin(s) that provoke divine judgment. As Scott Morschauser explains, “Opinion has

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4 Ryan P. Juza, “Echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day the of the LORD: Intertextuality and Tradition in 2 Peter 3:7–13,” BBR 24 (2014): 229–32. The tradition linking the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities is also evinced in the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers, thought to date from the second or third centuries CE: “(You are) the one who kindled the fearful fire against the five cities of Sodom, and turned a fruitful land into salt because of those living in it, and snatched away pious Lot from the burning. You are the one who delivered Abraham from ancestral godlessness” (Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers 12:61 [Darnell]).

5 “Few episodes in the Hebrew Bible have aroused such differing interpretations or responses as the account of the events leading to the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19.” Scott Morschauser, “Hospitality,’ Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19.1–9,” JSOT 27 (2003): 461.
The Ancient Pedigree of Homosexuality as the Sin of Sodom

divided over the major emphasis of the vignette: whether the denizens of Sodom are being condemned for aberrant behavior, or for their violation of a universally ‘sacrosanct’ code of ‘hospitality.’

2.1. Homosexual Intercourse

Multiple dynamics are apparent in the account, but exegetes traditionally view the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as one of the most prominent condemnations of homoeroticism in the HB. For instance, in recounting the narrative, Josephus explains, “Now when the Sodomites saw the young men to be of beautiful countenances, and this to an extraordinary degree, and that they took up their lodgings with Lot, they resolved themselves to enjoy these beautiful boys by force and violence” (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.3.200 [Whiston]). According to Martin Luther,

> The heinous conduct of the people of Sodom is extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which was implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.

The unnatural desires are thought to involve homoeroticism. Derek Kidner agrees with Luther that “at this early point in Scripture, the sin of sodomy is branded as particularly heinous.” E. A. Speiser asserts that, for the writer of Genesis 19, “it was the city’s sexual depravity, the manifest ‘sodomy’ of its inhabitants, that provided the sole and self-evident reason for its frightful fate.”

Among scholars who see homoeroticism as the chief impetus for Sodom’s demise, Lot offering his virgindaughters is considered clear evidence that the hostile crowd demanding to “know” the houseguests intend to have sexual intercourse with them. Andrew E. Steinmann explains,

> Some have tried to argue that the demand of the Sodomites was not sexual, but simply an insistence that they be able to understand who it was that was staying in the city with Lot. This is belied by the fact that Lot begs them not to do *this evil* (v. 7) and then

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7 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 92. “In discussions of homosexuality in Zimbabwe, the story of Sodom (Gen. 19) is one of the primary reference points for discussants. This story, it is argued, illustrates the dangers posed by homosexuality to Zimbabwe, that is, the destruction that was visited upon Sodom awaits communities that tolerate or accept homosexuality.” Masiwa Ragies Gunda, “Jesus Christ, Homosexuality and Masculinity in African Christianity: Reading Luke 10:1–12,” *Exchange* 42.1 (2013): 16.


offers his daughters \textit{who have not been intimate} [literally, ‘have not known’] \textit{a man} (v. 8). Clearly, Lot understood their request as sexual in nature.\footnote{Andrew E. Steinmann, \textit{Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary}, TOTC 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 198.}

Gordon J. Wenham similarly affirms that, in this context, the mob’s demand to “know” Lot’s guests in Genesis 19:5 must be sexual in nature. This conclusion is inescapable, he says, since Lot responds to the ultimatum by offering his virgin daughters, who have not “known” men, in Genesis 19:8.\footnote{Gordon J. Wenham, \textit{Genesis 16–50}, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 2:55.} The sexual connotation in 19:8, at least, is clear.\footnote{Morschauser, “‘Hospitality, Hostiles and Hostages,’” 471. “When Lot responds by offering his daughters ‘who have never known a man’ (v. 8), it becomes clear that the issue is intercourse and not friendship.” Victor P. Hamilton, \textit{Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50}, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34.}

Exegetes who perceive that sexuality is, in some respect, the primary evil in Sodom disagree regarding whether homosexual rape or homosexual relations more generally is condemned.\footnote{Among those who agree that the issue is sexual, the question arises whether the issue is homosexual relations per se or homosexual rape.” Hamilton, \textit{Genesis 18–50}, 34.} Assuming the mob intends to have intercourse with the ostensibly male strangers, they almost certainly intend to do so forcibly and without the visitors’ consent. This amounts to homosexual gang rape.\footnote{Wenham, \textit{Genesis 16–50}, 2:55.} Some scholars, then, suggest that the violence of rape provokes God’s wrath and no emphasis is made in Genesis 19 on the gender of the parties involved. James V. Brownson, for instance, declares the account “graphically portray[s] the horror of rape, [but] simply do[es] not speak to committed same-sex intimate relationships.”\footnote{James V. Brownson, \textit{Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 269.} Under the circumstances, it is difficult to sharply distinguish between the homosexual and forcible aspects of the Sodomites’ contemplated crimes.

\subsection*{2.2. Intercourse with Supernatural Beings}

While many scholars agree that homosexual intercourse—whether consensual or compelled—is the principal sin of Sodom, others contend that a different type of supposed aberration is in view.\footnote{“The sin is one of transgressing creational boundaries.” Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner, \textit{2 Peter and Jude}, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 194.} David A. deSilva, among others, posits that Sodom is destroyed because its inhabitants attempt to transgress “the boundaries between angels and human beings in regard to intercourse.”\footnote{David A. deSilva, \textit{The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James, and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 295.} Bauckham insists the reference to “strange flesh” in Jude 7 cannot refer to homosexual intercourse. Instead, as the fallen angels—called “sons of God” in Genesis 6—have intercourse with human women, the Sodomites attempt to have intercourse with angels.\footnote{Richard J. Bauckham, \textit{Jude, 2 Peter}, vol. 50 of WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 54.} The behavior of the men of Sodom, then, is somewhat of a reversal of events described in Genesis 6.
2.3. Failure of Hospitality

Most scholars agree the Sodomites’ sins are sexual in nature—even if they disagree about the specific aspect that is condemned as aberrant—but some modern exegetes contend the cities’ destruction has nothing at all to do with sexual relations. Among other things, they note that, despite numerous references to the fate of the Sodomites in Scripture, homosexuality is never explicitly identified as their sin. Instead, the people are specifically accused of various forms of violence and immorality. For example, some aver that Isaiah depicts the sin as injustice, Ezekiel describes it as selfish pride and prosperity that results in a failure to aid the poor and needy, and Jesus indicates that Sodom was destroyed for lacking hospitality and failing to repent. “Grounding our interpretation in Scripture,” theologian Shannon Craigo-Snell affirms, “issues of sexuality and sexual practices recede.”

Scholars who deny the primacy of homosexual—or even sexual—sins in Genesis 19, increasingly contend that divine judgment was provoked by the Sodomites’ inhumanity to strangers. For instance, David M. Carr claims the episode tells of God’s “condemnation of a town that violated hospitality by trying to rape guests in one of its homes” rather than his judgment on homosexual behavior. John Boswell minimizes, or perhaps even denies, the episode’s sexual overtones. He credits the argument that, “When the men of Sodom gathered around to demand that the strangers be brought out to them, ‘that they might know them,’ they meant no more than to ‘know’ who they were, and the city was consequently destroyed not for sexual immorality but for the sin of inhospitality to strangers.” Similarly, Morschauser argues the implication of the verb “know” in Genesis 19:8 “is that the men be produced for interrogation: to discover (legally), and to ascertain their true identity—whether they are friends or foes; whether they truly deserve hospitality, or are to face hostility.”

Exegetes who emphasize the failure of hospitality at Sodom sometimes argue the traditional concern with sexual sin is the consequence of late Christian re-imaginings. Boswell, for instance, asserts that a purely homosexual reading of the account is “relatively recent” and “the rise of homosexual associations can be traced to social trends and literature of a much later period. It is not likely that such associations played a large role in determining early Christian attitudes.” Likewise, Craigo-Snell posits that “the story of Sodom and Gomorrah did not convince Christians that same sex relations were wrong. Rather, when some Christians in the medieval period were convinced that same sex relations were wrong,

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21 “Sodom is used as a symbol of evil in dozens of places, but not in a single instance is the sin of the Sodomites specified as homosexuality.” Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 94.


26 Morschauser, “‘Hospitality,’ Hostiles and Hostages,” 472.

27 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 93.
they reinterpreted the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in line with their beliefs. Such mis-readings have caused concrete harm to God’s beloved LGBTQ children.”

Scholars will undoubtedly continue to debate the extent to which the Sodom and Gomorrah pericope illustrates a divine rebuke of homosexual intercourse, forbidden relations between natural and supernatural beings, rape, inhospitality, or some combination of these behaviors. However, each element is clearly present in the account. The confluence of these factors is likely intended to illustrate just how far the cities of the valley have fallen and why the men of Sodom are “wicked, great sinners against the Lord” (Gen 13:13). Still, recent contentions that the traditional Christian emphasis on homosexual relations in Genesis 19 is misplaced deserve careful scrutiny. The arguments do not properly account for certain reflections on the pericope in the Second Temple period and NT literature like 2 Peter and Jude.

3. Second Temple Traditions in 2 Peter and Jude

Second Peter and Jude discuss similar subject matter and share the same general purpose—to warn against false teachers or subversives while encouraging faithfulness. Moreover, the epistles have a clear literary relationship since they share common vocabulary, present parallel material, and have similar introductions and conclusions. The modern consensus is that 2 Peter incorporates portions of Jude. The strongest arguments in favor of Jude’s priority are that its Greek is less difficult and its writing is more succinct than 2 Peter. Those who favor the primacy of 2 Peter tend to (1) believe the unity of style in 2 Peter makes it unlikely the author borrowed wholesale from Jude; (2) emphasize the future tense of predictions of false teachers in 2 Peter compared with the present tense in Jude; and (3) argue the improbability that Peter would borrow from Jude. A conclusion regarding priority—which Michael Green calls “one of the most enigmatic [questions] in New Testament studies”—is necessarily hypothetical and tentative.

Whatever one’s conclusions regarding the relationship between these epistles, each draws on Second Temple era traditions in citing three OT examples to demonstrate the inevitability of divine judgment on false prophets. Second Peter references God’s condemnation of the Watchers, the flood of Noah’s day, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:1–8). Jude invokes God’s judgment on the people of Israel in the wilderness after God delivers them out of Egypt, the fall of the Watchers, and the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah (4–7). Notably, each of these episodes potentially involves a strong sexual element. For instance, Jubilees states that the flood was brought about by fornication, pollution, and injustice (7:20–21a), and the Bible affirms that Israel’s fornication in the wilderness draws God’s ire (Num 25:1–9; 1 Cor 10:5–8).


29 Ben Witherington III, Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 615.

30 Peter H. Davids demonstrates the letters’ similar arrangement and affirms their shared vocabulary. Peter H. Davids, A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude: Living in the Light of the Coming King, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 204–8.

31 Green, 2 Peter and Jude, 69–70.

32 Green, 2 Peter and Jude, 69.

33 And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all of the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and
3.1. The Fall of the Watchers

Extrabiblical traditions influence the references to divine judgment in these epistles. For instance, Jude 6 states that certain angels did not remain in their original positions of authority. Instead, they left their proper dwelling and were consequently restrained in darkness until an occasion of final judgment. Second Peter charges them generally with sin and affirms they are bound in darkness until the judgment (2:4). These are presumably allusions to events recorded in Genesis 6:1–4, which describes “the sons of God” procreating with “the daughters of man,” but the details in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 are not described in the OT.

Intertestamental literature often identifies these “sons of God” as angels. First Enoch, for instance, asserts that angels defile themselves with women (8:8–9; 12:1–6), take human wives and sire giants (7:1–6), and are confined in darkness until the day of judgment when they will be destroyed in fire (10:3–4, 11–15). Jude, who quotes 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14–15, knows and follows this tradition. The author of 2 Peter is almost certainly aware of it also. Jubilees similarly alleges the Watchers fornicated with the daughters of men and “made a beginning of impurity,” producing murderous sons and prompting the flood (7:21–25 [Wintermute]). In the final centuries of the common era, then, Jewish tradition typically identifies “the sons of God” in Genesis 6 with angels and ascribes sexual sins as the reason for their condemnation.

3.2. The Ruin of Sodom and Its Neighboring Cities

Despite their similarities, the epistles refer to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with different emphases. Second Peter emphasizes God’s power to deliver righteous people while destroying the unrighteous. He saves Noah, “a preacher of righteousness,” while destroying the ungodly world in the flood (2 Pet 2:5), and he saves Lot—who is twice described as “righteous”—while overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet 2:7–8). Having done so in the past, it is implied that God continues to deliver godly people while reserving ungodly people for punishment (2 Pet 2:9).

While the Wisdom of Solomon calls Lot “a righteous man” who “escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities” (10:6 [NRSV]), the affirmation in 2 Peter 2:7–8 that he is both righteous and constantly vexed by the wickedness of Sodom has no parallel in Genesis 19. The author of Wisdom classes Lot with heroes like Noah (Wis 10:4), Abraham (10:5), Jacob (10:10), and Joseph (10:13). Later, 1 Clement 11:1 affirms Lot is delivered specifically because of his hospitality and piety. These references confirm

cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honor father and mother, and each one love his neighbor and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice. For on account of these three the Flood came upon the earth” (Jub 7:20–21a). Bauckham notes “the sins of the generation of the Flood are not here specified, but in view of v10a, it is relevant to note that Jewish tradition usually held them to be guilty of the same series of vices as it attributed to the Sodomites.” Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, 251.

35 Hamilton, Genesis 1–17, 272.
a tradition among Jews and early Christians that casts Lot in a positive, even heroic, light.38 While 2 Peter merely alludes to Sodom’s wickedness, it expands on the dynamics of Lot’s life there in a way that reflects pseudepigraphal influence.39

A different kind of expansion occurs in Jude 7, which says “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” Most scholars disagree with Boswell, who flatly declares “there is absolutely no justification” for interpreting this verse as a homosexual allusion.40 For instance, Ben Witherington III opines, “While Old Testament scholars debate what the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was, there is no doubt in Jude’s mind that it involves sexual improprieties of a severe sort, not only of a heterosexual but also of a homosexual nature.”41 If Jude does intend to indict the cities of the plain for homosexual sins, he is not alone among first-century CE writers. Philo of Alexandria declares the Sodomites engage in “unlawful forms of sex,” including adulterous heterosexual relations and “men ha[v]ing] intercourse with males, the active partners having no respect for the common nature shared with the passive partners” (On the Life of Abraham 135 [Birbaum and Dillon]).

Moreover, several sources generally attribute sexual aberrations to the inhabitants of Sodom. For example, according to the Testament of Benjamin, potentially dating to the second century BCE, the patriarch warns his descendants, “From the words of Enoch the Righteous I tell you that you will be sexually promiscuous like the promiscuity of the Sodomites and will perish, with few exceptions. You shall resume your actions with loose women, and the kingdom of the Lord will not be among you, for he will take it away forthwith” (9:1 [Kee]). Jubilees, written during the same period, describes the inhabitants of the ruined cities as “polluting themselves and … fornicating in their flesh … [and] causing pollution upon the earth” (16:5 [Wintemute]). The document also portrays Abraham forthrightly warning his children against fornication and impurity. There, Abraham alleges the Sodomites died “on account of their fornication and impurity and the corruption among themselves with fornication” (Jub 20:5 [Wintemute]).

Second Peter’s reference to sexual sin in Sodom and Gomorrah is implicit while Jude’s is explicit, but the likelihood that each is referring to sexual sins is strengthened by association with their respective triads of historic judgments.42 Jude, especially, seems to agree with the pseudepigraphal traditions because, in the same context, he embraces the tradition that the Watchers were guilty of sexual sins.43

39 Noah’s characterization as a “preacher of righteousness” is also without parallel in Genesis but well-attested in extrabiblical literature. For instance, Sibyline Oracle 1:148–198 attributes a long sermon on repentance to Noah, and Josephus avers that Noah attempted to persuade his wicked neighbors “to change their dispositions and their acts for the better” (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 3.1.74 [Whiston]).
40 Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, 94.
41 Witherington, Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians, 616.
42 “Instead of specifying the sins of each of his three OT examples of sinners in turn, the author [of 2 Peter] has chosen to sum up the sins of all three in the words of v 10a, which in fact give a strong emphasis on sexual indulgence.” Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, 248–49.
43 “Jude 7 refers to the famous example of Sodom and Gomorrah whose sin, in addition to general immorality, was going after ‘strange flesh,’ that is, angel visitors. The Greek clearly refers to ‘different flesh,’ and so one of their sins was a violation of the creation order. Though the intention of the Sodomites was probably homosexual (i.e., the text does not suggest that the Sodomites knew the visitors were angels, not men), the Sodomites are condemned for the same sin as the angels in Jude 6—they violated the creation order and went after a different kind
As Darian Lockett explains, “the apostasy of Jude’s three types are all associated with rejection of God’s order: in the case of the wilderness generation they rejected God’s purposes and order for taking the Promised Land (Num 14.11), the rebellious angels and Sodom and Gomorrah are both extreme cases of sexual perversion marking an outright rejection of God’s created order.”44 Jeremy F. Hultin agrees that sexual transgressions are emphasized in Jude’s references to the Watchers and Sodom and Gomorrah. He explains,

Although Jude’s parade of previously punished sinners includes many familiar faces, Jude seems to evoke a rather particular, and not so common, unifying theme: namely, sexual transgressions that involved the mixing of two categories of beings. For instance, although reference to the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah was common, Jude is among a minority who specify that their sin was of a sexual nature, and he is virtually unique in likening their transgression to that of the Watchers. In Jude’s depiction, both instances involve sexual acts (or attempted acts) between different orders of beings: the angels “did not keep their rule” and “left their own dwelling”; the Sodomites “went after strange flesh” (Jude 6–7). This presumably means that just as the Watchers sought intercourse with human women, the Sodomites sought to have sexual relations with the angels.45

For Jude, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah are sexually immoral and pursue “strange” or “different” flesh. Since they do not know the visitors are angels rather than mere men, their intentions, at least, are homoerotic. The potential harms, though, are aggravated by the true identities of Lot’s houseguests.46

4. Antiquity of the Emphasis on Homosexuality in Sodom

In light of the contexts in which 2 Peter and Jude cite the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah and the influence of extrabiblical traditions on the epistles, it is unlikely that Christians only began associating the cities’ destruction with divine condemnation of fornication and homosexuality as late as the medieval age. Scholars who allege only a historically recent association fail to carefully consider critical evidence.

of being for a sexual partner, only here the initiative is on the part of humans, whereas in Genesis 6:1–4 it is the reverse.” Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 614.


46 Keener writes, “Already in the Old Testament and even more so in later Jewish tradition, Sodom came to be viewed as the epitome of wickedness. ‘Strange flesh’ (KJV, NASB) here could mean angelic bodies, but because Jewish tradition would not call angels ‘flesh’ and the Sodomites did not realize that the guests were angels (Gen 19:5), Jude may have their attempted homosexual acts in view. (‘Strange flesh is literally ‘other flesh’, but this may mean ‘other than what is natural,’ rather than ‘other than their own kind.’))” Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 721. Green says, “In addition, the unnaturalness of their conduct is stressed. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah engaged in homosexuality: that was unnatural. But Jude may mean that just as the angels fell because of their lust for women, so the Sodomites fell because of their lust for angels (sarkos heteras indeed!).” Green, 2 *Peter and Jude*, 193.
First, early Christians inherited the HB and read Genesis 19. The “overall tenor” of the chapter is sexual in nature. The judgment pericope depicts aggression by the male inhabitants of Sodom against what they believe are human male visitors, and Lot responds to their demands by offering his virgin daughters. While some modern scholars contend the Sodomite mob intends only to question the visitors in order to learn the foreigners’ identities and intentions, it is virtually undisputed that Lot’s response anticipates his daughters being sexually assaulted. Given the crowd’s demand to “know” the visitors and Lot’s immediate offer of his daughters in the angels’ stead, he seemingly understands the aggressor’s demands as sexual in nature.

Second, while the cities of the valley are charged with a variety of sins in the HB and homosexuality is not specifically alleged in many instances, homosexuality is still potentially referenced. For instance, Ezekiel 16:47 and 16:50 accuse Sodom of committing “abominations” (from תּוֵֹעָבה). This term is applied to male-male homosexual intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, as well as adultery with the wife of one’s neighbor in Ezekiel 22:11. While it is also applied to deception (Prov 12:22; 11:1; Deut 25:16) and arrogance (Prov 16:5), among other things, deception is not implicated in Genesis 19 and Ezekiel 16:49 alleges arrogance separately. “Abomination,” then, can refer to sexual sin, including homosexual intercourse. In fact, it is used regarding sexual sin elsewhere in Ezekiel. Therefore, it is too much to declare that Ezekiel 16:46–50 says nothing about sexual sin or homoeroticism in Sodom.

Third, Jude 7 plainly charges the inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of valley with “sexual immorality” and pursuing “unnatural desire.” Even if the allegation involves an unwitting attempt to sexually transgress the boundaries between natural and supernatural beings, the transgression necessarily involves conscious efforts to participate in male-male intercourse, and the Law of Moses prescribes capital punishment for such behavior (Lev 20:13). In light of the specific denunciations in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and the common gender of the parties involved, modern exegetes must not lightly or completely dismiss the possibility that Jude’s archetypal invocation of Genesis 19 concerns homosexual relations in some substantial part.

Fourth, the authors of 2 Peter and Jude are almost certainly aware of Jewish traditions affirming the sexual, even homosexual, nature of Sodom’s sins. There is a considerable tradition reflected in Second Temple literature charging the cities of the valley with sexual promiscuity, and numerous writings before the first century CE warn against fornication and sexual impurity using Genesis 19 as an exemplar. Moreover, writers like Josephus and Philo specify that the fornication and impurity are homosexual in nature. The authors of 2 Peter and Jude reflect the persistence of these traditions in the primitive Christian church.

5. Conclusion

Scholars will undoubtedly continue wrestling with the precise nature of Sodom’s sin because, among other reasons, the conclusion potentially impacts social views about homosexual intercourse and relationships. This article does not purport to conclusively isolate one sin. Instead, it argues that one
of the recent arguments against the traditional view—that God destroys the cities of the valley, in large part, because of rampant fornication, including homosexuality, in Sodom—is overstated. Christians did not adopt this reading of Genesis 19 in some historically recent era. Second Temple literature demonstrates that the view predates the Christian church, and first century CE Christian writings, especially the Epistle of Jude, show the reading was accepted by at least some of Jesus’s early disciples. Consequently, in attempting to understand how Christians have historically understood Sodom’s sin and the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality, it is better to acknowledge all of the prominent elements in the ancient narrative, including the attempt to transgress natural and supernatural boundaries, rape, and inhospitality, without dismissing the emphasis on divine condemnation of homosexuality.
Pedagogy and Biblical Theology: Tracing the Intertextuality of the Book of Proverbs

— Dan Martin —

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Abstract: This paper articulates a provisional thesis, namely, that we need a pedagogical category within our biblical theological frameworks, on the basis that such a category was in the New Testament authors’ minds. I begin by outlining the challenges of integrating the book of Proverbs into biblical theology to date, before highlighting the value of intertextuality as the primary inductive method for constructing biblical theology. I then demonstrate through a ‘worked example’ the mutually interpretive canonical relationship of a Proverbs text with the New Testament, providing a tentative basis for a pedagogical biblical theological category. I conclude by outlining how this thesis can be tested and developed through further research.

How does the book of Proverbs ‘fit’ into whole-bible theology? Broadly speaking, treatments of the Proverbs with respect to biblical theology have tended towards one of two poles. Some scholars have tended to ignore the covenantal outlook of the book, insisting it is creation theology.1 Alternatively, some scholars have inserted Proverbs into redemptive-historical frameworks which can integrate some aspects of the book of Proverbs but exclude much at the same time.2 The rich textual connections between Proverbs and Genesis, Deuteronomy, and other parts of the Hebrew canon are well recognised within Old Testament scholarship.3 Yet among works of biblical theology, Proverbs is


generally considered in fairly brief terms when compared with the space it occupies within the canon. In contrast to the first category, we might ask, if the Proverbs do not inform a biblical theology, why are they quoted in the New Testament? In contrast to the second category we might ask, given that the book of Proverbs is quoted and alluded to in multiple New Testament texts, why is so little attention given to it in contemporary works of biblical theology? I have previously argued, following a survey of the literature, that a robust biblical theology which fully integrates the book of Proverbs is lacking.

Much contemporary biblical theology scholarship has tended to be preoccupied with redemptive-historical readings. While the ‘storyline’ of the canon is foundational, redemptive history must not be considered co-extensive with the task of biblical theology. The relative under-consideration of the book of Proverbs in works of biblical theology is emblematic of an approach to biblical theology that tacitly views redemptive history as functionally its goal and extent. In such an approach, as we argue below, the pedagogical categories of the canon become overlooked.

The problems are at root methodological, bound up with whether biblical categories are established inductively. For instance, a false dichotomy between ‘creation’ and ‘covenant’ easily creeps into biblical theology. The problem lies not with these as distinct theological themes or concepts, but with the assumption that the canon presents them as separable categories. Further, as will be considered further below, the category of ‘wisdom literature’ is far from inductive. Rather, it is essentially a functional category imposed upon the canon, intended to summarise texts which perform the ‘function’ of wisdom instruction, or appear to meet the criteria of a wisdom ‘form’. The canon does present us with categories within which to understand the Proverbs, but these must be received inductively if we are to be faithful to the project of biblical theology.

The solution is at root methodological. The aim of this paper is to suggest that we need a pedagogical category within our biblical theological frameworks, by demonstrating that such a category was in the New Testament authors’ minds. I argue that intertextuality is the primary inductive method for constructing biblical theology. I demonstrate through a ‘worked example’ the mutually interpretive canonical relationship of a Proverbs text with the New Testament, providing a tentative basis for a pedagogical biblical theological category. Intertextuality is being rewardingly rediscovered as a core tool for biblical theology, and we now turn to consider it directly.

I am using the term ‘pedagogy’ to mean ‘training for right living’, or ‘formation’, a concept which encompasses formal and informal—or explicit and implicit—methods and content, and a focus not only on skills but also on character. It is generally acknowledged that Proverbs 1–9 are pedagogical, but

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4 In one of the newest and most outstanding Biblical theology volumes, Proverbs is considered in a handful of pages and ‘wise living’—as a biblical theological synthesis—in a page: Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 320–24, 762–63.

5 A laudable exception to this trend is James M. Hamilton, God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).


Ansberry has shown convincingly that indeed the whole book is compiled as a deliberate pedagogical progression through its discrete units.9

1. Intertextuality and Biblical Theology

There is growing scholarly support for the rejection of ‘wisdom literature’ as a theological category.10 This is due on the one hand to the lack of inductive canonical evidence for such a category11 and on the other hand to the manifest weakness of form-critical approaches which, built upon historical speculation, have been found wanting, especially at the level of individual texts.12

There is a degree of logical inevitability to the rejection of form criticism, given that ‘mixed forms are the norm, not the exception’.13 Furthermore, ‘not only are the historical settings extrapolated from the literary forms along traditional lines, but the forms themselves must be extrapolated as well’.14 The waning interest in form criticism correlates with the rising interest in intertextuality, since generalised form-critical theories imposed upon texts had the effect of ‘obscuring the particularities of individual texts’.15 The quest for wisdom literature’s influence in the canon had the effect of silencing the interpretation of intertextual links, ‘thereby perpetuating wisdom’s isolation even when pursuing its interaction with the rest of the canon’.16 As the form emphasis has dissipated, such textual relationships can be allowed to speak and be heard:

The challenges to form criticism’s focus on generalization encourage these new connections to be pursued. Doing so enables the complexity of these texts and the culture from which they came to emerge anew from the shackles of categorical segmentation.17

What, then, do we mean by intertextuality? ‘Intertextuality’ includes ‘diachronic’ (or ‘sequential’) and ‘synchronic’ (or ‘simultaneous’) methods of reading texts and theoretical reflection on what texts are. Fundamentally, intertextual interpretation ‘examines connections between actual texts as an aid to

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13 Dell and Kynes, Reading Proverbs Intertextually, 2.
14 Dell and Kynes, Reading Proverbs Intertextually, 2.
17 Dell and Kynes, Reading Proverbs Intertextually, 2.
their interpretation. As a simple shorthand we might say that intertextuality, in its clearest instances, is a form of ‘inner-biblical exegesis’.

But if intertextuality is the primary avenue to biblical theological construction, we must recognise that it is a variegated category. Whilst no consensus exists about the precise criteria needed to establish a given type of intertextual relationship — and thus quite where one category becomes the next may be debated — three distinct clusters of intertextuality can be articulated as below.

- Demonstrable, authorially intended, mutually interpretive intertextuality.
- Demonstrable, authorially intended, intertextuality without mutual interpretation.
- Reader controlled intertextuality.

Each cluster is centre-bounded rather than boundary-bounded. Thus, while certain intertextual relationships will clearly fall into one of these three categories, clear criteria are needed to define precisely where the boundaries lie. Thus far, consensus on such criteria has proved elusive and is likely to remain so. Nevertheless, our purpose at this point is simply to highlight that ‘intertextuality’ is necessarily a variegated dynamic.

By ‘mutually interpretive’ we mean that the later text interprets the earlier and also in some way is interpreted by it. The later text may make clearer a latent meaning contained in the earlier text, while being controlled or constrained by the earlier text in some way; ‘later biblical quotations of and allusions to earlier Scripture unpack the meaning of that earlier Scripture, and yet the earlier passage also sheds light on the later passage’. This relationship is at its most marked when the New Testament explicitly quotes the Old, though it is present within the Hebrew Bible. We will explore an instance of mutually interpretive intertextuality below.

In contrast, Ben Sirach’s allusions to Proverbs 7 (for instance) fall into our second category, since the interpretive relationship — though intended by the author of Ben Sirach — is not mutual. Whilst consensus does not exist regarding the criteria by which authorially intended intertextuality can be established, it is widely accepted that a mere solitary verbal allusion or parallel is insufficient.

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Other factors, such as multiple verbal allusions or similar contexts or genres, would likely be needed to substantiate an authorially-intended intertextuality.

Beyond this lie ‘reader controlled’ intertextualities, essentially arbitrary or coincidental points of connection between texts, within which a thoughtful reader can discern meanings which were not necessarily intended by the author of either text. Such intertextual relationships have been called ‘spatial’ in contrast to ‘temporal’ and are ‘completely non-intentional’; their value lies in ‘what texts can be taken to mean.’

With regards to our first category of intertextual relationship, we cannot have a ‘mutually interpretive’ relationship unless a canon of inspired texts is presupposed. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with questions regarding the canon, we can note two points. Firstly, if new redemptive historical stages were accompanied by new inspired writings, then biblical theology implies canon as much as canon implies biblical theology. Secondly, we can therefore infer that added layers of intertextuality were necessarily added as biblical redemptive history progressed. The degree to which the books of the canon were ordered so as to promote intertextual readings is a subset of this progressive layering.

The task of meaningful theological construction from intertextuality ultimately depends upon an inspired canon. If there is no inspiration, there can be no authorially-intended, mutually interpretive intertextuality. If there is no mutually interpretive intertextuality, the reader of Scripture is left with the problem of arbitrariness: how seriously should I take this intertextual relationship? If the best answer is, ‘this is of intellectual interest,’ then it is clear that the intertextual relationship is not authoritative enough to inform life and practice. It is illustrative that, in Dell and Kynes’s volume on reading Proverbs intertextually, Heim’s chapter on Proverbs in relationship to the New Testament did not treat the New Testament’s own quotations of Proverbs as qualitatively more significant than the author’s own intertextual explorations.

To summarise our method, then: the inspired canon provides the redemptive-historical framework which makes mutually interpretive intertextuality possible. This type of intertextuality is authoritative for theological construction. We now provide a worked example of Proverbs/New Testament mutually interpretive intertextuality.

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26 Beentjes, ‘Intertextuality Between the Book of Ben Sira and the Book of Proverbs’.
31 Dell and Kynes, Reading Proverbs Intertextually.
2. Worked Example of Intertextuality Between Proverbs and the New Testament

Below we outline the mutually interpretive relationship of Proverbs 3:34 with two New Testament passages, 1 Peter 5:5 and James 4:6. Before examining the specific details of this connection, we can note that both Peter and James, in quoting this text, considered it to be authoritative to the contexts they were addressing. The presence of even one such quotation challenges both the ‘solely creation theology’ perspective on the Proverbs (since the canon clearly regards at least this text as covenantal) and the ‘Christocentric heuristic’ perspective (since in this example, ‘Christ as wise man’ is not clearly in view).33

2.1. Proverbs 3:34 in Original Context

Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour. (Prov 3:34 ESV)

ִאם־ַלֵלִּッツ ֽהוּא־ָיִ֑ליץ ולעניים יִֶתּן־ֵֽחן
(Prov 3:34 WLC)

κύριος ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν. (Prov 3:36 LXX)

In the original context, Proverbs 3 is located within the lengthy preamble of chapters 1–9 which provides the interpretive framework for the rest of the book.34 Both chapter 3 and the wider preamble are strongly pedagogical. Verse 34 forms part of the conclusion (3:33–35) to a discrete lecture (3:13–35) within this preamble section.35 Proverbs 3 contains a number of referents to life in covenant with YHWH.36 The word ‘favour’ (ֵֽח) functions as an inclusio, occurring at the end of the introduction (3:4) and at the conclusion (3:34). Finally, the chapter ends with a string of covenantal antitheses (3:33–35).

Five prohibitions are given in Proverbs 3:27–31, all of which communicate the kinds of relationships which a young man displaying ‘sound judgement and discernment’ will avoid. The prohibitions are followed by the motivations behind these prohibitions (3:32–35), within which our text is placed. Common to all these motivations is the antithesis between YHWH’s posture towards the wicked and his posture towards the righteous. Verse 34 states this antithesis incisively and pithily. Whilst the humble will receive favour (grace), ‘mockers will get from God exactly what they give others: as they tear everything down with their mouths, so the Lord will tear them down with his curse; as they cover others with reproach, so that Lord will cover them with shame.’37

In James, the quotation of this text falls within a call to repent. In 1 Peter 5 the quotation falls within a call to ‘humble yourselves’. The NT appears to see 3:34 then as a kind of ‘shorthand’ for the covenantal love placed upon those in Christ, as opposed to those who live in opposition to God’s rule. In both James and 1 Peter the Proverbs text appears to have been presumed familiar enough that it is being treated as an axiom. Let us consider each NT text in turn.

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33 For further consideration of these perspectives see Martin, ‘Let the Simple Learn Wisdom’, 19–25.


36 Martin, ‘Let the Simple Learn Wisdom’.

2.2. Proverbs 3.34 and James 4.6

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ (Jas 4:6 ESV)

μείζονα δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν; διὸ λέγει • ὁ θεὸς ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν. (Jas 4:6 NA28)

James 3 has considered and contrasted two kinds of wisdom and highlighted the ‘wisdom that comes from heaven’ which leads to human flourishing. ‘The beginning of James 4 ...is not changing the subject but rather analyses what does not make for peace.’ 38 Carson summarises the logic of James 4:5–6 as follows:

God’s longing for us is driven by his own holy jealousy, but God is as gracious as he is holy, and he supplies us with all the grace we need to meet his own holy demand....4:6a comes across as an encouragement, [and] James ...will not permit grace to stand by itself, without consideration of the appropriate response. That response is humility, and its antithesis is pride—a point that James makes by quoting Prov 3:34. 39

Regarding the Hebrew text, we must note the choice of words. Literally, ‘He [God] mocks the mockers’. In the LXX, which James follows, we have the subtly different phrase, ‘the Lord opposes the proud’. This text does not appear to be quoted or clearly alluded to in extrabiblical Judaism. 40 Thus in James 4:6 the author appeals to a familiar wisdom contrast encapsulated in Proverbs 3:34; the text is regarded as axiomatic to how sinful creatures can dwell in relationship with a holy and jealous God.

2.3. Proverbs 3:34 and 1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ (1 Pet 5:5 ESV)

Ὅμοιως, νεώτεροι, υποτάγητε πρεσβυτέροις • πάντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην ἐγκομβώσασθε, ὡτι [ὁ] θεὸς ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν. (1 Pet 5:5 NA28)

Peter appeals to Proverbs 3:34 as justification for the exhortation for ‘all’ to ‘humble themselves’. It is clear that by the first century there was a strong tradition within Judaism which stressed the antithesis between the wise and the foolish, 41 and which stressed the importance of dependence on God for the kind of wisdom that brings life. 42 Like the book of James, 1 Peter follows the LXX rather than the

40  Carson, ‘James’, 1008.
Hebrew text in its quotation of Proverbs 3:34 which, as already noted, has a subtle loss of the wordplay on ‘mock.’ Unlike James, Peter emends ‘the LORD’ to ‘God.’

In context then, Peter calls Christian disciples to ‘true humility … recognizing one’s complete dependence on God … expressed by the acceptance of one’s role and position in God’s economy.’ It is worthy of remark that Peter appeals to a Proverbs text when wishing to emphasise a theme which ‘lies at the heart of the Bible’s storyline and of God’s plan of redemption brought to fulfillment in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to consummation at the end.’ We are thus provided with a connection between the pedagogical and the redemptive-historical.

2.4. Concluding the Worked Example

The initial intertextual exploration above serves as an illustration of the need for further research of this kind if a robust, exegetical, and intertextual biblical theology of the Proverbs is to be constructed. This is because Proverbs 3:34 is one of the most explicit quotations of the book of Proverbs in the New Testament yet does not fall simply into the ready categories of existing biblical theologies. In each of the two New Testament quotations of Proverbs 3:34, the text quoted is referred to as authoritative, axiomatic, and a key point of reference for the point being made (contra the trend of downplaying the canonical matrix of the Proverbs). In both cases the category of ‘Christ as wise man’ is not primarily in view, nor any other redemptive-historical contour (contra the trend of rigidity in biblical theological frameworks).

At this point let me return to my thesis: In the minds of the New Testament writers, the book of Proverbs occupied a predominantly pedagogical category which was located within the broader redemptive-historical framework of the canon. I am not arguing that inductive categories are necessarily limited only to typology or pedagogy, but that pedagogy is a warranted biblical-theological category which should therefore be reflected in our biblical-theological construction.

If it is true that the entirety of the book of Proverbs is intended to function pedagogically, we can reasonably expect pedagogy to have been the default category in the minds of NT writers. The use of Proverbs 3:34 in the New Testament is consistent with pedagogy which is located within a broader redemptive-historical framework.

This emerging hypothesis leads us to make the tentative comment that the book of Proverbs leads us not only typologically—to Jesus as the Sage greater than Solomon (Matt 12:42)—but also, pedagogically, to find a treasury of pedagogical content for embodied living in the ‘real world in real time’ under the rule of Christ. If this thesis is substantiated by the intertextual data, the implications are extensive. How might we scrutinise this thesis?

3. Testing the Thesis

A systematic study of intertextual connections between the Proverbs and the rest of the canon, and a subsequent synthesis, is warranted. This would take as its starting point explicit quotations of the Proverbs in the New Testament. The following list (in addition to the texts considered above) represents a starting selection of clear intertextual connections, though it is far from exhaustive:

44 Carson, ‘1 Peter’, 1043.
45 Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad*, 184–90.
Themelios

- Prov 3:11–12 and Heb 12:5–6
- Prov 4:26 and Heb 12:13
- Prov 10:12 and 1 Pet 4:8
- Prov 11:31 and 1 Pet 4:18
- Prov 22:9 and 2 Cor 9:7
- Prov 25:6–7 and Luke 14:10
- Prov 25:21–22 and Rom 12:20
- Prov 26:11 and 2 Pet 2:22

This would be followed by a systematic study of lexical allusions in the Greek NT to the LXX text of Proverbs (e.g., Luke 2:52 and Prov 3:4). It is likely that this will yield a more significant volume of intertextual data than has been recognised to date. For example, the NT’s use of a term such as παιδεία (Eph 6:4; Heb 12:5–11) appears not as a referent to a Graeco-Roman category, but to the LXX of Proverbs, where it appears 26 times, often translating מָשָׁל (‘discipline/instruction’), and also functioning as a ‘shorthand’ or primary term for wisdom.46 Even on this preliminary detail much hangs, since it would appear that Paul has the book of Proverbs in mind when he urges fathers in the church in Ephesians 6:4. Thus, further study of NT allusions to the LXX text of Proverbs is merited.

The above research can then be synthesised in part around Jesus of Nazareth’s self-awareness as the ‘wisdom of God’. Noting the emphasis on wisdom in Jesus’s boyhood in Luke’s gospel (Luke 2:40, 53), this course of research would go on to consider Jesus’s own wisdom expressions in relation to himself, including Luke 11:49 in relation to its parallel in Matt 23:34, and Jesus’s comment that he is ‘greater than’ Solomon (Matt 12:42). The recent resurgence of interest in Proverbs 8 in relation to texts such as 1 Corinthians 1:24 and Revelation 3:14, in light of eternal generation,47 would be commended for inclusion within this synthesis. Directly related is Jesus’s own apparent pedagogical preference to teach in ‘parables’—the LXX’s main translation of the Hebrew מָשָׁל, which is doubtless significant.48

The above research can then be synthesised with two directly connected biblical theological themes, namely the tree of life and the fear of the Lord. The ‘tree of life’ is a phrase occurring only in Genesis, Proverbs, and Revelation of the biblical canon. The literature to date seeking to integrate the tree of life’s appearance within the Proverbs to biblical theology has been fairly scant. Although the ‘fear of the Lord’ has long been recognised as a richly intertextual49 organising principle of the Proverbs and indeed of ‘wisdom’ literature,50 it merits attention as an overtly biblical theological theme spanning both testaments.

46 For instance, Proverbs 25:1 LXX renders ‘proverbs of Solomon’ (מְשֵּלי שלמה) as αἱ παιδεῖαι Σαλωμόντος.


49 Bullock, ‘Wisdom, the “Amen” of Torah’, 11–16.

Our thesis can then be further tested alongside the *historical reception* of Proverbs. Such an accessory stream of research could help to confirm or disprove whether, historically, the book of Proverbs has been received within Christian communities as (at least in part) pedagogical.

Finally, the ultimate goal of this research is thorough integration of the Proverbs into the dominant themes and categories of biblical theology. In this paper we are making the tentative suggestion that we need a robustly *pedagogical* category in our biblical theology, a category which connects the canonical redemptive storyline to our dynamic, situated lives and wills. For this to be achieved, all of the above will need to be synthesised with the broader themes of, for instance, the kingdom of God, union with Christ, ironic ‘redemptive reversals’, and more.

Clearly, much theological reflection is required to tease out the relation of pedagogy and typology in the new covenant. If it is true that Proverbs pedagogically complements the Deuteronomic paradigm, then we can expect ‘wisdom’—as pedagogical training for right living—in the new covenant to reflect the ‘greater’ redemptive reality of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This in turn brings us back to the study of ‘Jesus as Sage’ above. We might express this *a fortiori* relationship as ‘fractal’; a consistency of shape with an increase in scale. Just as Jesus’s sermon on the mount is rooted in Deuteronomy but expanded in keeping with the greater redemptive reality, so new covenant wisdom is rooted in Proverbs, and expanded. For instance, the assurance of grace to the humble of Proverbs 3:34 is amplified in Jesus’s assurance that those who take up their cross and follow him will find eternal life.

Furthermore, if this thesis is true, it enriches reflection on the relationship between biblical and systematic theology, since it subverts—to a degree—the assumption that biblical theology (first) sets the stage upon which systematic theology (second) then builds application. The presence of even one demonstrable NT quotation or allusion to the Proverbs shows that, at least in part, biblical theology’s scope legitimately expands into ‘application’. At the same time, the warrant for Proverbs-grounded pedagogy within the new covenant immediately provides a framework for far more granular real time application, given the diversity of content contained within the Proverbs; a framework which complements both biblical and systematic theology in their classic senses. We might say that it adds a third layer, that of necessarily situated pedagogy, which addresses the question of how people should make decisions, and interpret situations, in real time.

If this provisional thesis is found to be warranted after testing against the textual data outlined above, it will add richness to the understanding that the risen Lord Jesus Christ, as Sage, leads his people in real time, in the real world, by his words—words rooted in the Proverbs.

4. Conclusion

How does the book of Proverbs ‘fit’ into whole-Bible theology? If biblical theology *functionally ceases* at the point of establishing a redemptive-historical reading of a theme or themes through the

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54 Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad*, 188–89; Bullock, ‘Wisdom, the “Amen” of Torah,’ 16–18.
canon, there will be a resultant skew in the New Testament’s perceived handling of the Old. The book of Proverbs is one example of an Old Testament book which a) features explicitly in the New Testament, through quotations (as well as implicitly through allusions), and yet b) does not feature much in biblical theological literature at either academic or popular levels. Rather than seeing redemptive-history as functionally co-extensive with biblical theology, it should function more as the starting point for rich, biblical theological construction. The hypothesis we have articulated in this paper is that Proverbs occupied a pedagogical category of ongoing importance in the minds of the NT writers.

The significance of recovering a biblical theology of the Proverbs lies in the subsequent capacity for the right application of wisdom within home, church, academy, marketplace, and state. The book of Proverbs claims to hold out wisdom pertinent to all these spheres and more. If a solid foundation can be established for how to read and apply the Proverbs, then wise living can be built upon that foundation. Axiomatic to constructing such a foundation is to arrive at clarity upon how Solomon’s wisdom relates to the Christ and his kingdom. We have argued in this paper that such a biblical theology of Proverbs can be constructed by careful consideration of intertextual connections across the canon. We have argued that Proverbs occupies a pedagogical category within biblical theology, a category that existed in the minds of the New Testament writers, and we have outlined how this hypothesis can be tested in future research.
Filial Revelation and Filial Responsibility: (Dis)obedient Sonship and The Religious Leaders in Matthew 11–16

— Adam Friend —

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Abstract: Sonship appears in every section, at every turning point, and on the lips of every character in Matthew’s Gospel. In determining the motif’s function, the religious leaders have largely been neglected. This study analyzes Matthew’s development of the motif of sonship in Matthew 11:1–16:11, arguing that the religious leaders clarify the positive concept of sonship from their provision of its negative example. For Matthew, sonship must be actualized in obedience.

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For Matthew, sonship is actualized by obedience. Jesus is the son of God par excellence but not merely because of his divine conception (Matt 1:18), nor even because of his adoption into the Davidic line (1:1, 16, 17). Instead, Matthew recognizes Jesus of Nazareth as the son of God because he did his Father’s will (see 3:15–17; 4:1–7; 26:39–42). That is, he responded to his Father’s revelation with believing obedience. The sonship of disciples in Matthew’s Gospel is then patterned on his exemplar: obedience to the revealed will of God.

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1 Cf. William L. Kynes, A Christology of Solidarity: Jesus as the Representative of His People in Matthew (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 7; David B. Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel, JSNTSup 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 255.


3 Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 252–53.

Matthew roots this conception of sonship in Deuteronomic expectations of obedience from Israel.⁵ Indeed, Jesus’s recapitulative activities in chapters 2–4 climax on this point in the temptation narrative (4:1–11). Jesus is the persistently obedient wilderness wanderer contra Israel, resisting temptations presented as challenges to the nature of his sonship (εἰ ὦ ἴς εἶ ὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:3, 6). But Jesus is not the only character upon whom Matthew brings these expectations. The religious leaders, too, are assessed with the measure of obedience. And, in Matthew’s presentation, they are found wanting.⁷

I contend in this article that, as the disqualification of the religious leaders is demonstrated, the nature of sonship, as outlined above, receives greater clarity. My method builds on Bauer’s suggestion that consistent contrasts and comparisons shape the reading experience of Matthew’s Gospel.⁸ The reader must compare themselves to the character of Jesus, to many supplicants, and, at times, to the disciples, while also contrasting their idea of discipleship with that found in the example of the religious leaders and other antagonists (e.g., Herod, Pilate, the Gerasene townspeople).⁹ In this study, I apply Bauer’s idea to Matthew’s development of the motif of sonship, arguing the religious leaders function rhetorically to distinguish the positive from the negative. That is, they provide a model of what is not sonship, contrasting with Jesus, whom the narrative tells (e.g., 3:17; 11:25–27; 16:16; 17:5) and shows (4:1–11; 26:39, 42) to be the archetypal son.¹⁰

The positive example of Jesus, the obedient son, and the mixed manifestations of sonship by the disciples and crowds have been studied at some length.¹¹ But the role of the religious leaders in negatively defining sonship has been neglected.¹²

The study focuses on Matthew 11–16, beginning after Jesus’s Missionary Discourse, and ending before the decisive confession of Peter at 16:16. This focus was chosen for two reasons. First, this section heavily features Jesus’s interactions with the Pharisees (esp. ch. 12), providing a significant sample to consider their characterization. Second, Matthew 11–16 culminates with Jesus’s declaration that his disciples ὁρᾶτε καὶ προσέχετε their teaching (16:6, see also 16:11–12), presenting the Pharisees as the

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¹² For example, it is absent from three key studies on this topic: Kynes, *A Christology of Solidarity*; Crowe, *The Obedient Son*; Pattarumadathil, “Your Father in Heaven”; cf. Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 237.
Filial Revelation and Filial Responsibility: (Dis)obedient Sonship and The Religious Leaders in Matthew 11–16

primary contrast to Peter’s declaration in 16:16. This suggests that Matthew’s characterization of the Pharisees is not only a common but an important feature of this section of the gospel.

In analyzing the interactions between Jesus and the leaders in these chapters, I attend to the vocabulary of sonship (υἱός, πατήρ) as it is utilized by the narrator and in the gospel’s dialogue, discourse, and diverse allusions. I further explore the figure of sonship as Matthew enacts it, positively or negatively, in the activities of the religious leaders.

1. Matthew 11–13: Revealing Rejection

Israel’s unbelief in the face of messianic revelation is pervasive in chapters 11–13. These chapters address a rising tide of disappointment in and opposition to the kingdom of God that has risen in response to Jesus’s ministry. The shape of chapters 11 and 12 is comparable, culminating in descriptions of the status of those who responded rightly to Jesus (11:25–30; 12:46–50), contrasting with the poor examples preceding them. These two chapters set out the narrative basis for the parables discourse by exploring how the people of Galilee, especially their leaders, have reacted to Jesus. Three themes are common to all three chapters: divine revelation (11:25–27; 13:11–17), diverse responses (positive and negative; 11:3, 16–19, 20; 12:2, 14, 23, 42, 45, 50; 13:3–9, 18–23), and coming judgment (11:24; 12:30–32, 33–37, 41–42, 43–45; 13:24–50, 46–43, 47–50).

The Baptist’s doubt opens the section, asking σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (11:3), jarring against his earlier confidence (3:14). Jesus had fallen short of John’s expectations. Most likely, this refers to the expectations articulated in 3:7–12: does Jesus really have a winnowing fork in his hand? This pericope serves as a re-introduction of the judgment theme into the foreground of the narrative; the audience recalls John’s anticipation and desires with him for its fulfilment.

So, judgment features in the pericopes that follow (e.g., 11:21–24; 12:36–37). But it is a judgment that falls in response to those who have rejected the revelation that comes with Jesus. Jesus shows his focus on responses: the questioners are told to report to John ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ βλέπετε (11:4). Then to those who went out to see John the Baptist (θεάομαι, 11:7; ὁράω, 11:8), Jesus presents two impressions: one positive, his own (11:7–15), and one negative, that of τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην (11:16–19). In contrast to his positive review, Jesus casts the reactions to John strikingly in terms of the kingdom, saying it has suffered violence and is being taken by force by the violent (βιαστής, 11:12).

Allusions to Deuteronomic sonship are present here, ensuring comparisons are made on filial grounds. Of particular interest is the religious leaders characterizing the Son of Man in 11:19 as φάγος

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13 Kingsbury, Matthew, 18.
17 See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Matthew 8–18, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 239.
19 Cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 266.
καὶ οἶνοπότης. This combination echoes the similar words in Deuteronomy 21:20 (MT: לַאֲלֵי חַרְבִּי; LXX: συμβολοκοπέω, οἴνοφλυγέω), used to describe the rebellious and stubborn son (cf. Prov 23:19–22; 28:7). The prospect of a filial theme here is strengthened by Matthew’s use of children as a fitting comparison to γενεά in 11:16 (see also, Deut 32:20; Matt 12:39; 16:4; 17:7).21

Two potential disobedient sons are in view: Jesus and the religious leaders. There is significant irony in the religious leaders making this claim about Jesus when it does not match the narrative’s portrayal of his actions. Indeed, the irony may run so deep that, rather than being simply a false accusation, Jesus’s accusers, by raising the question of disobedient sonship, have suggested that they are those to whom belongs its proper classification.23

Following this pericope are two that explicitly concern revelation. The first laments the response of the cities of Galilee, οὐ μετενόησαν (11:20),24 and expresses the principle that greater accountability attends greater revelation.25 A great light shone in their midst (4:16), yet they refused to acknowledge it. And so, their judgment would be worse than those who had not received the same (11:22, 23): Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, all cities that typified godlessness in the Old Testament. The Galilean failure to repent is indicative of the hostility that will follow in chapter 12. From this story, readers expect the rejection of revelation in Jesus to be behind opposition to Jesus.

But first, the condemned of 11:20–24 are contrasted with the accepted of 11:25–30.26 Jesus’s sonship is the means of this acceptance, the revelation involved in his own filial relationship enabling the Father’s revelation to whomever the Son chooses to make him known (11:27). Sonship thus finds expression in knowing, in revelation.27 Further, sonship is functional here. The Son draws others into the knowledge and rest of the Father (11:27–29).

Revelation is discriminatory. Judgment is coming, and the axe will fall on those who fail to respond to Jesus’s revelation with obedience. But those who respond rightly demonstrate they are sons, ones to whom the Son has chosen to reveal the Father.28 Chapter 11 anticipates the way Matthew unites the themes of revelation and judgment in chapters 12 and 13.

1.1. Matthew 12:1–21: Sons by Service, not by Sabbath

Two Sabbath controversies begin chapter 12. They end with a scheme for Jesus’s murder and are followed by a sharp counterpoint in 12:15–21.29 Such a shocking conclusion spills out of a far more subtle competition: a contest of wisdom. On one side are the Pharisees, with their role and reputation as teachers of the Law (12:2; cf. 9:11; 15:1–2; 16:6,12), the wise men of Judaism (23:2, 16, 24). On the

21 Crowe, The Obedient Son, 176.
22 See Crowe, The Obedient Son, 179.
23 Crowe, The Obedient Son, 178.
26 Carson, “Matthew,” 274.
27 Kingsbury, Matthew, 64.
28 Cf. Kynes, A Christology of Solidarity, 93.
other is Jesus, who is flanked by material defining him as both the Wisdom of God (11:19, 27–30) and the Teacher of Wisdom (13:1–52).³⁰ Phariṣaic understanding of the law is tested in these passages.³¹ They are exposed as misinterpreting Scripture, as Jesus utilizes the rhetorically sharp, ὥστε ἀνέγνωτε (12:3, 5) and εἰ ἐγνώκειτε (12:7), to demonstrate their error.³² Though they critique his Sabbath-keeping, they do not really know the law they use to convict him.³³ As a result, they fail to see the arrival of something greater than the temple (12:6).³⁴ The something greater is a present reality (ἐστιν ὧδε, 12:6). Jesus is not here prophesying about a future revelation but is himself a revelation of what is in the present, the kingdom.³⁵ Their obsession with the law makes them incapable of perceiving the significance of the miracles Jesus was performing.³⁶

The Phariṣeess’ misapprehension is not accidental but willful.³⁷ The questions, “have you not read” and “do you no know,” suggest that what Jesus argues should have been obvious.³⁸ Their opposition arises from a rejection of what is clear. The fruit is that they present themselves as those apparently wise and understanding and yet effectively ignorant: their wisdom is skin deep, borne of following form and not of understanding substance. So, they fail to see the irony of spending their Sabbath plotting the murder of the man they accuse of breaking it by healing.³⁹

The destructive nature of their misunderstanding is foreshadowed in their condemnation of the guiltless (12:5), it is demonstrated in their failure to care for the man with the withered hand (12:10), and it climaxes in their plotting of Christ’s death (12:14). Jesus provokes the second controversy, healing on the Sabbath that which could have waited until the following day.⁴⁰ It is telling that Matthew makes no mention of the encounter between the man and Jesus; the evangelist is interested in Jesus’s conflict with the Phariṣeess.⁴¹

A filial frame is cast over this conflict by its context, both what comes before and what follows. In the preceding pericope, Jesus is framed as the Son of the Father who gives rest. Matthew presents the Phariṣeess in parallel. Ironically, they are guardians of the Sabbath, God’s regulated rest, yet their application of that guardianship is without regard to the hunger (12:1) or hurt (12:10) of those under their care.⁴² They show themselves to be the givers of a heavy burden, one that voids the Father’s rest and

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³¹ Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 330.
³⁴ Osborne, Matthew, 453.
³⁶ Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 334.
⁴² See Talbert, Matthew, 149.
opposes the merciful yoke given by the Father's Son (cf. 11:28–30).\footnote{Osborne, Matthew, 448; France, The Gospel According to Matthew, 457.}

The passage following the conflicts complements this contrast. In 12:18–21, Matthew brings together the roles of Servant and Son, defining the obedience of Jesus in these terms and against the example of the Pharisees.\footnote{Cf. Luz, Matthew 8–20, 191; France, The Gospel According to Matthew, 471; Carson, "Matthew," 286; Kingsbury, Matthew, 65–66.} Matthew's quoting of Isaiah 42 intrudes into the narrative.\footnote{Luz, Matthew 8–20, 191.} He has amended Isaiah 42 to reflect the heavenly declarations of sonship in 3:17 and 17:5.\footnote{Cf. Carson, "Matthew," 286; Kingsbury, Matthew, 65–66.} The comparison below shows Matthew's amending of the LXX and MT to conform with these two events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isa 42:1 MT</th>
<th>Isa 42:1 LXX</th>
<th>Matt 12:18</th>
<th>Matt 3:17; 17:5 (identical)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>רָצַּה נְפִשְׁנוּ...</td>
<td>...ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου, προσέδέξατο αὐτόν ἢ ψυχή μου...</td>
<td>...ὁ ἀγαπητός μου εἰς δὲν εὐδόκησαν ἢ ψυχή μου...</td>
<td>...ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ὧν εὐδόκησα...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Αγαπητός and εὐδοκέω from 3:17 and 17:5 replace ἐκλεκτός and προσέδεχομαι from Isaiah 42:1, though ἢ ψυχή μου is preserved. The result is to bring together Son and Servant.

By linking this quotation with the voice of God after Jesus's baptism, Matthew implicitly claims that the Messiah's mission, inaugurated with his baptism, is now being fulfilled in the Son of God.\footnote{Francis P. Viljoen, “The Holy Spirit’s Characterisation of the Matthean Jesus,” IDS 54.1 (2020): 4; France, The Gospel According to Matthew, 206.} Thus faithful son meets faithful servant.\footnote{Brown, Matthew, 122.} The MT's עבד (Isa 42:1) could be translated as either δοῦλός or παῖς. Matthew's choice of παῖς may be a function of the ambiguity of the term, showing, in that choice, the pulling together of servant and son.\footnote{Harrington, The Gospel of Matthew, 180–81; Osborne, Matthew, 465; cf. Carson, “Matthew,” 286.} Both are significant dimensions.

The conflict with the Pharisees clarifies this Servant-Son Christology.\footnote{Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42,1–4 in Matthew 12,” Bib 63 (1982): 457; Brown, Matthew, 121; Charles H. Talbert, Matthew, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 153.} Doyle argues that given the Pharisees are very much featured through the chapter (12:2, 14, 24, 38), it is likely they are also in view when it comes to the formula quotation of 12:17–21.\footnote{Doyle, “A Concern of the Evangelist,” 21–2.} Four significant lexical connections to the Pharisees' portrayal throughout the chapter strengthen this connection.\footnote{J. P. Nickel, “Jesus, the Isaianic Servant Exorcist Exploring the Significance of Matthew 12,18–21 in the Beelzebul Pericope,” ZNW 107 (2016): 185.} The first is Matthew's use of ἐν ταῖς παλαιαίς in 12:19, notably absent from the LXX. Its only other use in the Gospel characterizes the...
hypocrisy is certainly a relevant characterization of the Pharisees in this instance, their stated desire to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath day being at odds with their murderous plotting.

A second connection concerns the servant’s anointing with τὸ πνεῦμά μου (12:18). Matthew goes on to assert, against the Pharisees’ accusation of demonic authority, that Jesus’s exorcisms occur ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ (12:28). Indeed, the very wrongful ascription of Jesus’s authority by the Pharisees is then described to be blasphemy against the Spirit (12:31, 32).

The quotation’s framing of the messianic task as bringing justice (ἐκβάλλω, 12:20; cf. ἐκφέρω, Isa 42:1, 3 LXX) provides the third connection. The Beelzebub narrative uses the same term to describe Jesus’s exorcisms (12:24, 27, 28). Indeed, the word is used with striking frequency through Matthew 12 (12:20, 24, 26, 27x2, 28, 35x2), five of which describe exorcism and the final two (12:35) summarizing the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. A final connection is, admittedly, more tenuous. In 12:19, the highlighting of the messiah’s failure to be heard (οὐδὲ ἀκούσει) may be said, on the suggestive weight of the other connections, to correspond thematically with Jesus’s repeated calls to listen (11:16–19, 20–24; 12:24, 41–42; 13, 14–15).

The sum of these connections is to indicate Isaiah 42:1–4 has been quoted here to contrast Jesus, the Servant-Son, with the Pharisees. Against those who do not know the Law they seek to enforce, Jesus fulfills the Isaianic portrait of the will-doing sufferer. He is the wise one whose words and works surpass those of wise teachers of Judaism. And he is the gentle and quiet one, not breaking reeds or snuffing out wicks (12:20), but healing and feeding (12:1, 13). The murderous intent of the Pharisees thus contrasts absolutely with Jesus’s servanthood. Indeed, casting Jesus’s sonship specifically in terms of his servanthood challenges any filial relationship of the Pharisees with the Father. They, in their hypocrisy and callousness, are a foil for the Servant-Son, with whom God is pleased and who will obediently submit to the Father in proclaiming justice to the Gentiles.

Thus, sonship is defined in terms of obedience to revelation, here in the form of the prophetic pattern of the Servant (ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθέν, 12:17) and the obvious function of the Sabbath-laws (12:3, 5). Further, the purpose of sonship is suggested in the giving of rest expected of sons of wisdom and delivered by Jesus (12:1, 13) and the drawing in of Gentiles (12:21).

1.2. Matthew 12:22–45: Sons by Speech

Sons see and speak. The Pharisees fail to identify Jesus’s messianic authority, and so their speech is corrupted (12:34–37). Their problem is not evidential (cf. 12:38–39). It is spiritual. Indeed, a man, deaf and

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54 Nickel, “Jesus, the Isaianic Servant Exorcist,” 185.
60 Osborne, Matthew, 162.
blind by demonic activity, is healed to imply the blindness and deafness of the Pharisees by similar spiritual work (cf. 12:43–45). In the case of the disciples plucking wheat, the Pharisees are recorded as “seeing” this (12:2) and reacting negatively. In response to the demoniac’s healing, they “hear” and again react negatively (12:24). They cannot perceive the reality behind Jesus’s external actions (cf. 9:27–34). They are blind and deaf, missing words and works (cf. Matt 13:14–15, quoting Isa 6:9–10).

Those concerned with the external see only the external, unwilling to accept what this testifies about the inner life.

The height of their blindness is in the misattribution of Jesus’s miracles to demonic authority (Matt 12:24). The misattribution occurs in answer to the crowds’ cautious conferral on Jesus of the royal title, son of David (12:23). The Pharisees’ reply begins with the demonstrative οὗτος, its emphatic position conveying along with the elaborate οὐκ ... εἰ μή structure, the contempt implicit in the answer. A similar accusation has been made before (9:34), but here it is more vivid and offensive: Beelzebub is named.

Jesus’s response reveals the seriousness of the Pharisees’ charge. He constructs their misattribution as a culpable misunderstanding of the manifestation of the kingdom, reflective of an irrational (12:25–26) and immoral (12:31–32) decision to stand against the Spirit by whose authority he really acts (12:28). This is no mere intellectual argument. In “disputing the indisputable,” the Pharisees’ response exposes more than their impression of Jesus. It reveals their standing before God. Ultimately, they are those who stand without forgiveness, now and in the age to come (12:32).

A filial frame is once again implicit in this narrative. Most significantly because of the pericope crowning the chapter, 12:46–50, discussed below. But two details surface the theme here. The first is in 12:27, where ὦιός receives prominence, fronted in the apodosis. Jesus presents a clever argument, establishing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who cannot denounce him without denouncing their own followers. The use of ὦιός emphasizes the close relationship between the Pharisees and those Jesus refers to. If they are indicted, the Pharisees are implicated: sons do the will of their fathers (cf. 12:50; 21:31). Ironically, the Pharisees here deny that Jesus is acting on the authority of God, i.e., that he is not doing the will of the one he claims to be his Father.

The second suggestion of sonship attends the image of the strong one. Jesus is likely alluding here to Isaiah 49:24–25, where the captives and plunder of the mighty one (ִּגבּוֹר) taken by the Lord are Israel’s sons (ָּבַניִךְִ, Isa 49:25; also, 49:22). The movement of Isaiah 49 is one of familial restoration,

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63 Cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 334.
65 Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 335.
69 Luz, Matthew 8–20, 203.
71 Cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 338.
72 Luz, Matthew 8–20, 209.
as Yahweh brings them from being under the care of foreign foster fathers and mothers (49:23) to being under his own care (49:15). In leveraging this passage here, Jesus suggests his work effects the rescue of sons and the restoring of proper paternal relationship.

Following Jesus’s discussion of blasphemy is a short discourse on good and bad words, tying speech and identity close together (Matt 12:33–37).\(^73\) Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν appears again (12:34; cf. 3:7), underlining the seriousness of Jesus’s critique.\(^74\) He matches this with the severe observation that, being evil, the Pharisees are incapable of speaking good (πονηροὶ ὄντες, 12:34; cf. 7:11). Words are the fruit of a good or bad root.\(^75\) The misattribution of Jesus’s authority shows the evil of the Pharisees. Conversely, responding rightly to Jesus is constructed here as the fruit indicating the good tree from which it sprouts.

Matthew continues his exposé of the Pharisees by returning to the now-familiar tool of contrasting the religious leaders with believing gentiles (cf. 2:1–11; 8:11–12). The request for a sign in 12:38–42 sharpens the focus on the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus and his message. It reflects a failure to repent (cf. 12:41)\(^76\) typical of a “wicked generation.” Like the devil, they ask Jesus for a sign (cf. 4:6).\(^77\) And the sign given is none except that of Jonah (12:39). Jesus quotes directly from Jonah 2:1 (LXX), the explicit point of comparison being the mutual confinement in belly and earth (12:40).\(^78\) The genitive, Ἰωνᾶ, is epexegetical. Jonah himself was the sign to the Ninevites, one who had been delivered from certain death.\(^79\) Jesus anticipates presenting himself as a similar sign; this generation will see the greater revelation of deliverance from certain death: the resurrection. Yet, so far, Jesus has been rejected.

The case of Jonah is interesting. The book typifies biblical denunciation of nationalistic spiritual prejudice. Jonah was reluctant to bring about the repentance of a pagan nation for fear that Israel be condemned by comparison (see Jonah 4:1–3).\(^80\) In Matthew 12:39–41, Jesus uses the image of Ninevite repentance to realize that fear. The condemnation of Israel is achieved by comparison of revelation, πλεῖον Ἰωνᾶ ὧδε (Matt 12:41). Despite their lesser revelation, the Ninevites then repent, but now the Pharisees have not. The reference to the Queen of Sheba serves the same function, the wisdom of Solomon was great, and he drew even gentiles in, but something πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε (12:42) and the Pharisees have not received him.\(^81\)

The use of gentiles here as the standard of comparison recalls the proximity of Israel to revelation and, therefore, the expected rightness of their response. This is the supposed sonship of Israel’s leaders, shamed in contrast to the right response of gentiles (cf. 8:11–12). Their failure to recognize the even greater revelation of Jesus makes them more culpable than the pagans (cf. 11:21–24).\(^82\) It confirms Jesus’s evaluation of the religious leaders, blind and deaf, the bad tree providing the bad fruit.

\(^73\) Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 349.
\(^74\) See Doyle, “A Concern of the Evangelist,” 27.
\(^75\) Hagner, *Matthew 1 –13*, 351.
\(^79\) Carson, “Matthew,” 296.
The depths of spiritual distance are determined as expected sons are cast as demoniacs. The near are now far in the worst way possible. Jesus’s judgment of the Pharisees reaches a new intensity in 12:43–45: refusal to acknowledge what God is doing in Jesus has left them worse than before his coming. And so, the temporarily restored are permanently alienated and separated. The evil generation faces disaster in their rejection of Jesus.

1.3. Matthew 12:46–50: Sons by Obedience, not by Blood

Dramatic division concludes a chapter of conflict. Matthew defines the basis of inclusion and exclusion, of standing outside (12:46; cf. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and standing under Jesus’s stretched-out hands (12:49). The Pharisees, and those they represent, are excluded from familial relationship with God in much the same way that Jesus’s biological family are; genetics are insufficient. More than Abrahamic descent will be required to escape the coming judgment (cf. 3:9–10). Those plundered from the strong one are identified with another criterion: obedience.

Sonship is in view for Matthew. In 12:50, the phrase, τοῦ πατρός μου, is a Matthean redaction. He is highlighting Jesus’s sonship (cf. Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21). Further, the absence of a father from the list of family members does not only follow the composition of the group entreating Jesus in 12:46 but likely reserves the position of father for God alone (cf. 10:30). The family of God, those who share a kinship with Jesus, is decided on obedience to the will of the family head. The same language, doing the will of God, distinguishes those who truly were and were not sons in the Parable of the Sons (21:28–32; see also, 3:15; 26:39). Αὐτός in 12:50 makes this exclusive criterion emphatic, the impression being, “he and no other.”

Concluding the conflict in these terms suggests that chapter 12 has been a narrative performance of Jesus’s teaching in 11:25–30. As Jesus speaks with his disciples here, the Son enacts his revealing of the Father to those who are children, while the apparently wise and understanding Pharisees (cf. 12:3–8) who fail to listen and receive the revelation Jesus’s offers (12:24, 38), remain outside, represented by Jesus’s family. Matthew has clarified what it means to be a son through his portrayal of this conflict. Recognizing Jesus’s authority is the only means by which one might do the will of the Father. To hear and obey Jesus is to hear and obey his Father (cf. 28:19).

Notably, the chapter has concerned itself not with how one becomes a son of God but rather with how one is identified as a son. The Pharisees have shown their evil by their words and their ignorance by their lack of gentleness. So, Jesus looks around at those at his feet, in contrast to those who have rejected him, and says these are sons, the ones doing the will of the Father.

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90 Carson, “Matthew,” 300.

Chapter 13 begins without any temporal interruption (Ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, 13:1), signaling corresponding thematic continuity. Thus, the rejections of Jesus by the present generation (11:26), the cities of Galilee (11:21, 23), and especially the Pharisees (12:14, 24, 38–39) remain firmly in the foreground. The chapter acts somewhat as an apologetic explaining why Jesus’s messianic credentials ought to be retained despite this poor reception. As has been seen, sonship interacts with these themes of revelation rejection and consequent judgment. The motif surfaces explicitly in the Parable of the Weeds as two seeds are explained as two sons.

The interaction of the parables with the themes of revelation and judgment indicates that the religious leaders are being considered by Matthew as the first application of its negative categories, bad soil (13:3–8), bad seed (13:24–30), bad fish (13:47–50). The first parable in the Discourse illustrates rejection and hostility, the apparent failure of the kingdom. Seed is eaten, and plants wither or are choked (13:4–7). Jesus’s focus is not on the nature of seed or sower, but rather on soil, and its effect on the seed’s fate. Not all soil is productive. The sense is of a revelation, the message of the kingdom, the same and given to all, yet received differently. Despite this mixed reception, amid hard hearts and competing pressures, the Parable is clear that the kingdom produces an abundant crop. The theme of divided responses is sharpened in the explanation of parables given in 13:10–17. Only to some is it given to know those mysteries of God now manifested on earth.

Of particular interest in this chapter is the Parable of the Weeds. Its titling as such by the disciples demonstrates its focus: not on the righteous, but on the wicked and the judgment they ought to face. The passage concerns timing. The kingdom has come. Yet despite its eschatological character, the end is delayed. It is not the time of harvesting when the separation between wheat and weeds will occur, instead, the two will remain intermixed until a future judgment. In the parable’s explanation (13:36–43), the emphatic comparison made by ὡσπερ/οὕτως marks this temporal thrust, the gathering and burning of the weeds, judgment, will occur not now, but at the end of the age.

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92 Kingsbury, Matthew, 64.
93 See Kingsbury, Matthew, 22.
94 Cf. Luz, Matthew 8–20, 250.
96 Carson, “Matthew,” 310, 315–16.
97 Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 376.
98 Cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 427; Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 392.
100 Carson, “Matthew,” 316; Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 393.
102 Osborne, Matthew, 534.
Timing is a consistent theme in the Parables Discourse. It is the note on which the parables conclude in the Dragnet Parable (13:47–50),103 and sandwiched between the parable of the weeds and its explanation are two parables emphasizing the fact that the kingdom has come, but not in a spectacular and unmistakable fashion.104 The sense of the Parables of the Mustard Seed (13:31–32) and of the Yeast is that although the kingdom’s beginnings are modest, those beginnings yet guarantee and even generate an extraordinary outcome.105 Initial mediocrity is justified on the basis of a future judgment.106 Significantly, the Weeds Parable is not seeking to address the nature of the church, as is commonly argued,107 but rather to explain how the kingdom might be in the world without wiping out all opposition.108

Finally, here is the answer to the Baptist’s doubting (cf. 11:3). The absence of explicit judgment on the religious leaders and those who follow them is shown to be delayed with cause. The fact that these parables and, particularly, the Parable of the Weeds, provide the narrative answer to this concern confirms that the religious leaders were very much in Matthew’s sights in this chapter. Indeed, the religious leaders may be identified as the exemplar υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ of 13:38. This is supported by Matthew’s framing of the two fates of the wheat and weeds in terms very similar to John the Baptist’s invective in 3:12.109

With this background in mind, the reference to sons in the explanation of the Weeds Parable may be understood as having the religious leaders in mind as the prototypes of those who have rejected revelation. An interpretive catalogue of seven equivalences (εἰμί, 13:38–39) begins Jesus’s explanation of the Weeds Parable. They facilitate understanding of the more discursive outline of coming judgment in 13:40–43.110 Not every element is given an interpretation. Jesus explains those elements relevant to the judgment to come.111 The identification of the Sower as the Son of Man confirms the parable’s connection with the narrative context: this is about responses to Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom.112 Further, it matches the parable’s eschatological content.113 However, different from the parable of the Sower (13:1–8), it is the nature of the seeds that is relevant to the drama of the parable (and not the soil). Two sets of sons map onto two sets of seeds.

The good seed is identified as οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας, and the weeds as οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ (13:38). The two grow together but are separated at the end of the age (13:39). Hagner and France each gloss the uses of υἱός here idiomatically as signifying belonging.114 Similarly, Osborne suggests that the term

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109 Esp. συνάξει τὸν σῖτον αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν ἄποθήκην (3:12); τὸν δὲ σῖτον συναγάγετε εἰς τὴν ἄποθήκην μου (13:30).
113 Davies and Allison, Matthew [8–18], 427.
designates the chief characteristics of a group. On these readings, no specific paternal relationships are in view. However, although the term may be used idiomatically as suggested (e.g., οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος, 9:15), the context indicates familial relationships are being alluded to. The kingdom sons present as those in the discourse who have heard the word and understood it (e.g., 13:23). Given that the discourse’s narrative precedent, 12:46–50, defined Jesus’s family on the basis of those who hear and do, who receive the revelation of the Son and respond to it with obedience, it would be consistent to see a divine-filial connotation here. This is strengthened by Jesus’s nearby reference to the kingdom to which these sons belong as τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν (13:43).

The phrase, οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ, appears only here in the New Testament, and has no extra-biblical parallel. It was likely coined by Matthew to complement, by opposition, the kingdom sons. The term might be masculine or neuter. The neuter is possible as distinguished from the certainly personal διάβολος in the next verse (13:39; also, 4:1; 25:41). This would mean the phrase designates primarily behavior, sons characterized by evil. However, the use of ὁ πονηρός in 13:19 as a personal agent makes the masculine more likely. This is further indicated by the correspondence of this seed with the enemy actor of 13:25.

Thus, sonship here has a spiritual dimension. Those opposing the Messiah are labeled the sons of the evil one. They are of his planting (13:25; cf. 15:13). This builds off the conclusion of Jesus in 12:43–45, where the Pharisees, expected sons, were demonstrably demoniacs.

This matches the extensive description of what is to be removed, the sons of the evil one drawing the additional description of πάντα τὰ σκάνδαλα καὶ τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν (13:41). Lawlessness is a recurrent and serious characterization of those opposing Jesus in Matthew (e.g. 7:23; 23:28; 24:12), even applied to the Pharisees and scribes at 23:28. Likewise, the causing of others to stumble is considered particularly grievous, attracting severe warnings of judgment (18:6–7).

The antithesis of these things is righteousness (οἱ δίκαιοι, 13:43), characteristic of those who shine like suns in the kingdom of their Father. In comparison with their present hiddenness (cf. 13:30, 32, 33), they shine here with a glory that all can see. The idea of hidden glory draws a comparison with the use of the same language in 17:2, where Jesus’s transfigured glory is revealed to stand behind his

115 Osborne, Matthew, 533.
118 Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 83.
121 Jeremias says it must be masculine as there is no example of υἱός or τέκνον being followed by a substantival adjective in the neuter, whereas son of the devil is found in Acts 13:10 and 1 John 3:10; Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 83; see also, Luz, Matthew 8–20, 268–69.
122 Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 431.
125 Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 394.
ministry of suffering and death (16:24–26). It is further the eschatological counterpart of 5:14–16, the shining of sons in truth.\(^{127}\)

Jesus’s contrast of the two sons is extensive, spanning action (ἀνομία/δίκαιος, 13:41, 43), influence (σκάνδαλον/ἐκλάμπω, 13:41, 43), and outcome at the final judgment (13:42–43). The broader discourse provides the cause of these differences: the bad seed and sons of 13:38–42 are also the bad soils of 13:3–9 who fail to hear and understand the message of the kingdom. There is, therefore, again, a correlation between revelation, obedience, and sonship. Rejection versus reception, lawlessness versus righteousness; Matthew frames each as a litmus for filial actuality.

Such a litmus is desirable. Despite the clear disparity between the sons, the time for their division remains in the future. In the present age, where kingdom sons do not yet shine in glory, but coexist alongside sons of the evil one, the reader is provided by this contrast with a means of discriminating between the two. Receiving Christ and his teachings is the indicator of future judgment (cf. 12:46–50; 28:19).

2. Matthew 15:1–14: Filial Infidelity

“Leave them.” Jesus’s disciples must abandon concern for the religious leaders’ offence (15:14); the Pharisees’ filial infidelity has rendered them unfit for leadership. In this pericope, Matthew continues to leverage the relationship between sonship and the reception of revelation. Here revelation, in the form of God’s commands, is repudiated and replaced by the religious leaders, an activity connected directly to the dishonor of both earthly and heavenly fathers. The sum? Their filial pattern is perilous: these blind guides are not to be followed (15:14).

The religious leaders are concerned with the wrong things. In 15:1–14, they appear as pedants.\(^{128}\) The disciples have acclaimed Jesus as God’s Son (14:33), and the masses have approached him, finding compassion and healing (14:14, 34–35; cf. 15:32). But here, the religious leaders question handwashing.\(^{129}\) 15:3–9 is a powerful polemic against the scribal tradition behind this pedantry.\(^{130}\) The accusation of the religious leaders is presented as a question, made circumspect by its focus on the disciples (διὰ τί, 15:2).\(^{131}\) Notably, the grounds of the question are presented second after the more general charge.\(^{132}\) The implication is that the specific issue of handwashing is incidental to the more important concern: preserving the elders’ tradition. Jesus’s reply then is consistent with this, focusing not on an example relating to purity but on the honoring of parents.\(^{133}\) Indeed, the description of handwashing is much simplified than the Markan equivalent (Mark 7:1–3), so as almost to disappear into the background until it reappears in 15:15–20.\(^{134}\)


\(^{133}\) Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 328.

Rather than answer the religious leaders’ question, Jesus begins by asking his own question, paralleling his to the religious leaders with similar words (διὰ τί, παραβαίνω, παράδοσις). The similarities make the differences more striking. Jesus uses the emphatical pronoun ὑμεῖς and modifies τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων to τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν. In so doing, Jesus changes their circumspect accusation into a direct challenge.

The Corban example is framed by two near-mirrored verses, 15:3b, and 15:6b, which draw attention to God as the one whose command and word has been broken/ rendered void for the sake of tradition. Inside this frame, Matthew parallels two sayings (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς εἶπεν, Matt 15:4; ὑμεῖς δὲ λέγετε, 15:5). The first is God’s speech, coming in the form of two commandments relating to filial responsibility. The second is the religious leaders’. Introduced as a contrast by the emphatic ὑμεῖς, the speech describes the Corban practice of circumventing this responsibility. The parallel uses of λέγω enact the contradiction Jesus asserts in the frame, the speech of the religious leaders’ undercutts and replaces the speech of God.

15:4–5 is typically interpreted as presenting Jesus’s eager preservation of the law against its denial, exposing the problem of assessing morality with extra-biblical tradition. This flipping of the religious leaders’ accusation on its head is significant, exposing their privileging of the will of their elders to be a rejection of the will of God. There is a significant intersection with the Gospel’s presentation of sonship on this point, the doing of the Father’s will being central to Matthew’s presentation of sons (e.g., 3:15–17; 4:1–7; 6:9–10; 21:31). Indeed, the typical interpretation of this passage may be extended from this basis: it is more than coincidence that the Corban example touches on filial themes.

When compared to Mark, Matthew intensifies the Corban example (cf. Mark 7:1–3). To the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12), Matthew adds the related prohibition of speaking evil against one’s parents (21:17). There is a certain solemnity in Jesus’s quoting of this second command. He includes the Semitism reflecting the Hebrew infinitive absolute, θανάτῳ τελευτάτῳ, putting emphasis on the supreme penalty of the action. Matthew emphasizes God’s regard for the regulation of filial responsibility, underlining the seriousness of the religious leaders’ undercutting. The parental right to expect filial provision is invalidated/ nullified by the practice; this is the robbing of a parent of their rightful privilege. The οὐ μή construction beginning 15:6 sharply emphasizes the negative effect of parental neglect: dishonor.

137 See Luz, Matthew 8–20, 325.
138 Osborne, Matthew, 586.
139 E.g., Osborne, Matthew, 586–87; Luz, Matthew 8–20, 330; Brown, Matthew, 142; Keener, The Gospel of Matthew, 411.
142 Hagner, Matthew 14–28, 431; Osborne, Matthew, 586.
143 Hagner, Matthew 14–28, 432.
The religious leaders’ use of tradition in a manner dishonoring their earthly parents points to a more essential and pervasive use of tradition to dishonor the supposed heavenly Father. This is suggested by the frame enclosing the Corban example discussed above (15:3b, 6b). Though Jesus has overtly treated the honoring of earthly parents in 15:4–6, his transition to the honoring of God in 15:7–9, confirms that the divine relationship has stood behind his critique. Matthew, different from Mark, places the Isaiah quotation at the end of his argument (cf. Mark 7:6–7). The effect of this placement is to tighten the citation’s application around the Corban issue. This is relevant because the quotation’s thrust is false honor and vain worship, close lips but far hearts. The use of τιμάω in both 15:6 and 15:8 suggests a fundamental connection between the Corban example and the honoring of the Lord. The treatment of two fathers, the heavenly and the earthly, are therefore considered in parallel, the shaming of the lesser proving the shaming of the greater.

The contrast between heart and lips in 15:8–9 prepares for 15:10–20, where the source of defiling and evil is the heart (esp., Matt 15:11, 18–19). Jesus treats the religious leaders’ adverse reaction to his denunciation as irrelevant, consigning them to be plants not planted by his Father (13:13). As these, they are dangerous, blind guides who must be abandoned (cf. 16:5–12). The metaphor of planting connects a thread of agricultural-judgment images applied to the religious leaders since 3:10 (also, 3:12; 12:33; cf. 13:40–42). In each case, separation is made on the basis of some essential quality: wheat, bad trees, a planting of non-heavenly origin. Here, the repudiation of God’s commands reflects hearts that are far from him. The religious leaders have shown by their dishonoring of God that they are not his sons.

Following this pericope, a pagan woman with no claim on the God of the covenant petitions Jesus and, because of her great faith, has her request granted. This makes the denunciation of the religious leaders even more startling; the apparent children reject the bread that the “dogs” are now eating. Again, Matthew uses the pagan paragon of faith to demonstrate the right response of those who should be sons (cf. 2:1–11; 8:5–13; 12:39–42).

In Matthew 15:1–14, the religious leaders claim the piety of pedantry. Yet their corrupted hearts have corrupted their tradition. They have wielded tradition in the repudiation of divine commands and, consequently, in the dishonoring of the one who gave them. The fruit is failure of filial duty: they do not obey the Father’s will. Reception and response to revelation are, once again, expected of sons, rejection of it marking the difference between the Father’s progeny and those not of his planting. Though the

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151 Carson, “Matthew,” 353.
154 Luz, Matthew 8–20, 332; Brown, Matthew, 143.
religious leaders present themselves as faithful sons, their preferencing of traditions reveals otherwise. The disciples, and the readers with them, must therefore conceive of their own sonship in contrast to the religious leaders’ example. They must not follow these blind guides. So, Matthew prepares for a great contrast in chapter 16. The filial failure of the Pharisees is emphasized by their demand of a sign in the face of those already given (16:1–4). Thus, their leaven, their unfilial rejection of the Father’s revelation, is to be avoided: the disciples must see and understand the significance of the loaves (16:9–11). It is Simon Peter then who demonstrates his sonship, receiving the revelation of the Father (16:17). Indeed, as he declares Jesus to be the Son of the living God, he shows himself to be a son with him (cf. 16:23).

3. Conclusion

In the movement from doubt (11:3) to faith (16:16), Jesus’s filial identity is sharpened by contrast with religious leaders who reject the Father’s revelation. This rejection is pervasive in its scope, extending to the Father’s commands (15:4–6), the Father’s kingdom message (13:19–22), and, most seriously, the Father’s Son (12:14, 24). And it is pervasive in its impact, producing unpardonable speech (12:32), unlawful action (13:41), and unfilial piety (15:4–9). The obedience of Jesus, reflected in his adopting the gentle ministry of the Servant (12:18–21), is drawn against this characterization. Disciples, and readers with them, are then invited into a sonship that takes place alongside him and dependent on him, as they receive the revelation of the Father that comes through him (see 11:27; 12:41–42, 46–50; 13:37). Kingdom sons are found to be those who receive and understand the message, produce lives of righteous obedience, and look forward to their full disclosure in the kingdom of their Father (esp., 13:43).

So, filial revelation invokes filial responsibility in Matthew’s presentation of sonship. This study has contended that a sonship that must be actualized in obedience is developed through the rhetorical contrast of the religious leaders with other characters in Mathew 11–16. Revelation begets discrimination as responses to the Father-revealing Son sort kingdom sons from those of the evil one. Family lines were seen to be drawn from obedience instead of blood or adherence to tradition. Indeed, kingdom sons were those who received and understood the kingdom message, responding by producing lives of righteous obedience. And Jesus's sonship was defined against the ignorant, uncaring religious leaders whose blasphemy charge had demonstrated both their rejection of Jesus and their attendant spiritual bankruptcy. Indeed, Jesus's filial faithfulness was confirmed in his obedient acceptance of the Servant’s characteristically quiet and merciful manner.

What emerges from this study is the simple observation that, for Matthew, sons hear and obey. That is, the reception of and response to revelation figures first in Matthew’s filial framework. The locus of the Father’s revelation being in the words and works of Jesus means that the acknowledgment of him as the authoritative Servant-Son is the foremost fulfillment of this filial responsibility. It is as sons that we repent and follow the Son as he leads us in his pattern of filial faithfulness.

Further, sonship is seen to have its own revelatory function (cf. 11:27). Sons who do their Father’s will reveal their Father’s will, thereby drawing others into the privilege and obedience of sonship alongside them (5:16; cf. 28:19–20). Thus, sonship plays a role in Matthew’s missiology. Sons receive revelation but also refract that revelation as the obedience it calls them to has both vertical (to God) and horizontal (to world) dimensions. Indeed, obedience is visible; a response to revelation works its way out in speech and action, affecting those who witness it. This has been seen negatively

in the religious leaders, whose disobedience is determined to be dangerous (e.g., 15:14; 16:6, 11), their activities understood as representing the Father’s will. Jesus must characterize them as “blind guides” (15:14) and instead urge looking to his own filial pattern. Disciples then follow this form, living as salt and light, their works causing others to see and give glory to the Father (see 5:16).

The diagram below illustrates this idea of sons refracting the Father’s revelation in the moment of obedience and drawing others into the same relationship:

*The Refractive-Attractive Function of Filial Faithfulness*
The Divine Identity in 1 Peter: The Father, Christ, and the Spirit in Relation

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Abstract: Traditionally the discipline of New Testament studies has not been welcoming to a Trinitarian understanding of God. In recent years, however, some scholars working in the discipline have argued for the positive exegetical benefits for what they have called a “Trinitarian hermeneutic.” While working within the historical-grammatical paradigm, a Trinitarian hermeneutic seeks to understand the text’s God-talk by attending to the relations between the Father, Christ, and the Spirit. By using this method, the article argues that the divine identity found in the letter of 1 Peter puts pressure on its readers to articulate an understanding of God that agrees with later Trinitarian confessions.

Within the historical-critical model of interpretation, any hint of the doctrine of the Trinity is deemed “anachronistic,” “philosophical,” and uncongenial to the early church’s experience of God. Recently some scholars working within biblical studies have vocalized criticism

1 Francis Watson, “Trinity and Community: A Reading of John 17,” IJST 1 (1999): 168. Francis Watson captures well the ethos when he writes, “Modern biblical scholarship has no great love for the doctrine of the Trinity.” He continues, “It likes to warn its customers that, if they read a biblical text in the light of what was to become the orthodox Nicene theology of the fourth century, they will inevitably be committing the ‘sin of anachronism.’” With respect to 1 Peter, consider the attitude by Julian Price Love, “First Epistle of Peter,” Int 8 (1954): 70, when he writes, “Peter, and indeed all the writers of the New Testament, were too genuinely religious, rather than philosophical, to congeal their experience with God into any cold dogma. Theirs was an intuitive rather than a logical understanding, and to a large extent we wrong them if we seek to enclose in straight creedal jackets that which in their thought flows like a river.” See Scott Swain, The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson’s Trinitarian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 18, who summarizes the shift from a Trinitarian hermeneutic being axiomatic to contested, “With the rise of Enlightenment thought, the aforementioned hermeneutical problematic became more acute, and, as it did, Trinitarian theology underwent a (oftentimes radical) material transformation. Among many relevant factors contributing to this transformation, three deserve mention here: the rise of new interpretive methods, new attitudes toward classical metaphysics and new agendas for the Protestant university.” For common objections to Trinitarian hermeneutics in biblical studies, see also Wesley Hill, Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 18–22.
against the anti-Trinitarian assumptions undergirding the historical-critical enterprise. Not only have they offered disapproval of anti-Trinitarianism but they have claimed positive exegetical benefits of an alternative Trinitarian framework.

When discussing a biblical author’s God-talk, the typical starting point within biblical studies is Jewish monotheism. Scholars discern how Christ and the Spirit “fit” within a monotheistic framework and often try to determine whether a particular biblical author has a “high” or “low” Christology. As an alternative, the application of the category of “relations” to texts that speak about God, Christ, and the Spirit forms the basis of what some scholars have called a Trinitarian hermeneutic. As Wesley Hill states, a Trinitarian hermeneutic “considers the identities of God, Christ, and the Spirit by means of their relations to and with one another.”

This essay will be an exercise in reading 1 Peter through the lens of a Trinitarian hermeneutic in order to trace the identity of God. I argue that Peter’s presentation of God, through the language of the Father, Christ, and the Spirit contains the “underlying logic” by which later creedal statements

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4 See examples of both “low” and “high” Christology in Hill, Paul and the Trinity, 3–18. Unlike Hill, I am less critical of the standard Jewish monotheistic framework. I find the Jewish emphasis of the NT documents, along with the high/low Christological questions, to be valuable as we interpret these texts. If one uses a high/low Christological framework, 1 Pet 3:15 is perhaps an example where a NT writer freely identifies Christ with Yahweh of the OT. See Karen H. Jobes, 1 Peter, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 229. Utilizing an alternate framework for understanding 1 Peter should not be taken as my rejection of other categories.

5 Hill, Paul and the Trinity, 2.

6 For the complexities associated with the term “identity,” see Robert W. Jenson, “Identity, Jesus, and Exegesis,” in Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 43–59. After sifting through some of the challenges to defining identity, Jenson links “having an identity” with “persons.” Jenson writes, “Having an identity is something persons do—or want or hope to do, or even not to do. Let us say that an identity, in recent usage, is what can be repeatedly specified by a proper name or an identifying description, particularly with respect to what, again in more recent usage, may be called a person” (emphasis mine). Joel B. Green, 1 Peter, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 25 n. 37, uses identity “in the sense of continuity in terms of a network of relationships and narrative of interactions, together with an emphasis on functionality that refuses any dichotomy between performance and sentiment (or character).” Throughout the paper I will be similarly employing the term, focusing on the function of each person of the Godhead as well as their relationship with each other as presented in 1 Peter.
The Divine Identity in 1 Peter: The Father, Christ, and the Spirit in Relation
devolve. First Peter puts pressure on its readers towards a triune conception of God. To be clear, I am not arguing that Peter has a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, I posit that the letter contains a sample of fertile soil for which later Trinitarian developments could properly flourish. The thesis will be advanced by first considering the Father’s relationship to Christ by examining two texts, 1 Peter 1:3 and 1:18–21. Second, I will look at the Spirit’s relationship to God the Father and Christ in 1 Peter 1:10–12; 3:18; and 4:14.

1. The Relationship between the Father and Christ

What is the nature of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1 Peter? How does God’s actions towards Christ contribute to our understanding of Peter’s conception of the identity of God? These questions will govern this section. Accordingly, Jesus Christ’s identity can only be understood in relation to his unique filial relationship with God the Father. Furthermore, God’s relationship with Christ is disclosed when the identity descriptions of Peter’s God-talk are given proper attention.

1.1. A Unique Relationship with Father

Divine fatherhood is the controlling concept of God in 1 Peter (1:2, 3, 17). Commentators connect the picture of God as a Father to the rebirth metaphor that Peter uses to describe believers’ salvation (1:3). As John Elliott writes, “the metaphor of God as father ... implies God as progenitor and

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7 Even beyond the development of Christological language there are dissimilarities between later creedal formulas and the biblical text of 1 Peter. For instance, in later centuries the triune appellations during baptismal confessions became standardized (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The order in 1 Peter (and the NT in general) is less consistent. Furthermore, the Trinitarian core was expanded in baptismal confessions by expanding the appositional words, phrases, and clauses that identify the three persons and by adding other items of faith to the basic Trinitarian confession. See Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Trinitarian Baptismal Creeds and New Testament Christology,” in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 173.


9 Hill, *Paul and the Trinity*, 45, rightly cautions and says, “To avoid this [projection] pitfall.... First, the readings ...will be self-consciously historical readings, guided by the canons of ‘critical’ modes of exegesis.... Second, Trinitarian theologies will be employed as hermeneutical resources and, thus, mined for conceptualities which may better enable a genuinely historical exegesis to articulate what other equally ‘historical’ approaches may have obscured.” As many who advocate for a Trinitarian framework admit, assuming the biblical author is operating with a full-fledged Trinitarian doctrine will lead to anachronism. See, for example, Rowe, “Biblical Pressure,” 310. However, this does not mean the framework which produced later codifications of orthodoxy is inherently misguided.

10 Jobes, *1 Peter*, 46.
the believing community as God’s family or household (2:5; 4:17) and ‘brotherhood’ (2:17; 5:9).”¹¹ We may add that Peter clarifies that rebirth is not given by means of “perishable seed” (σπορᾶς φθαρτῆς), but the “imperishable” (ἀφθάρτου), that is, the living and abiding word of God (1:23).¹² Further, as God is the Father of believers, certain codes of conduct from his children are required (τέκνα ὑπακοῆς; 1:14).¹³ Thus, in 1 Peter both spiritual and social privileges of the community are grounded in the thick metaphor of the fatherhood of God.

Since the believing community relates to God as Father, how should we understand the fatherhood of God in relation to Jesus Christ (1:3)? Is the sonship of Jesus symmetrical with the sonship of believers? There are several points in 1 Peter that forward the notion that Christ’s relationship to the Father is indeed unique.

In 1 Peter all believers can certainly invoke God as Father, nevertheless, they do so in a mediated sense. Green is close to the point when he says, “although both Jesus and believers find their identity in relationship to God, they do so in different ways.”¹⁴ To bring out an obvious point, not only is the believer’s relationship with God different from Christ’s due to mediation, but they are only designated children of God through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This point is seen as Peter consistently uses the preposition διά to indicate how believers participate in calling God their Father. For example, in 1:3 the metaphor of rebirth (which is connected to the father metaphor for the believing community) is said to be “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν).¹⁵ Also, in 1:21 it is through Christ that Peter’s audience have faith in God (τοὺς δι’ αὐτοῦ πιστοὺς εἰς θεόν). Later in 2:5, Peter affirms that believers offer spiritual sacrifices well pleasing to God “through Jesus Christ” (δι’ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Finally, according to 3:21 believers appeal to God for a clear conscience “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

What this suggests is that while both Christ and believers have a filial relationship with God, Christ’s relationship with the Father is unique by its unmediated nature. It does not necessitate much imagination to see how comparing the filial relationship between believers and the Father alongside the filial relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father causes serious reflection upon the ontological relationship between the Father and the Son.¹⁶


¹² Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 95.

¹³ As Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann (God of the Living: A Biblical Theology, trans. Mark E. Biddle [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015], 84) observe, “The reborn, as ‘children of obedience’ (1 Pet 1:14), orient their behavior toward God as Father, who is simultaneously their judge (1 Pet 1:17).”

¹⁴ Green, 1 Peter, 24.

¹⁵ We can only tentatively affirm this connection at 1:3 since there is a dispute as to whether the phrase δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν relates to “living hope” (ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν) or “rebirth” (ἀναγεννήσας). While word order may point us exclusively in the direction of the former, the latter choice seems likely as well. See Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 62, and Michaels, 1 Peter, 19, for respective positions. Following Elliott, 1 Peter, 334–35, it is best to see the phrase linked with the believer’s rebirth and future hope. So also, Goppelt, 1 Peter, 84. Alternatively, Jobes, 1 Peter, 82–83, and Green, 1 Peter, 24, connect rebirth exclusively to Christ’s resurrection.

¹⁶ Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity,” 115, writes, “If Jesus is Son of God, then God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: the purpose of the father/son language is to indicate that God and Jesus are identified by their relation to each other, and have no existence apart from that relation.”
1.2. Identity Descriptions of the Father

The category of “mutuality” or “bi-directionality” has been used within a Trinitarian framework to analyze the God-talk of various texts.17 Mutuality is explained by Watson when he writes, “Trinitarian theology claims that God’s identity is determined by God’s relation to Jesus, just as Jesus’ identity is determined by his relation to God.”18 In other words, both the identity of God and the identity of Jesus is determined by how they relate to each other. Using the concept of mutuality, we find that Peter likewise puts pressure on his readers to conclude that God’s identity is tied to Jesus Christ in such a way that we cannot talk about God without reference to Jesus Christ, and we cannot talk about Jesus without reference to God.

Mutuality between the Father and Christ is found in 1 Peter 1:17–21. Peter concisely narrates the Christ-event that stretches back before history and culminates in the moment of Christ’s death (vv. 19–20). A profound articulation of God’s identity appears at the conclusion of the semi-creedal statement about the Christ-event in 1:21. Peter’s description of God’s actions in that event is expressed with a pair of participles connected by a conjunction. God is described as “the one who raised him [Christ] from the dead” (θεὸν τὸν ἐγείραντα αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν) and who “gave him glory” (καὶ δόξαν αὐτῷ δόντα).19 Such descriptions of God are found elsewhere in the NT (cf. Gal 1:1; Rom 4:24; 8:11). According to Elliot they represent a “central” and “stable element of early Christian tradition.”20

Due to the ubiquity of the depiction of God, as well as its semi-creedal nature, scholars working within a Trinitarian framework have labeled such participial phrases “identity descriptions.” As Hill comments, “the aim of such formulations is not merely to reference some divine action but also to ‘name’ God or specify his unique character by that action.”21 The description of God’s action of raising Christ from the dead and giving him glory also discloses something about God’s identity. Following Watson, “the raising of Jesus discloses, not only what God does but, at the same time, who God is.”22 Again,

17 Hill, Paul and the Trinity, 49.

18 Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity,” 119. See Hill, Paul and the Trinity, 49–50, who contrasts mutuality in relations with the common trend to locate Jesus on a spectrum of “high” or “low” Christology. He writes, “In order to identify Jesus, it is necessary to refer to God, but also, in order to identify God, it is necessary to refer to Jesus. Mutuality, rather than a unilateral movement (in either direction), is the watchword here. Jesus, the Son, is who he is only in relation to the Father, and likewise the Father is who he is only in relation to Jesus the Son.”

19 Michaels, 1 Peter, 69–70, followed by Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 89, interprets the phrase “gave him glory,” as defining “for the reader the significance of ‘raised him from the dead.’ The ‘glory’ (i.e., the vindication, or demonstration of divine favor) given to Jesus at his resurrection is the glory they are waiting to see revealed (4:13; 5:1, 4) even as they suffer ridicule for the sake of his name (4:14).” One may also interpret the phrase as God’s enthronement of Christ, which has precedence in the letter (3:22). If so, Peter’s participial “identity description” would include, not only the act of God raising Jesus from the dead but also a subsequent action of enthronement.

20 Elliott, 1 Peter, 378, notes, “this formulation of 1 Peter, which combine who raised him from the dead with gave him glory, is unique in the NT, though it succinctly formulates similar words by Peter in Acts: ‘(God) glorified his servant Jesus ... whom God raised from the dead.’”

21 Hill, Paul and the Trinity, 53.

22 Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity,” 106. There is an assumption here which understands the inseparability of divine action and divine identity.
Watson writes, “Divine being and divine action are inseparable from one another, and no distinction is drawn between how God is in se and ad extra.”

One may object by asking why God’s action towards Christ should be constitutive to his identity? As the context of Peter’s letter indicates, God’s action in raising Christ from the dead is the definitive act of God. For Peter, the action of raising Christ from the dead and giving him glory constitutes the redemptive act by which God has brought about the new birth for his people. Specifically, the intended result connected to God’s actions in 1:21 is so that believers have “faith and hope in God” (ὅστε τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα ἐἶναι εἰς θεόν). The action of raising Christ from the dead is elsewhere connected to providing believers with eschatological hope (1:3). Moreover, the divine act of raising Christ from the dead is integral to both cleansing believer’s consciences and forgiving their sins (3:21). Thus, from Peter’s perspective, God’s action in raising Christ from the dead is the definitive work of God’s redemption and relates to several benefits the people of God experience.

Finally, working from the assumption that divine act reveals divine being, we may consider two additional divine acts that disclose God’s identity in 1 Peter. Preceding 1 Peter 1:21 are two participial phrases that also narrate God’s actions towards Christ. Peter says Christ is “foreknown” (προεγνωσμένου) before the foundation of the world (1:20) and he is “made manifest in the last times” (φανερωθέντος δὲ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων). According to Achtemeier, it is the person of Christ and not merely God’s plan that is foreknown. Moreover, this manifestation refers to Christ’s incarnation with the passive form of the participle indicating divine action. Putting all these divine acts together we see that, in 1 Peter, Christ is the one who was foreknown, manifested, raised, and given glory by God. As such, God’s identity is constituatively tied to his actions in Christ as Christ is definitively identified by his relationship with God the Father.

1.3. Summary

What does the relationship between God and Jesus Christ tell us about the divine identity in 1 Peter? God is who he is by virtue of his relationship with Jesus Christ; he is the Father of Christ, and by implication Christ is his son. This relationship between God and Christ, although sharing some

23 Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity,” 105. I’m aware of the philosophical and theological disputes concerning the economic Trinity and immanent Trinity. I have no intention of adjudicating such discussions here. I merely want to bring to attention the relationship of action and identity, which seems to be inseparable as we consider this epistle. Robert W. Jenson, The Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002); Swain, The God of the Gospel; Jenson, “Identity, Jesus, and Exegesis.”

24 Elliott, 1 Peter, 379, adds, “This clause [v. 21c] ... states the intended personal result of Christ’s eschatological manifestation, resurrection, and glorification by God...”

25 On the interpretation of 3:21 see Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 196–97.

26 Watson, “The Triune Divine Identity,” 111, writes, “Like others, Jesus is the object of divine action, unlike others, he is the object of the specific divine action of definitive self-identification, entailing as it does the reconciliation of the world to God.”

27 See Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 88. While Christ’s preexistence is not necessary to the interpretation of this verse, foreknowledge here likely implies preexistence. Additionally, Schreiner, 88 n. 144, cites those who argue against the preexistence of Christ by saying texts like these refer to God’s plan for salvation, not necessarily the person of Christ himself.


29 Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 88; Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 131.
The Divine Identity in 1 Peter: The Father, Christ, and the Spirit in Relation

commonalities with all believers, is marked uniquely by the unmediated nature of their relationship. Further, God is identified in 1 Peter by his actions. Scholars have noted the importance of “identity descriptions,” and specifically, the ability to “pick out” the God of 1 Peter through these descriptions. When applied to 1 Peter, God is defined as “the God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory.” Moreover, he is the God who has “foreknown” and “manifested” Jesus Christ. These identity descriptions work in a bi-directional manner; thus, Jesus is also identified as the one whom the Father foreknew, manifested, raised, and glorified. In short, God is defined in 1 Peter by his relationship to Jesus Christ, just as Christ is defined by his relationship to God the Father.

2. The Father and Christ in Relation to the Spirit

The significance of the Spirit in 1 Peter cannot be judged upon the number of times the author uses the word. Instead, the Spirit sits prominently at the beginning alongside the Father and Christ (1:2) and thus foreshadows his important role in the letter. Our examination of the Spirit considers his relationship to God and Christ. I argue that the Spirit’s identity is governed by his relation to God and Christ and his actions are defined in so far as they are related to their redemptive work.

2.1. The Spirit of Christ

While 1:10–12 is a passage with exegetical difficulties, it serves as a crucial text on the identity of the Spirit in 1 Peter. The uniqueness of 1 Peter as it concerns the Spirit is primarily found in the phrase “the Spirit of Christ” (πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ). What is perhaps determinative for several interpretive questions is the connection between v. 11 and v. 12. The two events—the first in the past and the second in the present (νῦν)—both reference the Spirit. The Spirit in v. 12 unambiguously points to the divine Spirit since πνεῦμα is modified by the adjective “holy” (πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). In addition, Peter says the Holy Spirit is “sent from heaven” (ἀποσταλέντι ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ), thus reinforcing His divine origin. Furthermore, since Peter parallels vv. 11–12, it is best to interpret “the Spirit of Christ” (πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ) in v. 11, not

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30 Michaels, 1 Peter, lxxv, seems to be guilty of this move as he compares numerically the use of “spirit” to other key themes such as “grace” or “glory” by Peter.

31 Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 249, observes that πνεύματος in 1:2 is best taken as a subjective, “in which case,” he writes, “its collocation with πατρός and Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, both personal, suggest that πνεύματος is personal too.”

32 While it is not abnormal to find similar references elsewhere, the exact phrase is rare and has caused scholars to consider its meaning in detail. See Rom 8:9, εἰ δέ τις πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ. For similar expressions see Acts 16:7; Gal 4:6; and Phil 1:19.

33 Perhaps a Christological origin of the Spirit is suggested. The participle is a divine passive, referencing either God or Christ. While Schreiner, I, 2 Peter, Jude, 75, understands Peter to be reminding his readers of the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost, Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 111, says such an interpretation is probably not intended. Goppelt, 1 Peter, 101, understands Peter to be saying the Spirit accompanies the messengers of salvation for strength and authority. If this interpretation is correct, Peter is not referring to the unique event of Pentecost but the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit as the good news is preached.
as Jesus’s human spirit, but instead as the divine Spirit. Michaels is correct in eschewing the choice in 1:11 between a reference to the Holy Spirit or a reference to the preexistent Christ.

2.1.1. The Operation of the Spirit

The operation of the Spirit can first be described as revelatory. Peter opens v. 10 with the term “salvation” (σωτηρίας), which links the thought to v. 9. Salvation here, as generally in the letter, is eschatological. As Peter draws his readers’ attention to their present experience of “the grace destined” for them (τής εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος), he reminds his readers that they are in a privileged position. Peter says the prophets have “earnestly investigated” (v. 10; ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηραύνησαν) and have been “searching” (v. 11; ἐραυνώντες). While what the prophets were searching for is difficult to determine with certainty, the fact that the object of their searching serves the main verb ἐδήλου (“was indicating”) carries the sense that “their searching and the Spirit’s indicating [ἐδήλου] coincide…” The important point is that the activity of the prophets (i.e., ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηραύνησαν) does not happen independently—it is revealed to them. What is more, neither is the prophets’ activity the primary focus of Peter. Instead, the emphasis is on the revelatory operation of the Spirit of Christ. This conclusion is seen by noting the emphasis on the Spirit’s work when Peter says the Spirit “indicates” (ἐδήλου), “predicts” (προμαρτυρόμενον), as well as “reveals” (ἀπεκαλύφθη) to the prophets.

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34 Ἡριστοῦ is best taken as a genitive of source (“the Spirit from Christ”), rather than epexegetically (“the Spirit, namely, Christ”). Contra Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 110; See Dubis, *1 Peter*, 19. Also, understanding Ἡριστοῦ as a genitive of source does not negate interpreting the verse as referencing the preexistence of Christ. See Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 110 n. 60, for this point. It is likely the preexistence of Christ is implicit in 1:12 since Peter knew of Christ’s preexistence (cf. 1:20). Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 73; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 109–10.

35 Michaels states, “From Peter’s standpoint it is a false alternative because for him the two amount to the same thing.” Michaels, *1 Peter*, 144.


37 Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 252.

38 Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 75.

39 The prophets are taken as OT prophets here. Not all scholars are convinced this refers to OT prophets. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 134, argues these are NT prophets. This is a minority position for good reasons as Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 72–73, outlines. Ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηραύνησαν is interpreted as a hendiadys to emphasize the persistence and thoroughness of their search. So Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 108; translation Dubis, *1 Peter*, 17–18.

40 The τίνα could be an interrogative adjective modifying καιρόν (“what or what sort of time”) or an interrogative pronoun. If masculine, it would render “what person or what sort of time.” Forbes, *1 Peter*, 123.

41 Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 109. The other option is taking the phrase εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρόν as the object of ἐδήλου and προμαρτυρόμενον.

42 Also, the consistency of the content of the revelation across time (see below).

43 Achtemeier, 109 n. 49. This is not the action of the prophets “... since the singular neuter participles must modify ‘Spirit,’ not the plural masculine ‘prophets.’”

44 Note the divine passive.
Second, the operation of the Spirit can be described as dynamic. As Schreiner comments, “those who proclaim the gospel [did] so by the power of the Holy Spirit.” While the apostles are the human agents, it is the Holy Spirit who is the means by which the gospel is empowered to be proclaimed. As the purpose in preaching the gospel is conversion or rebirth (1:3ff), perhaps there is a corresponding effect of the Spirit’s activity as he simultaneously empowers gospel proclamation and produces his “sanctifying” (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος) change in the lives of the elect (1:2).

The operation of the Spirit includes his revelatory activity to the prophets as well as his dynamic work in empowering gospel proclamation. Importantly, both the Spirit’s revelatory and dynamic work is done in relation to Christ. The significance of the operation of the Spirit is also seen in conjunction with the next point.

2.1.2. The Witness of the Spirit

The revelatory and dynamic operation of the Spirit finds its significance in the content of his witness. Through the prophets, we are told in 1:11, the Spirit foretold “the sufferings destined for Christ and his subsequent glories” (τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα καὶ τὰς μετὰ ταῦτα δόξας). Among the recipients of Peter’s letter, the Spirit empowers gospel proclamation; thus “the same Spirit at work long ago is currently at work in the community of believers and so provides for a consistent witness to the same reality.” In other words, the content of the Spirit’s witness across time is Christological. Schreiner summarizes this point well:

Both the OT prophets and those who herald the good news of Christ on this side of the cross speak by means of the Holy Spirit. In both instances, Peter emphasizes, they center on the gospel of Christ. The prophets anticipated the gospel by looking forward to the fulfillment of their prophecies about the Messiah as the crucified and risen LORD. Those who now proclaim the gospel announce the fulfillment of the prophetic word in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. In both instances the ministry of the Spirit centers on Jesus Christ.

The revelatory and dynamic witness of the Spirit in 1 Peter is centered on the sufferings and glories of Christ.

In summary, the Spirit inspired the prophets of old the same Christ-centered message that he now empowers to be proclaimed to the Petrine community, reinforcing the point that the identity of the Spirit in 1 Peter is defined by his relationship to Christ. In other words, in 1:11–12 the Spirit cannot be comprehended without reference to Christ, both in the past and the present. The Spirit’s identity, and conversely Christ’s identity, are mutually bounded.

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45 Chester and Martin, The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude, 118.
46 Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 75. This interpretation takes πνεύματι ἁγίῳ as an instrumental dative. See also Forbes, 1 Peter, 32.
47 Forbes, 1 Peter, 31. It is better to render the construction here as destination and thus bring out the divine purpose. There is a similar use of the preposition in v. 10 (“the grace destined for you”).
48 Green, 1 Peter, 216.
2.2. The Spirit of God

As the Spirit is in juxtaposition with Christ (the Spirit of Christ), so also the Spirit relates to God in 1 Peter. While the identity of the Spirit is thus broadened beyond a Christological focus, it does not undermine or compete with it. As we consider two passages, we will note the identity of the Spirit is determined by his relationship to God as the agent in Christ's resurrection. Furthermore, according to 1 Peter, the Spirit functions as God's comfort and power for the believing community as they suffer for their relationship to Christ. The presentation of the “Spirit of God” in 1 Peter thus reinforces that the identity of the Spirit is determined by his relationship with God and his actions are defined in so far as they contribute to God's redemptive work in Christ.

2.2.1. God’s Spirit Raised Jesus from the Dead

As discussed above, God is defined as the one “who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory” (1:21). God’s identity is tied to this particular action, and it is significant that 1 Peter 3:18 implicates the Spirit as the agent through which God accomplishes this great act of redemption.

Not all scholars agree Peter intends such teaching in the letter. The debate involves the final phrase, “on the one hand he was put to death in the flesh but made alive in/by Spirit” (θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι). The symmetry of the phrase provided by the μὲν … δὲ construction has been a compelling factor in determining the meaning of πνεύματι. 50 That Peter intends to parallel θανατωθείς with ζῳοποιηθείς, and σαρκί with πνεύματι, seems obvious. What is not clear, however, is whether the parallel structure necessitates interpreting the datives (σαρκί and πνεύματι) in the same way.

If Peter intends the datives to be taken the same way, then σαρκί and πνεύματι can be understood as datives of sphere, or perhaps datives of reference. 51 This interpretation would likely rule out capitalizing “spirit.” 52 Others, however, are not convinced that the parallelism determines the meaning of both datives. For example, Schreiner writes, “The deadlock can be broken if we recognize that the two dative nouns are not used in precisely the same way; the first is a dative of reference, and the second is a dative of agency.” 53

The important point for our discussion is that the latter interpretation allows for the Spirit to be the divine agent in Christ's resurrection. While Christ was put to death by humans, he was raised by God’s Spirit. 54 As noted above, God is identified as the one who raised Christ from the dead (1:21), but here, writes Schreiner, “Peter ascribes [Christ’s] resurrection and the beginning of his reign to the work of the Spirit.” 55 God, by the power of the Spirit, raises Christ from the dead. This may constitute the most

50 Jobes, 1 Peter, 240–41; Elliott, 1 Peter, 646.
51 Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 250, explains, “Widely represented is the construal as a dative of sphere, that is, the two spheres of existence within which Christ is described, that of human existence and that of the divine Spirit. Closely related to dative of sphere is the adverbial dative, or dative of reference, that is, Christ’s being put to death had reference either to his own spirit or to the divine Spirit by whose power he was raised.”
52 Forbes, 1 Peter, 123.
53 Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, 184. Both Schreiner and Dubis (1 Peter, 118) appeal to 1 Timothy 3:16 as an example where two nouns, though preceded by the same preposition, are to be interpreted differently.
54 Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 250.
important triadic formula in 1 Peter as the totality of the triune God is found within the central saving act of God.56

2.2.2. God’s Spirit in Comfort and Power

First Peter 4:12–19 serves “both as a summary of the past discussion and as an introduction to the final section of the letter.”57 It is because of their allegiance to Christ that they are insulted (ἐἰ ὀνειδίζεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ). But Peter’s emphasis is that although they are rejected by men, they are “blessed” (μακάριοι) by God. The reason why they are blessed is also answered by Peter—they are blessed “for the Spirit of glory, that is, the Spirit of God rests upon you” (ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται).

The exegetical details of the debate surrounding this phrase is complex.58 However, many of the conclusions do not affect our understanding of the Spirit of God at work here. Most commentators take this as a reference to the divine Spirit.59 As such, we simply note the dual role of the Spirit as God resting upon believers. First, the Spirit of God acts as a foretaste of the coming eschatological glory during suffering.60 Second, as the Spirit of God rests upon believers, they experience empowerment to endure persecution.61 In this way, the future glory serves as an encouragement to endure suffering for their allegiance to Christ.

Therefore, the Spirit of God in 1 Peter is the divine agent who raised Christ from the dead. Further, the Spirit of God is the one who comforts and subsequently empowers those afflicted with suffering for their allegiance to Christ.

56 It may also serve as the basis of interpreting 1 Peter 4:6 as another example of the Spirit’s work in the letter. So, writes Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 497, “Suffering believers are reminded that the opposition and discrimination that they face is short-lived because it is confined to this life. Believers die, and hence they receive a judgment according to the flesh, but they are promised physical resurrection by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.”

57 Achtemeier, *1 Peter*. The passage reflects previous points about persecution (1:6–7), suffering as part of Christian identity (3:14–16), rejection of Christ resulting in judgment (2:7–8; 4:5), and entrusting one’s life to God (2:23), as well as two new points about bearing the name “Christian” and Christian suffering as the commencing of God’s judgment.

58 The repetition of the article is problematic. See Dubis, *1 Peter*, 150, for a full summary of positions. The phrase has been understood as (1) a hendiadys (“the Spirit of the glorious God”); (2) an epexegetical expression (“the Spirit of glory—indeed, the Spirit of God”); or (3) expressing two distinct subjects of ἀναπαύεται with the καὶ being conjunctive and τὸ τῆς δόξης being either a reference to the Shekinah (“the divine Glory and the Spirit of God are resting upon you”) or the eschatological glory in verse 13. Definitive judgments are difficult to arrive at. However, the repetition of “glory” throughout the letter, referring to Christ’s eschatological glory, points to taking τὸ τῆς δόξης as an anaphoric reference to the glory mentioned in verse 13. Michaels’s estimation is likely correct in seeing Peter combining a reference to Isaiah 11:2 (LXX) with the Gospel tradition (Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12; Matt. 10:20). Michaels, *1 Peter*, 264–265.

59 Elliott, *1 Peter*, 783, affirms “This is one of the few references to the divine Spirit in the letter.” Nevertheless, he proposes a distinction which is left unexplained when he writes, “The thought reflects the OT notion of God’s Spirit resting on God’s people and its leaders rather than a ‘Trinitarian’ sense of Spirit of God.”

60 Schreiner notes, “Believers who suffer are blessed because they are now enjoying God’s favor, tasting even now the wonder of the glory to come and experiencing the promised Holy Spirit.” Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 223.

61 “For it is only by the power of the Spirit that one finds the resolve and strength to live an uncompromising life in a society that is hostile to one’s fundamental convictions and values.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 288.
2.3. Summary

What has emerged from Peter’s portrait of the Spirit is a divine agent of both God and Christ. The Spirit’s identity, while distinct, is tied intimately to God and Christ. He bears witness to Christ in the OT and empowers messengers of the gospel to proclaim the truth of Christ’s sufferings and glories. The Spirit also is identified as God’s agent in raising Christ from the dead and thus stands with the Father and Christ at the center of God’s great redemptive act. The Spirit is also the one who comforts and empowers the believing community in their suffering for Christ. Thus, Green fittingly says, “Peter demonstrates clearly that the Spirit must be understood intimately in relation to the Father and Christ within Peter’s portrait of the triune God.”

3. Conclusion

Although a Trinitarian approach in NT studies has gained momentum over the past decade, scholars have focused primarily on the Pauline letters and the Johannine corpus. The Catholic Epistles have received less attention on the topic. This essay has sought to help rectify the trend and contribute to the broader question of Trinitarian approaches in the NT studies by applying a Trinitarian hermeneutic to the letter of 1 Peter. I hope this essay will encourage further study on the divine identity in other NT writers outside of Paul and John.

A second contribution is to help break down the (false) dichotomy between exegesis and theology by showing the richness of Peter’s God-talk and the value of theological frameworks to the exegete. The field of biblical studies is in a state of uncertainty. With many of its previous long-held assumptions being challenged, biblical studies has opened itself up to a range of different perspectives. Whether this is a positive development is still to be seen, but there is now tolerance to approaching the text with what Hill calls “doctrinal exegesis.” At the same time, my hope is for the theologian to see the dogmatic benefits of intensive engagement with the biblical text. It is often said that the early church formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity was biblical and exegetical while those opposing Trinitarianism relied upon a patchwork of individual proof-texts. It is important then for contemporary

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62 Green, 1 Peter, 217.


65 I would add that approaching the biblical text from a theological perspective is different from approaching the text from other ideological approaches (e.g., Feminist or post-colonial) that take a posture of the distrusting interpreter. See Bockmuehl, Seeing the Word, 68–74 on the implied (or ideal) reader of the text.

Trinitarians to recover not only the dogmatic conclusions of the early church but also their method of a close reading of Scripture.

While this essay contributes to a Trinitarian approach in NT Studies, one must remember that the letter itself is primarily pastoral. How then does a Trinitarian reading of 1 Peter impact us pastorally? First, such a reading helps us remember that salvation for believers is rooted in the work of the entire triune God. As we have already outlined above, the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit all play crucial roles in the accomplishment of the believer’s redemption. The Father foreknows and manifests the Son so that he would suffer and die in our place. The Spirit is likewise active in the accomplishment of salvation. It is the Spirit who is active in raising Christ from the dead. Moreover, it is the Spirit who points the prophets of the past and human beings in the present to the work of the Son. Pastorally then, when we proclaim the salvation that believers participate in, we must remember that we are pointing others to the work of the entire triune God.

Pastorally, one also thinks of how 1 Peter addresses suffering in the Christian life. Peter seeks to encourage and exhort his audience towards a particular way of being in a hostile environment. Rensburg comments that the ethics in 1 Peter is “rooted in the reality of God” is instructive here. While 1 Peter centers on Christ as the exemplar in suffering (2:21–24; 3:18), significantly, the Father, Son, and Spirit are all active when Christians face trials. Peter seamlessly integrates the Father’s pronouncement of blessing with the comforting power of the Spirit on a believing community that suffers for their commitment to Christ (4:12–19). Thus, Peter encourages us to think of trials not only in a Christocentric manner but also in a Trinitarian manner.

First Peter says much about the triune identity of God. I have argued that 1 Peter puts pressure on its readers to articulate an understanding of God that agrees with later Trinitarian statements. While not detailing a full-fledged “doctrine” of the Trinity, the divine identity found in 1 Peter welcomes those later Trinitarian expressions as detecting the underlying logic of the text. As one scholar notes, “to speak about ‘God’ in 1 Peter therefore demands speaking as well about Jesus Christ and about the Spirit.” In addition, to speak about Christ and the Spirit is to necessarily include the work of the Father. In other words, 1 Peter supports the idea of mutuality of relations between the Father, Christ, and the Spirit.

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68 Elliott, 1 Peter, 104–5.


The Spiritual Utility of Calvin’s Correspondence during the Strasbourg Years

— Christopher Osterbrock —

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Abstract: Calvin’s letters are no mere collection of personal correspondence but served him in his lifelong spiritual formation. Of note are those letters collected during his time in Strasbourg (1538–1541). This study argues for and assesses the unique spiritual utility of Calvin’s correspondence during the Strasbourg years. The reformer is observed in these letters examining himself, seeking counsel and companionship, and recording the evolution of his philosophy of ministry, all this while shepherding his French refugee church under Martin Bucer’s mentorship. Calvin’s letters evidence a desire for theological implication through reciprocated dialogue, which pastors and laypersons alike ought to consider.

“I Would Not Suffer Myself to Be Drawn Away from Writing to You.”
John Calvin to Willem Farel

Reading the mail of significant figures is a long-treasured practice no matter the distance in time or difference in culture. Some of the most beloved letters among Reformed thinkers include those of John Calvin (1509–1564). Calvin’s correspondence reveals his inward meditations; he utilized letter-writing as a form of self-examination, both in the context of his friendships and his congregational affiliations. The goal of this essay is to isolate one particular season of such correspondence (the so-called Strasbourg years of 1538–1541) in order to identify how it impacted the theological development of Calvin.

While Calvin did not provide an explicit, overarching reason for his letter-writing, the subject matter contained within his extensive corpus allows for readers to infer a progression of theological and ecclesiological maturation. In the case of Calvin, this season served a greater purpose than mere


correspondence for correspondence's sake. Despite lacking an expressed pragmatic goal, Calvin clearly conveyed a desire for intimacy through the composition of letters. His growth as a theologian under the close shepherding of Martin Bucer (1491–1551) during the Strasbourg years proved to extend beyond the theoretical and blossomed into practicality, which was demonstrated through the network he amassed by paper and ink. The Christian community in which Bucer thrived comprised of a diverse blend of Reformed peoples—a group who, however counterintuitively, held to only what can be described as a “commonality of differences”: they welcomed sharing divergent opinions through constant communication. In these circumstances the practice of letter-writing coincided with a theological conviction of heterogeneous, intercongregational fellowship. It was into such a world that a young, teachable Calvin was plunged—swimming alongside Bucer in a fellowship that forced self-examination.

Calvin used this season to experience assurance through Christian communion while discerning his ministry calling. His correspondences, though not unique for the time, brought into focus the ecclesiological distinctives of Calvin's faith. These aspects can be displayed first by noting the form of letters in the era and the utility of them for Calvin as it related to fellowship and spirituality. Through this dual utility, the significance of these letters becomes evident as it pertains to Calvin's perseverance in exile. Finally, contours of Calvin's theology during the Strasbourg season emerge from these considerations.

1. Calvin and the Utility of Correspondence

Broadly speaking, letter-writing in the 16th century was in the form of sharing news about oneself, similar to a modern newsletter. This was not intended as an academic or rhetorical device, but rather contained notable information and individualized appeals, typically being time-sensitive in nature. Calvin's letters fit alongside the corpus of the sixteenth-century European style. As one author frames it, these were “highly context-sensitive [and] personal,” and yet they were also social interactions, with the expectation of response and further inquiry. Yet the purpose (or utility) as to why Calvin wrote during this period cannot be addressed simply by noting to whom he wrote (such as the frequency of his correspondence with William Farel [1489–1565]), nor can it be found by categorizing any one central dogma within the corpus—a faulty method for historical theology. A conclusion concerning the pragmatic component of Calvin's writing, however, can be derived from two observations.

First, he had a perspective on the Christian community that influenced his desire to fellowship with those outside of his local church. Second, Calvin had a deeply analytical mind that found comfort in self-examination through unabashed honesty in the form of writing, both in sending and receiving forthright responses. This two-fold utility of fellowship and reflection were pervasive elements throughout. The tremendous blessing of Strasbourg (for Calvin's sake) was the personal spiritual growth

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4 See James Daybell, Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 151–52. Though Daybell's book draws specific attention to women in Tudor England, the research likewise proves the genre of letter writing was similar throughout 16th century Europe.

5 Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti, “Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern Culture: An Introduction,” Journal of Early Modern Studies 3 (2014): 29. Though the use of rhetorical, or polemic, literature may be observed accompanying letter writing, the distinction between personal letters and letter-type treatises should be obvious to the reader.
and corresponding perseverance he found through this highly personalized process, a process that, whether consciously or not, was impacted by Bucer's community-driven, ecclesiological framework, even while in exile.

1.1. Intercongregational Fellowship

The context of Calvin's Strasbourg letters presents a strange dichotomy. As Richard Muller notes: “his letters from those years reveal, his perturbation, particularly concerning his calling, took place in a context in which his ministry was well received, his pen productive, and his engagement with other Reformers ... fruitful.” The time spent in Strasbourg is considered some of the best in all of Calvin's life; it is where his theology was truly born. And yet, Calvin and Farel had fled Geneva on unpleasant and personally heartbreaking terms. Though Calvin had interactions with Bucer prior to this context, Farel was his only real personal connection outside of Geneva. But Farel had departed to Neuchatel while Calvin settled in Strasbourg. Despite this, Calvin affirmed God's providence in these events. The exilic pressures served to steady him and polish the rough edges of his naiveté concerning ministry, which led to a surer and more resolved mindset. The complexities of Calvin being a refugee serving refugees led to a freedom to lead this church as he saw fit, thus nurturing within him a willingness to receive the advice of others.

Alister McGrath articulates the consensus on Calvin's context in Strasbourg: “it seems that this new confidence in his calling is to be attributed to the new sphere of ministry and literary activity to which he had been called.” In a statement that proved to be a comfort to both his Strasbourg and Genevan churches, Calvin writes in the French 1541 Institutes that “the universal church consists of the very many who agree with God's truth and with the teaching of his word.” This language of a universal church is how Calvin conceives of all those local, “individual churches dispersed in various towns and villages.” His context in Strasbourg did not end his spiritual connection to the church in Geneva. Calvin and Farel both saw themselves in the community at Geneva, even if their proper ministry was in another location. As Bruce Gordon attests, their pattern of continued correspondence would actually lead Calvin back to a warm reception in Geneva in the future.

Over the course of the Strasbourg years, Calvin not only wrote to Farel and the church in Geneva, but fervently sought out other Reformation-minded individuals, to whom he attached himself by pen and paper. Though Calvin acknowledged the convenience of letter-writing, he considered the

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6 Muller, The Unaccommodated Calvin, 27.
7 Herman J. Selderhuis, John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 86–87. Selderhuis regards this time and this place as where “all the theological influences came together to form the Calvin—and Calvinism—known today.” Selderhuis's biography is helpful in considering the Strasbourg letters, as it was written primarily from a synthesis of Calvin's letters, even to the neglect of Calvin's theological writings.
8 Selderhuis, John Calvin, 89.
13 Bruce Gordon, Calvin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 86.
enterprise an almost daunting task and even saw his own reluctance to participate stemming from what he perceived as the intimate nature and utility of his letters. He eventually garnered the motivation to write Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575):

I came to the conclusion that I must do now what I had too long delayed. What ought we rather, dear Bullinger, to correspond about at this time than the persevering and confirming, by every possible means in our power, brotherly kindness among ourselves? We see indeed of how much importance that is, not only on our own account, but for the sake of the whole body of professing Christians everywhere, that all those on whom the Lord has laid any personal charge in the ordering of his Church, should agree together in a sincere and cordial understanding.\(^\text{14}\)

He persisted in this personal correction and conviction. Examining himself before Bullinger, he writes: “it is our duty carefully to cultivate friendly fellowship with all the ministers of Christ, so we must needs also endeavour by all the means we can.”\(^\text{15}\) Calvin also wished to grow a more intimate bond between Strasbourg and Zurich, which came about by the strengthening of his friendship with Bullinger: “I might wish there was a closer connection or rather relationship.”\(^\text{16}\) There is no doubt, then, that exchanging letters was the means for exercising spiritual connection. To that end, Calvin and Bucer agreed that the “Spirit’s bond of fellowship is determinative for the church.”\(^\text{17}\) This ecclesiological underpinning stirred ever more in what we see through Bucer’s concept of the christlichen Gemeinschaften (Christian communities), which certainly played a role in Calvin’s thinking (even if not sustainable in Strasbourg as a whole).\(^\text{18}\)

The conceptual centrality of a disciplined community that held together, even if only exercised through pen and paper, can be further evidenced in his thought. Philip Benedict argues with brevity, “Calvin’s sojourn in Strasbourg was instrumental in shaping his thinking about ecclesiology.”\(^\text{19}\) This is not only based upon theological conviction, but—taking the point as argued above further—one can say that Calvin’s sojourn was shaped with practical conviction as seen through his letters. The letters, however, went beyond the building of bonds.

1.2. Personal Spirituality

Calvin’s understanding of personal piety was not individualistic, but ecclesial. Joel Beeke and Ray Pennings remark, “Growth in piety is impossible apart from the church, for piety is fostered by

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\(^{17}\) Spijker, “Bucer’s Influence on Calvin,” 33.


\(^{19}\) Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 84. Benedict notes that Bucer was already an influence upon Calvin’s thinking prior to the three years they were together in the close quarters of Strasbourg, but this season shows a particular distillation of Calvin’s understanding of church community.
the communion of the saints. The community constrains believers,” and does so to the extent that they grow according to the love and gifts shared among one another.\(^{20}\) The letters of Calvin during his time in Strasbourg were one such means of achieving this social aspect of piety, wherein he explored his own innerworkings and pleaded for his friends to consider his thoughts alongside him. This spiritual concern led him both to ruminate on possible chastisement from the LORD as well as to discern whether his vocation in ministry was still evident from God.\(^{21}\)

This practice was a vital mechanism that gave him the necessary outlet to share his mind and scrutinize his own behavior with Farel, in both an honest and edifying manner.\(^{22}\) Since Farel was the overwhelming recipient of Calvin’s mail throughout the Strasbourg years, a relationship emerged in likeminded ministry. Calvin was not shy to write tersely (or even at times rudely) to Farel, but he also wrote warmly, with Farel noting that Calvin had done so as if talking to himself.\(^{23}\) Likewise, Farel was prone to question Calvin and reproof him in personal ways. At one point it was implied that Farel had written in the same manner as Calvin when Farel had accused him of becoming too comfortable in Strasbourg and thus prone to “flatteries.”\(^{24}\)

In a two-part letter, Calvin unpacked his thoughts on the state of the Reformation within the church, the current debates on doctrine, and his conversations with Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560). He did all this in a framework of quasi self-examination, yet he still desired Farel’s input on the matters. This continues the themes of friendship and intellectual refinement within the larger context of a unified, global church.\(^{25}\) He elaborated to Farel specific church affairs, personal confrontations between Melanchthon and Bucer, and even personal desires. Though he shared little concerning his ministry within the French refugee church during this season, his influence over those who return letters weighed heavy on Calvin’s soul as he examined how he would lead his part of reforming God’s kingdom on earth.

There were also lighter notes of exchange, such as Calvin expressing personal desires concerning matrimony when Bucer and Farel attempted to find him a wife. Calvin reminded Farel of the type of woman he would like to marry, saying that he would “speak more plainly” for their sake about a companion.\(^{26}\) Based on Calvin’s allusions it may also be inferred (about the nature of Farel’s letters) those

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\(^{21}\) Gordon, Calvin, 93, 95.


\(^{23}\) For example, see this language used in both “XL—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters 4:157; and “XLIV—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:171, written 6 February 1540.

\(^{24}\) Calvin, “LIV—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:212, written 27 October 1540. “You allege that I am too nice and delicate, and after having been daubed with these flatteries [from the French refugee church and from Bucer], cannot now bear with patience to hear any harsher sound.” This referring to Farel calling Calvin to return to Geneva and handle the conflicts unavoidable in the Swiss community.

\(^{25}\) Calvin, “XXXII—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:116; “XXXIII—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:128, “Fearing lest the further delay of my writing to you might be inconvenient, I chose to forward a part or portion of the letter rather than to keep you waiting,...” Both the above letters were presumably written at the same time, 15 March 1539.

\(^{26}\) Calvin, “XXXVI—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:141, written 19 May 1539.
things about which Calvin complained, proffered advice, and elicited clarity.\footnote{Calvin, “XLIII—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:170, written 31 December 1539.} In keeping with brutal honesty, Calvin shared his sickness report, freely discussing his dysentery and discomfort in sitting.\footnote{Calvin, “LII—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:205, written in October 1540. For those who desire to learn of Calvin’s dysentery, see “XXVI,” Tracts and Letters, 4:90, written October 1538.} As vital as these two considerations were, the aid from these correspondences went beyond fellowship and friendship and into real-world impact.

### 2. Letter-Writing as Key to Perseverance

At this point, one of the tangible benefits that Calvin received through his letter-writing becomes clear. Those internal exercises of spiritual examination and external endeavors to engage a mutual holiness led Calvin to practical employment of his theoretical ecclesiology—even if he had done so subconsciously. The desire to commune with other Christians was inextricably linked to self-analysis in Calvin’s heart, and thus the letters of those to whom he was spiritually connected produced perseverance. As means of his endurance in ministry, such letters solidified a familial connection for Calvin as a reformer among many reformers—and with it, a desire for experiencing greater connection with those co-laborers. Correspondence with Farel reveals these innerworkings of Calvin with clarity as he took refuge in Strasbourg.

To Geneva he wrote, “we have been called to the fellowship of this ministry among you,”\footnote{Calvin, “XXV—To the Church of Geneva,” Tracts and Letters, 4:83, written 1 October 1538.} and in one of Calvin’s earliest letters to Farel, he expressed his affection for Farel along with the anxieties he experienced ever since Farel had left him to go serve in Neuchatel. Calvin also included letters from Bucer seeking advice or shared considerations.\footnote{Calvin, “XXII—To William Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:74–76, written 4 August 1538.} Farel’s role as a confidant is seen in other occasions as well; for example, Farel had even asked Calvin to share the content of his letter and the response from Pierre Viret (1510–1571), demonstrating how typical it was for Calvin to seek wider counsel among his network of friends, and how intimate these relationships were even through long-distance correspondence.\footnote{Calvin, “XLVI—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:182, written May 1540. Calvin likewise writes to Viret to share how he has explored his decision regarding Geneva with Farel at length, see “LXI—To Viret,” Tracts and Letters, 4:230, written 1 March 1541. He says, “I therefore left … to write to Farel and let him understand what were my thoughts.”}

The last struggles in leaving Strasbourg were ceremonially written for Farel in August 1541. Calvin shared how feeble he felt in the work of reforming Geneva, but the letter also served as a spiritual journal for his internal wrestling with how the Spirit would use those with whom he was corresponding in order to understand God’s purpose. He begged, “I submit my will and affections … to the obedience of God; and whenever I am at a loss for counsel of my own, I submit myself to those by whom I hope that the LORD will speak to me.”\footnote{Calvin, “LXXIII—To Farel,” Tracts and Letters, 4:281. He notes in this letter that he spoke with Bucer and they jointly sent letters to the overseers in Strasbourg.} Thus, he demonstrates a mutual union with Christ, as he would later expound upon how such a union is executed in an ecclesiological practice—nevertheless, these letter exhibit the personal development of the practicality of his union with Christ and correspondence with fellow believers.
As shown above, not only was letter-writing personally edifying, but Calvin's correspondences served to network and organize those in ministry connected to him. As with Viret and Farel, even from Strasbourg (and at Geneva as soon as he arrived), Calvin's writing helped to shape and affectionately cultivate the church in Neuchatel.33

Although exhaustion had begun to set in for Calvin, he had discovered a necessary key to perseverance in the practice of writing intimate letters to his friends and colleagues, an essential spiritual practice that increasingly gave him a resilience and purpose, that he “would not suffer to be drawn away from writing.”34

3. Theological Themes in Correspondence

Having observed the context, utility, and significance of letters in this reformer's life, it becomes evident that Calvin did not practice letter-writing absent from theological implications. These implications can be identified in three particular contours, namely, Calvin's views on friendship, the church, and the unifying power of faith.

3.1. Friendship

While Calvin believed that union with God brings an experiential knowledge of God, the nature of this union is not situated in some kind of personal monastery, in isolation from others. A perseverance rooted in regular correspondence was one way in which despondency, accrued through isolation, was blunted—particularly for him while ministering. The isolation felt during the Strasbourg years accentuated this facet of friendship for Calvin. He realized on a deeper level that to experience union with God is to be in union with God's people. Developing a deeper bond in Christian friendship and mutual union with God, therefore, is the means by which one develops a greater sense of satisfaction in the circumstances of life. This stands in stark contrast to the worldly friendships that are devoid of the Divine component, as Calvin expressed when he said that Christ “will no more allow his believers to be estranged from him than that his members be rent and torn asunder.”35

3.2. The Church

As a functional shepherd for the flock of Geneva (though in Strasbourg, and while Farel was in Neuchatel) Calvin contended that he and Farel may, as a conduit of blessing, bind the people of Geneva to the pastors who were serving over their churches—with sincere and friendly affection.36 The fact that Calvin issued advice to the church of Geneva in absentia, reveals his mentality toward the church and the intimacy he felt for them, and the spiritual obligations of stewardship he felt for those churches. He was one who could instruct and appeal to them as an overseer from a distance. He wrote with what may be considered brazen spiritual authority, “I require you, in the first place, by our Lord Jesus Christ,

33 Gordon, Calvin, 150–51. Gordon notes, Calvin's 1541 letters, shortly after arriving back in Geneva and beyond, are noted as being read and moderated by Viret.
36 Calvin, “XXXVII—To the Church of Geneva,” Tracts and Letters, 4:143, written 25 June 1539. This letter shows Calvin's continued overseeing hand in the spiritual concern for Geneva while pastoring his French refugee flock.
that so far as may be, you will first of all weigh the matter in your mind, and without any hastiness of judgment. For since we all of us owe this on the score of charity to one another, that we may not rashly pass sentence against others." Calvin's letter does not seem to be a mere suggestion but a bona fide spiritual charge, un eclipsed by distance or material means. He understood a bond of fellowship (and even a degree of authority) to remain intact, which is communicated via letter. The church was local, but also global. The way such a connection is possible is through his conception of the role of faith.

3.3. The Bond of Faith

Calvin believed that faith is gifted by “action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual believer,” yet is experienced and stirred in maturity through the life of the church and through the providential hand of God. Fellowship should not cease, even if miles apart, but ought rather be “gladly and wholeheartedly share[d] with one another, as far as occasion requires.” Again, although Calvin was apart from his Genevan congregation and his close friends, he desired this particular kind of fellowship with them—even if it had to be mediated through pen and paper, and not merely on “occasion” but as much as “special affection” required.

Calvin expressed a certain expectation concerning the church with regard to this faith, namely, that through the favored communion gifted in Christ to the members of the church, even that which is invisible would be clearly demonstrated, as he writes: “it is signified this way, so that even though it is invisible to us, we recognize it no less, than if we could see it evidently.” He called upon the churches to evidence their union one with another, including with him and those at distance, as an evidence of their union with Christ. Even though Calvin was physically separated from those to whom he wrote, including those in Geneva, he held to a theological principle that “the union into which Jesus Christ draws his faithful people is of such a significance that they share together in all good things.”

In their reciprocal letters, both Calvin and Bucer articulated a theological understanding of the church's communion to be far more societal than what is often understood by personal faith: the community embraces Christ together. Although localized expressions will be observed (such as in the Lord's Supper), such practices still in some sense remain seated in the universal community as a whole. Thus the foundation for Calvin and Bucer in writing to one another and relishing in the other's insights (as well as the aforementioned cases of Farel and the Genevan congregation) is based upon this communal edification—even while Calvin pastored his small French refugee church. These letters give verification for the notion of a communion of the saints that exists beyond the walls of the local church, with sincere regard for piety within the individual. The interplay between the roles of local and universal fellowship is not resolved in this essay but could be explored further by considering Calvin's apparent

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39 Calvin, Institutes 3.20.38.
40 Jean Calvin, Institution De La Religion Chrestienne: Texte De La Premiere Edition Francaise, ed. Abel Lefranc, reprint ed. (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1911), 269. Original text: “…en cela il nous est signifié, qu'il ne nous la faut point moins reconnoître, quand elle nous est invisible, que si nous la voyons évidemment.”
41 Calvin, Institutes, trans. Robert White, 262.
42 Spijker, “Bucer's Influence on Calvin,” 34, 38.
need for communion with others outside his proximity, constrained by a new community in a seeming personal exile.

4. Conclusion

Letter-writing as a discipline helped Calvin consider his words and his calling, preserved his connection to the ministry in Geneva, and kept his friendships flourishing both in Strasbourg and beyond. While he remained in Strasbourg for a short time, it was because of his correspondences that his return to Geneva was smooth and his partnership with the reformed ministries throughout Europe had yielded fruit—simply through the means of sincere words on paper. He noted to Bucer that he is “not unmindful” of the benefit and honor he received.43 The Strasbourg letters were a means of perseverance amidst the turmoil in his personal ministry, as well as for the development of a rich ecclesiology—in Calvin personally and in the future community of Geneva. Perhaps Calvin was not so far from the apostle Paul in the framework of his letter-writing, even if Calvin is not writing for the canon of Scripture.

Today, those who study the letters of Calvin and appropriate his thought for theological advantage are not “stealing” from the venerable scholar by procuring his mail. Rather, they are continuing this communal bond he saw through his correspondence united in faith, which remains true even for those temporally distant from Calvin. More investigation is needed concerning the nature of letter-writing within the framework of this reformer’s ecclesiology, as well as its relation to union in Christ and practical spiritual examination on the part of Christians.

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43 Calvin, “LXXVIII—To Bucer,” Tracts and Letters, 4:293, written 15 October 1541.
A Change in Kind, Not Degree: Labels, Identity, and an Evaluation of “Baptistic Congregationalists”

— Nathan Sherman —

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Abstract: How do we decide what to label people of centuries past when they had no clear labels for themselves? Should we describe seventeenth century Baptists as “Baptists” if that was not what they called themselves? Matthew Bingham has recently argued that instead of using the label “Particular Baptists” for the English Calvinistic Baptists of the 1640s and 50s, historians would more clearly describe their subjects as “baptistic congregationalists.” Is Bingham justified in his use of this neologism? While this article might be considered a book review—which several others have already contributed—it also contributes to the debates about wider religious labels of Early Modern England.

Labeling was a blurry business in the seventeenth century, and it becomes no easier for historians who are centuries removed. Some labels more or less accurately describe people or movements; still others clumsily lump one group into another. And yet labels are sticky—once they are conventionally adopted, they become tough to shake, even if they unhelpfully “imply the coherence

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2 A version of this article was presented as a paper at the Triennial Conference of the International John Bunyan Society at Northumbria University on 8 July 2022.
or even existence of a particular group when that may not be obvious." For centuries, many of these labels were assumed as unquestioned truisms until the twentieth-century Marxist historian Christopher Hill bumped a series of dominos in the wider re-analysis of labels and identities. Following in his footsteps, historians have since debated, among others, the usage and application of “Puritan,” “Dissenter,” “Radical,” “Anglican,” “Ranter,” “Protestant,” as well as later and contemporary labels. Hill argued that assigning labels to seventeenth-century subjects is anachronistically irresponsible because there were not yet clearly defined denominations or borders. Similarly, Claire Cross warned that using these labels can only be helpful if implemented to study “pre-history.” Yet others maintain that while historians must indeed be careful to avoid an anachronistic and pre-determined Whiggish teleology, traditional labels can still be helpful—if nothing else because there are no available “baggageless alternative(s)”—and their complete abandonment is unnecessary.

distrusting any attempt to systematize the past. To them, history defies generalization; most of the great theories of history are only sound and fury, signifying very little” (Palmer, “The Burden of Proof,” 125–26).


13 Hill, “History and Denominational History,” 66, 68.


A Change in Kind, Not Degree: Labels, Identity, and an Evaluation of “Baptistic Congregationalists”

While several of these wider labels and identities received considerable attention in the decades surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century, surprisingly “Baptist” has largely managed to slip through the same level of scrutiny. In 2012, perhaps with “Baptist” in mind, Peter Marshall lamented that the type of analysis given to “Protestantism” or “Puritanism” has “not been extended very much to any of the other denominated identities of English religion in the Reformation period.”

His observation was not to imply that there has been no shortage of denominational histories, or that labels for specific kinds of Baptists have not been widely used, but that larger denominational labels—like “Baptist” itself—have not been put in the dock, tried, and questioned.

From their very beginning, those in England who had adopted believer’s baptism had an identity and branding problem. “Baptists” of different stripes and origins were ubiquitously accused of Anabaptism which conjured the specter of Jan of Leyden and the continental anarchy of Münster from the previous century. These English “Baptists” did not know what to call themselves. In various confessions of faith, they referred to themselves as “baptized churches,” “baptized congregations,” “baptized believers,” and “not Anabaptists.”

Like many other labels, “Baptist” was first used as an epithet—this one initially aimed at them by Quaker opponents in the 1650s. However, Mark Burden has found that, within their extant church books and early records, Calvinistic Baptists did not refer to themselves as “Baptists” until 1691. Complicating labeling matters further, there were various kinds of Baptists with different theology, ecclesiology, and genetic histories: the so-called “General Baptists” named for their broadly Arminian theology of general or unlimited atonement; the so-called “Particular Baptists” named for their Calvinistic theology of particular or limited atonement; and the smaller and minority “Seventh-Day Baptists” who observed the Sabbath on Saturday.

Despite the differences of these various kinds of Baptists, denominational historians have tended to lump the General and Particular Baptists into a larger Baptist identity or a unified “Baptist story.” As early as 1738, Thomas Crosby defended the nascent Baptist denomination of his day by moving comfortably about between seventeenth-century General and Particular characters, congregations, and origins. Similarly, Joseph Ivimey, in 1811, bounced all over the baptistic landscape, lamenting the division that resulted from quibbling over, in his estimation, Calvinistic theology.

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21 I will provisionally use these traditional labels until further analysis or conclusions require change.
and Thomas Armitage all connected the General and Particular Baptist genetic origins through prior centuries by highlighting John the Baptist, the Patristic Era, medieval England, Lollardy, and Wycliffe and Tyndale, implying that differences amongst Baptists—historical or contemporary—were distinct, yet ultimately minor. That is, General and Particular Baptists were shown to be cousins sharing the essential family resemblance of believer’s baptism.  

With a few scattered exceptions, this lumping trend continued into the twenty-first century. But in 2019, Matthew Bingham presented a provocative contribution to Baptist historiography in his *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution*. He opposes the lumping tendencies of historians like Stephen Wright, who argued that pre-Civil Wars General and Particular Baptists belong together under a unified, baptistic movement of Separatism. Even further, Bingham suggests that labeling any person of the pre-Restoration era as a “Baptist” is obfuscating and inherently anachronistic. While, indeed, Calvinistic “Baptists” did not have a self-referential label, Bingham presents, in his judgment, a more clearly descriptive neologism: they were “baptistic congregationalists.” This novel label seemingly solves two problems: (1) it locates these “baptistic congregationalists” within uppercase C, orthodox Congregationalism, that is, they were radicals, but they were orthodox radicals, well situated within Reformed categories of original sin, election, and covenant, thus splitting them away from other heterodox baptismic sects, like the so-called General Baptists, among whom they were (and are) often categorized; and 2) by relegating “baptistic” to a mere adjective of their larger identity—they were Congregationalists—Bingham dismantles the notion of an early “pan-Baptist denomination,” even if a later denomination would eventually and actually evolve. At last, the taxonomy and labeling of the wider category of “Baptists” is receiving the kind of scrutiny Marshall asked for in 2012, and Bingham does so by persuasively attacking the status quo on multiple fronts.

Following a brief summary of the book, this article will evaluate Bingham’s overall methodology and conclusions while offering a way forward of appreciative compromise.

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28 Even though Bingham does not capitalize “congregationalism,” I will use the more commonly accepted and ubiquitous “Congregationalism” throughout the rest of this article. Any use of “congregationalism” will be a direct quote from Bingham.

29 Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 65.
1. Summary of Orthodox Radicals

In chapter 1, Bingham shows that so-called Particular and General Baptists were not theological cousins who found agreement on the essential issue (baptism) but then unfortunately disagreed on secondary theological accidents. Rather, they were distinct groups who were fundamentally opposed to one another. Among many other incendiary hostilities, Bingham quotes a 1654 letter from a Particular Baptist congregation at Hexham, saying that while that church would continue to maintain communion with other “godly preachers and congregations’ who were ‘unbaptized’ and yet true ‘ministers and churches of Christ,’ they would not intermingle with ‘those tainted with that Arminian poison that hath so sadly infected other baptized churches.’” In addition to many other references against Arminian Baptists, Bingham shows that these General Baptists were reciprocally inimical toward the Calvinists. He summarizes that, “Calvinist teaching on election and the atonement was declared to be ‘a wrong faith’ and ‘another Gospel’—in other words, a theological breach which no amount of baptismal concord could ever hope to repair.” Theological differences, which would later be assumed as subtle and secondary, were actually stark and primary, thus preventing any sense of a unified baptistic identity.

Instead, in chapter 2, Bingham highlights the close friendship, cooperation, and unity between early “baptistic congregationalists” and their Congregationalist brethren from whom they were evolving. When Hanserd Knollys and other members of the semi-Separatist Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey (JLJ) church adopted believer’s baptism, Congregationalist mediators did not recommend discipline or reproof, but rather “to count them still of our Church; & pray, & love them.” Praisegod Barbon, a JLJ Congregationalist who would later form his own paedobaptistic church, distinguished between those called “Anabaptists … some of which are my loving friends” and those who were not. Though he passionately disagreed with his friends’ theology of baptism, he held that it was a disagreement of “outward religion.” That is, because they found agreement on the primary and fundamental theological issues, Barbon was reticent to disrupt their Christian unity over baptism. Bingham then recreates the clandestine events surrounding the publishing of the first London Baptist Confession of 1644, arguing that the Congregationalist Dissenting Brethren possibly leaked information from inside the Westminster Assembly to their baptistic allies. This surreptitious cooperation helps to explain the similarities in the 1644 baptistic confession and the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, suggesting that there was no difference between these “Baptists” and Congregationalists, “but rather a difference between congregationalists of different kinds, congregationalists with different understandings of baptism.” If there was a pan-anything denomination of cooperation and identity, Bingham might argue, it was pan-Congregationalist.

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30 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 22.
31 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 23.
32 The Jacob-Lathrop (or Lathorp)-Jessey church (heretofore JLJ) is named after its first three semi-Separatist pastors. It was within the context of this congregation that many of its members debated and ultimately splintered into many other Congregationalist and baptistic congregations in the 1630–1640s.
33 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 45.
34 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 53–54; Praisegod Barbon, A Discourse Tending To Prove The Baptisme In, Or Under The Defection Of Antichrist To Be The Ordinance Of Jesus Christ (London, 1642), A2.
35 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 56–60.
36 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 61.
Chapter 3 then helpfully asks and answers, *Why did baptistic congregationalists abandon paedobaptism in the first place?* Bingham argues that the Congregationalist emphasis of “visible saints” forced an inevitable tension within their theology which *required* one to either reject the ecclesiology of regenerate church membership or, instead, reject paedobaptism altogether as the initiating rite into the covenant community. So, in turn, Bingham argues, those who adopted believer’s baptism were merely taking the Congregationalist polity to its logical outcome. This helpfully explains why so many Congregationalists adopted baptistic convictions while comparatively few Presbyterians made the same progression.

In chapter 4, Bingham argues that while Oliver Cromwell granted some level of toleration—and even affirmation—to Particular Baptists in the Interregnum years, he did not afford the same level of liberty or affirmation to any General Baptists. The distinction made by the Cromwellian Church shows that “‘Baptists’ as a group were not tolerated, because ‘Baptists’ as a coherent group did not exist during the mid-seventeenth century.” So, as Bingham would argue, to haphazardly attach the label of “Baptist” in this era to any person who embraced believer’s baptism in rejection of paedobaptism is to anachronistically lump two disparate groups into one.

Finally, in chapter 5, Bingham explores the formation of early associations and the debate surrounding “open vs. closed” communion amongst these newly formed baptistic congregations. In response to historians who use the debate to demonstrate dividing denominational lines, Bingham believes the attention given to the debate is overblown for three reasons. (1) The controversy over communion was one of many increasingly divergent convictions amongst these baptistic congregationalists. (2) It ignores the way in which the controversy developed and hardened over time. (3) It ignores those “closed communion” individuals and churches who still worked closely with “open communion” congregations, some even with the established, national church. Individuals and congregations of both sacramental convictions were pursuing the wider-Protestant and Puritan goal of “primitive worship” and a “primitive church,” i.e., the worship and ecclesiology of the Apostles dictated by Scripture. Baptistic congregationalists were merely scraping off “one more ‘popish’ barnacle that had inappropriately attached itself to the ark of Christ’s church.” The communion debate should then be understood alongside the adoption of believer’s baptism—that is, their labeled identity did not fundamentally change with either progression. After all, when other Puritans scraped off other “anti-Christian’ accretions … we do not assume that each new divestment would have immediately created

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38 Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 113.

39 While more nuance is required, generally, those practicing “open communion” allowed the communion table to remain *open* to any professing Christian, while “closed communion” practitioners *closed* the table allowing admittance to only those who had been prior baptized as believers.


41 Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals*, 136.
A Change in Kind, Not Degree: Labels, Identity, and an Evaluation of “Baptistic Congregationalists”

In other words, those who adopted believer’s baptism did not evolve into a new kind—into Baptists, nor certainly did they become—as like-minded cousins of the General Baptists—Particular Baptists. Instead, they merely progressed further along the spectrum of Congregationalism in degree—they were baptistic congregationalists.

Orthodox Radicals has severely damaged, if not mortally wounded, previous lumping historiographies of early Baptists. While many kinds of anti-paedobaptists were breathing much of the same Separatist air, Bingham shows a genetic, theological, and cultural gulf far too wide between Particular and General Baptists dissuading future historians from considering an overarching Baptist unity. Yet questions remain. Should historians now use “baptistic congregationalists” as the standard replacement nomenclature for Particular Baptists of the mid-seventeenth century? That is, while Bingham has rightly split General from Particular Baptists, is he justified by lumping Particular Baptists together with Congregationalists? By emphasizing the location of these so-called baptistic congregationalists within the orthodox Puritan church, is it possible that—despite the title of his book—Bingham has underemphasized just how radical they actually were? The remainder of this article will argue that believer’s baptism necessitated a change in kind from Congregationalism, not merely degree.

2. They Were Orthodox Radicals

Bingham is correct to highlight the orthodoxy of most of the early Particular Baptists in addition to the close personal connections that several of them enjoyed with esteemed Congregationalists. Indeed, it was the baptistic William Kiffen who coined the phrase, the “Congregational Way.” There was certainly cross-pollination among Congregationalists and Particular Baptists, but Bingham underemphasizes the decisive baptistic break away from Congregationalism by not accounting for the following five observations:

First, the same level of labeling scrutiny given to “Baptists” must be equally applied to “Congregationalists” themselves. While many Congregationalists did struggle with the tension between baptism and the visible church, Bingham’s readers are led to assume that “Congregationalism” was a fully-formed theological system out of which then “baptistic congregationalists” took one further step. And yet, the language of the Savoy Declaration of 1658 may not necessarily describe the evolving beliefs of Congregationalists in the 1620s, 1630s, and 1640s. In fact, Geoffrey Nuttall, writes that “[t]he Congregational men’ [and] ‘the Congregational way,’ do not begin to appear until the 1640s” (emphasis

42 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 136.
43 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 48; Anonymous, A Glimpse of Sions Glory, or, The Churches Beautie (London: William Larnar, 1641). B. R. White suggests Sions Glory was written by John Lilburne. Bingham and Mark Bell hypothesize the author was Thomas Goodwin, while David Como makes the most likely case for Jeremiah Burroughs (following Paul Christianson). In any case, Como is right that whoever it was, the author was of Congregationalist inclination, and indeed Kiffen’s introductory epistle included the important “Congregational Way” supporting Bingham’s argument. See B. R. White, “How did William Kiffin join the Baptists?” in Baptist Quarterly 23 (1970): 201–78, 206; Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 172; Mark R. Bell, Apocalypse How: Baptist Movements During the English Revolution (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 70; David Como, Radical Parliamentarians, 103–5.

44 In addition to the entire theological exploration of Chapter 3, Bingham’s explanation of the Half-way Covenant crisis of New England in the 1650s is superb, see especially Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 63, 79.
added) having finally coalesced out of a Brownist pre-history. Great care must be taken not to assume that it was merely those arriving at baptistic convictions who were settling into theological landing zones. In reality, many disparate groups were settling their convictions during this era, including Congregationalists themselves.

Second, while Bingham rightly highlights the unity and affection between many Congregationalists and their baptismic friends—which indeed stands in stark contrast to the antipathy between Particular and General Baptists—he avoids other instances of frustration and antagonism across the purported baptismic lines of “congregationalism.” It was not only Presbyterian heresiographers who denounced those who had adopted believer’s baptism. The Wapping Congregationalist William Bartlet summarily wrote against “those ways and practises which do vary from what is laid down as the truth,” including the ways and practices of Presbyterians, Erastians, and notably, against those who practice “the way of re-baptizing.” In one fell-swoop, Bartlet excludes “re-baptizers” from a true ecclesiology, placing those of baptistic conviction outside the norms of Congregationalism.

Likewise, while Praisegod Barbon might have understood baptism to be a non-essential and secondary issue of “outward religion” (perhaps especially amongst his close JLJ church friends with whom he once shared communion), the Congregationalist Samuel Chidley did not come to the same charitable conclusion. Chidley believed baptism to be one of the primary or “Fundamental points of Religion,” and he opposed the baptistic John Spilsbury where he had “swerveth from the rule of righteousness,” that is, baptism. Like Bartlet, Chidley is outside of the commonly accepted mainstream of Congregationalism represented by the likes of the Dissenting Brethren, and therefore may lose representative weight. But perhaps moving concentrically out from the JLJ network is actually helpful to clarify real theological difference when not held by those who were close and trusting friends.

45 Geoffrey Nuttall, Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640–1660 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 8. In the 1570s, Robert Browne began to subtly challenge the authority of the episcopal structure, and by the early 1580s, he had attracted a small East Anglian following by teaching that godly congregations ought to be able to choose their own like-minded ministers from within rather than receiving an unknown hierarchal appointment from without. Even further, Browne rejected the Erastian and parochial system altogether, eventually encouraging a separatism that would form new congregations who would give “their consent to join themselves to the Lord in one covenant and fellowship together.” It is from this nascent separatism that the JLJ church would form its semi-Separatist ecclesiology. See Michael Watts, The Dissenters, From the Reformation to the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 28–29; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, Visible Saints, 133–34; Murray Tolmie, The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616–1649 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 9–14.


47 Samuel Chidley, Separatists Answer to the Anabaptists Arguments Concerning Baptism. Or, The Answer of Samuel Chidley to John Spilsbury, Concerning the Point in Difference (London, 1651), A2.

48 Peaceable relationships and ongoing friendship do not demand the level of theological unity that Bingham assumes. Indeed, in his study on French Catholics and Huguenots, Keith P. Luria says, “[C]lose examinations of societies that appear ridden by confessional conflict often show coexistence not to be exceptional; if we look for examples of good relations among those groups we assume to be bitterly opposed, we frequently find them. People of competing faiths can and do get along in daily life” (Keith P. Luria, Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005], xiii). See also Alexandra Walsham, Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
And yet the antipathy did not just spew from Congregationalists—it was often reciprocal. One can make the caveat that John Spilsbury had only the national church in mind when he wrote against paedobaptism, but no amount of caveats will remove the rhetorical punch from statements like, “So I say, give to Antichrist his baptizing of infants, and to Christ His baptizing of believers.” Likewise the baptismic Andrew Ritor wrote against “the Separated,” by which he means Congregationalists. After making many standard arguments against paedobaptism, Ritor indignantly concluded, “Therefore the administration of Baptisme upon Infants is Antichristian and abominable … wherefore it is high time for us to looke about us to awake out of this drunken slumber.” And in Ireland, Thomas Patient assumed that all paedobaptism was “idolatry and false worship,” and “the Worship of Devils.” If Bingham rightly shows division and a lack of commonality amongst General and Particular Baptists from their writings against each other, then we must be willing to do the same with writings which clearly show the contentious nature of the new relationship amongst Congregationalists and Particular Baptists as well.

Third, while Congregationalists were semi-Separatists—still willing to pay tithes and otherwise cooperate with the national church (even if begrudgingly)—Particular Baptists were, for the most part, strict Separatists. Bingham’s chapter on the Cromwellian inclusion of Calvinistic Baptists indeed shows some level of social and theological acceptance, but while they maintained civic loyalty, Particular Baptists rejected any ecclesial link with the State, thus diverging from their semi-Separatist Congregationalist brethren. Most Congregationalists had goals for national comprehension as well as the overall reunification of orthodox puritans, but B. R. White has persuasively shown that the 1644 London Confession not only departed from the 1596 True Confession for its stance on baptism but also in Church-State relations as well.

Fourth, it is imperative to understand baptism in its social context as a public rite of passage. Arnold Van Gennep has separated various rituals into three categories: pre-liminary rites of separation, liminary rites of transition, and postliminary rites of communal incorporation. Van Gennep applied these three categories primarily to rituals pertaining to birth, marriage, and death, but a person of baptismic persuasion in the seventeenth century would likely recognize believer’s baptism comprehensively accomplishing all three. Émile Durkheim argued that we cannot understand religious beliefs until we observe the “defined collectivity that professes them and practices the rites that go with them.” And so Gordon Smith is surely right to describe believer’s baptism as “a moral act with moral consequences”—that is, it is a liminal transition out of one community and into another. While, indeed, as will be later

49 John Spilsbury, A Treatise Concerning the Lawfull Subject of Baptisme (London, 1643), 54.
50 Andrew Ritor, The Second Part of the Vanity & Childishes of Infants Baptisme (London, 1642), 30.
52 James Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 14–15; Michael Watts, The Dissenters, 94–99.
conceded, some Calvinistic Baptists remained in comfortable communion with Congregationalists, for most, believer’s baptism became the social waters of the Rubicon—once gone under and then crossed, there was no going back to a Congregationalist communion.

Fifth, and relatedly, most so-called baptistic congregationalists not only separated from the national church, but they also cut off all ecclesial ties with their former Congregationalist brethren as well. While Bingham is right to observe ongoing Christian friendship—especially within the narrow network of the London JLJ church—Joel Halcomb recounts the futile Congregationalist efforts of the mid-1650s in Ireland to regain a public communion with the newly separated baptistic congregations. Even though one Baptist leader was the irenic Christopher Blackwood, the Congregationalists instead complained about the wider Calvinistic Baptists’ “totall withdrawings from us in publique worship.”

Likewise, a Congregationalist chaplain for the Cromwellian church reported to John Thurloe that he found the Irish Baptists “every where unanimous and fixt in separateing from us, even to the ordinance of hearing the word.”

What is more, the development of associations, and the accompanying debate surrounding “open vs. closed” communion, despite Bingham’s argument to the contrary, further proves the point. Because of the interconnectedness of the sacraments—baptism as the door into the life of the church and communion as the ongoingly experienced life of the church—Baptists began to argue that a church should not ongoingly affirm covenantal existence (communion) without first affirming covenental entrance (believer’s baptism)—to do so would be disordered. And if the pursuit of a “pure church” at a local level was the driving force behind believer’s baptism, communion, and membership, the same desire for purity also informed the bodies with whom congregations would then more widely associate. Hence, the Tetsworth Baptist association concluded, “unless orderly churches be owned orderly, and disorderly churches be orderly disowned,” then the purity of the wider body of Christ’s churches would be impossible to achieve and maintain.

The first of these “orderly” baptistic associations formed in south Wales in 1650. By 1652, five Welsh churches had formalized cooperation with one another, and all of them were closed communion churches—that is, because believer’s baptism, according to their conviction, must precede access to the communion table, they effectively barred all Congregationalists from church or associational fellowship. Likewise, the Abingdon association formed in 1652 with the recognition that “true churches of Christ ought to acknowledge one another to be such.” Bingham rightly recounts, but then minimizes, the closed communion considerations of the Abingdon association for whom the sacramental question was extremely serious—convictional agreement about baptism was required for cooperation.

Similarly, the Ilston church book includes letters signed by London Baptists who warned their Welsh brethren in the early 1650s that infant baptism was “absolutly contrary to the word” and that “the Scripture comaunds …a withdrawinge from every brother that walks disorderly and not accordinge to the rules of Christ and his Apostles.” To not withdraw ecclesiologically from their Congregationalist

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58 Halcomb, “Congregational Church Books and Denominational Formation,” 60.
acquaintances and friends would be the kind of “indifference and lukwarmnes in the wayes of Christ the Lord will spue forth.” The Ilston book likewise recounts the ordeal of the Welsh pastor, Thomas Proud, who, in 1651, was suspended by his own church for leading in open communion—that is, for allowing “unbaptized” Congregationalists to the communion table—by which the congregation declared that their pastor had “grievously sinned against God.”

Baptism, and its ecclesiological implications, brought decisive breaks. While Bingham portrays William Kiffen as ecumenically adaptable during the 1640s and 1650s, Kiffen had actually arrived at hardened ecclesiological convictions during the era. In 1643, visitors from the Broadmead church in Bristol would later record in their church book of their experience with Kiffen’s church, that “only those professors that were baptized before they went up, they did sit down with Mr. Kiffin and his church.” Kiffen’s wide and ongoing social friendships, which Bingham rightly highlights, did not necessitate an open communion table for his own particular church. That is, the fact that Kiffen was willing to cooperate outside of his church does not indicate a reciprocal level of cooperation toward paedobaptists within his church. This was no two-way street. While Bingham shows that, in 1653, the Council of State gave Kiffen “free use of any pulpits to preach in,” there is not the slightest inclination that Kiffen would have given similar liberty of his pulpit to those not sharing his convictions. In Kiffen’s likely thinking, it would not be disordered or problematic for a rightly baptized Christian to preach at a paedobaptist—but otherwise orthodox—church, and we might even assume that Kiffen, and others like him, might view those opportunities as evangelistic openings to further legitimate their cause.

Bingham is right to point out that the communion controversy was just one of many issues causing division amongst the Particular Baptists. It is unnecessary, Bingham would argue, to further taxonomize them into splintering denominational species of those who, for instance, did or did not insist on the laying on of hands or those for or against congregational hymn-singing. On the one hand, baptism was indeed one of many other controversies of the day. But on the other, baptism (and its implications on ecclesiology, communion, and association) was in a class of its own. These other lesser controversies undoubtedly caused no small level of dissension and even division, but it was for their view on baptism that Bingham rightly calls them “radicals.” It can be tempting to understand mid-seventeenth century baptistic developments in merely Crossian categories of “pre-history,” and presumably, historians could say that Thomas Proud pastored a Welsh “baptistic congregationalist”

62 Birch, To Follow the Lambe, 47; Owens, The Ilston Book, 20.
63 See Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 128.
65 Bingham, Orthodox Radicals, 111.
church at Ilston. But if that church censured their own pastor for allowing Congregationalists to come to the communion table, then surely they cannot be called Congregationalists—even with the “baptistic” qualifying adjective. Believer’s baptism had drawn real and observable dividing lines. Of course, the Particular Baptists of the 1640s brought much of their Congregationalist DNA along with them to their newly formed Baptist churches, but, as James Renihan argues, the Baptists now had a “self-conscious identity distinct from the Independents.” Similarly, in his explorations of their actual church books, Joel Halcomb concludes that “the distinctions and debates between Congregationalists and Baptists are not evidence for denominational ‘pre-history,’ but instead reveal two “set, rival ecclesiastical programmes resulting in separate church movements.” In other words, the baptistic evolution did not result in a change in theological degree but in kind—not a move to the far-left, baptistic end of the Congregationalist spectrum, but a leaving behind of the spectrum altogether.

3. A Concluding Way Forward

“Congregational” is a wonderfully helpful adjective to describe a polity, but it becomes a poor identity marker when removed from uppercase C- Congregationalism. This is exactly what Kiffen did with his phrase “the Congregationall way.” The Congregational Way describes the doctrine of a local, gathered, and visible church—true, Baptists imbibed this polity, but the majority then rejected Congregationalism because it remained invisible by its baptism of infants. While they would not stomach a shared identity with just any anti-paedobaptist, becoming a baptized believer was fundamental to who they were and how they associated. “Baptist,” therefore, belongs not merely as a descriptive adjective but as an identifying noun to communicate their significant break from paedobaptist theological and social norms. Historians must certainly heed John Coffey’s warning to “keep their wits about them” in understanding that religious identities were often hybrid and evolving, but so long as careful distinction is made between the traditional labels of “Particular Baptist” and “General Baptist,” there is no compelling reason to abandon them.

But of course, while many of these baptistic men and women of the mid-seventeenth century decisively moved from one theological kind to another, not all made the same break. Bingham is right to identify the murky categorization of John and Lucy Hutchinson, Henry Jessey, Thomas Hardcastle, John Tombes, Vavasor Powell, and John Bunyan, who all embraced an open communion table alongside those who had not equally received the light of their baptistic convictions. In support, Halcomb notes that “in the 1650s many congregations could be described equally as Congregationalist or Baptist,” practicing what Hill describes as “intercommunion.” If these individuals and churches were not Particular Baptists—those who decisively broke from Congregationalism, leaving the Congregationalist spectrum altogether behind—what should we call them?

In 1972, B. R. White suggested that there were not two kinds of English Baptists in the mid-seventeenth century, but three: 1) General Baptists; 2) “closed” membership Particular Baptists; and

68 Renihan, Edification and Beauty, 37.
69 Halcomb, “Congregational Church Books and Denominational Formation,” 60.
3) “open” membership Particular Baptists. White helpfully separated the second and third categories because of their inability to agree on sacramental dividing lines. Now five decades after White’s suggested three categories, if anything, Bingham has perhaps supplied an interchangeable label for White’s third category: 1) General Baptists, 2) Particular Baptists, and 3) baptistic congregationalists.

Bingham’s hybrid neologism does justice to someone like John Bunyan, who Anne Dunan-Page calls a “middle way Christian.” Similarly, the ecumenical Henry Jessey becomes an ideal mascot for baptistic congregationalists, while others like Kiffen, Spilsbury, Hanserd Knollys, Benjamin Coxe, and other traditionally identified Particular Baptists would not so easily fit on the cover of Bingham’s book.

Agreeing on seventeenth-century labels has always been a moving target because convictions were evolving, religious definitions were tenuous, and identity borders were porous. Yet Joel Halcomb has warned that “to name is, of course, to denominate.” And so, if a growing number of pastors and their churches were moving in a deliberate baptistic exodus away from Congregationalism, historians should be reticent to drag them back to the identity which they had so decisively left behind.

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74 Porous religious borders were not just an English phenomenon. For a study on conversion and trans-identity movement among seventeenth century French Catholics and Huguenots, see Keith P. Luria, Sacred Boundaries, especially 153–61, 193, 246–307.

75 Joel Halcomb, “Congregational Church Books and Denominational Formation,” 51.
What Republicanism Is This? An Introduction to Christian Republicanism (1776–1865)

— Obbie Tyler Todd —

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Abstract: While the term “Christian republicanism” is known to most historians of the early republic, very few have attempted to explicate its unique theology or to identify its various religious, moral, and even racial permutations in the church. Christian republicanism was much more than just a set of political or social commitments. It was also a loose theological system. This article provides an introduction to Christian republicanism, tracing its beliefs, defining its boundaries, and chronicling its lifespan in the early United States when it flourished in the American mind.

On December 10, 1811, during the twelfth session of Congress, Rep. John Randolph of Virginia launched a verbal assault on the Committee on Foreign Affairs for its call for troops against England. A resolution for a standing army, he harangued, was a declaration of war and stood against the very ideals of the Republican party. As the vocal leader of the “Old Republicans,” Randolph was a sort of self-appointed prophetic figure, calling his people back to its original Jeffersonian principles. Therefore, when the Episcopalian defined what he believed to be the essence of republicanism against its heresies, what transpired on the floor of the House was a mix of political theater and religious sermonizing. Clinging to “the ark of the Constitution” and holding firmly to the “doctrine that Republicans are destitute of ambition,” he excoriated his fellow Republicans for their “want of moderation” and lack of honor. “Gallant crusaders in the holy cause of Republicanism!” he mocked. “Such Republicanism does indeed mean anything or nothing.” For the so-called “War Hawks,” he charged, republicanism was merely self-interest. However, in Randolph’s mind, republicanism was rooted in something much deeper and more ancient. “If we must have an exposition of the doctrines of Republicanism,” he exclaimed,

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1 Fellow Virginian Robert Lewis Dabney revered Randolph. The Presbyterian even visited Randolph’s house shortly after the latter’s death. At the end of his life, Dabney compiled all of the stories he had collected of Randolph in a reminiscence for the Union Seminary Magazine (R. L. Dabney, “Reminiscences of John Randolph,” Union Seminary Magazine 6 [1894]: 14–21).
“[we] should receive it from the fathers of the church, and not from the junior apprentices of the law.”

Ultimately, republicanism belonged to religion, not to legal philosophy or political science. Randolph was reaching back to the church fathers, not to the founding fathers. For Randolph, as for most Americans, the concept of republicanism was birthed in the Greek and Roman republics yet embodied fully in Christianity itself. Republican character traits like prudence, restraint, temperance, fortitude, dignity, disinterestedness, and independence were Christian virtues. Christianity was a republican religion.

With a republicanized faith (or at least his version of it), Randolph wielded biblical passages for his old school Jeffersonian purposes, including the defense of slavery. Accusing his younger, self-interested partisans of setting a dangerous example for their slaves, Randolph drew from the book of Genesis: “You have deprived him of all moral restraint, you have tempted him to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, just enough to perfect him in wickedness; you have opened his eyes to his nakedness; you have armed his nature against the hand that has fed, that has clothed him, that has cherished him in sickness; that hand, which before he became a pupil of your school, he had been accustomed to press with respectful affection.” In the third chapter of Genesis, Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil after being tempted by the Devil, discovering their nakedness and rebelling against the Almighty. Ironically, in Randolph’s version, it is the slave who fulfills the role of fallen Adam and the slave-owner who plays the part of both God and the Devil. In his interpretation, slaves were formed in the image of their owners, but their owners were not always conformed to the republican image of their Creator.

But was there really such a thing as disinterested slaveholding? Could one slave-owner lecture another for his lack of “restraint”? And could the generation of 1776 rebuke the generation of 1812 for their “war spirit”? With the authority of the Bible, republicanized Christianity allowed the slave-holding Randolph to scold his younger counterparts for their self-interest while preserving the right to seek his own. After attacking “standing armies, loans, taxes, navies, and war,” he concluded his diatribe by asking, “What Republicanism is this?” In the new republic, it seemed, not even the Republicans were agreed upon the nature of republicanism. Whatever it was, it was bound up with the very definition of Christianity itself. Two hundred years after Randolph’s screed to the House of Representatives, the ubiquitous ideology known as Christian Republicanism is still more described than defined. While the terminology is known to most historians of the early republic, very few have attempted to explicate its unique theology or to identify its various religious, moral, and even racial permutations in the church. In short, Christian republicanism was much more than just a set of political or social commitments. This

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5 *Annals of Congress*, 12–1, 451, 455. Randolph did, however, free all of his slaves when he died. (See Robert Elder, *Calhoun: American Heretic* [New York: Basic, 2021], 92.)

6 For example, in her work on Southern evangelicals from 1800–1860, Anne C. Loveland is typical of most historians when she concludes, “Because of their conviction that Christianity was vital to the preservation of the American republic, evangelicals argued that ministers should show the application of religious principles to the political and social order, reproving magistrates and citizens when necessary” (Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800–1860* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980], 111). While Christian republicanism was certainly not less than this expectation, it was also more.
The article provides an introduction to Christian republicanism, tracing its beliefs, defining its boundaries, and chronicling its lifespan in the early republic when it flourished in the American mind.

1. “Our Republican Experiment”

As the most celebrated intellectual and moral movement in the early United States, republicanism was ironically one of the most difficult to define. Although Randolph had spelled it with a capital “R,” for instance, most Americans did not associate republicanism with a particular party. Even Timothy Dwight, the so-called Federalist “Pope” of New England, once described himself to George Washington as “so independent a republican, and so honest a man, as to be incapable of a wish to palm myself upon the world under the patronage of another.” Dwight eventually dedicated his epic poem *Conquest of Canaan* to the first president, “The Saviour of his Country,” whom he portrayed as a modern Joshua. But republicanism was not necessarily synonymous with patriotism. Swiss-born Presbyterian pastor John Joachim Zubly believed that Christians should resist unjust taxes and even published a sermon on the eve of the Revolution entitled *The Law of Liberty*. Zubly was elected to the Second Continental Congress from Georgia but opposed American independence, giving up his seat. He was a so-called “Whig-Loyalist” despite “being borned and bred in a Commonwealth” and hoping that his fellow Americans would “not be unacquainted with republican Govt.” As historians have noted, republicanism did not preclude monarchy though it did transform it. Nevertheless, for most loyalist clergy, “anarchy” became a code word for republicanism.

The republicanization of American Christianity was distinct from the so-called “democratization of American Christianity” as outlined by Nathan O. Hatch. Although, as its opponents often noted, republicanism carried with it many egalitarian forces, the moral energy of republicanism brought Christians together for various causes and compelled them to centralize authority as much as it brought them to *de-*centralize authority. The republican ethos animated high Calvinists and low church revivalists alike. As one of the chief opponents of the revivalism and popular religious movements of the Second Great Awakening, Horace Bushnell disavowed the “extreme individualism” of his generation. Yet, the father of American religious liberalism also exhorted the students at Andover Seminary, “We shall be men of the nineteenth-century, not of the first—republicans, men of railroads and commerce, astronomers, chemists, geologists, and even rationalizers in the highest degree.” For some, republicanism meant returning to a more classical era. For others, it meant embracing the present.

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Republican values like personal morality, individual responsibility, freedom, and equality were embraced so thoroughly by American evangelicals as they preached the importance of faith and the rebirth that republicanism often became a watchword for evangelicalism. However, like the evangelical tradition itself, republicanism was not a homogenous movement and influenced established and disestablished churches alike. For instance, Devereux Jarrett was an Anglican minister in Virginia who welcomed and even imitated the emotional preaching of the Methodists. Nevertheless, despite his evangelical sympathies, Jarrett did not approve of the populist and anti-authoritarian spirit of the age, which he identified as republicanism, lamenting in 1794, “in our high republican times, there is more levelling than ought to be.”

As the spirit of the age swept over the American people, the lower orders of society no longer yielded an instinctive deference to the religious authority and nobility as they did in patriarchal England. On the other hand, evangelicals in the Episcopal Church (the Anglican Church in America reconfigured in 1789) identified more strongly with republicanism. By 1853, Episcopal clergyman Calvin Colton boasted that the “genius of the American Episcopal Church is republican.” Rev. John Alonzo Clark declared, “Every one now begins to see that the principles of our [Episcopal] church are in most delightful harmony with republican government.” Republicanism was thoroughly embedded in early American evangelicalism, extending its reach into the older, more formalist denominations.

Between the revolutionary and Civil War eras, republicanism was more assumed than defined, and it was not the intellectual property of white males only. Historians have demonstrated how black founders such as Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church “often presented themselves as the consummate representatives of republicanism.” Congregationalist Lemuel Haynes, the first African American ordained in any denomination, urged “true republicanism” upon his hearers and acknowledged “that civil authority is in some sense, the basis of religion.” As John Randolph suggested in his screed to the House, even slave-owning whites expected that their republican values would be passed on to their slaves in some way, so long as black republicanism did not conflict with white supremacy. On the other hand, abolitionists like Baptist David Barrow believed that republicanism prohibited slavery. In a 1798 Circular Letter explaining his departure from Virginia to Kentucky, Barrow insisted, “I wish that all masters, or owners of slaves, may consider how inconsistently they act, with a Republican Government, and whether, in this particular, they are doing, as they would others should do to them!” According to Barrow’s logic, republicanism was but an extension of the second


14 Amanda Porterfield explains, “With growing detachment from civil authority, religion came to function less in its traditional role as a support for civil authority and common good and more in a compensatory role of managing problems ignored but often created or exacerbated by government policies” (Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012], 8).


commandment to love thy neighbor. Despite lacking a universal definition, the republican ideal was so powerful that it shaped both sides of the slavery debate, taking Christian form. Even Baptist Basil Manly Sr., who owned forty slaves, confessed, “Slavery seems to be utterly repugnant to the spirit of our republican institutions.” Nevertheless, Manly opposed both emancipation and colonization and virtually any effort to limit slavery.

With such a wide spectrum of political, theological, racial, and social beliefs under the same ideological umbrella, sometimes the best way to describe republicanism was by its appearance: you knew it when you saw it. Or, rather, when you didn’t. When Presbyterian-turned-Catholic Fanny Calderon de la Barca, the Scottish-American wife of a Spanish ambassador, visited the legislative hall in Mexico City in 1839, she described it as “as anti-republican-looking an assembly as I ever beheld.” Indeed, republicanism even had its own sound. Shortly after the Revolution, officials in the colony of Sierra Leone believed that the preaching of black American Dissenters like Moses Wilkinson and David George was too “republican” and therefore subversive to public order. Ultimately, even though republicanism was derived from the Greek and Roman republics and crossed international waters, it was mostly understood to be an American phenomenon. Benjamin Rush, a last-minute delegate to the Continental Congress and a devout evangelical Presbyterian, wrote to a friend that the Declaration of Independence inspired the Philadelphia militia to “be actuated with a spirit more than Roman,” implying a kind of American superiority.

The people of the United States had not invented republicanism nor could they always agree upon its meaning, but they were perfecting it with the help of the church. And when the vast majority of Americans spoke of American Christianity or republican religion, they meant the Protestant church. “There is no religion on the face of the earth, consistent with republicanism but the Protestant,” declared minister William Cogswell. In Boston in 1831, Lyman Beecher stated unequivocally, “Republicanism and Catholicism . . . are incompatible with each other.”

Republicanism was, like Protestant Christianity, meant to be seen and heard. In an 1844 sermon to Congregational ministers in Massachusetts, Edwards Amasa Park announced, “This connection between sacred things, and freedom in civil, is well understood by transatlantic observers of our republican experiment.” Just as the Puritans had sought to display pure and undefiled religion before the eyes of an apostate Anglican church, the world was once again invited to witness free religion take

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place in America. But this time it had a name: republicanism. In Park's view, not just the United States but American Christianity itself was a “republican experiment.” In the same sermon, Park offered his own concise definition: “This is American Christianity. It is in sympathy with the broadness of our lakes, the expanse of our prairies, the length of our rivers, the freeness of our government, the very genius of our whole social organization. A narrow-minded religionist is no true countryman of ours.” Although distinct, Christianity and republicanism coalesced in the American mind because they both helped explain the American experience, from its lakes to its rivers to its “social organization.” In some sense, the citizens in America were as free from kings and tyrants as its Christians were free from “popery” and sin and as its settlers were free from boundaries and barriers. Each of these freedoms mutually reenforced the importance of the others.

For this reason, Mark A. Noll has noted “the unusual convergence of republicanism and Christianity in the American founding,” identifying a so-called “Christian republicanism” that dominated and even molded the church. “American Christians,” Noll insists, “despite substantial conflict among themselves, took for granted a fundamental compatibility between orthodox Protestant religion and republican principles of government. Most English-speaking Protestants outside the United States did not.” Noll is by no means the only scholar to identify the wedding of republicanism with American Christianity in the new American nation. In The New England Soul, for example, Harry S. Stout concluded that, during the Revolution, “The American people, it was clear, were bound by ties of common ideology, not a common religious faith.” James P. Byrd has argued, “By the end of the Revolution, colonists had shaped not one republican Bible but many republican Bibles.”

However, while most scholars have sought to explain the effects of republicanism on church and state and its relation to the Revolution, very few have defined or expounded upon the republicanization of American Christianity in its everyday faith and practice. Republicanism colored more than Christian politics and patriotism. It imbued Christians’ view of God, salvation, and even themselves. It shaped their understanding of history, their code of ethics, their Calvinism and Arminianism, and other modes of thinking that could not always be detected in political sermons. In turn, these changes had a profound effect upon Christian living in America because, as historian Perry Miller once stated, “the mind of man is the basic factor in human history.” Republicanism was brought to bear upon the American mind—and the American conscience—with as much force in religion as it was in politics.

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26 Edwards A. Park, A Discourse Delivered in Boston before the Pastoral Association of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts (Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill, & Wardwell, 1844), 17, 11.


In the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations, it was generally understood that Enlightenment Christians were a thinking people, and if the latest ideas and trends in the intellectual world could not be sublimated into Christian thought, they were more than likely not reasonable or cogent enough to be accepted and believed. University of Vermont president James Marsh wrote to English Romanticist Samuel Coleridge in 1829, “in this country, the most practical and efficient mode of influencing the thinking world, is to begin with those who think from principle and in earnest; in other words, with the religious community.” ³¹ In some ways, the dialogue between Christianity and republicanism was inevitable. In The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment (1994), Carl J. Richard argues, “The strict dichotomy between classical republicanism and liberalism which has dominated Revolutionary and early republican historiography for the past generation undervalues the complexity of the relationship between the two intellectual constructs, underestimates the human propensity for inconsistency, and ignores the contribution of Christianity to the founders’ thought.” ³² At least in America, even the most heretical of “infidels” were not unaffected by Christian beliefs. Although republicanism found its origins in the classic republics of ancient Greece and Rome and was championed by non-Christians, it should come as little surprise that a Deist like Thomas Jefferson would still consider himself a Christian of some kind (albeit of a naturalistic sort). ³³ Richard adds, “Although many of the founders held unorthodox religious views, they sometimes interpreted classical virtue in a Christian light.” ³⁴ Christianity was likewise an indomitable intellectual and moral force in American life, regardless of someone’s personal belief in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, classical ideas were not simply shaped by Christian beliefs; Christian beliefs were imbued with classical ideas. If Thomas Jefferson could adapt his republicanism to some form of Christianity, Protestants could certainly adapt their Christianity to some form of republicanism. As John Adams reflected to his rival Jefferson in 1815, “The Revolution was in the minds of the people.” ³⁵ Indeed, American Christianity could not escape that intellectual Revolution.

More than simply a school of political thought, republicanism was a moral philosophy that ultimately sought to answer the question “how should a people live inside a republic?” This question might seem a bit simpler today than it appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After all, America was, in the words of Edwards Amasa Park, a “republican experiment.” Although, as historians have often noted, the New England colonies composed “quasi-republics” under the rule of the English crown, the United States became something much different once it shed monarchial authority


³⁴ Richard, The Founders and the Classics, 7.

and ratified a Constitution. That a people could elect their own representatives and presidents and that power could be vested in (white male) citizens was an idea that many in Europe believed was neither practical nor tenable. As a result, Christian and non-Christian thinkers frequently responded to the accusation that republics could not last without some form of monarchy or oligarchy. From the pulpit, the response was the same: Christianity was vital to the survival of a republic. Republics might come and go, but a Protestant republic was God's will and could not be shaken.

For instance, when famed Congregationalist-turned-Presbyterian preacher Lyman Beecher preached against intemperance (which he often associated with Roman Catholicism), he stressed the fact that Christianity was “indispensable” to a healthy republic. “It is admitted,” he declared, “that intelligence and virtue are the pillars of republican institutions, and that the illumination of schools, and the moral power of religious institutions, are indispensable to produce this intelligence and virtue. But who are found so uniformly in the ranks of irreligion as the intemperate?” In other words, without intelligence and virtue, the republic would fail. And without Christianity, intelligence and virtue would disappear. For American Christians, the answer to the question of virtue—and the only hope for the United States—was Christianity.

“The best place to begin to understand the views of the revolutionary generation is with a look at the word ‘virtue,’” explains Thomas E. Ricks in his First Principles: What America’s Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country. “This word was powerfully meaningful during the eighteenth century.” According to Ricks, “The founders used it incessantly in their public statements. The word ‘virtue’ appears about six thousand times in the collected correspondence and other writings of the Revolutionary generation, compiled in the U.S. National Archives’ database, Founders Online (FO), totaling some 120,000 documents. That’s more often than ‘freedom.’” Americans were a people seemingly obsessed with virtue. Therefore, a better way of asking the republican question would be “how should a people live virtuously inside a republic?” If Americans could not be a certain kind of people, they would not be a people at all. As Gordon S. Wood has shown, republicanism encompassed all spheres of an individual’s life, including both private and public virtues. On one hand,


39 According to Philip Schaff in 1855, “The greatest American statesmen and orators have on various occasions thrown the weight of their voice into the scale of virtue and piety, and have repeatedly and emphatically declared that Christianity is the groundwork of their republic, and that the obliteration of the church must involve the annihilation of all freedom and the ruin of the land” (Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of its Political, Social and Religious Character, ed. Perry Miller [Cambridge: Belknap, 1961], 35).


41 This theme of virtue was also inherent in the ancient Greek and Roman literature. According to Carl J. Richard, “The connection between the classics and virtue was deeply ingrained and implicitly understood.” (Richard, The Founders and the Classics, 37.)
while admirable and serviceable to the greater good, virtues like prudence, frugality, and industry still allowed people to promote their own interests. On the other hand, “the virtue that classic republicanism encouraged was public virtue.” Wood explains, “Public virtue was the sacrifice of private desires and interests for the public interest. It was devotion to the commonweal.... Republicanism thus put an enormous burden on individuals. They were expected to suppress their private wants and interests and develop disinterestedness—the term eighteenth century most often used as a synonym for civic virtue.”

A republic demanded a moral standard from its citizens that was not required in a monarchy. In this sense, to be an American was both a privilege and a responsibility. The relationship between liberty and virtue was somewhat circular: virtue was made possible by liberty, and liberty demanded virtue. In 1802, Savannah pastor Henry Holcombe pointed to this vital connection in Georgia’s *Analytical Repository* when he stated, “I need not prove, for it is evident, that without religion there can be no virtue; and it is equally incontestable, that without virtue, there can be no liberty.”

Americans during this time conceived of the virtuous person as the individual who sought to promote the well-being of others above their own. In fact, other than single words like “liberty” and “virtue,” no phrase was invoked more often by the Revolutionaries themselves than “the public good.” With virtue as its guiding principle and the public welfare as its goal, republicanism was not so much a codified list of beliefs about the political nature of a republic so much as a set of moral ideals and values that permeated the American mind. Between America’s founding in 1776 and its rupture in the Civil War, republicanism quite naturally became the ethos of American Christianity. The exalted virtues of the classic, non-Christian republics were adopted as inherently Christian, and the teachings of Christianity were cast in a republican frame. Republicanism was Christianized, and Christianity was republicanized. This process gave birth to a distinctly American faith.

### 2. Virtue and Disinterestedness

“The principle of the universal equality of human rights, with one lamentable exception, has here been fully recognized,” President Francis Wayland boasted to his students at Brown University, noting the evil of slavery. “But does any one believe that our constitution can endure, if it rely for support on nothing but the natural love of justice in the human bosom?” Republicans did not flourish by good intentions alone, reasoned Wayland, one of the leading moral philosophers of his generation. “Nay, abstract from this people the influences diffused abroad by the religion of Christ, abolish the Bible, the Sabbath, the instructions of the sanctuary, abandon us all to the natural workings of the human heart, and let any one ask himself how long such a government as our could possibly exist.” Pardoned of their sins and called to good works, Christians in the early republic fully subscribed to the idea that a people must be virtuous in order to remain free and must be religious in order to remain virtuous. After all, what hope was there to understand virtue without belief in Jesus Christ, the ultimate public servant who had sacrificed himself for the world? Who could practice public virtue but the people who had been

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commanded to be “slaves of all” (Mark 10:44)? The fate of the infant nation and the “virtuous cause of America” rested upon the simple faith of Christians.46

Therefore, in many ways, the republicanization of American Christianity began with the sacralizing of virtue, a theme on which President Wayland frequently sermonized. Over the course of his presidency, Wayland preached to his students about the “principles of virtue,” the “power of immaculate virtue,” “self-denying virtue,” “public virtue,” the “virtue of the community,” and, of course, the “Savior’s virtue.”47 In The Elements of Moral Science (1841), his moral philosophy textbook, Wayland devoted an entire chapter to “The Nature of Virtue.” In order to demonstrate that biblical teachings were the bedrock of virtuous living and essential for the public good, the concept of virtue was consecrated as fundamentally Christian. Ministers spoke of “holy virtue” as God’s ultimate aim for humanity.48 Arch-revivalist Charles Finney, ever in pursuit of Christian perfection, simply concluded, “Virtue is holiness.” These were “synonymous terms” in his mind, both concerned with “moral perfection” and “conformity to the law of God.”49 Republicanism was not a new teaching for the church, but the same command from God to “be holy as I am holy” (Lev 11:44). To be virtuous was to simply believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whereas Puritan Jonathan Edwards had taken a more metaphysical approach in The Nature of True Virtue (1765), defining virtue as “benevolence to being in general,” his descendants were much more concerned with baptizing republican virtue, or at least demonstrating that classical republican values found their fullest expression in the Christian religion.50 For instance, when William Allen preached at his grandson John Wheelock Allen’s installation service at Evangelical Trinitarian Church in Wayland, Massachusetts, in 1841, he began by reminding the audience of the true source of virtue. “The Gospel without doubt contains the most perfect system of morals, enjoining all the various virtues, which are essential to the welfare of individuals and to the general benefit of society,” Allen posited. He continued, “but then the moral virtues are represented in the Gospel as the result of faith in Jesus Christ, or the consequence of love to him,—so that we may say, with the earnestness of the Christian poet,—’Talk they of morals? O, thou bleeding Love!—The grand morality is love of Thee.’”51 As a graduate of Harvard (1802) and president of both Dartmouth College (1817–1819) and Bowdoin College (1820–1839), Allen knew the value of studying Greek and Roman literature. As an accomplished biographer, he also knew the importance of history. But Allen made a significant distinction between classical virtue and Christian virtue. In his mind, Christianity offered “the most perfect system of morals” and “moral virtues” because


47 Wayland, Sermons Delivered in the Chapel of Brown University, 14, 112, 113, 155, 195, 263.


49 Charles Grandison Finney, Systematic Theology, ed. Anthony Uyl (Woodstock, ON: Devoted, 2018), 42. E. Brooks Holifield explains, “[Finney’s] theology of moral government consisted of a series of maneuvers to uphold the obligation of immediate and persisting obedience to moral law. Rather than contrast the law and the gospel, he urged that the design of the gospel was to establish the law and enforce obedience to it” (Holifield, Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 364).


51 William Allen, Christ Crucified (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842), 4.
it was grounded in love to God. Although Greek and Roman philosophers and poets knew something of virtue and “talked of morals,” these were incomplete without the “bleeding Love” of the gospel. Allen’s sermon text revealed the way he viewed the relationship between Christian and non-Christian virtue: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23–24).

During the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, Christian ethics were in large measure republican ethics, as the concept of disinterestedness shaped the most heterodox of founders as well as the most orthodox of clergymen. For example, on March 5, 1773, Unitarian John Adams wrote in his diary that his defense of British soldiers in the so-called Boston Massacre was “one of the most gallant, generous, manly, and disinterested Actions of my whole Life.”52 Years later, in 1791, the Deist Thomas Jefferson told George Washington that Adams was “one of the most honest and disinterested men alive.”53 Interestingly, Trinitarian Christians spoke in a similar manner to describe the work of God. In 1798, when the Reverend Samuel J. Mills reported the “unusual religious appearances” in the town of Torringford in the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, he happily noted that God had awakened dozens of sinners to the sovereignty of God and “the duties of unconditional submission and disinterested affection.”54 And the emphasis upon disinterestedness did not seem to fade in the earliest decades of the republic. So fond of disinterestedness was Charles Finney in the twilight of his ministry that he was convinced that there was “no true love but disinterested love.”55

Indeed, one of the primary reasons that the principle of disinterestedness pervaded the evangelical mind in America is due to the perception that self-love had begun to pervade the world around them. By the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville reported that self-interest had become “universally accepted” in the United States, as the country encountered a “market revolution” on the coast, a rising slave plantation economy in the South, and increasing land speculation in the West.56 For Separate Baptist Isaac Backus, the War of Independence was rooted in self-love—on both sides. According to Backus, “Self-love, under the specious name of government and a concern for the public good, has moved and now moves the Britons to act towards us like incarnate devils. And self-love in this country, by sinking our public credit, has exposed us to greater danger than all their fleets and armies could do.”57

Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, American theologians had a litany of reasons to suspect

55 Finney, Systematic Theology, 153.
that self-love had become a popular and even celebrated concept in their market-driven generation. 1776 was the year Adam Smith published his *Wealth of Nations* wherein he argued that human ambition and avarice were actually a social benefit. In 1788, even the framers of the United States Constitution prided themselves in their ability to tailor the new government to the natural self-interest of human beings.

In *The Federalist No. 51*, James Madison asked, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” The respective offices must therefore be designed “in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other—that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights.” Socially, politically, and economically, American Christians inhabited a world that seemed to welcome self-love as a public good.

Against the idea of selfish ambition, churches preached sacrifice. Christians in both the North and South responded to the greed and ambition around them by stressing disinterestedness as a key characteristic that distinguished the godly from those of the world. In Charleston, Baptist Richard Furman urged his congregants to exercise a “love of disinterested virtue, and generous conduct, excited by every engaging motive.” In New York, Rev. Seth Williston declared, “In deciding on the character of our personal religion, the grand inquiry must be, Is it disinterested?” Samuel Hopkins’s Edwardsean concept of “disinterested benevolence” was so popular in American religious culture that it crossed nearly all denominational lines and was even utilized by the so-called “father of Unitarian Christianity” William Ellery Channing. While his mentor Jonathan Edwards had sought to balance disinterested benevolence with self-love, Hopkins abandoned the concept of self-love altogether, insisting that Christians should be willing to be damned for the glory of God! In Hopkins’s mind, the only way to be sure that someone repudiated their own private interest was if they were willing to lose their own soul for Christ’s sake. Although Jonathan Edwards Jr. did not adopt his teacher’s extreme view, he too emphasized disinterestedness, claiming that “the nature of true religion [is] in a disinterested spirit.” In the American mind, to be religious was to be virtuous, and to be virtuous was to be disinterested.

But disinterestedness required a bit of limelight. Seeking to be virtuous for the good of the infant nation, Christians in the early republic often expressed their determination to maintain an “enlarged public spirit,” convinced that it was their duty to reform their communities according to the Word of

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62 According to Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Finney not only emerged from institutions that had been built by Hopkinsians but was influenced by the New Divinity itself” (Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 30).

Just as John Winthrop had exhorted the Massachusetts Bay colonists in 1630 to be a “city on a hill,” Christians in the early United States believed they too were called to live out a visible, public faith. In addition to the biblical command to “love one another” (John 15:12), and rooted in the Puritan vision of a Christian commonwealth, voluntary societies and moral reform groups arose out of the republican ideal of a virtuous and free society. Along with the federal and state-by-state disestablishment of religion, the so-called “benevolent empire” that arose in the new republic was erected upon a republicanized Christianity which emphasized the free exercise of religion as the highest form of virtue. In turn, if certain Christians did not appear to promote the common good, they were criticized for their self-interest and lack of virtue. For example, when frontier missionary John Mason Peck arrived in Liberty, Missouri, in September 1824, he painted the local settlers as uneducated and ungodly:

> The people who have settled this district are chiefly from Kentucky and Tennessee, sadly destitute of public spirit, and manifest a great degree of apathy toward benevolent institutions, even when they are obviously intended for their own benefit. More than one hundred of these families are believed to be entirely destitute of the Scriptures, yet when I explained—after preaching—the design of an auxiliary Bible society, the need and the benefits of it, and then urged its formation, no one stepped forward and offered to engage in it. In Ray and Clay and Lillard counties, little or nothing could be effected.65

Peck correlated a “public spirit” with a willingness to improve and educate society. In Peck’s mind, the settlers from Kentucky and Tennessee were not just poor Americans; they were questionable Christians who had neither a desire to serve the community nor a will to promote the gospel. Peck spent most of his life contending against anti-missionary Baptists, whom he associated with a lack of “public spirit,” and who, ironically, were indwelled by a republican spirit of their own.66

In order to exercise Christian virtue, one had to be willing to be a somewhat public figure, beginning with church attendance. Sabbath observance was yet another demand of a republican society because it strengthened the character and discipline of the people. If the people of Massachusetts stopped observing the Sabbath for half a century, Williams College President Zephaniah Swift Moore asked in 1818, “what would be its religious and moral character? Go to those places within the limits of the United States, where there has been no Sabbath for only half that period, and they will tell you.”67 Like Peck, Moore believed in the power of social reform and voluntary societies to calibrate the moral compass of America, most especially on the frontier. If Americans could not cultivate a “public spirit” at

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64 Francis Wayland, “The Duty of Obedience to the Civil Magistrate,” in *Sermons Delivered in the Chapel of Brown University* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, & Lincoln, 1849), 262.


66 According to Joshua Guthman, the dissent of Primitive Baptists “was steeped in the kind of customary republicanism that plain folk used to savage elites.” Guthman states, “Primitive Baptists’ self-image could fit comfortably within the generous confines of Mark Noll’s term [the American intellectual synthesis], but Primitives were considerably more skeptical of the senses than many nineteenth-century Protestants” (Guthman, *Strangers Below: Primitive Baptists and American Culture* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015], 162). Therefore, one might say that the anti-mission movement was not a battle against republicanism, but a battle within republicanism.

church, they would not do so in society. In the South, the connection between church and society was no less strong, demanding that the pastor exhibit republicanism and public virtue in its purest form. As E. Brooks Holifield has demonstrated, “the minister was to become a public self. He was to conform, without hypocrisy, to the expectations of the improved and elevated classes. Indeed, he was to identify himself, without reserve, with his public role.”

The role of public virtue in a republican society casts an even greater light upon the evil of slavery in the early republic and the contradiction that existed between the nation’s ideals and its institutions. Without their freedom, slaves were not simply deprived of basic human dignity and civil rights, but they were also unable to exercise public virtue. They inhabited a republican society and were instructed in its ideals, but without access to them. For example, how could one practice disinterestedness without the possibility of self-interest? Sacrifice seemed like an empty concept for someone who owned nothing. Even pro-slavery theologians considered whether virtue was possible for slaves. In a published sermon entitled *The Rights and the Duties of Masters* (1850), Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell concluded, “The question is—not whether it is the state most favorable to the offices of piety and virtue—but whether it is essentially incompatible with their exercise. This is the true issue.” Thornwell, who viewed the conflict over slavery as a war between “Christianity and Atheism,” obviously did not believe virtue was unattainable to the slave. Nevertheless, regardless of one’s position on the slavery issue, for many black and white Christians, the morality of slavery hinged on the extent to which slaves could exercise virtue. To deprive a human being of virtue was, at least in part, to deny them of their faith. For this reason, blacks were much more prone to speak of “holy Freedom” than “holy virtue.”

While Christian slaves were not barred from some level of private virtue (i.e., temperance, frugality), even these were limited apart from liberty. Like most Christian groups, African American Christianity underwent a republicanization in the early republic that shaped the black vision of the Christian life, but with less of an emphasis upon virtue as the means of sustaining the republic. While white Christians were speaking of the “public good,” black Christians were securing their very existence and the future of their own communities. Many slaves believed that if they could but possess the republican ideal of freedom, they could then achieve virtue in a free society. After Abraham Lincoln signed a bill on April 16, 1862, abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, Daniel Alexander Payne’s welcoming address to his fellow blacks presented the beautiful potentials of a republican life:

> Enter the great family of Holy Freedom; not to lounge in sinful indolence, not to degrade yourselves by vice, nor to corrupt society by licentiousness, neither to offend laws by crime, but to the enjoyment of a well-regulated liberty, the offspring of generous laws; of law as just as generous, as righteous as just—a liberty to be perpetuated by equitable law, and sanctioned by the divine; for law is never equitable, righteous, just, until it harmonizes with the will of Him, who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” and who commanded Israel to have but one law for the home-born and the stranger.

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Having attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, been ordained by a Lutheran Synod, and then having joined Richard Allen's A.M.E. Church in 1841, Payne believed that freedom without faith was no freedom at all. But with their new “holy Freedom,” blacks in Washington, DC could make their own choices and live their own virtuous lives. In warning his brethren against vices like “indolence” and “licentiousness” and unregulated liberty, Payne was extolling the republican ideals of prudence, restraint, and moderation. He believed that all of these virtues “harmonized” with the will of God and the teachings of the Bible. Many African Americans believed that they now had the opportunity to exercise at least some degree of virtue in American society. Whether they would receive honor, the highest republican ideal, was still another matter. Proponents of colonization like John Hough of Middlebury College argued that, for free blacks, “No station of honor or of authority is accessible.”

Ironically, in the land of the free, it seemed the blacks were either deemed capable of republicanism and consigned to chains, or considered incapable of republicanism and therefore best suited to be shipped to Africa.

African American Christians were “as desirous of freedom” as their white brothers and sisters. As a result, their republican aspirations were often just as strong, and they condemned slavery because it was both anti-biblical and anti-republican. When slaves were finally emancipated in the state of New York in 1827 after an 1817 law became effective, Nathaniel Paul, pastor of the Hamilton Street Baptist Church in Albany, celebrated the historic day by lauding the “spirit of pure republicanism” that had finally sprouted from the seeds of liberty planted in 1776. In Paul’s view, slavery robbed both slaves and slave-owners of their virtues. Explaining republican ideals in a biblical frame, Paul averred,

> After the fall of man, it would seem that God, foreseeing that pride and arrogance would be the necessary consequences of the apostacy, and that man would seek to usurp undue authority over his fellow, wisely ordained that he should obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow; but contrary to this sacred mandate of heaven, slavery has been introduced, supporting the one in all the absurd luxuries of life, at the expense of the liberty and independence of the other. Point me to any section of the earth where slavery, to any considerable extent exists, and I will point you to a people whose morals are corrupted; and when pride, vanity and profusion are permitted to range unrestrained in all their desolating effects, and thereby idleness and luxury are promoted, under the influence of man, becoming insensible of his duty to his God and his fellow creature.

According to Paul, by prohibiting slaves the right to “obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow,” slave-owners denied them not only the virtue of “liberty and independence,” but industry and the divine gift of work, as instituted by God in the Garden of Eden. Conversely, by affording white men such “absurd luxuries of life,” slavery created a people “whose morals are corrupted,” impugning the very ideals of their religion. The republicanization of American Christianity, as illustrated by Paul, took place not simply in white churches, but in black congregations, who likewise sought to fulfill “his duty to his

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God and his fellow creature.” Ironically, blacks may not have yet been citizens in the United States, but many already shared a similar vision of a godly commonwealth.

Not surprisingly, the virtues that were extolled among black and white Christians in the early national period were ultimately applied to Christ himself. Republican virtues were cast theologically. In *Grace Consistent with Atonement* (1785), Jonathan Edwards Jr. contended that Christ’s death on the cross satisfied public justice, which he defined as comprehending all moral goodness and “every other virtue, as truth, faithfulness, meekness, forgiveness, patience, prudence, temperance, fortitude, &c.” This was republican justice. In Edwards’s version of the atonement, Jesus Christ becomes the classic republican public servant, seeking the good of the cosmic community at the expense of his own life. The cross was, in some sense, republicanism on display. Although historians have written extensively on the *freedom* for which Christ died and how Americans readily connected their political liberty with spiritual liberty, almost no one has examined the way that Christians during this period republicanized the way that Christ died. The younger Edwards was by no means the only New England theologian to turn Jesus Christ into George Washington, so to speak. In fact, theologians often described Christ’s atonement as if he were one of their local officials. In *The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement, Proposed to Careful Examination* (1785), Stockbridge pastor Stephen West asserted that the purpose of the death of Christ was to show “his regards to the good of the great community over which he presides.” In a remarkably republican analogy, West explained, “Whenever the supreme Magistrate neglects the execution of the laws, he loses the confidence of the people; and his regard to the public welfare becomes suspected. No one can confide in his public spirit, when he suffers the disturbers of the peace to go unpunished: for ideas of true regard to public good, as necessarily connect punishments with crimes, as rewards with virtue.” Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, was a republican leader. Models of the atonement were drawn from a number of republican and patriotic images of the day. Founder and president of the Massachusetts Missionary Society Nathanael Emmons even illustrated the necessity of the atonement with an anecdote about George Washington himself: During the republicanization of American Christianity, the concept of virtue was elevated to new importance, and for a people who valued sacrifice for the sake of the greater good, Jesus Christ inevitably became the model republican. From this seminal idea of godly virtue, American Christians would revolutionize the doctrine of God, man, and seemingly everything in between.

3. Anti-Republicanism

As the zeitgeist of the early republic, republicanism was just as recognizable (if not more so) to its opponents as it was to its defenders. Not surprisingly, critics of republicanized Christianity were often from other countries or were ensconced in theological traditions firmly rooted in other countries.

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In one way or another, due to influences like loyalist Anglicanism or German mediating theology, these groups did not share the ethos that characterized American Christianity in the early national period. They saw republicanism either as a threat to their way of life, as an aberrant form of historic Christianity, or both. Yet, these dissenting voices in the church still had the effect of solidifying republican Christianity as a movement and further yoking republicanism with the spirit of America itself. In perhaps no other group was this more evident than in Methodism, a denomination with deep ties to the mother country. As Russell E. Richey has shown, “Prior to the Revolution, Methodists could, and for the most part did, simply ignore the state.” During the War of Independence, Methodists remained so “aloof” from the republican agenda that they were often suspected of loyalism and even persecuted for their “Tory imprint.” Bishop Francis Asbury, the only Methodist minister from Britain to remain in America during the war, remained in relative seclusion. Even Freeborn Garrettson, one of the first American-born Methodist preachers, adopted a pacifist approach. Therefore, the intellectual and moral movements taking place in the United States were not absorbed into the Methodist worldview as they did most other Christian groups. For example, in 1784, when Asbury read Georgia Baptist Silas Mercer’s [*Tyranny Exposed*], he scoffed, “His is republicanism run mad. Why [be] afraid of religious establishments in these days of enlightened liberty?”

Nevertheless, even the Anglicized, English-rooted Methodists could not stop the current of republicanism from flowing through the denomination, or at least from taking part of the denomination with it. In 1794, James O’Kelly established the Republican Methodist Church, breaking away from the British Methodism of John Wesley, who in 1790 had scoffed, “We are no republicans, and never intend to be.” Behind the fracture were the principles of the Revolution itself. In *The Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government*, O’Kelly attacked the un-republican nature of episcopacy, comparing American Methodists’ relationship to Wesley to Americans’ relationship to the British crown. Spurning the canon law of the Methodist Church, which he referred to as “Wesley’s old general rules,” O’Kelly declared that “those rules, are no more the rules of the Methodist Church in America, than the British government is the civil government of Columbia.” Since the United States had gained liberty from England, argued O’Kelly, why would its churches then submit to England’s ecclesiastical authority? The Revolution had created a denominational crisis. O’Kelly sounded remarkably like an American pamphleteer when he reasoned, “The governors of the Methodist Episcopal Church, not only come into office without being elected by the suffrage of the people, but continue in office, so long as they please to walk by the rules themselves have made; and whenever they please to change their conduct, they can change their laws.” O’Kelly indicted the British Methodists for essentially the same offense committed by Parliament just two decades prior: tyranny without representation. As Richey explains, in this new version of Methodist religion, O’Kelly would “baptize republicanism. In that sense, O’Kelly’s protest and his critique belonged to this larger effort to adapt the ideology of the Revolution to Christian use and to give Christian direction to the nation.”

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81 Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 90.
But O’Kelly’s republicanism was more than simply American prejudice against Britain or anti-
tyranny. Although his primary focus was on rights and liberties, the seminal ideal of virtue is still extant
in his protest, underlying many of his arguments against the British Methodists. O’Kelly believed that
republicans had the moral high ground:

As to my conduct, it may be traced through the American revolution. After the itinerant
preachers fled from the south, for fear of danger; I labored and traveled from circuit to
circuit, in North Carolina, to feed and comfort those poor distressed sheep, left in the
wilderness…. I was taken prisoner by the tories, and robbed: I was retaken before day,
by captain Peter Robertson, the great and noted whig. I was afterward taken prisoner
by the British: The chief officer urged me to subject myself to my king. Although I was
in his hands, I would not yield. He offered to release me if I would solemnly promise
not to let any man know, asked or not asked, where the British army lay. I refused to do
that. Then I was despised, and very near famished for bread. At which time I resolved
through grace, to hold my integrity till death. My honor, my oath—my soul was at stake!!82

In some ways, O’Kelly had undergone a spiritual and moral baptism during the Revolution. As a
lone itinerant preacher in the South, he had experienced the weaknesses of the Methodists’ centralized
polity in England. As a British prisoner, he had been plunged into a fiery trial that had tested his integrity,
his honor, and indeed his Christianity. Consequently, when he emerged from the war, O’Kelly adhered
to a style of Methodism that fused episcopacy and tyranny together as twin evils and merged republican
virtues like integrity and honor together with faith. Without an inveterate sense of virtue, ministers like
O’Kelly would not have attacked anti-republicanism so severely. By threatening liberty, British religious
leaders were endangering Americans’ ability to exercise virtue and therefore impugning the ideals
of Christianity itself. And as a virtuous people, it was an American duty to resist corruption. Before
anything else, republicanism was a moral philosophy, not a defense of any written document or polity
or creed.

During the “Second” Great Awakening, an event which lasted for the first several decades into
the new republic, the chasm between those who embraced republicanism and those who did not, steadily
grew. While not all anti-revivalists were anti-republicans, many skeptics of revivalism began to associate
the unrefined, individualistic, frenzied style of revivalists with republican Christianity. None were more
critical of the Second Great Awakening than the proponents of the so-called Mercersburg Theology,
a movement within the German Reformed Church which embraced German idealism, emphasized
the centrality of the doctrine of Christ, and replaced the subjectivity of evangelical revivalism with
the objectivity of church liturgy. According to John Williamson Nevin, professor of Biblical Literature
(1830–1840) at the newly founded Western Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, “The fond notion
which some have of a republican or democratic order in Christianity … is just as far removed from the
proper truth of the gospel as any other that could well be applied to the subject.” For Nevin, it was Christ
who shaped the church, not the church who shaped Christ. Ultimately, religion was not invented by
human beings or conceived by earthly modes of thinking, but handed down by the ministry of Christ
and the apostles. “The basis of Christianity, as it meets us in the New Testament,” he demurred, “is not
the popular mind and popular will as such in any form or shape.”83 As a philosophical idealist, Nevin

82  O’Kelly, The Author’s Apology, 74–75.
was just as hostile toward Scottish Common Sense Realism, which he also associated with republican
religion.

Philip Schaff, Nevin’s protégé who was trained in Germany by such names as Baur, Tholuck, Hengstenberg, and Neander, even viewed Roman Catholicism as a check against the tide of republicanism in American evangelicalism, both of which he viewed as filled with theological and social extremes. Schaff, who was criticized for his sympathies with the Oxford Movement, believed that an unrestrained republican spirit had led to sectarianism and the atomization of American society. In *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character* (1855), Schaff observed, “On the free Republican and Puritanic soil of North America the Roman Catholic Church, with its medieval traditions, centralized priestly government, and extreme conservatism, seems to be almost an anomaly, but is perhaps just on this account necessary and useful as a check and corrective for the extremes of Protestantism and religious radicalism.” Schaff believed that human bondage in the “freest country in the world” was likewise an “anomaly,” but his anti-slavery views were not so much the product of republicanism as they were governed by his Hegelian view of history and belief in human progress, both of which he had imbibed from his teachers in Germany. Schaff was not an abolitionist, but believed that “slavery will gradually die out of itself” and that the church should work with the state “to provide for a gradual emancipation of the slaves, by training them to the rational use of freedom, and by laws for the liberation of the new generation at a certain age.” After a visit to the Fatherland, Schaff explained the significance of the Civil War in terms of divine retribution: God had judged the United States for its centuries-long complicity in the evil of slavery.

Yet, for all of Schaff’s critiques of American society and republicanized Christianity, he too adhered to certain republican ideals in his faith. He was, after all, from a republic. Schaff “contended that from the free air of Switzerland he imbibed a republican, if not quite a democratic, predilection, and so could see the United States as a sort of extended Switzerland.” In his preface to the first edition of *America*, Schaff stated plainly, “For religion is the deepest and holiest interest of man, and thrives best in the atmosphere of freedom. It is, in fact, itself the highest freedom.” In the American version printed in 1855, he concluded the preface with the maxim “No liberty without virtue; no virtue without religion; no religion without Christianity; Christianity, the safeguard of our republic and hope of the world.” Schaff had imbibed a fair degree of republican Christianity, albeit from a European vantage point. As he would relay to his colleagues in Berlin after ten years in the United States, despite the many evils that beset the American nation in its infancy, the United States was in fact the “world of the future.”

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89 Schaff, *America*, 82.
4. Conclusion

In *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815–1837*, Paul E. Johnson refers to the epoch between Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson as “a generation of change.” American Christianity during this period could be characterized in much the same way, as the spirit that indwelled American politics and culture also transformed its religion. That spirit was republicanism, and it reinforced the already tight link between the pulpit and the public square. In *The Loving Kindness of God Displayed in the Triumph of Republicanism in America* (1809), evangelist Elias Smith exhorted his listeners, “Venture to be as independent in things of religion as those which respect the government in which you live.” In Smith’s mind, to be an American citizen and to be a Christian were distinct, though overlapping, concepts. Thus, when Smith instructed the congregation to “be republicans indeed,” he was not simply being patriotic; he was speaking the dominant language of American Christianity. This process of republicanization began before the Revolution and lasted at least until the Civil War, when a predominantly Christian nation was ripped apart over issues like freedom, justice, honor, integrity, and so many other republican ideals that had buoyed their nascent republic in the antebellum period. Indeed, the vestiges of Christian republicanism could still be found after the war itself, guiding the American people in the midst of tragedy. One week after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, Brooklyn pastor Henry Ward Beecher offered a word of encouragement to his congregants at Plymouth Church that would have made his father Lyman proud:

Republican institutions have been vindicated in this experience as they never were before; and the whole history of the last four years, rounded up by this cruel stroke, seems now in the providence of God, to have been clothed with an illustration, with a sympathy, with an aptness, and with a significance, such as we never could have expected or imagined. God, I think, has said, by the voice of this event, to all nations of the earth, “Republican liberty, based upon true Christianity, is firm as the foundation of the globe.”

By the end of the nineteenth century, Christian Republicanism had survived in the United States, albeit in enervated form, offering to war-weary Americans the same beliefs and ideals that had carried the republic through its infancy. But much had changed. In many ways, republicanism gave way to Reconstruction, as a divided and less optimistic nation re-envisioned long-cherished concepts like freedom and the common good. By clarifying the dominant ideology of Christian republicanism that flourished in the early republic, Christians today can better understand how early Americans reconciled their religious, social, and political values, and why many of those values continue to persist in American culture today.


John Wesley and Faith at Aldersgate

— Roger W. Fay —

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Abstract: The importance of justification by faith to the thinking of John Wesley (1703–1791) both during and after his Aldersgate Street experience in May 1738 has long been doubted by some Wesley scholars. This article demonstrates that the historical data surrounding Aldersgate is compelling and points to the validity of Wesley’s own interpretation of that occasion. A reprise of the historical data, coupled with an examination of some alternative interpretations by distinguished modern Wesley scholars, demonstrates the weak historical basis for interpretations that downplay justification by faith. John Wesley remains an important and instructive figure in the history of evangelical revivals.

It is about 285 years since John Wesley (1703–1791) experienced for the first time an assurance that his sins were forgiven. He famously wrote in his Journal for 24 May 1738:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

But, despite this emphatic and memorable statement, some modern scholars have been hesitant to accept Wesley’s explanation of Aldersgate’s significance or to give it the prominence that it clearly had for him; to put it more pointedly, they are uncertain about the continuing centrality of justification

1 The exact location of this meeting-place; its attendees, whether Anglican or Moravian; the person reading Luther’s preface out aloud; and which part of the preface was being read when Wesley’s heart was ‘strangely warmed,’ are all uncertain. However, according to W. Reginald Ward, Moravian sources suggest the location was Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street. Ward also says the preface reader may have been William Holland (1711–1761), who introduced Charles Wesley to Luther’s commentary on Galatians, Journal and Diaries I (1735–1738), ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, The Works of John Wesley 18 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 249 n. 79.

by faith to the thinking of the more mature Wesley. This hesitation has, in some cases, been partly due to their own theological presuppositions, but also, no doubt, due to several enigmatic factors emanating from Wesley himself.

These factors include, first and foremost, Wesley’s surprising footnotes to the ‘pessimistic’ January 1738 entries concerning his spiritual state, in the 1774 edition of his *Journal*; second, his modified, post-Aldersgate doctrinal emphases, often perceived as confusing and even idiosyncratic; and third, his occasional, post-Aldersgate expressions of self-doubt. Wesley was also not immune from lapses of memory or the retrospective revising of details impinging on his past actions, particularly in apologetical contexts.

Wesley’s theologising after Aldersgate was often complex and at times inconsistent. But, as his own soteriological understanding developed, he never jettisoned Aldersgate’s evangelical significance, whatever caveats and nuances he later incorporated into his writings. For example, in 1785 he preached:

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.

Salvation is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, ‘through grace’, we ‘are saved by faith’.

This complex statement, with its own rather unique understanding of how grace works, invites further analysis (beyond the scope of this article), but what is clear is that, for Wesley, salvation
culminates in 'the proper Christian salvation; whereby, “through grace”, we “are saved by faith”'. Wesley's description, here given in old age, of 'the proper Christian salvation' coheres well with his account of what happened at Aldersgate.

However puzzling the enigmas, to undervalue what Aldersgate meant to Wesley is to misunderstand both the man and his ministry, and to help perpetuate an unhelpful trend in Wesley studies, which John W. Wright highlighted in a wider context:

During John Wesley's life and within the early nineteenth century and onward, polemic has accompanied the question of how to situate the texts and practices of John Wesley as interpreted by friend and foe alike. His heirs have proven a most fractious group. They have abandoned Wesley's seemingly fundamental commitments, consequently taking the movement in radically different directions.¹⁰

If wrong perceptions concerning John Wesley's fundamental commitments, especially his relationship to faith, have gained traction, they need correction, both for the sake of historical accuracy and because, despite any eccentricities, Wesley stood for theological centralities that matter as much in the present as the past.

For all his shortcomings, Wesley's role was that of a pioneer leader of the eighteenth-century evangelical awakening in Britain, reinforced by energetic longevity, strong leadership and organising abilities,¹¹ and perpetuated by the vigorous impact of Wesleyan Methodism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹² All these factors stamped Wesley's influence on evangelicalism for well over two centuries, so that his legacy was felt in both Established and Nonconformist churches.¹³ And, arguably, even today Wesley's influence as a ministerial role model for an evangelical awakening is still commended among some Protestant churches by means of serious literature.¹⁴

So this article first treads familiar ground by recalling uncontested but now relatively neglected historical data—including the writings of Peter Bohler (1712–1775), an important eyewitness—surrounding Wesley's 'conversion'. Second, it assesses some more recent interpretations of Aldersgate by influential Wesley scholars, from the perspective that the best interpretations must relate robustly to the primary historical sources. It is this author's conviction that this aspect of Wesley scholarship urgently needs revisiting.


¹¹ Typical is this anecdote of early Methodist preacher John Nelson (1707–1774). When he and Wesley were preaching at St Ives in Cornwall, Nelson wrote, 'At that time, Mr Wesley and I lay on the floor: he had my great coat for his pillow, and I had Burkitt’s Notes on the New Testament for mine. After being here near three weeks, one morning, about three o’clock, Mr Wesley turned over, and, finding me awake, clapped me on the side, saying, “Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer: I have one whole side yet, for the skin is off but on one side”', John Nelson, 'An Extract of John Nelson's Journal', in The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves, Vol. 1, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871).


1. February–April 1738

Two days after landing at Deal after his mission to Georgia (1735–1738), Wesley arrived in London.\textsuperscript{15} His journal entry for 3 February 1738 acknowledged that God had humbled and used him and taught him various lessons, including to ‘beware of men’. In addition, he recorded, ‘All in Georgia have heard the word of God. Some have believed and begun to run well.’\textsuperscript{16}

Despite this relatively upbeat entry, Wesley had, in fact, returned from the colony with a deep sense of personal failure. This is apparent in his January 1738 journal entries made during the voyage home.\textsuperscript{17} It also becomes apparent when, nearly four months later, spiritual failure is the prevailing theme of most of his lengthy autobiographical memorandum, written for readers of his Journal to help them ‘better understand’ what happened at Aldersgate. The flavour of this account is exemplified by the memorandum’s ninth section:

> All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in Him, bringeth salvation ‘to every one that believeth’, I sought to establish my own righteousness; and so laboured in the fire all my days. I was now properly ‘under the law’; I knew that ‘the law’ of God was ‘spiritual; I consented to it that it was good’. Yea, ‘I delighted in it, after the inner man’. Yet was I ‘carnal, sold under sin’… In this vile, abject state of bondage to sin, I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering.\textsuperscript{18}

In London Wesley met with the Georgia Trustees and informed them of the ‘truly deplorable’ state of the colony and his reasons for leaving it. Then on 7 February he, for the first time, met Moravian missionary Peter Bohler, who was a 25-year-old theology graduate of the University of Jena, as well as three other Moravians—Georg Schulius, Abraham Richter and Wensel Neisser—all ‘just then landed from Germany’.

Wesley helped the Moravians find lodgings in London.\textsuperscript{19} Their stay in England was to be brief, while they awaited departure for America. Bohler and Schulius were en route to minister to the negroes of Purrysburg, Carolina, and Neisser to join those Moravians already in Georgia. While in England, Bohler intended to preach to the students at Oxford.\textsuperscript{20} He later reported that his Oxford preaching led to an awakening among both the students and ‘more than a hundred citizens’.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{15} The initial participants in this Anglican mission were John, his brother Charles (1707–1788), Benjamin Ingham (1712–1772) and Charles Delamotte (c.1714–1786).


\textsuperscript{21} John P. Lockwood, Memorials of the Life of Peter Bohler, Bishop of the Church of the United Brethren, ed. Thomas Jackson (Wesleyan Conference Office, 1868), 74.
Wesley’s *Journal* shows that, from February until Bohler’s departure for Carolina on 8 May, their conversations were of crucial significance in reorientating his understanding of salvation away from works-righteousness to salvation by faith alone. The same was to be the case for his brother Charles.

John wrote, ‘From this time I did not willingly lose an opportunity of conversing with [the Moravians], while I stayed in London.’ He journeyed to Oxford with Bohler on 17 February and ‘conversed much’ with Bohler (in Latin, since Bohler was still learning English), but ‘understood him not, and least of all when he said, “My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away”’. Bohler described the Wesley brothers to Count Zinzendorf:

The elder, John, is a good-natured man; he knew he did not properly believe in the Saviour and was willing to be taught. His brother, with whom you often conversed a year ago, is at present very much distressed in his mind, but does not know how he shall begin to be acquainted with the Saviour. Our mode of believing in the Saviour is so easy to Englishmen that they cannot reconcile themselves to it: if it were a little more artful, they would sooner find their way into it…. Of faith in Jesus they have no other idea than men generally entertain. They justify themselves; therefore they always take it for granted that they believe already, and would prove their faith by their works; and thus so plague and torment themselves that they are at heart very miserable.

Wesley was still binding himself by ‘Holy Club’ rules and on 28 February ‘renewed’ his ‘former resolutions’. But on 4 March Bohler recorded this significant conversation:

I took a walk with the elder Wesley and asked him about his spiritual state. He told me that he sometimes felt certain of his salvation, but sometimes he had many doubts; that he could only say this, ‘If what stands in the Bible be true, then I am saved.’ Thereupon I spoke with him very fully; and earnestly besought him to go to the opened fountain, and not to mar the efficacy of free grace by his unbelief.

Wesley recorded his conversation with Bohler the next day:

March 4, Sat. I found my brother at Oxford, recovering from his pleurisy; and with him Peter Bohler, by whom (in the hand of the great God) I was, on Sunday the 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved. Immediately it struck into my mind, ‘Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?’ I asked Bohler whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, ‘By no means.’ I asked, ‘But what can I preach?’ He said, ‘Preach faith till you

22 Lockwood, *Memorials of the Life of Peter Bohler*, 81.
28 Lockwood, *Memorials of the Life of Peter Bohler*, 73.
have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.' Accordingly, Monday the
6th, I began preaching this new doctrine, though my soul started back from the work.29

That Wesley called justification by faith a ‘new doctrine’ reveals that, while professedly adhering
to his Church’s Articles, he did not fully grasp what they taught. Article XI of the Church of England’s
Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion expressly states,

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: wherefore, that we are
justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more
largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

In contrast, Wesley’s spiritual life up to 1738, including his ‘new seriousness’ from about 1725,30
his Holy Club activities31 and his participation in the Anglican mission to Georgia, was driven, albeit
unconsciously, by works-righteousness rather than by ‘salvation by faith’.

After three months of following Bohler’s unexpected advice, to ‘preach faith till you have it’,
Wesley noted that ‘preaching this new doctrine’ offended at least four, and probably six, congregations.32
That Wesley should have encountered this response demonstrates that the doctrine of salvation by
faith was equally ‘new’ to these congregations. By the early eighteenth century, few Church of England
ministers were vigorously promulgating justification by faith as set forth in the Articles.33 Gregory F.
Scholtz has written of that era:

Hundreds of eighteenth-century sermons repeat this theme—that faith without works
cannot satisfy the conditions of salvation, but I have not encountered a single Anglican
sermon that asserts the sufficiency of faith alone. For although it is true that no one
denies the necessity of faith for salvation, few if any preachers emphasize it, and all reject
even the suggestion that salvation might be by faith only.... According to Archbishop
Tillotson, ‘To make men truly good, and to teach them to live well’ is ‘the great business
of religion’.34

On 23 March, Wesley said:

[Bohler] now amazed me more and more by the account he gave of the fruits of living
faith, the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it. The next morning I
began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by ‘the law and the testimony’ and
being confident, that God would hereby show me, whether this doctrine was of God.35

31 V. H. H. Green, The Young Mr Wesley (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 145–201.
33 Late seventeenth century Anglican thinkers favoured varying blends of Scripture, tradition and reason,
rather than Sola Scriptura, in seeking final truth. See Frank Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England (Lon-
34 Gregory F. Scholtz, ‘Anglicanism in the Age of Johnson: The Doctrine of Conditional Salvation,’ Eighteenth-
Wesley’s recourse to ‘the law and the testimony’ at this point reflected an important change of mind, concerning the relative authority of Scripture and tradition, from how he began his Georgia mission. From childhood his parents had inculcated in him a high esteem, not only for the Scriptures and Church of England, but for the early Church Fathers.\(^{36}\) This esteem was enhanced through a select reading list recommended to him by his father in preparation for ordination.\(^{37}\) During the next few years a zeal to recover the ‘Primitive’ Christianity of the early church took hold of Wesley and directed many of his actions in Georgia. In this John Wesley was heavily influenced by Holy Club member John Clayton (1709–1773) and his Manchester-based associate Thomas Deacon (1697–1753). Deacon’s writings directed Wesley to the usages of the Primitive Church.\(^{38}\) Wesley wrote in May 1738 that, from spring 1731 he ‘began observing the Wednesday and Friday Fasts, commonly observed in the ancient Church; tasting no food till three in the afternoon’.\(^{39}\) His ‘Primitive’ focus became ‘so well-known that in 1730 [Wesley’s] friend Mary Pendarves nicknamed him “Primitive Christianity”’.\(^{40}\) Despite the parameters laid down by Article XXI of the Church of England,\(^{41}\) Wesley’s ‘primitivism’ was heavily influenced by tradition.

Then, in September 1736, Wesley’s thinking was radically changed through reading Bishop Beveridge’s (1637–1708) *Pandectae Canonum Conciliorum*. He now agreed that ‘both Particular and “General Councils may err, and have erred” … and that things ordained by Councils as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless they be taken out of Holy Scripture’.\(^{42}\) *Sola Scriptura* was now key to the thinking of Wesley in the weeks leading up to Aldersgate.

On 27 March John Wesley and Charles Kinchin (c. 1711–1742) preached faith and prayed with a condemned man at Oxford Castle. Here Wesley saw for himself the positive impact of the ‘new doctrine’:

> After a space [the convict] rose up, and eagerly said, ‘I am now ready to die. I know Christ has taken away my sins; and there is no more condemnation for me’. The same composed cheerfulness he showed when he was carried to execution; and in his last


\(^{40}\) Hammond, ‘High Church Anglican Influences’, 192. The exact quotation—‘I honour *Primitive Xtianity*, and desire you will let him know as much when you next see him’—which was written by Mary Pendarves (née Granville) to her sister Ann Granville on 4 April 1730, is in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delaney: with interesting Reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte*, ed. Lady Llanover (London, 1861–1862), 1:250.

\(^{41}\) ‘General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes. And when they be gathered together, forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and word of God, they may err and sometime have erred, even in things pertaining to God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture.’

moments he was the same, enjoying a perfect peace, in confidence that he was ‘accepted in the Beloved’.

On Saturday 22 April, Wesley met with Peter Bohler again. He had become convinced from Scripture that what Bohler said concerning the nature of faith was true:

But I could not comprehend what he spoke of an instantaneous work. I could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment: how a man could at once be thus turned from darkness to light, from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost.

I searched the Scriptures again touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles: but, to my utter astonishment, found scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions; scarce any so slow as that of St Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth. I had but one retreat left; namely, ‘Thus, I grant, God wrought in the first ages of Christianity; but the times are changed. What reason have I to believe He works in the same manner now?’

But on Sunday the 23rd, I was beat out of this retreat too, by the concurring evidence of several living witnesses.... Here ended my disputing. I could now only cry out, ‘LORD, help Thou my unbelief!’

Wesley’s final capitulation came when Bohler brought some Moravian brethren to testify personally of their instantaneous conversion. He was now fully persuaded that it was possible to receive faith ‘in a moment’; he was also persuaded that he had not yet received it. He asked that those present should sing, ‘My soul before Thee prostrate lies’. Bohler wrote that:

During the singing of the Moravian version, he often wiped his eyes. Immediately after he took me alone into his own room, and declared, ‘that he was now satisfied of what I said of faith, and he would not question any more about it; that he was clearly convinced of the want of it: but how could he help himself, and how could he obtain such faith? He was a man that had not sinned so grossly as other people’. I replied that it was sin enough that he did not believe on the Saviour: he should not depart from the door of the Saviour until He helped him.... He wept heartily and bitterly, as I spoke to him on this matter, and (insisted that) I should pray with him. I can say of him, he is truly a poor sinner, and has a contrite heart, hungering after a better righteousness than that which he has till now possessed, even the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Bohler recounted how that same evening Wesley preached what he had found so difficult to accept:

In the evening he preached from 1 Cor. 1:23: ‘But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block,’ &c. He had above four thousand hearers and spoke upon this

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45 Wesley’s included his German translation of this hymn by Christian Frederick Richter (1676–1711) in his Collection of Psalms and Hymns (1737), compiled in Georgia.
subject until the congregation was astonished, because no one had ever heard such things from him…. There have been many awakened by it.46

2. May 1738

On 25 April there was heated disagreement between the Wesley brothers about instantaneous conversion. Charles wrote,

We sang and fell into a dispute whether conversion was gradual or instantaneous. My brother was very positive for the latter, and very shocking; mentioned some late instances of gross sinners believing in a moment. I was much offended at his worse than unedifying discourse. Mrs Delamotte left us abruptly. I stayed and insisted a man need not know when first he had faith. His obstinacy in favouring the contrary opinion drove me at last out of the room.47

But by 3 May John was able to write, ‘My brother [Charles] had a long and particular conversation with Peter Bohler. And it now pleased God to open his eyes; so that he also saw clearly what was the nature of that one true living faith, whereby alone, “through grace, we are saved”. On 8 May, Bohler, who had departed for America, wrote to John: ‘Delay not, I beseech you, to believe in your Jesus Christ; but so put Him in mind of His promises to poor sinners that He may not be able to refrain from doing for you what He hath done for so many others’.48

John's and Charles’s spiritual progress was now increasingly inter-connected. On 13 May Charles recorded: ‘At night my brother came, exceeding heavy. I forced him (as he had often forced me) to sing an hymn to Christ, and almost thought He would come while we were singing’. Charles wrote the next day: ‘I longed to find Christ, that I might show him to all mankind; that I might praise, that I might love him’. A few days later, on Wednesday 17 May, he wrote,

I first saw Luther on the Galatians, which Mr Holland had accidentally lit upon. We began, and found him nobly full of faith…. Who would believe our Church had been founded on this important article of justification by faith alone? I am astonished I should ever think this a new doctrine; especially while our Articles and Homilies stand unrepealed, and the key of knowledge is not yet taken away.

Two days later Charles experienced another bout of pleurisy. Then on Whitsunday 21 May John received the ‘surprising news that my brother had found rest to his soul. His bodily strength returned also from that hour’. This was Charles’s ‘Day of Pentecost’.

Charles wrote, ‘I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ’.49 The next day he wrote, ‘My brother coming, we joined in intercession for him. In the midst of prayer, I almost believed the Holy Ghost was coming upon him. In the evening we sang and prayed again. I

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At 5:00 a.m. on Wednesday 24 May John read the words of 2 Peter 1:4 in his Greek New Testament: ‘There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature’. He wrote, ‘Just as I went out, I opened [the Bible] again on those words, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God”. In the afternoon at St Paul’s the words of the anthem were Psalm 130.51 As hopeful as these biblical texts must have seemed to John, he wrote later that day to a friend,52

I know that I, too, deserve nothing but wrath, being full of all abominations, and having no good thing in me to atone for them or to remove the wrath of God. All my works, my righteousness, my prayers need an atonement for themselves.... Yet I hear a voice ... saying, ‘Believe, and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth is passed from death unto life. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life’.... Does ‘His Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God’? Alas! with mine He does not.53

John was convinced that he did not yet have saving faith and of his need to believe in God’s only begotten Son. No longer was he hoping to achieve righteousness by his good works. A revolution in his thinking had taken place.

Then, at about 8:45 p.m. on 24 May, at the society meeting in Aldersgate Street, the climax came. John felt his heart ‘strangely warmed’ and that he did trust in Christ alone for salvation. After describing this momentous realisation, John continued: ‘I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.’ Before long he was buffeted with doubts and temptations, but could write,

[God] ‘sent me help from His holy place’. And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.

Thur. 25. The moment I awaked, ‘Jesus, Master’, was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him, and my soul waiting on Him continually.54

Charles’s journal entry for 24 May said: ‘Towards ten, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared, “I believe”. We sang the hymn with great joy and parted with prayer.’55

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52 The friend is unidentified. Rack suggests it was John Gambold (*Reasonable Enthusiast*, 144).
Both brothers had attained ‘a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven and he reconciled to the favour of God’.\(^{56}\) Both had experienced ‘the inward witness’ that their dying father Samuel Wesley (1662–1735) had more than once spoken of.\(^{57}\) Nearly 30 years later John preached that, ‘The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are children of God’.\(^{58}\) This he experienced on 24 May 1738.

### 3. Interpretations of Aldersgate

However, not all scholars take a conversionist view of what happened at Aldersgate Street.\(^{59}\) In fact, there is a surprising variety of interpretations of this event.\(^{60}\)


Writing in 1964 at the height of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement, Albert Outler observed that: “The Aldersgate Experience” … has come to be the most familiar event in Wesley’s life.\(^{61}\) He then proposed, ‘It often goes unnoticed, however, that it actually stands within a series of significant spiritual experiences, and is neither first nor last nor most climactic.’\(^{61}\)

But an examination of Wesley’s writings shows that he considered Aldersgate not merely one ‘significant experience’ among many, but as an experience pivotal to his whole ministry. Two examples suffice to illustrate this. First, in a letter to Thomas Church, Wesley compared his preaching before and after the year 1738:

(1) From the year 1725 to 1729 I preached much, but saw no fruit of my labour. Indeed, it could not be that I should: for I neither laid the foundation of repentance nor of believing the gospel; taking it for granted that all to whom I preached were believers and that many ‘needed no repentance’. (2) From the year 1729 to 1734, laying a deeper foundation of repentance, I saw a little fruit. But it was only a little, and no wonder: for I did not preach faith in the blood of the covenant. (3) From 1734 to 1738, speaking more of faith in Christ, I saw more fruit of my preaching and visiting from house to house than ever I had done before; though I know not if any of those who were outwardly reformed were inwardly and thoroughly converted to God. (4) From 1738 to this time—speaking continually of Jesus Christ; laying Him only for the foundation of the whole building, making Him all in all, the first and the last; preaching only on this plan, ‘The


\(^{57}\) Letter, 22 March 1748, WCAT.

\(^{58}\) Sermon 11, ‘The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse Two’, Romans 8:16, 4 April 1767, JWSP.


\(^{60}\) Collins, ‘Twentieth-Century Interpretations’.

kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel’—‘the word of God ran’ as fire among the stubble; it ‘was glorified’ more and more; multitudes crying out, ‘By grace are ye saved through faith.’

And, second, in correspondence with ‘John Smith’ he said,

It is true that, from May 24, 1738, ‘wherever I was desired to preach, salvation by faith was my only theme’, that is, such a love of God and man as produces all inward and outward holiness, and springs from a conviction, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, of the pardoning love of God; and that, when I was told, ‘You must preach no more in this church, it was commonly added, ‘because you preach such doctrine!’ And it is equally true that ‘it was for preaching the love of God and man that several of the clergy forbade me their pulpits’, before that time, before May 24, before I either preached or knew salvation by faith.

Aldersgate was, in Wesley’s thinking, an unmistakable turning point.

3.2. Henry D. Rack

In his influential 1989 biography of Wesley, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, Henry Rack’s discussion of Aldersgate is thorough but over-cautious. Rack posits that, in considering Aldersgate in terms of intellectual, theological, spiritual and psychological factors affecting Wesley, it is wise to ‘avoid one-sided, doctrinaire, unitary interpretations and to allow for eclectic and, if necessary, inconsistent positions on Wesley’s part, subject also to changes in the light of his subsequent experience’.

Rack is wary of regarding Aldersgate exclusively as an ‘evangelical conversion’, although he does not altogether rule that aspect out. He suggests that ‘Wesley’s religious problems and the solutions he found for them were conditioned by his upbringing and psychological development’. He enlarges on the phrase ‘evangelical conversion’, saying: “‘Evangelical’ conversion, in fact, really originates no earlier than the very end of the sixteenth century, at least in England, and may almost be said to have been invented by some late Elizabethan Puritans, notably William (‘Drunken’) Perkins’.

Rack is no doubt technically correct in locating the phrase ‘evangelical conversion’ among more modern conversion narratives, but his discussion bypasses the *phenomenon* itself. To imply that ‘evangelical conversion’ only arrived in the late sixteenth century would be to neglect the catholic (that

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62 Letter to Thomas Church, 17 June 1746, WCAT; John Wesley, *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*.


is, wider) perspective of church history. The word ‘conversion’ (and its derivatives) is found as early as the Bible itself, and nearly always in an ‘evangelical’ context.

The idea of personal evangelical conversion was intrinsic to the Reformation, since one of its results was to move the Mediaeval Church from a works-based to a faith-based approach to salvation. When, in 1517, the first of Martin Luther’s (1483–1546) 95 Theses proclaimed, ‘When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance’, it was referring to a personal repentance, not mere participation in a church rite.

The need for evangelical conversion was, by implication, documented even earlier, for example, by the early Church Father Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and in the pre-Reformation teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), John Wycliffe (c.1330–1384) and Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290–1349, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349). Bradwardine wrote concerning Romans 9:16, ‘I had no liking for such teaching, for towards grace I was still graceless … but afterwards … the truth before mentioned struck on me like a beam of grace’.

3.3. Vivian H. H. Green (1915–2005)

Vivian Green’s otherwise valuable study of 1961, The Young Mr Wesley, also failed to do justice to Wesley’s account of Aldersgate. Green presented his experience mainly as ‘psychological reassurance’, that is, as Wesley gaining confidence in the truth he was preaching. In his later book, John Wesley, Green described Wesley’s experience as ‘a spiritual breakdown which by liberating pent-up emotion would bring a re-integration of personality, so setting free creative forces strong enough to change the world around him.

But neither Rack nor Green interacted in detail with Wesley’s theologically rooted descriptions of his spiritual experiences immediately prior to and at Aldersgate. Rack almost caricatures Wesley for his May 1738 memorandum, as having a ‘harsh valuation’ with ‘self-excoriation’ on his pre-conversion

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69 Martin Luther, The 95 Theses (1517).


73 ‘So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy’ (Romans 9:16).

74 John Francis Mcnamara, ‘Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the “Pearl”-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer’ (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1968), 31.

75 V. H. H. Green, The Young Mr Wesley (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 287–88; Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 146–47.

religion. And Geordan Hammond (see below) seems to do something similar in using the phrase ‘self flagellating autobiography’ to describe Wesley’s self-analysis. But these perspectives do not relate meaningfully to Wesley’s deliberate and sustained use of Romans 7 categories to describe his pre-Aldersgate experience, for example:

I was now properly ‘under the law’; I knew that the law of God was ‘spiritual; I consented to it that it was good’. Yea, ‘I delighted in it, after the inner man’. Yet was I ‘carnal, sold under sin’. Every day was I constrained to cry out, ‘What I do, I allow not: for what I would, I do not; but what I hate, that I do. To will is’ indeed ‘present with me: but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me: even the law in my members, warring against the law of my mind; and still ‘bringing me into captivity to the law of sin’.

In Wesley’s later Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament (1755), his comment on Romans 7:14 no doubt reflected how he saw his own experience:

St Paul … interweaves the whole process of a man reasoning, groaning, striving, and escaping from the legal to the evangelical state. This he does from Romans 7:7, to the end of this chapter. ‘Sold under sin’—Totally enslaved; slaves bought with money were absolutely at their master’s disposal.

Wesley was, in 1738, using such categories to identify himself as convinced of sin but not a real Christian. This self-identification remained consistent with his later understanding of how grace works, as described in his 1785 sermon (already quoted):

Salvation is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, ‘through grace’, we ‘are saved by faith’.

To be brought by the Spirit to ‘convincing grace’ is to be brought within reach of the goal of attaining ‘the proper Christian salvation’. For Wesley in 1738, Aldersgate marked the attainment of that final goal.

3.4. Richard P. Heitzenrater

After May 1738, justification by faith was at the centre of John Wesley’s theologising. But, if this doctrine is conceived as occupying the centre of Wesley’s soteriology, there is a marked centrifugal

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78 Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 149.
80 ‘For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin’ (Rom 7:14).
81 John Wesley, ‘Romans’, John Wesley’s Notes on the Bible (1755), WCAT.
82 Sermon 85, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’, Philippians 2:12–13, September–October 1785, JWSP.
tendency in Henry Rack's and Vivian Green's evaluations of Aldersgate, since to different degrees they displace Wesley's experiential discovery of justification by faith from the centre.

The same cannot be said of Richard Heitzenrater's interpretation of Aldersgate, since he argues quite helpfully that the primary issue at Aldersgate was one of assurance, that is of Wesley becoming assured that he was a child of God. But Heitzenrater's insight needs qualifying: Wesley was indeed seeking assurance, but attaining ‘salvation by faith’ is not the same thing as experiencing assurance of salvation (even though for Wesley they seemed the same thing that May evening), in that, conceptually at least, one follows the other. Assurance is not the essence of salvation, but the fruit or result of salvation at work in the soul.

Before Aldersgate, Wesley realised his deepest problem was that he did not have salvation: ‘I know that I, too, deserve nothing but wrath, being full of all abominations, and having no good thing in me to atone for them or to remove the wrath of God.’ Wesley continued his lament: ‘Oh let no one deceive us by vain words, as if we had already attained this faith! By its fruits we shall know. Do we already feel “peace with God” and “joy in the Holy Ghost”? ’

Although in 1738 Wesley accepted a Moravian identification of true faith with full assurance, his autobiographical account for 24 May 1738 was not of someone seeking assurance concerning the reality of his faith, but of someone who believed (rightly or wrongly) Aldersgate to be the place where he actually received saving faith. He had said only a few weeks before Aldersgate:

By the grace of God, I resolved to seek it unto the end, (1) By absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up; (2) by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him, as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.

Whenever exactly that saving faith was communicated, Wesley's assurance was the existential vehicle by which he was at last convinced that he had it.

This explanation coheres with Wesley’s inward disturbance (only a day after his heart had been ‘strangely warmed’) at the thought that the requisite evidence of true faith might not yet be within him: “But is not any sort of fear”, continued the tempter, “a proof that thou dost not believe?”

However, Wesley successfully confronted these fears with the ‘words of St Paul, “Without were fightings, within were fears”’. Aldersgate now marked the point when he realised he had become ‘more than conqueror’ over his temptations, rather than being conquered by them.

### 3.5. Geordan Hammond

In 2014 Geordan Hammond published a monograph, *John Wesley in America, Restoring Primitive Christianity*, demonstrating that Wesley’s ministry in Georgia was focused on planting...
'Primitive Christianity' in the new colony. In this book Hammond characterises Wesley's Georgia ministry as, in broad terms, a success rather than a failure. But for Wesley, looking back on his voyage home in 1737–1738, Georgia was a place of failure:

All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in Him, bringeth salvation ‘to every one that believeth’, I sought to establish my own righteousness; and so laboured in the fire all my days.

In his ascription of success to the Georgia mission Hammond fails to interact fully or convincingly with Wesley’s ‘pessimistic’ self-analyses. He cites silence in other first-hand, contemporary accounts from Georgia as to any impending theological crisis in Wesley as part of his evidence. He avers, ‘Wesley left little evidence for his own assessment of himself in his writings contemporary to the Georgia mission.’ But neither Wesley’s Journal nor his Diary were intended as ongoing commentaries on his state of mind. His Diary is usually highly cryptic and his Journal objective in focus. Only his traumas over the two colonists Beatre Hawkins and Sophy Williamson spill, at times, into the two documents. In the absence of further evidence, Wesley’s January and May 1738 spiritual self-analyses are not so easily set aside.

Whatever Wesley’s state of mind during the Georgia mission, there is evidence enough in his only extant Georgia sermon and in his detailed counselling of a young woman in South Carolina that works-righteousness was the predominant theme of his colonial ministry. Both during and after his return voyage to England Wesley was at pains to make his sense of spiritual failure clear to his readers, so that the transformative work of grace at Aldersgate may be ‘the better understood’ by his readers.

Hammond refers to Wesley’s 1778 sermon, ‘The Late Work of God in North America’, as exemplifying a more positive recollection of Georgia—the inference being that Wesley no longer looked on Georgia as a scene of failure. But Wesley’s autobiographical reference leaves open the exact nature of his role in God’s ‘work of grace’ in 1736. He said,

In the year 1736 it pleased God to begin a work of grace in the newly planted colony of Georgia, then the southernmost of our settlements on the continent of America. To those English who had settled there the year before, were then added a body of Moravians, so called; and a larger body who had been expelled from Germany by the Archbishop of Salzburg. These were men truly fearing God and working righteousness. At the same time there began an awakening among the English, both at Savannah and Frederica; many inquiring what they must do to be saved, and ‘bringing forth fruits meet for repentance’.

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89 Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 190.
90 Sermon 139, ‘On Love’, 1 Corinthians 13:3, 20 February 1736, JWSP.
93 Sermon 131, ‘The Late Work of God in North America’, Ezekiel 1:16, 1778, JWSP.
In the same year there broke out a wonderful work of God in several parts of New England. It began in Northampton, and in a little time appeared in the adjoining towns. A particular and beautiful account of this was published by Mr Edwards, Minister of Northampton. Many sinners were deeply convinced of sin, and many truly converted to God. I suppose there had been no instance in America of so swift and deep a work of grace, for an hundred years before; nay, nor perhaps since the English settled there.

The following year, the work of God spread by degrees from New England towards the south. At the same time it advanced by slow degrees, from Georgia towards the north. In a few souls it deepened likewise; and some of them witnessed a good confession, both in life and in death. In the year 1738 Mr Whitefield came over to Georgia, with a design to assist me in preaching, either to the English or the Indians. But as I was embarked for England before he arrived, he preached to the English altogether, first in Georgia.

Wesley is explicit here concerning the positive contribution of the Moravians and Salzburgers to the awakening and, later in the sermon, highly commendatory of George Whitefield: ‘All men owned that God was with [Whitefield], wheresoever he went; giving a general call to high and low, rich and poor, to ‘repent, and believe the gospel’. But his words hardly negate his 1738 reflections concerning Georgia. In fact, they leave open the exact part he played in any incipient revival.

4. After Aldersgate, Wesley’s Legacy

After Aldersgate, Wesley was a changed man, and his ministry integral to the eighteenth-century evangelical awakening in Britain—an awakening that realised the hopes of the Puritan remnant of the late seventeenth century. Wesley’s legacy was felt in Britain, America and the rest of the world well into the twentieth century. The Gentleman’s Magazine wrote of Wesley in April 1791:

By the humane endeavours of [John Wesley] and his brother Charles a sense of decency in morals and religion was introduced in the lowest classes of mankind, the ignorant were instructed and the wretched relieved and the abandoned reclaimed.... He was one of the few characters who outlived enmity and prejudices, and received in later years every mark of esteem from every denomination.... His personal influence was greater perhaps than any private gentlemen in the country.... Instead of being an ornament to literature he was a blessing to his fellows: instead of the genius of his age, he was the servant of God.

Wesley inculcated the many converts with sobriety, clean living, hard work, piety, accountability and a humanitarian concern for prisoners, slaves, the poor, sick and aged, and children. All this was, from one perspective, the outworking of saving faith at Aldersgate in his life and ministry. But the greatest impact was indirect and delayed.

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John Wesley and Faith at Aldersgate

Between 1791 and 1840 the stream of converts to evangelical Christianity in Britain became a flood, as up to one and a half million people were gathered into the Nonconformist chapels of England and Wales.97 A substantial part of this converting impulse, especially among unskilled labourers and the poor, came through the Primitive Methodists. This movement looked back to Wesley’s example and named their denomination after a phrase Wesley used in one of his last sermons. On 6 April 1790, in preaching at Chester to a gathering of Methodist preachers, Wesley used these closing words:

Fellow labourers, wherever there is an open door, enter in and preach the gospel, if it be to two or three, under a hedge or tree; preach the gospel—go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed and the halt, and the blind: and the servant said, LORD, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

He then lifted up his hands, and with tears flowing down his cheeks, repeated, ‘And yet there is room, and yet there is room,’ and added, ‘and this is the way the primitive [first] Methodists did.’98 ‘Primitive Methodism’ was, according to Primitive Methodists, Methodism as John Wesley would have wanted it and Methodism as first practised after Aldersgate.

The ‘Primitive Methodists’ most famous convert would be the 15-year-old Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), converted after turning in unexpectedly, due to snow, to a morning service at Artillery Street Primitive Methodist Chapel, Colchester, on 6 January 1850. Spurgeon became one of the most influential Baptist preachers of the nineteenth century and, in an indirect sense, part of Wesley’s legacy of faith in the late nineteenth century.99

5. Conclusion

Those alternative interpretations of the significance of Aldersgate which downplay Wesley’s own interpretation of that event are unsupported by convincing historical evidence.100 Wesley never stopped thinking of Aldersgate as the pivotal occasion when he became aware that he had true faith. Only on 24 May 1738 was he able to say: ‘An assurance was given me that [Christ] had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.’ From 1738, during over 50 years of pioneering ministry, he never lost his hold upon justification by faith. As J. E. Rattenbury put it, Aldersgate was ‘equally a terminus ad quem and a terminus a quo. He reached a goal and found a starting point.’101

Where Wesley’s legacy concerning the nature of real faith has been forgotten, loss to the global church has resulted. A rediscovery of both the doctrine and the experience that John Wesley articulated at Aldersgate in 1738 would be highly salutary for the spiritual health of today’s churches.

97 The population of England and Wales in 1801 was 8.9 million. This ingathering is described by Paul E. G. Cook in Fire from Heaven—Times of Extraordinary Revival (Darlington: EP Books, 2009), 21–25.


99 While Wesley’s positive legacy was immense, his theological shortcomings had a lasting negative impact beyond the scope of this article to delineate.

100 Even though confusion later resulted from Wesley’s 1774 glosses to the ‘pessimistic’ January 1738 entries of his Journal (423 nn. 1–2; 424 n. 1), those glosses represented a refinement rather than a rejection of what he had previously written. He did not expunge the original entries.

The House Divided: An Assessment of the American Neo-Evangelicals’ Doctrine of Scripture

— Ryan Reed —

Abstract: Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Lindsell, and Bernard Ramm represent three of the most formative voices within the neo-evangelical movement in America. Nevertheless, these three figures held to three different tones and methodologies on the doctrine of Scripture. Lindsell represents the evangelicals that saw inerrancy as a test for evangelical authenticity, as seen in his works, *The Battle for the Bible* and *The Bible in the Balance*. Though closer to the Lindsellian view, Henry saw inerrancy as a test for evangelical consistency rather than authenticity. Ramm represents evangelicals that affirmed a broad concept of inerrancy but did not see it as either the test of authenticity or consistency. This particular issue would cause early cracks in the unity of the new evangelical movement. By examining these three figures’ understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, this paper will show how the early neo-evangelical leaders struggled to decide how clearly they would identify with their fundamentalist roots.

In October 1976, Carl F. H. Henry sat down with Stephen Board from *Eternity* magazine to discuss neo-evangelicalism. Birthed from the womb of fundamentalism, neo-evangelicalism emerged onto the scene of the American theological stage with the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1943. Men like Harold Lindsell, Bernard Ramm, Kenneth Kantzer, Billy Graham, and Henry himself championed the movement. This new evangelicalism repudiated the spirit of fundamentalism’s separatism while holding fast to the fundamentals of the faith. Nevertheless, the ghost of their funda-
mentalists heritage was hard to remove.2

The movement firmly stood against the separatists, but the question remained: How much of the spirit and symbols of fundamentalism should they preserve?3 Nowhere did this question arise more frequently than on the issue of biblical authority, and on inerrancy in particular. When Harold Lindsell wrote The Battle for the Bible in 1976, he effectively threw down the gauntlet against those who would bear the evangelical title but jettison the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Lindsell’s work magnified the widening controversy over the question of who is a “genuine evangelical.” Naturally, Board began his interview with Henry on this particular subject: “Who on earth is an evangelical in your view?”4

Board’s chief concern dealt with the widening controversy within evangelicalism on whether inerrancy should be a central mark in evangelical identity. In this, the neo-evangelical movement did not have one unified answer. This can be seen in the writings of three neo-evangelical representatives: Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Lindsell, and Bernard Ramm. These three figures represent three different tones and methodologies on the doctrine of inerrancy. Is inerrancy a test for evangelical authenticity, or is it merely a test for evangelical consistency? These three figures ultimately disagreed in their primary concerns. By examining Lindsell’s, Henry’s, and Ramm’s doctrine of Scripture, this paper will attempt to show the underlying presuppositions with which each theology was concerned and argue that evangelicals today should embrace a modified Henrian-Lindsellian position on inerrancy as a test for evangelicalism.

To prove this thesis, this paper aims to analyze three different viewpoints related to inerrancy: first, Lindsell’s doctrine as presented in The Battle for the Bible and The Bible in the Balance; second, the critique of Lindsell’s work by Henry; and third, Ramm’s doctrine in relation to Lindsell and Henry’s critiques. Lastly, this paper will discuss the contemporary applications of these viewpoints for evangelicals.

1. The Battle for the Bible: Beginning the Neo-Evangelical Civil War

In 1946, Charles Fuller chose Harold J. Ockenga to preside over a new evangelical divinity school he hoped would become the “evangelical Cal Tech.”5 Ockenga would operate as the “president in absentia” and “work to recruit the charter faculty and map out the curriculum.”6 Seeing an opportunity

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3 This tension could be seen first at Fuller Theological Seminary. Marsden writes, “As far as their movement was concerned, they all sided firmly with Graham against the separatists and the militant dispensationalists. But for some, as for Graham himself, this inclusivism did not mean abandonment of militant fundamentalist defenses of the faith and its key symbols, especially the inerrancy of Scripture” (George M. Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 171).


5 Owen Strachan, Awakening the Evangelical Mind: An Intellectual History of the Neo-Evangelical Movement (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 111.

6 Daniel P. Fuller, Give the Winds a Mighty Voice: The Story of Charles E. Fuller (Waco, TX: Word, 1972), 200.
to utilize his connections with his fellow Cambridge Evangelicals,7 Ockenga began recruiting them to fill the prospective faculty. One of the men primed for this new endeavor was Harold Lindsell. Lindsell was young, but he possessed administrative abilities and could fill the role of the registrar, along with teaching church history and missions.8

Though the school faced adversity early and often, the prospects for Fuller were excellent.9 Lindsell writes, “The seminary started with thirty-seven students, and in a few years enrolled three hundred. Faculty members were added, buildings were erected, and endowments were secured.”10 At its inception, the school was committed to the fundamental doctrines of the evangelical faith. According to Lindsell, the school committed itself to “provide the finest theological defense of biblical infallibility or inerrancy.”11

The first test for Fuller concerning inerrancy came in 1949 with the hiring of Bela Vasady, who joined as a visiting professor from Princeton Theological Seminary. Vasady had been recruited to Fuller by Henry and Edward Carnell, who were highly impressed with the scholar. Henry reported to Ockenga that Vasady regarded “the Bible as God’s inscripturated revelation, and as infallible.”12 Nevertheless, when the first faculty completed the school’s doctrinal statement, they discovered that Vasady had reservations about an inerrant Scripture. Specifically, the statement adopted by the faculty and by the board of trustees of the seminary stated, “The books which form the canon of the Old and New Testaments as originally given are plenarily inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part. These books constitute the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”13

Vasady made it clear that he could not sign this statement in good faith. Lindsell recounts that the statement included a preface requiring every faculty member to sign it yearly without mental reservations. Anyone who could not do so would voluntarily leave the institution. Vasady believed that inerrancy was a trait that could be “applied to God alone and not to any production in which humans had a hand. The relevant question for him was whether the Scriptures were ‘an authentic source for our salvation.’”14 The early faculty called a special council in the last effort to resolve this difficulty with Vasady. Still, when all was said and done, Vasady agreed to begin looking for another position immediately.

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7 The Cambridge Evangelicals were a group of scholars that studied in Cambridge in the 1940s. These young evangelicals determined to gain elite training and credentials from Harvard and other secular institutions. Many of these evangelicals were drawn to Cambridge because of the influence of Ockenga, who organized the Plymouth Conference. The conference was an early attempt to cultivate the burgeoning neo-evangelical academic impulse. For more on this group, see Garth M. Rosell, The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 187–212.

8 For more on the early faculty of Fuller, see Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 25–27.

9 For a firsthand account of early Fuller see Carl F. H. Henry, Confessions of a Theologian (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 114–43.


11 Lindsell, Battle for the Bible, 107.

12 Marsden, Reforming Evangelicalism, 102. Marsden notes that perhaps Henry and Carnell’s eagerness caused them to see more commonality on Scripture than was actually there.

13 Lindsell, Battle for the Bible, 107.

14 Marsden, Reforming Evangelicalism, 114.
The seminary had survived its first test and had stood upon a statement of biblical inerrancy. Nevertheless, according to Lindsell, by 1962 it became evident that certain faculty and board members no longer held the belief that the Bible was without error. Cracks began to form over the issue until, eventually, the board was confronted with the fact that a number of the faculty did not believe in an inerrant Scripture. In a meeting on what would come to be known as “Black Saturday,” the board refused to stand firm on the original commitment of the seminary’s confession. This event inevitably led to the resignation of several faculty members. Lindsell writes,

Presciently Charles Woodbridge left in 1957. After Black Saturday, on the heels of further abundant evidence of the change of direction, other faculty resignations followed. Wilbur Smith was the next to resign after the 1962–1963 school year closed. I left the institution at the end of the following year, and Gleason Archer left just one year after that. The departure of all four was directly related to the question of biblical inerrancy.

The shift in direction at Fuller was becoming apparent.

The internal struggles of Fuller would soon grow into a wider battle within the broader neo-evangelical movement, and Lindsell would lead the charge. In 1976, he published The Battle for the Bible, which charted the slide away from inerrancy by many organizations considered evangelical. This book included a chapter on “The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary.” It is in this book that Lindsell defines his doctrine of inerrancy.

Lindsell wrote that the Bible, in all of its parts, constitutes the written word of God to men. He affirmed strict inerrancy, believing that the Bible is free from all error in its original autographs. He wrote, “It is wholly trustworthy in matters of history and doctrine. However limited may have been [the original author’s] knowledge, and however much they may have erred when they were not writing sacred Scripture, the authors of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other errors.” Lindsell confessed that the Bible was written by human and divine agencies, but this did not necessitate error.

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15 The Vasady fiasco itself warned of the difficulty to come. It essentially pitted Fuller’s two prominent desires against one another: the desire to maintain doctrinal fidelity and the desire to produce a world-class faculty.

16 Glenn Miller writes that Lindsell’s book marked the end of the “Era of Good Feelings” and set off a series of battles within evangelicalism (Glenn T. Miller, “Baptist and Neo-Evangelical Theology,” Baptist History and Heritage [2000]: 33). Philip Thorne notes, “Various attempts to analyze this battle have occurred, but the important point is that American Evangelicalism in the seventies reached “an impasse” on the interpretation of biblical authority. Some institutions and denominations developed new doctrinal statements or position papers designed to include a range of opinion on the subject (Fuller Seminary, Christian Reformed Church, Wesleyan Theological Society). Others revised doctrinal statements to exclude broader interpretations (Assemblies of God), sponsored conferences to clarify and defend traditional doctrine (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy), or mobilized constituencies to gain control of educational institutions (Southern Baptist Convention)” (Phillip R. Thorne, Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology [Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1995], 23).

17 Lindsell, Battle for the Bible, 106–21. Marsden writes, “To complete the salvo, Lindsell persuaded his old friend Harold Ockenga to write the foreword…. Ockenga [still on the board at Fuller] had nothing but praise for Lindsell’s work and mentioned the Fuller case directly. This was full-scale civil war” (Marsden, Reforming Evangelicalism, 279).

18 Lindsell, Battle for the Bible, 30–31.
Lindsell believed that just as Christ was fully human and fully divine, yet without sin, the Bible is the product of human and divine agencies, yet without error. God cannot lie, he argued; therefore, he cannot produce any falsehood. If Scripture is inspired at all, it must be infallible. This conclusion, for Lindsell, impacts how students of the Bible interpret and study the Bible. Those that hold to the presupposition that Scripture is true will not stumble over its supernatural elements. A confession of biblical infallibility rightly places the Bible above human judgments instead of placing human judgments over the Bible.

Next, Lindsell made two critical arguments concerning biblical inerrancy. First, he argued that inerrancy is a revealed truth belonging to the catholic Christian heritage. He wrote, "It is my contention that, apart from a few exceptions, the church through the ages has consistently believed that the entire Bible is the inerrant or infallible Word of God." Lindsell briefly examined various Christian leaders’ teachings from the early church until the modern era to bolster this claim. He concluded that it has only been in recent years that evangelical Christianity has been "infiltrated by people who do not believe in inerrancy." 

Lindsell's second crucial argument in *The Battle for the Bible* is that inerrancy is a touchstone, watershed, and rallying point for evangelicals. Lindsell believed that returning to biblical inerrancy would usher in a new day of experiencing the blessings of God. He encouraged those who had left the inerrant position to return to this essential belief and those who held the position to remain steadfast. According to Lindsell, when inerrancy was lost, it inevitably led to other concessions. For Lindsell, biblical inerrancy was the anchor that kept believers from theological drift. He believed that the impact of forsaking inerrancy would cause a domino effect that would eventually shipwreck individuals and institutions. Some, nevertheless, believed that Lindsell went as far as to insinuate that those who "disown inerrancy are indeed headed for final wrath and doom."

At the end of *The Battle for the Bible*, it was clear that Lindsell believed that evangelicalism should make biblical inerrancy a benchmark for membership. Moreover, Lindsell argued for a stricter view of inerrancy than many in the evangelical camp. It was also apparent that Lindsell was closer to

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21 Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 70.
22 Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 201–2.

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23 Board, "The House Divided," 24. Lindsell writes, "I do not look for or expect a time in history as we know it when the whole professing church will believe either in inerrancy or the major doctrines of the Christian faith. There will always be wheat and tares growing together until the angels begin their task of reaping the harvest at the end of the age." Carl Henry took particular offense at this statement, calling it "an unfortunate and excessive" statement. In his follow up book, *The Bible in the Balance*, Lindsell responded to Henry that he did not intend to make that implication. He writes, "I thought the statement about the wheat and tares was clear enough and had nothing more in it than the biblical observation that there are wheat and tares awaiting the harvest. I did not have in mind as tares those whose only transgression is a denial of inerrancy. I had in mind the denial of the major doctrines of the Christian faith." Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 34–35.

24 Marsden writes, “Whereas Carnell, in his notorious chapter on ‘difficulties’ in his *Case for Orthodox Theology*, had resorted to the expedient that the Old Testament chronicler might have given us ‘an infallible account of what was said in the public registers and genealogical lists,’ which themselves might have been inaccurate, Lindsell would allow no such equivocations. He implicitly rejected, for instance, Everett Harrison’s principle of interpretation published in Carl Henry’s *Revelation and the Bible*, published in 1958. Harrison, a solid inerrantist, had said
his fundamentalist forefathers in tone than other neo-evangelicals, particularly Carl Henry, one of the four men to which *Battle of the Bible* was dedicated. Although Henry was far closer to the Lindsellian position than Fuller’s, he maintained several reservations about Lindsell’s book.  

### 2. God, Revelation and Authority

Carl Henry may not have been the father of the neo-evangelical group, but he was undoubtedly one of their leading theologians. His first significant theological work, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, energized the early movement and foreshadowed Henry’s future as a theological and societal leader of the new evangelicalism. In Henry’s most significant work, *God, Revelation and Authority*, he argued a thorough defense of the doctrine of inerrancy. For Henry, “There was a confidence in inscripturated divine utterances that could withstand all analysis and any scrutiny.” Henry stood firmly in the inerrantist tradition of Old Princeton and believed, like J. Gresham Machen, that the doctrine of inerrancy is prior to and contingent upon the doctrines of revelation, God, and Jesus Christ. Furthermore, one must build the doctrine of inerrancy on Scripture’s inspiration and authority.

These convictions are present in the ordering of *God, Revelation and Authority*. Henry does not tackle the doctrine of inerrancy until after writing a prolegomenon (vol. 1) and discussing revelation (vol. 2), the doctrine of Christ as the supreme revelation of God, and propositional revelation (vol. 3). It is not until halfway through volume four of his *magnum opus* that he addresses inerrancy specifically, and only after describing the authority and inspiration of Scripture. This organization shows the context in which Henry believed theologians should discuss inerrancy.

Much like Lindsell, Henry believed that Scripture teaches its own inerrancy. Nevertheless, contrary to Lindsell, Henry believed that the Scriptures did not teach inerrancy as explicitly as it teaches its own authority and inspiration. Henry stated that inerrancy is the position on Scripture because it “is implicitly taught, is logically deducible, and is a necessary correlate of Scripture as the inspired Word of God.”

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Henry argued that inerrancy is a deductive conclusion from Scripture’s authority and inspiration, and many of those who reject inerrancy do so based on an inductive approach to Scripture. That is, many who reject inerrancy begin with the presupposition that the text of Scripture includes errors. This is less justifiable logically, Henry supposed, than beginning with the presuppositions of inerrancy. Henry believes that the Scriptures explicitly teach verbal inspiration, and he notes that many who deny inerrancy inevitably deny verbal inspiration.

In agreement with Lindsell, Henry affirms that inerrancy has been the church’s historical position. He cites examples from church history and shows that the first debates over the term inerrancy only began with the major battles at Old Princeton, within the work of J. Gresham Machen, and in the contemporary evangelical discussion. Henry asserted that the inerrantist position on Scripture has always been the general view of historic Christianity.

The significant difference between Henry and Lindsell was not their belief concerning inerrancy, as both agreed it was taught in Scripture. Instead, it was how far each was willing to press the centrality of the doctrine for evangelicals. Lindsell clearly believed that inerrancy was the test of evangelical authenticity, whereas Henry believed it was merely the test for evangelical consistency. Ronald Nash notes, “However much Henry regretted the fact that some evangelicals were wavering on the doctrine of inerrancy, he was not quite ready—on that count alone—to dismiss them from the evangelical camp.” Henry warned against making inerrancy central to all theology and believed that the debate concerning inerrancy within evangelicalism had become an “unbalanced preoccupation.”

There are at least three reasons why Henry lacked the desire to make inerrancy the test of evangelical authenticity. First, Henry believed that the chief concern for evangelicals should be scriptural authority. He wrote, “My conviction is that the first thing the Bible says about itself is not its inerrancy or its inspiration, but its authority.” His primary difference with Lindsell was that he believed that Lindsell inverted the emphases present in Scripture concerning itself. As has been shown in Henry’s theological hierarchy, authority must come before inerrancy.

Second, Henry’s primary strategy in the neo-evangelical movement was to build a coalition of evangelicals that held to a Christian world and thought view. Henry’s ambitions for the movement were large, and to accomplish them he must employ the best and the brightest evangelical minds, even if they did not hold to strict inerrancy. Henry believed that making inerrancy a strict test of evangelicalism would alienate “the enthusiasm and cooperation of one whole wing of the conservative theological witness today, precisely at a time when we need all the energies we can enlist in the battle.”

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32 Henry specifically mentions Daniel Fuller. He writes, “The inevitable consequence of insisting on biblical authority and inspiration on the one hand and on an errant Bible on the other is, of course, that inspiration ceases to be a guarantee of the truth of what the Bible teaches; the authority of Scripture must then somehow be divorced from the truth of its content” (Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:193).
envisioned a “Big Tent” evangelicalism that would fight against a non-evangelical world view, but this inevitably created a doctrinally minimalist evangelicalism. Third, Henry questioned whether inerrancy could unite people in any meaningful way other than to simply affirm inerrancy. Henry felt that in-house evangelical arguments over inerrancy would distract evangelicals from important tasks such as evangelism, societal and political involvement, and confronting liberal theology. It was not that Henry believed that inerrancy was not crucial. Still, he believed that inerrancy alone could not propel a coalition to engage the broader society nor protect an organization from doctrinal compromise. In this way, Henry distinguished himself against the more fundamentalist branch of neo-evangelicalism.

As expected, Lindsell disagreed with Henry. He feared that Henry's position was in danger of compromise because of his willingness to place a lower priority on inerrancy than other statements concerning the Bible. This was not the only negative reaction to Henry's doctrine of inerrancy. Some neo-evangelicals, including Bernard Ramm, criticized Henry's position as modern and rationalistic. Ramm suggested that Henry's position stumbles because it “glosses biblical criticism.” Ramm believed that Henry's old paradigm of evangelical theology should be abandoned for a better one.

3. The Biblicism of Bernard Ramm

Both Carl Henry and Bernard Ramm represent evangelicalism's willingness to dialog with alternative viewpoints, but Ramm took a more positive approach to modern theology, particularly neo-orthodoxy. Unlike Henry, Ramm “hoped to find in aspects of [Karl Barth's] brand of modern theology

38 In a letter to Dick Kantzer, Henry expressed his concern in this way, “I'm troubled by reports from various places about Dr. Lindsell's forthcoming book which specializes in identifying sheep and goats among evangelicals on the matter of inerrancy. The non-evangelicals will rejoice that they are making gains; the evangelicals who repudiate inerrancy will be glad to know they have a base in so many places; and those who hold inerrancy will seem to have only a polemical weapon rather than an epistemological arsenal” (Henry Archive, box 6 folder 24, cited by Coon, Recasting Inerrancy, 193).

39 Coon, Recasting Inerrancy, 190. Henry specifically fought to prevent Eastern Theological Seminary from removing their inerrantist statement from their confession of faith. For more on this, see Coon, 195–98. Henry believed that Lindsell's Domino Theory was true, particularly with institutions. He identified jettisoning inerrancy as the leading cause of theological compromise.

40 It was not that Henry's view of inerrancy disregarded biblical criticism, but rather higher criticism. Lindsell disagreed with Henry stating that "Orthodoxy and historical-critical method are deadly enemies that are antithetical and cannot be reconciled without the destruction of one or the other (Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible, 82). Henry disagreed and stated that many scholars in the Evangelical Theological Society utilize biblical criticism without compromising the doctrine of inerrancy. He wrote, "What is objectionable is not historical-critical method, but rather the alien presuppositions to which neo-Protestant scholars subject it" (Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 4:393).


42 Ramm was not the only evangelical seeking to find another way forward on inerrancy. Donald Bloesch also articulated an alternative on inerrancy (“The Sword of the Spirit: The Meaning of Inspiration,” Reformed Review 33.2 [1980]: 65–72). Bloesch sought to find a middle ground between those that see inspiration as nothing more than a general illumination and those that hold to a “inerrancy of Scripture … which allows for no inconsistencies in the details of what is reported.” In some ways Bloesch sounds like Henry. He emphasizes the importance of affirming the authority of Scripture, but he insists that the authority of Scripture is “rooted not in the manner of its
assistance in reformulating evangelical theology in order to move beyond fundamentalism.” 43 Ramm eventually came to believe that Barth provided a paradigm for evangelical theology in the wake of the Enlightenment.

Like Henry, Ramm devoted himself to the topics of Scripture, authority, and inspiration. Ramm intended to chart a middle course between subjectivism and authoritarianism. He believed that God produces, in his divine self-disclosure, the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, which is the source of its authority. As a result, the final authority of Scripture is in the revelation of Christ, to which “the Bible witnesses as the Spirit effects illumination.” 44 If Lindsell’s chief concern was inerrancy, and Henry’s was authority, Ramm’s was revelation.

Ramm believed that fundamentalism made at least three errors concerning Scripture. First, he believed that fundamentalists had lost a comprehensive doctrine of revelation by overemphasizing inspiration. Second, fundamentalists divorced the Spirit from the Scripture. 45 Finally, despite their distaste for scientific accommodation, they “let the spirit of science permeate their apologetic” and sought to scientifically demonstrate Scripture’s inspiration. 46

Although Ramm did not spare fundamentalism in his critique, he still affirmed verbal plenary inspiration. 47 He believed that only an intelligent “biblicism is adequate to the present day situation in science, philosophy, psychology, and religion.” 48 Much like Lindsell and Henry, Ramm affirmed that “all the major churches of Christendom have accepted the divine inspiration of the Bible,” but he maintained that “these churches have accepted the inerrancy of all the historical and factual matters of the Scriptures which pertain to matters of faith and morals.” 49 Ramm concluded that “the Bible is errant in historical, factual, and numerical matters which do not affect its faith and morals.” 50 This concession was closer to the Fuller position than the Lindsell-Henry position. 51

writing but in the way it is applied by the Spirit to direct us to Christ” (p. 68). Bloesch’s understanding of inspiration is spiritually pragmatic. In other words, the Spirit’s use of the word to save is more important than inerrancy. His view is much closer to Ramm’s new paradigm. For details on other evangelical departures from Henry’s view, see Millard Erickson, The Evangelical Left (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 61–86.


45 Bernard Ramm, Special Revelation and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 120.

46 Ramm, Witness of the Spirit, 126.

47 Ramm’s understanding of inspiration requires a closer look that is outside the scope of this paper. Robert Price writes, “Ramm does seem to be proposing the conceptual inspiration model, though his language at one point suggests that he means merely to explain what he sees as the proper connotation of the rubric ‘verbal inspiration.’ Nonetheless, it would be hard to deny that he is defining it in terms of conceptual inspiration. Ramm seems to have been alone in holding this view, even among neo-evangelicals” (Robert Price, “Neo-Evangelicals and Scripture: A Forgotten Period of Ferment,” Christian Scholar’s Review 15 (1986): 327).


49 Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 201.

50 Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 201.

51 Interestingly enough, Marsden remarks that when Billy Graham and L. Nelson Bell determined to start an evangelical paper, Lindsell wrote to them suggesting that Carl Henry would make an excellent editor. Graham replied that Henry might be too fundamentalistic for the periodical. Graham remarked that “its view of Inspiration would be somewhat along the line of the recent book by Bernard Ramm, which in my opinion does not take
Ramm criticized Lindsell’s *Battle of the Bible* not only for its tone but also for its overall theological point. He writes,

Further, we are not home free if we claim there are no errors in Scripture. Anybody who has lived with biblical criticism through the years knows the clusters of problems we face on every page of Scripture. If we told a logician that there are no errors in Scripture but a thousand problems ... he would die laughing. We must not have a view of Holy Scripture which—to use a current philosophical phrase—dies the death of a thousand qualifications.\(^{52}\)

Furthermore, Ramm believed Lindsell’s insistence on inerrancy would turn off evangelical scholars who know “the battle and the issues are elsewhere and must be elsewhere.”\(^{53}\)

Inerrancy, for Ramm, was a broad, nonrestrictive category, and he believed that debates concerning it “pay no great dividends.”\(^{54}\) His only restriction concerning Scripture, for evangelicals, was biblicism, or a particularly high regard for the Bible and a belief that all essential spiritual truths are found in it.\(^{55}\) Ramm could not find common ground with more conservative evangelicals that understood the doctrine of Scripture as a test for evangelical authenticity. Simply put, Ramm argued that to be inerrantly sure of scriptural inerrancy requires a theology of glory that Christians do not yet possess.\(^{56}\)

Lindsell believed that Ramm’s desire to produce something modern and novel was the motivating factor for rejecting Lindsell’s views of inerrancy. Lindsell declared that the real question “is not whether it is ‘old hat’ but whether it is true.”\(^{57}\) In numerous references in *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry spoke highly of Ramm’s contribution to evangelical thought, specifically to its doctrines of revelation and inspiration. Yet, Henry does criticize Ramm’s “theology of glory” statement. If that type of certainty were required to believe in inerrancy, in Henry’s estimation, it would also be necessary for the theology of the cross. Henry writes, “To be inerrantly sure of anything—including Ramm’s alternative—would seem to fall under the same judgment.”\(^{58}\)


\(^{53}\) Ramm, “Misplaced Battle Lines,” 37.


\(^{55}\) For more on biblicism as a mark of evangelicalism, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989). Bebbington’s Quadrilateral has long been a standard in defining evangelicalism. His four marks of an evangelical are biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. See also Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

\(^{56}\) Bernard Ramm, “Misplaced Battle Lines,” 38.

\(^{57}\) Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance*, 50.

\(^{58}\) Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:190.
Henry also reviewed two books by Bernard Ramm, expressing concern over the direction of Ramm's theology. In Henry's review of *An Evangelical Christology*, Henry wrote, “Ramm defends the Gospels against radical criticism but disavows the evangelical orthodox emphasis on inerrancy.” Henry believed that this was a capitulation to Barthian thought. He faults Ramm for viewing inerrancy as indefensible and for rejecting propositional revelation. Henry believed that Ramm was sailing too close to neo-orthodoxy and did not represent the direction Henry desired for the evangelical movement.

4. Contemporary Application

The theologies of Lindsell, Henry, and Ramm offer several lessons for contemporary readers. This paper will examine these contemporary applications by evaluating the positives and negatives of each position and then state several helpful observations for evangelicals wrestling with these issues.

First, Lindsell's position of strict inerrancy has much to admire. His desire to allow the Bible to speak for itself and take it “in its plain and obvious sense” must be commended. Lindsell’s sounding of the alarm on the doctrinal drift away from inerrancy, particularly in Southern Baptist life, revealed the inevitability of the inerrancy controversy within the denomination. Lindsell's work falls short in its tone and his desire to find strict logical consistency in the supposed contradictions of Scripture.

Henry's work on establishing the intellectual foundations for inerrancy is magisterial. Inerrancy must be supported by authority and inspiration. It does no good to have an inerrant document that does not bear the authority and inspiration of Almighty God. His desire to seriously engage the works of broader evangelical scholars is also worthy of emulation. Henry's warning of a truncated theological system that is reduced only to inerrancy is a trap to be avoided. Nevertheless, Henry's “big tent” philosophy of evangelicalism may be desirable for the entire movement but practically fails at the institutional level. Inevitably, without an anchor, the tent grows too big.

Ramm's insistence on the Spirit's role in revelation is commendable, but his capitulations to Barthianism are concerning, particularly in how he redefines inerrancy to only apply to spiritual matters. Ramm's desire to discuss the relationship between science and Scripture is also commendable, but again, in doing so, he diminishes Scripture's authority.

A study of these three men and their theology of Scripture yields at least four implications for evangelicals today. First, evangelicals must confess that Lindsell's Domino Theory has proven true throughout American evangelical history. Once an institution jettisons a belief in inerrancy, this generally leads to other capitulations as well, especially after the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Henry is correct

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63 Johns, “Revelation and Creation,” 274–82.
64 See Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 141–60.
to point out that this is truer for institutions than for individuals, but the warning is clear: churches and institutions that intend to maintain doctrinal purity must not cede an adherence to biblical inerrancy.\textsuperscript{65}

Second, evangelicals must be willing to follow Henry’s example in engaging with and partnering with other scholars who hold to an evangelical biblicism but are not comfortable with the language of inerrancy. Indeed, there is much to be learned from those who do not consider themselves inerrantists. However, inerrantists should be careful with the degree to which they partner with non-inerrantists. Henry is correct to view inerrancy as a test of evangelical consistency instead of authenticity; nevertheless, this belief must be tempered with an understanding of Lindsell’s Domino Theory. Perhaps an individual evangelical can remain orthodox and evangelical without adhering to inerrancy, but evangelicalism as a movement cannot.\textsuperscript{66}

Third, evangelicals must heed Henry’s warning not to miss the theological forest for the proverbial tree of inerrancy. Inerrancy must be part of a broader, comprehensive, and historical theological system, not merely the theological system.

Fourth, evangelicals must avoid the tone and separatism of fundamentalism. Lindsell’s failure to root inerrancy in biblical authority and his tone caused many to tune out his jeremiad. J. I. Packer writes, “[Lindsell] makes himself appear as an evangelical (or should I say, fundamentalist) scholastic, doing theology as it were by numbers, concerned only to maintain frozen finality of some traditional formulations of the doctrine of the nature of Scripture—and that is to make this whole discussion seem a great deal less important than it really is. Indeed, some evangelical wiseacres have written it off as trivial already; but that is not really a very discerning position.”\textsuperscript{67} These critical issues should not be hindered by a loveless tone, nor are they so trivial that evangelicals can retreat and cede broader Christian scholarship to those who do not hold to inerrancy. Instead, evangelical Christian scholars ought to present winsome arguments that show the authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of the Christian Scriptures.

5. Conclusion

We return to Stephen Board’s question to Carl Henry, “Who on earth is an evangelical in your view?”\textsuperscript{68} Henry answered, “An evangelical, in brief, is one who believes the evangel. The Good News is that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to all who repent and receive divine salvation proffered in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Redeemer. The Christian message is what the inspired Scriptures teach—

\textsuperscript{65} Perhaps the neo-evangelical movement would have had a greater lasting impact if it had more ecclesiolog-ical accountability. The interdenominational aspect is commendable, but not at the expense of sacrificing the local church and its authority.

\textsuperscript{66} Christopher Huan states it this way: “An evangelical can remain orthodox and evangelical without being an inerrantist; but evangelicalism cannot remain orthodox when evangelicals are not inerrantists” (Christopher Huan, “Inerrancy as a Litmus Test of Evangelical Orthodoxy?” in Vital Issues in the Inerrancy Debate, ed. F. David Farnell [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015]).

\textsuperscript{67} Packer, Beyond the Battle for the Bible, 146.

\textsuperscript{68} Stephen Board’s question is still hotly debated today. For a contemporary discussion on this issue, see Thomas Kidd, Who Is an Evangelical?: The History of a Movement in Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
no more, no less—and an evangelical is a person whose life is governed by the scriptural revelation of God and his purposes.” Furthermore, a consistent evangelical holds to the inerrancy of God’s word.

This brief study of Lindsell, Henry, and Ramm’s views on Scripture show the internal disagreement within the neo-evangelical movement. Yet, despite the disagreements, evangelicals today can glean from each. They warn evangelicals of the importance of doctrine and the dangers of in-fighting. How believers walk this line will affect their cultural impact on a broad scale. Henry warns, “It is we ourselves who champion God’s inerrant Word who will be weighed in the balances for what we have done with it, both internally and externally.” May evangelicals be found faithful in their stewardship of God’s word.

Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

— Robert Golding —

Abstract: There is a curious tendency in modern culture to simultaneously reject objective truth (e.g., “live your truth”) and to live as if it were real (e.g., “you must fight for the truth”). Objectivity has worked its way back into the subjectivity of postmodernism. This is not pure postmodernism, nor a return to the modernism that preceded it. This is a new phase, which I call metamodernism (a term coined elsewhere). This paper first explains metamodernism (sections 1–2). Then, it offers some suggestions for Christians to rebut metamodernism (section 3). Finally, it concludes with an anecdote to better explain the recommendation of the third section (section 4).

We are awash in the Western world’s tides of anger and polarization. The white caps of dissent arose decades ago, and the recourse was called postmodernism—rather than fight for the truth, let’s all believe what we want to. Live and let live. This provided floating rubble (i.e., subjective beliefs) to amass and combine as we swam in the increasing storm. Now, decades later, our rubble-dinghies have been transformed into capable ships—not just capable of keeping us afloat, but of warring against the constructions of others. The choice of young people today is not how to find the truth, but which truth (or boat, to keep the analogy) to select. Once the selection has been made, smooth sailing is not an option. A fight for truth dominance must ensue. We have sailed past the primitive age of postmodernism. We are now in the murky waters of post-post-modernism—the idea that we may select various truths according to our subjective experiences, but that those selected truths are objectively true. I and others call this metamodernism. In what follows, we will examine these ships and seek to determine the best way to interact with them from our own. In other words, how does a Christian modernist interact with a non-Christian metamodernist when both believe that “their truth” is the truth?

1. Metamodernism Milieu (The Origin of Subjectivity in the Sea)

It is not a secret that the preference for subjectivity has helped produce modern phenomena like “choosing one’s gender” or “living your truth.” The curiosity, however, is that so many argue about
these relative truths as if they were objective. The subjective feeling of one’s gender, for example, is expressed in terms of scientific or even empirical certainty.1 In what follows, we will not focus on the important topic of subjective gender identity. Instead, we will focus more on the cultural milieu that has enabled us to select subjective realities, whether sexual or spiritual, that are increasingly becoming seen as objective.

Almost 30 years ago, Leith Anderson presciently wrote, “the culture and the church are entering an extended era of greater diversity, increased segmentation, polarization, division, even hostility.”2 The hostility that Anderson saw on the horizon is abundantly manifest today. If he saw the groundswell, we are swimming in the tsunami.

The conventional wisdom used to be that tolerance (read: acceptance) will bridge the cultural divides that plague us. However, traditional wisdom failed us. Modern Americans were taught to allow various groups to “be their authentic selves” and to accept them unquestioningly so that these different identity groups would all get along. Gene Veith Jr. has shown that the reverse is true: “Although designed to promote tolerance (perhaps the only absolute moral value insisted upon by postmodernism), the sorting of human beings into mutually exclusive cultures trends to produce intolerance.”3 This acceptance, argues Veith, leads to the solidification of relative groups which have gained isolated identities. While this was a cheap price for cheap peace, now the West must pay the piper. Now that these groups have been given sovereign status, we see them warring with one another. Long gone are the days when everyone in America was aboard The Great Experiment sailing to the same truth. Now, we are part of our own isolated Small Experiments that hoist up the sails of relative truths. We are a nation of independent and sovereign nations (or, to keep the metaphor, a fleet of independent ships) vying for preeminence. This seems to be the case no matter what Western society one examines, though it is perhaps preeminently so in America.4

While Veith saw this trend on the horizon thirty years ago, from a more recent and secular perspective, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt describe our current reality: “This is an essential part of our story. Americans now bear such animosity toward one another that it’s almost as if many are holding up signs saying, ‘Please tell me something horrible about the other side, I’ll believe anything!’”5

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What has caused this trend? The authors point to many causes, but perhaps most significant is the idea that “the United States has experienced a steady increase in at least one form of polarization since the 1980s: affective (or emotional) polarization.” This is one of the three main “untruths” that the authors indicate as culprits for our current polarization, namely, “always trust your feelings.” This is a commonly recognized postmodernist sentiment—since there is no objective truth, just trust what you feel. But the ubiquitous anger that people feel is, I argue, indicative of something more than just gut-trusting. Objectivity seems to be working its way back into the Western psyche because seeing something as objectively true rather than relatively true is the only way people get enveloped in anger. Pure postmodern relativism does not produce rage. We need metamodernism for that.

Christians are very adept at recognizing the futility of postmodern pluralism. As Carl Truman notes in an article for First Things, “Conservatives often respond to claims about the death of metanarratives with the trite observation that this too is a metanarrativial claim. That is true, but only in the most banal sense, and the point is polemically useless.” Trueman argues that this point is futile because the goal in modern progressive thought is deconstruction, not finding an objective norm (or metanarrative) to hold on to (which would be constructive). But I argue that pointing out this contradiction in popular thought is futile rather because people no longer believe that their personal truth is relative. It is not that people do not care about metanarrativial claims; it is that people think their metanarrativial claims (i.e., their boats) are correct (or dominant). Though, on the one hand, most people are postmodernists who reject objective truth or metanarratives, many of those same people—paradoxically—think that their understanding of reality is objectively true. However, pointing to the incongruity of that position at a philosophical level is useless because people understand and accept the fact that they are constructing their own “objective” truth. This gives new meaning to the phrase, “masters of their own domain.” In the words of Ryan Anderson, ours is an “age that promotes an alternative metaphysics.” Welcome to the watery world of metamodernism.

1.1. Whence the Key Term: Metamodernism

The move beyond postmodernism has a few names: post-postmodernism, pseudo–modernism, or (the term I prefer) metamodernism. The concept of metamodernism generally deals with art, architecture, and literature. But these sectors offer terminology readily transferrable to common cultural parlance (as we will see below). Referring to people who imbibe the thinking of metamodernism (which he calls pseudo–modernism), Alan Kirby writes, “These are people incapable of the ‘disbelief of Grand Narratives’ which Lyotard argued typified postmodernists.” This is because “postmodernism called ‘reality’ into question, [but] pseudo–modernism defines the real implicitly as myself, now, ‘interacting’

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6 Lukianoff and Haidt, The Coddling of the American Mind, 141.
10 “Watery” is a helpful adjective for three reasons: (1) It nods to the biblical idea that evil both comes from and moves to the waters (Matt 8:32 // Mark 5:13 // Luke 8:33; Rev 13:1). (2) It highlights the instability of metamodernism. (3) It maintains the naval metaphor.
11 The lack of a stable term to describe this trend shows that it is currently taking shape and evolving.
with its texts.”

We see here that the initial relativism of truth that once dominated our landscape is being (or has been) eclipsed by the assumption that what was once relative is now objective. Where we are and what we are doing is no longer just “right for me”; it is just “right.” It is addition by subtraction—the removal of the small words “for me” adds a world of meaning.

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker were the first to use the term metamodern to describe the West’s current tendency to move beyond postmodernism. Metamodernist discussion is typically (as is the case with Vermeulen and van den Akker) a conversation about art and philosophy, but art, philosophy, and cultural thinking are not easily separated. Indeed, philosophy and art are often expressions of, or guiderails for, common cultural thinking.

In their article, “Notes on Metamodernism,” Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that “Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern.” One of the entailments of this oscillation is that metamodernism wants to have its cake and eat it too. That is, it lives as if objective truth is real, but it comes to that truth as if it were not. Truth is both subjectively constructed and objectively adhered to. The authors from a now-famous art gallery in Berlin cite an almost chilling explication of this concept. The Gallery Tanja Wagner introduced its then inconspicuous opening exhibition this way: “The works [on display] convey enthusiasm as well as irony. They play with hope and melancholy, oscillate [sic] between knowledge and naivety, empathy and apathy, wholeness and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity, ... looking for a truth without expecting to find it.”

Metamodernism denies the existence of the truth it seeks.

As noted above, this denial/embrace of objective truth is most prominently displayed in the current tendency of Westerners to claim that one’s sexual identity is simultaneously subjective (the agent gets to select gender based on feelings) and objective (what the agent decides is true). We confess the postmodernist creed with our lips (i.e., “there is no objective truth”) but build the modernist world with our hands (i.e., “agree with my objective truth!”). In the words of Augustine, “Man’s love of truth is such that when he loves something which is not the truth, he pretends to himself that what he loves is the truth.” The denial/embrace of truth is described this way by Carl Trueman, “Today’s world is not the objectively authoritative place that it was eight hundred years ago; we think of it much more as a case of raw material that we can manipulate by our own power to our own purposes.” Though Trueman is helpful here, I think Augustine most compellingly captures the current trend. Not only do we manipulate raw material to our purposes, we manipulate raw material and call the construction “truth.”

At this point, we may begin to think that the seeds of metamodernism were sown long ago. This intuition is correct. Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that modernism and postmodernism were built on Hegel’s “positive” idealism. But metamodernism is built on Kant’s “negative” idealism. For Kant, people live as if there is some natural goal toward which they are striving, even though it does not exist. In his 1784 essay, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” Kant said, “Each ...

16 Trueman, The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self, 41.
Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of them unknown goal.”

Vermeulen and van den Akker explain, “That is to say, humankind, a people, are not really going toward a natural but unknown goal, but they pretend they do so that they progress morally as well as politically. Metamodernism moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find.” In other words, to be spiritual today is, at its core, to pretend that there is ultimate meaning, but to do one’s best to forget the fact that reality has simply been ginned up. The metamodernist society is filled with little emperors without clothes who constantly compliment one another on their attire.

The insight of Kant’s centuries-old philosophy couples with the lived experience of many people today. In his *Spiritual Marketplace*, Wade Clark Roof says, “If metaphysical certainty is not possible, there are provisional approximations to hold on to even if they are no more than just that.” These “provisional approximations” grow like budding romantic relationships. What might begin as a casual interest evolves into a life commitment. People often think of their individual creeds as “mini-metanarratives” that give them a little direction and meaning in life. But as the years go by and the provisional approximation of a metanarrative takes deeper root, the result is often an adherence rivaling that of the faithful of any major world religion. To use a well-known example from the world of religious studies, what was once Sheila Larson’s personal belief system (a subject in a 1980s religious studies experiment), eventually became “Sheilaism,” a self-contained system of personally transcendent belief. Robert Fuller notes the downside of this well-worn system of belief, “The danger of Sheilaism, according to these scholars, is that it fails to connect the individual with any particular community or to any particular religious practice. In the long run, Sheilaism deprives us of a language genuinely able to mediate among self, society, the natural world, and ultimate reality.”

1.2 Metamodern Unity: Putting the Pieces Back Together

Postmodernism stalled because it terminated at the level of the individual, like Sheilaism. Metamodernism has solved this problem by reintroducing a corporate element back into subjective belief systems. If Sheilaism was the rubble that Sheila Larson was floating on, metamodernism offers her the rubble of a group of people with whom she can incorporate her own. Now, the structures that carry her seem more meaningful, though they are no less subjective than what she began with. The primary components of Sheilaism that were most appealing to her—moral autonomy, release from outdated sociological standards, sexual freedom, and an eclectic approach to religious forms—can be maintained along with a newfound experience of corporate solidarity. In other words, metamodernism is a...

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22 The word, “outdated,” is important here. Participants in metamodernism are not bound by allegedly obsolete social norms. However, this does not mean that new, ironically constricting, “cutting-edge” social norms do
combination of herd mentality and Sheilaism. The latter provides subjectivity and the former provides an impression of objectivity.

If Sheila finds that some of her rubble is incompatible with that of the craft she is incorporated, no matter. There are limitless numbers of crafts to which she may join herself, all instantly available through the interconnectedness of the internet. Not only does the internet allow Sheila to connect with exactly whom she wants to, so that her subjective beliefs remain intact, it also allows her to maintain an experience of complete autonomy. She can disconnect whenever she wants with zero commitment, she can view whatever portions she wants and block from her view whatever is unpalatable, and she can display herself or hide herself from whoever she wants on the craft. Strikingly, it is not that Sheila gets complete autonomy over a part of the craft, like a child’s autonomy over the décor in her room. Rather, Sheila experiences something analogous to being the captain of the craft. Of course, she is not in complete control, but she may forget that this is the case as she does things like make personnel selections and exercise complete autonomy over the image she presents to the others aboard. Though she does not determine who is on the ship, she does decide who she will see—and who will see her—the two actions provide a remarkably similar experience. The internet’s capacity for ultra-personalized connectivity has provided the sense of objectivity that postmodernism could never attain.

Though Christians (and others) have regularly ridiculed this lifestyle, those who live it have no problem with the contradiction in claiming their truth is both personally subjective yet corporately objective. The tension between their creed and their claim to objectivity provides the tension required to keep their sails of subjectivity taut. To engage this type of living, Christians should spend less time pointing to the tension and more time pointing to the fact that the ship will run aground. The question at hand, then, is how Christians can articulate that reality.

2. Metamodernism Moving (The Rising of the Sea of Sanctimony)

But before we get to a Christian response, we must first note the recent dramatic increase in the need for an answer to metamodernism. If the above is true, it is not hard to see how we got where we are today. If people began with the laissez-faire attitude of finding and living personal truth, it is no wonder that people begin to fight. If my truth contradicts your truth, then a disagreement will ensue. If the truths are important, fighting will take place. If they are foundational to who we are, war will result. Ironically, then, we have come full circle. If postmodernism was invented, in part, to help with our cultural animosity, its evolution into metamodernism has brought us back to square one. My subjective realities today are just as true as the objective realities of yesterday. Both are worth fighting for. To deny not replace them. Part of the malaise of much metamodernism can be attributed to the decrease in happiness that is directly proportionate to the increase of new social norms. In other words, the joy of being released from social standards is short lived because one must jump out of that cage and into another.

23 I am referencing here the capability to add and block people from one’s social media platform while also maintaining complete control over what pictures and written content are presented not just to all users but also on a case-by-case basis. For example, I may present a picture of myself wearing motorcycle gear only to my internet friends who will appreciate such attire. Yet, I can simultaneously offer pictures of myself in a suit and tie to my more professional friends.

Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

“my metamodern truth,” therefore, is to earn ridicule in the same way that we all shake our heads at flat-earthers or holocaust deniers. How could they deny the truth?

Therefore, the metamodernist’s relation to “his truth” is near-exactly the same as the modernist’s relation to the truth—both see the truth in view as objective and imposing its reality (or “reality”) on others. For example, the vitriolic nature of our current metamodernist political climate parallels the modernist political climate of fledgling America. When Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were running against one another, vitriol was spewed: “Jefferson’s supporters accused Adams of having a ‘hideous hermaphroditical character,’ while Adams’s camp called Jefferson ‘a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow.’”

Insults were slung, bullets were fired, and eventually a war was waged. Note how similar this sounds to our modern political climate. This is not so different from today, hopefully barring civil war, though it is currently discussed. We find ourselves, then, clinging to subjectivity as each person embraces her or her own truth. But, as these various forms of subjectivity begin to harden and we assemble them into creations of our own making, we find ourselves in the rising waves of sanctimony—“this is my truth and you better believe it!” This is what it means to swim in the sanctimonious sea of subjectivity.

A metaphorical summation might look like this: First, we let others float around with their own subjective truths. For a brief time, we were relatively content to float along on the wreckage of our own creations. But humans compare. One looks to another and sees some improvements being made. Another sees the construction of weaponry, another defense. Years later, all those floating along find themselves in a frenzy to defend and, if necessary, attack the truth structures that, for a time, were merely yet another instantiation of modern human life. Now, we find ourselves not floating on wreckage or even newly constructed dinghies. Instead, we are in the midst of solidified vessels (worldviews) with crews (proponents) and their own weaponry (“science”). It is no longer sufficient to “live and let live.” Everyone must choose a side because all sides are in the war of sanctimony. Modernism upheld the fight for truth. Postmodernism was the opiate of the masses. Metamodernism has brought the fight back, yet in a sanctimoniously unwinnable way. This fight cannot be won because the interlocutors are all the owners of different “objective” truths and they see their opponents as mindless Cretans for denying their claims. In other words, there is no common ground to fight upon. They float in the sea of sanctimony, yet fight they must.


26 In regard to bullets and wars, I refer to duels (which were often not deadly) and the Civil War.


28 The scare quotes refer to the tendency to respond to the statement: “I follow the science” with “whose science?” This is most prominently seen in the era of COVID-19 (but also regarding the “scientific” classification of gender, noted above). For example, many epidemiologists said masking was a sure-fire aid to the reduction of the spread of COVID (which we are all familiar with). Others said the exact opposite: Gemma Mullin, “Face Masks Can ‘Increase Risk’ of Catching Coronavirus,” The Sun, 23 April 2020, https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11079052/face-masks-increase-risk-coronavirus/.
3. Metamodernism’s Match (How to Function in The Sea)

How do Christians respond? Os Guinness said that “we have lost the art of Christian persuasion and we must recover it.”29 In what follows, I will build on the premise of another article that argues for righteous Christian anger (called “meek anger”).30 Assuming that anger is a valid Christian emotion (which is the argument of that paper), I will argue here that utilizing this form of Christian anger is, at times, the best option in rebutting the sea of sanctimony.31 This is because the expression of anger today is often the primary societal mechanism for determining which ship is most seaworthy (or which “truth” is most true).

3.1. Good Anger

Before going forward, however, some careful qualifiers must be quickly put in place. First, we must ensure that the anger we allow to manifest is only righteous anger. Sinful anger will obviously harm gospel presentation (as it has so many times before).32 Second, righteous anger never allows for a sense of superiority. The Paul who instructed the Romans to “hate strongly”33 (ἀποστυγοῦντες) what is evil (Rom 12:9), routinely used unflattering and diminutive terms to refer to himself (1 Tim 1:15–16; 1 Cor 15:9; Eph 3:8; cf. Acts 8:3).34 Superiority and righteous anger are contradictory. In the words of Christopher Watkin, “One notable feature of such prophetic invective is that the prophet does not exempt himself or herself from his condemnation.”35 Finally, and most importantly, righteous anger is not righteous when it is the only emotion ever felt. In his book on godly anger, David Powlison is quick to show that God’s anger is just one of his many attributes, most of which center around love, mercy, and patience.36 In other words, righteous anger should be allowed, I argue, to play its respective role—yet not to reign—in cultural engagement. Therefore, no Christian should be aptly referred to as “angry.”37 That should never be our sole characteristic any more than it is God’s. We should be marked by love, forgiveness, and

29 Os Guinness, Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 17.
31 A similar argument has been made along the lines of righteous mockery. See, Terry Lindvall, God Mocks: A History of Religious Satire from the Hebrew Prophets to Stephen Colbert (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
32 One thinks of the vitriolic and even blasphemous articulations, if one can call them that, of the Westboro Baptist Church, for example.
33 BDAG 123.
34 Though hatred and anger can be distinguished, I use them synonymously here. The philosophical distinctions that are at play here are important, but not for our purposes. It is sufficient to grasp that there are negative feelings (like anger and hate) that are righteous and unrighteous. Hence, I use the term “righteous anger,” though “righteous hatred” could conceptually be employed.
Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

meekness just as much as we should be angry with what God is angry with. The purpose of this section is not to produce angry Christians, but it is to stimulate overly quiet Christians who are never bothered by sin (other than their own) toward a full-orbed Christian lifestyle. As Guinness says, “Any Christian explanation or defense of the truth must have a life, a manner and a tone that are shaped decisively by the central truths of the gospel.” And there is no gospel without hatred for sin.

3.2. Anger as Authenticity

If we concede that anger can play a positive role—when properly regulated—then the question arises, “What positive role does it play in apologetics and cultural engagement?” The primary benefit I suggest is authenticity. A standard critique of Christians is that they are inauthentic or fake. This type of thinking is ubiquitous at the popular level. In an article for Christian Today, Jo Swinney says, “Christians are not supposed to be nice all the time. We are supposed to be the real, rounded, in-process people that we are. When we apply niceness to the surface of all our interactions like a layer of fine plaster of Paris, there are several consequences.” One of those consequences is that “niceness will not draw others to faith and it may well have a repellent effect.” She uses the derogatory cultural icon of American Christianity, Ned Flanders, from the top-rated T.V. show, The Simpsons, as an example of the way secular society views Christians who are overly nice. Flanders was a caricature of an irritatingly passive Christian who never got angry, yet never drew a single person toward God. If Christians were to express righteous anger, perhaps they would be seen as—at least—authentic.

Focus on authenticity is not only the Christian’s concern. In an age of secular self-identification and the loss of static norms, choosing who one is in an authentic way is seen to be truly human. Darrel Paul, a political science professor at Williams College, said that “the therapeutic ethos [of today] holds up the authentic and liberated self as the ideal of character.” He traces this back at least as far as 1992 when former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy defended “the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” Determining one’s authenticity and accurately portraying it is a human preoccupation. As we noted in the previous section on metamodernism, the subjective determination of who one is does nothing (as strange as it may seem) to negate the objectivity one feels in who he or she is. Indeed, the feeling of authentic identity is, in many respects, the most important element in Western life. In other words, while we have given ourselves the capacity to create our own truths, the defense of those truths often relies on a feeling of authenticity, rather than objective facts. It is not the one who has “science” on his side (whatever that may mean) but the one who champions his science in the most authentic way who wins. Authenticity

38 Guinness, Fool’s Talk, 175.
is the propellant, if you will, for the “science” or “truth” we select to hurl at one another’s structures in the sea of sanctimony.42

This focus on authenticity is also found in the non-Christian academic realm of religious studies. Coining the term “fakecraft” to describe religious practices that help distinguish what is genuine to a particular religion, Paul Christopher Johnson argues that “Afro-American traditions have a developed internal fakecraft. Internal discourses of the real and the fake are part of the lifeblood of Candomblé, Umbanda, Santería, Palo Monte, Vodou, Garifuna, and other communities.”43 He argues that many world religions are very focused on determining the difference between an authentic expression of their religion and a hoax. Though this often has abhorrently destructive outcomes, there are also good manifestations of the search for authenticity.

Of course, being authentically Christian is very important from an evangelical perspective because Christians “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). It is only those who are authentically in Christ who are saved. Perhaps no one thought more about the difference between authentic and counterfeit religion than the “last of the puritans,” Jonathan Edwards, as is evident in his Religious Affections, which was dedicated to the search for authentic Christianity.44 In this way, we see a connection between Christianity, other religions, and modern non-religious thought in terms of identifying what is authentic and what is disingenuous. To search for authenticity is to be human, not just Christian. Therefore, the use of authenticity markers in emotive discourse is an invaluable tool for the Christian apologist or evangelist. At the risk of overstating the case, authentic communication is the sine qua non of modern apologetics.

3.3. All Hands on Deck

This pervasive search for the authentic should compel Christians to embrace their own need to be genuine. When a militant atheist is debating with a Christian, for example, and he uses blasphemous terms to refer to God, what else is the world to think when the Christian—who supposedly loves God more than anything—wears a “plaster smile” and dismisses the attack as “your opinion”? Should anyone be convinced that we are united with Christ when we seem oblivious to attacks upon his body? If Jesus was outraged at the abuse of his father’s house, how much more should we be when he himself is attacked? Righteous—God-honoring—anger would go a long way in convincing the world that we believe what we say we do.

This tack is especially effective because feelings are given epistemic (or even ontological) weight today. To the metamodernist, subjective feelings are objective reality. Christians would disagree with this over-emphasis on emotion but, this fondness for the subjective can be leveraged for the benefit of Christianity. Though I do not believe in Christianity because Christians can be zealously faithful, I am happy to open the door of consideration to a non-believer by demonstrating such traits. Christian

42 See Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 675, cited in the Conclusion of this article.


Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

persuasion rightly wears the glasses of objectivity, but it can also don the cap of subjectivity. In other words, authenticity is not proof so much as it is persuasive.

In addition, we should remember that experience is an essential element of the Christian faith. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, begins its description of true Christian faith by saying, “True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture.” In other words, it is not enough to have the facts because “the demons also believe, and shudder” (Jas 2:19). One must also have faith. Faith—as distinct from fact-gathering—is an experience in which one finds himself (sometimes all of a sudden) giving himself over to God. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism goes on to describe this faith as “a wholehearted trust.” This 16th-century Reformed confession is not unique. Joel Beeke has shown that this emphasis on faith experience is the Reformed approach to Christianity. What is the primary mechanism in the Reformed tradition for bringing others into the faith of Christianity? It is preaching that “brings us face to face with the most glorious and delightful Being in the universe.” Metamodernists’ emphasis on subjective experience, rather than being something to be shunned, should be “subversively fulfilled.” That is, “our culture’s antipathy to Christianity is so thoroughly ... well, Christian.” In other words, rather than decrying culture’s emphasis on “lived experience” and “your truth,” we should say, “Listen to my lived experience of God which is my truth.”

Though Christians should vehemently disagree, using anger when necessary, with the constructions of metamodernists, they are fully capable of doing so with absolute humility. This is a categorical distinction between the secular combatant and the Christian. Though the metamodernist takes great pride in his construction, the Christian is not presenting “his own” anything. Whatever he offers by way of replacement or denunciation, he offers as a beggar who has been unilaterally blessed. The world compares ideologies as shipbuilders do their crafts (though all the ships are unseaworthy). But the Christian can passionately, even angrily, reject contradictory worldviews without pointing to his own accomplishments. He can be angry at error and humble with his interlocutor. He can be meek and angry by both condemning the dangerous vessels in the sea of sanctimony and refusing to take one foot off of the island of God’s truth, where his status as alien has been changed to citizen by grace alone (which perhaps wrought a providential shipwreck upon its rocky shores).

Christians should operate in the sea of sanctimony with a resolute resolve to defend their truth. Why? Because they claim that Christ is “the truth” (John 14:6, cf. 1 John 5:20). We may not wink at

49 This reminds me of Jordan Peterson's interview with Cathy Newman. Newman asks Peterson why he feels he has the right (theoretically speaking) to refuse to use someone's preferred pronouns, when doing so will be highly offensive to the person. Peterson responds by saying, in effect, “that question is offensive to me! Why do you have the right to ask it?” See “Jordan Peterson Debate on the Gender Pay Gap, Campus Protests and Postmodernism,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMcjxSThD54 (21:50).
50 Another commonly made analogy is that of a beggar telling others where to get free bread. The beggar is not proud of his bread, but he would, for example, condemn the methamphetamine his peers “cooked” for themselves. He can condemn something without being prideful in the alternative he suggests since it does not originate with him.
falsehood any more than we can wink at blasphemy.\textsuperscript{51} There is no truth that does not belong to God. The \textit{Lord} is not pleased with lies on our lips or any other (Prov 12:22). Therefore, we should not give up the fight for truth, no matter what arena it may occur in, any more than we should give up the fight for Sunday’s services and the Bible. Christians should be grieved to the point of righteous indignation when others disdain truth, slander truth, and mock truth (cf. Pss 31:6, 139:21). This, of course, is biblical, but it is also to speak the \textit{lingua franca}. Using authentic anger is common parlance, and if Christians participate, they have a corner on the market since there is only one truth and one valid form of anger. Of course, not all will be convinced, but at least we have fought the good fight—we have pointed out the failure in the vessels of warfare and have invited those about to drown to climb aboard the One that will carry us all safely home. None of us are at the helm, unlike the other ships. And this is a good thing. But if we are to serve the Captain well, we ought to defend attacks upon his craft.

\subsection*{3.4 Gay Weddings}

An application of the principle suggested in this article can be discerned in the current debate over Christians attending gay weddings. Both sides of the debate admirably want to demonstrate both truth and love. One side seeks to do this by objecting to homosexuality (truth) but by simultaneously attending the wedding (love). The other side rejects the invitation, seeking to be both truthful (rejecting a fictitious wedding) and loving (because such a rejection offers the greatest chance of eliciting repentance and salvation). However, if the thesis of this article is correct, attending a gay wedding as a Christian can be deemed inauthentic by the world itself. If the Christian \textit{really} believes marriage is defined by God as that which is only between one man and one woman, what is the world to think when said Christian attends a gay wedding, sits quietly without protest, smiles, and even joins in the celebratory festivities? Surely, this \textit{might} convey love, but does it also demonstrate that the Christian truly believes the Bible?\textsuperscript{52}

An alternative tack might involve sadly rejecting the invitation but also replacing it with another—that of a loving summons to the Christian’s home for a sumptuous meal for both homosexual individuals. Of course, this invitation might be rejected in kind, but it seems the best option if both truth and love are the goal.

In the metamodern sea of subjective sanctimony, any wavering, or appearance of wavering on one’s beliefs is perceived as a failure to \textit{truly} believe. In this watery world, if it is not truly believed, it is not true. Conveying the truth, therefore, requires conveying emotional authenticity, even if this is to be done through stern rejection. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin.…” Ultimately, we have no charge but to serve our brother … even when, in obedience to God, we must break off fellowship with him.”\textsuperscript{53} Our churches are filled with increasingly gaping holes in the pews each Sunday because the world refuses to countenance...

\textsuperscript{51} Of course, there is a distinction between a lie about some \textit{thing} and a lie about God. But this distinction is not a separation. I cannot lie about my homework, for example, without sinning against God by pretending that I am the arbiter of truth and falsehood. In other words, lying about something other than God is not the same as lying about God, but it is a step in the same direction. It is a link in the chain of sinning against God.

\textsuperscript{52} This propensity to demonstrate love at the peril of standing against sin harkens the lyrics of Whitecross: “Love is our weapon. We need to use it. Love is our weapon. Let’s not abuse it.” Whitecross, “Love is Our Weapon,” \textit{In the Kingdom} (Star Song: 1991).

Swimming in a Sanctimonious Sea of Subjectivity: A Proposal for Christian Authenticity in a Made-Up World

the teachings of Christ. This is the message they send us every LORD’s Day, loud and clear. Should not
the Church send a similar message to the temple of man? We must send this message—the liturgy of
sexual immorality is an abomination and it will not be countenanced by the body of Christ today, nor
his person at the day of judgement.54 This is an authentic and stable sentiment which the world can
readily perceive. Of course, the world will not like this message, but the point of this article has been to
persuade through authenticity, not through nicety.

4. Conclusion: A Personal Anecdote

Years ago, when I was training in the US Army, I was in a course with a Muslim soldier from the
Jordanian Army. We would discuss the differences between the Bible and the Quran, and my approach
was generally to listen to what he said about Abraham, for example, then reply with what the Bible said.
His approach, on the other hand, was to refute what I said the Bible said, and present the Quran’s version
as correct and superior. He would typically make his presentation, then look away disinterestedly when
I responded. One day, I decided to try a different tack. When he said that Abraham (Ibrahim) was
essentially perfect, and God therefore blessed him and his progeny, I interjected sharply, “No, that is
wrong. Abraham was previously an idolater, and it was God’s grace that saved him.” I can still see his
eyes quickly meet mine with a look of rapt attention on his face. Immediately, he seemed to listen to
what I was saying as if it were authoritative. When I allowed my speech about the Bible to align with my
feelings about the Bible, my interlocutor started listening. I was not foaming at the mouth or uttering
curse words, but I was genuinely upset that someone was lying about my God. I wanted this deceived
man to embrace truth. Amazingly, our conversations started to become more amicable because he
started to respect me as someone with a worthwhile perspective, rather than a child hopelessly clinging
to fantasies.

Of course, this is purely anecdotal, and worse, Islam and metamodernism are very different.
But the thing that led my Jordanian friend to listen to me is, I argue, the same thing that will incline the
metamodernist to listen—they see that we believe what we say. In fact, as I said above, the metamodernist
will be more inclined to listen because, for him, feeling is reality, whereas this is not true for the Muslim.
The key in this methodology is to only express anger that is based on the injury of God and his reputation.
We must be meek and angry. If a hostile interlocutor insults us, we should quickly turn the other cheek
(meek). But when he insults God, we should vociferously and authoritatively refute the insult (angry).
This best aligns with the pattern displayed by Christ and his apostles, and it is poised to reach those in
our current Western context who are steeped in metamodernism. We should let the person know that
what they say offends us and God, because it does. That is the authentic truth.

5. Concluding Unscientific Postscript

In his magisterial book, A Secular Age, Charles Taylor does not explicitly discuss the topic of
this article, but he does consider at length how those of opposing views might convince one another. His
conclusion is remarkable in that it points to the pragmatic rather than the objective:

54 Again, this does not mean that the Church should only send this message. She should also send a message
of radical love and invitation. She must do both—reject the sin of homosexuality while embracing homosexual
siners. This is the pattern Christ exhibited (see, e.g., John 8:11 which, despite its dubious authenticity, nicely il-
ustrates the capacity to simultaneously extend gracious love while compelling abstinence from sin).
Both sides need a good dose of humility, that is, realism. If the encounter between faith and humanism is carried through in this spirit, we find that both sides are fragilized; and the issue is rather reshaped in a new form: not who has the final decisive argument in its armory ... Rather, it appears as a matter of who can respond most profoundly and convincingly to what are ultimately commonly felt dilemmas.55

To be sure, we need more than convincing arguments and profundity. In The Ethics of Authenticity, Taylor says, “Your feeling a certain way can never be sufficient grounds for respecting your position, because your feeling can’t determine what is significant.”56 However, my hope is that this article has proved that emotive demonstrations of authenticity (to include all godly emotions, but especially anger) are an integral component of communicating Christ convincingly in our current circumstances.

Now to him who reigns supreme over the sea of sanctimony and whose eschatological throne will be revealed to all before, not tempestuous waters, but “a sea of glass, like crystal” (Rev 4:6).

55 Taylor, A Secular Age, 675 (emphasis mine).
“Salvation Without Spin”: How the Gospel of Christ Subversively Fulfills the Prayer Wheels of Tibetan Buddhism

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Abstract: With present calls for inter-religious dialogue, Christianity must relate to major world religions in specific ways to distinguish its uniqueness in belief and practice. This article uses one of the five “magnetic points” of J. H. Bavinck, “I and salvation,” to demonstrate how Christianity carries out Hendrik Kraemer’s notion of “subversive fulfillment,” specifically with the prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhism. The article first shows how Christianity confronts a trust in religious objects for salvation. Second, Christianity challenges a belief in mere mantras for spiritual help. Third, Christianity teaches that humans cannot gain merit through religious works. Instead, Christianity offers true deliverance through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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1. Introduction

Dutch theologian J. H. Bavinck once wrote, “It seems that man has had a vague notion all through the ages that there is something undefinable, something we cannot name, resting on human life and weighing it down, and that there must be salvation available in some way or other.”1 Bavinck aimed to describe the innate recognition in human consciousness of a need for deliverance and salvation. In turn, different religions and philosophies attempt in their own way to answer this need, albeit in distinctly contrasting means.

With present calls for ecumenicism and inter-religious dialogue, Christianity must relate to major world religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in specific ways. Furthermore, the Christian faith should distinguish its uniqueness in belief and practice. In contrasting Buddhism and Christianity, the respected English philosopher G. K. Chesterton states,

The more we really appreciate the noble revulsion and renunciation of Buddha, the more we see that intellectually it was the converse and almost the contrary of the salvation of the world by Christ. The Christian would escape from the world into the universe; the Buddhist wishes to escape from the universe even more than from the world. One would uncreate himself; the other would return to his Creation: to his Creator.2

To further illustrate the contrast, this article will demonstrate how Christianity “subversively fulfills” the prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhism by using one of the “magnetic points” put forward by J. H. Bavinck, “I and salvation.” First, Christianity confronts trusting in mere religious objects as a means for salvation and instead provides the person of Jesus Christ as Mediator to reconcile humanity to God. Second, Christianity challenges the offering of repetitive mantras to gain spiritual help, since these are never efficacious before the throne of God. In contrast, the gospel grants genuine confidence in prayer through a loving Father’s adoption and regeneration of the sinner. Third, humans can never gain merit through their works; salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. Christianity confronts the counterfeit peace Buddhism offers and proclaims that salvation comes exclusively through the person and work of Jesus.

To advance these arguments, the article first provides a short history of Buddhism and the Tibetan school of belief. Next, the article describes several crucial concepts relating to prayer wheels while defining Bavinck’s magnetic points and Hendrik Kraemer’s term “subversive fulfillment.” The article then delivers a biblical and theological analysis by examining Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels through Bavinck’s magnetic point of “I and salvation,” exposing the ineffectiveness of this practice and demonstrating how Christianity “subversively fulfills” what prayer wheels cannot provide. Finally, the article gives a brief missiological application for Christian consideration.

### 2. Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhism is the fourth largest world religion, with an estimated 488 million adherents.3 Often labeled a philosophical system rather than a religion, W. George Scarlett contends Buddhism calls for people to transform their view of life to one of a spiritual nature, appealing for faithfulness to its teaching. While not claiming a connection to a personal deity, Buddhism is “rooted in faith, faith that the nature of the universe is indeed essentially moral, and faith that in being compassionate, we tap into what is transcendent.”4

Buddhism began in northern India. Charles Farhadian reports that most scholars believe that Siddhartha Gautama was born in 563 BC to the warrior-caste family of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya.5 After attaining enlightenment, he taught his followers a lifestyle termed “The Middle Way.” Farhadian notes that Buddhism’s popularity arises from this teaching, which strikes a middle

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ground between pursuing pleasure and denying it altogether. Gautama would spend the rest of his life endeavoring to bring others into the same enlightenment.⁶

Gautama’s followers naturally passed down his teaching. C. R. Wells reports how Buddhism extended outward from India to Central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia.⁷ This slow but steady growth and a lack of centralized authority brought about different schools of belief within Buddhism, such as Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan. The schools’ diversity lies more in a historical lineage than formal doctrinal confessions.⁸

Vajrayana, or Tibetan Buddhism, developed in the seventh century AD. Elizabeth Dowling states that Vajrayana pulls from both Theravada and Mahayana but also focuses on tantras, which are written texts outlining spiritual techniques intended to refine and support the journey to enlightenment.⁹ Farhadian claims that Tibetan Buddhism uses such methods because it blends Buddhism with Bön, the folk religion of Tibet that emphasizes the spiritual world, magic, and demons. The Tibetan school also believes rituals are more important than meditation in reaching nirvana, and it uses prayer wheels in these practices. The Dalai Lama serves as the official head of this school and has lived alongside the exiled Tibetan government in Himachal Pradesh, India, since 1959.¹⁰ John B. Noss calls the Tibetan school the most advanced of Buddhism because, as a religious system, it holds “civil authority over the lives of a people.”¹¹

### 3. Descriptions and Definitions

The subject and content of this article necessitate several detailed descriptions and definitions for the thesis and argumentation. Along with the distinction of the Tibetan school within Buddhism, the reader needs to understand the different types of prayer wheels, the primary mantra of “Om Mani Padme Hum,” and the central purpose of merit-making in using prayer wheels. This section also defines Bavinck’s “magnetic points” and Hendrik Kraemer’s term, “subversive fulfillment,” as the primary tool for engaging Tibetan Buddhism with Christianity.

#### 3.1. Prayer Wheels as a Religious Object in Tibetan Buddhism

The prayer wheel has an extensive history in every school of Buddhism. Lorne Ladner reports a prophecy at Gautama’s birth that the baby would become a wheel-turning king or an enlightened buddha.¹² When Gautama left his family in The Great Renunciation, became enlightened, and began to teach others, he put the Dharmachakra, the Wheel of Dharma, in motion. In Buddhism, dharma is the summation of the Buddha’s teachings. Thus, as Ladner observes, “Rather than becoming a world, wheel-

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⁶ Farhadian, Introducing World Religions, 126–27.
¹⁰ Farhadian, Introducing World Religions, 162–65.
¹² Lorne Ladner, ed., The Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom, 2000), 16–17. This section notes the term “wheel-turning king” meant a powerful monarch. At that time, the image of a wheel was an emblem of authority.
turning king, [Gautama] became a king of the realm of truth, who by turning the Wheel of Dharma awakens others to the true nature of things.”

This visual concept of a wheel evolved into actual prayer wheels for ritual practice. L. Carrington Goodrich suggests that prayer wheels arose in Buddhism as early as the seventh century AD or as late as the fourteenth century AD, possibly developing from revolving library cases used in temple devotion in China. Ladner describes these cases as octagonal bookcases which turned clockwise from an axis in the middle. Using two Tibetan texts, Dan Martin agrees with Goodrich’s suggestion about the wheels’ origin and asserts that prayer wheels arose from mediation customs. Martin also relays another story of lore regarding Nāgārjuna, a Buddhist philosopher. In the tale, Nāgārjuna traveled to another place and asked a bodhisattva there for a wheel of dharma. Upon receiving it, he brought the wheel back to India, which was later taken to Tibet. From this wheel came the diverse prayer wheel customs of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhists use three types of prayer wheels for rituals. The first has fixed wheels stationed in rows for devotees to walk past and turn. Another kind is the large motion wheel often seen in monasteries. William Simpson describes them as nine feet high and four feet wide “with an iron spindle at each end; on the lower one, there was a crank to which a string was attached, and by simply pulling this the machine went slowly round.” A third type is the hand wheel, also called Mani-Lag-Khor. They are much smaller and intended to be held and turned.

Regardless of the type, each wheel functions the same. Ladner informs that devotees spin the wheels clockwise to symbolically trace the sun’s east-to-west movement as an example of the right path of living. Furthermore, the circular motion represents the significant moments of the Buddha’s existence: birth, enlightenment, setting the Wheel of Dharma in motion, and nirvana. Simpson additionally shares that Buddhists place other prayer wheels outside, where elements of water, smoke, and wind naturally turn the wheels.

Every prayer wheel contains a central axis, scrolls of mantras, and an outside shell. According to Martin’s research, the middle axis of the wheel must be made from sandal or juniper wood. The writing ink used for the mantras is mixed with fragrances, and the letters of the mantras must face

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15 Ladner, The Wheel of Great Compassion, 27.
18 See Appendix A for pictures of different prayer wheels.
23 See Appendix B for illustrations on constructing hand prayer wheels.
outward. The prayers are also carved on the outer housing for ritual purposes. Technology also affects prayer wheel construction. According to Lee Kane, “Modern prayer wheels incorporate microfilm with millions of mantras, instead of paper for thousands of mantras—a move applauded by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.”

Tibetan Buddhists employ prayer wheels to make praying more efficient. Alexander Gardner notes that by turning the prayer wheel, the devotee activates the mantras written on the inside and carved on the outside. Ladner emphasizes the central belief of why spinning prayer wheels are popular among Tibetan Buddhists: turning is equivalent to praying. According to A. R. Wright, the more quickly the wheel turns, the greater benefit comes to the worshipper. The most popular of the prayer wheel mantras is “Om Mani Padme Hum.”

3.2. The Primary Prayer Wheel Mantra: “Om Mani Padme Hum”

Prayer wheels are often called “mani wheels” because the chief prayer uttered while using them is “Om Mani Padme Hum.” According to Lama Anagarika Govinda, this mantra is the most important and valuable for Tibetan Buddhists. However, Simpson contends that the actual name “prayer wheel” is a misnomer because the meaning of “Om Mani Padme Hum” is not a request of prayer but a cry of praise. The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism states the mantra praises Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion and central deity of Tibet. H. P. Kemp remarks that Tibetan Buddhists consider the current Dalai Lama to be the fourteenth incarnation of Avalokiteśvara.

Along with these connections, Noss asserts that the mantra is both a statement of faith and a protective spell, alluding to the syncretistic nature of Tibetan Buddhism with Bön. The mantra has different translations; for example, Kemp translates it as “Hail to the jewel in the lotus,” which agrees with Simpson’s claim. Another translation places “jewel” and “lotus” together to laud Avalokiteśvara, “homage to the Jewel-Lotus One.” The present Dalai Lama believes the six syllables set an individual

27 Ladner, The Wheel of Great Compassion, 37–38. Lama Zopa Rinpoche writes, “Turning a prayer wheel containing a hundred million Om mani padme hum mantras accumulates the same merit as having recited a hundred million Om mani padme hum mantras…. Turning the prayer wheel once is the same as having done many years of retreat” (pp. 37–38). See Appendix C for an example.
29 Lama Anagarika Govinda, Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism (London: Rider, 1959), 257. Govinda writes regarding the famous mantra, “It is on the lips of all pilgrims, it is the last prayer of the dying and the hope of the living. It is the eternal melody of Tibet, which the faithful hears ... which accompany him everywhere.”
32 Noss, Man’s Religions, 218.
33 Kemp, “Mantra,” 310.
34 “Om mani padme hûm,” in The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, 1014.
on a transformational path, eventually making their living, speaking, and thinking like a Buddha.\textsuperscript{35} The mantra is an essential aid for Buddhist seekers to seek and achieve nirvana.

3.3. The Central Prayer Wheel Purpose: Merit-Making

The central purpose of prayer wheels is to make merit in order to gain good karma and erase bad karma. George J. Tanabe Jr. notes that the foundation of salvation in Buddhism rests in merit-making. Buddhists gain good and bad karma through their personal moral choices and religious rituals. Some Buddhist schools, such as Mahayana and Tibetan, value rituals more than others to earn merit.\textsuperscript{36} Edward Conze points out that the average Buddhist’s “one and only religious task at present can be to increase his store of merit.”\textsuperscript{37} Because Buddhism holds to a continuous cycle of rebirth that only breaks with nirvana, religious activities such as prayer wheels earn merit and thus good karma for the person. Tanabe summarizes,

Merit and merit-making comprise a cogent system in which moral action produces merit, ritual performance generates benefit, and the buddhas and bodhisattvas grant blessings to those who earn them through their efforts and can share the fruits of their virtues with the living and the dead in hope of gaining a good rebirth and, ultimately, entry into nirvana.\textsuperscript{38}

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche declares prayer wheels are “a powerful merit field” and believes, with proper motivation, they help others reach enlightenment faster than other routes.\textsuperscript{39} Prayer wheels are a central merit-making object in Tibetan Buddhism.

3.4. J. H. Bavinck’s “Magnetic Points”

In his work Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith, J. H. Bavinck lists five essential elements embedded in all religious consciousness, a universal similarity that all people possess and cannot escape. Bavinck termed these elements “magnetic points.”\textsuperscript{40} Timothy Keller adds that the points are “five fundamental things for which all human beings are searching and to which all of us are inevitably drawn ‘magnetically.’”\textsuperscript{41} First, “I and the cosmos” describes how people sense they belong to something much larger than themselves. Second, “I and the norm” refers to knowing that an objective moral standard exists outside the individual. Third, “I and the riddle of my existence” states the relationship between personal action and ultimate destiny, that amid personal choices, one perceives the ultimate story belongs to someone greater. Fourth, “I and salvation” speaks to the brokenness of the world, individual


\textsuperscript{37} Edward Conze, A Short History of Buddhism (Rockport, MA: Oneworld, 1995), 34.

\textsuperscript{38} Tanabe, “Merit and Merit-Making,” 2:534.

\textsuperscript{39} Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, foreword to The Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism, ed. Lorne Ladner (Boston: Wisdom, 2000), viii.


\textsuperscript{41} Timothy Keller, foreword to Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About ...And How to Connect Them to Christ, by Daniel Strange (Epsom, UK: Good Book, 2021), 7.
guilt, and the need for deliverance. Fifth, “I and the Supreme Power” conveys that everyone is related and somewhat accountable to a higher power.\(^\text{42}\) Daniel Strange retitles the magnetic points Totality, Norm, Destiny, Deliverance, and Higher Power.\(^\text{43}\) This article employs the fourth magnetic point of “I and salvation” (Deliverance) to analyze Christianity’s “subversive fulfillment” of Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels.

### 3.5. Hendrik Kraemer’s “Subversive Fulfillment”

Hendrik Kraemer coined the term “subversive fulfillment” to demonstrate Christianity’s relationship with world religions. Kraemer was adamant that other religions do not prepare people to come to Christ but stand in opposition.\(^\text{44}\) As a result, Christianity both confronts the other world religions and provides what they cannot. Strange explains, “It subverts in that it confronts, gets inside, unpicks, and overthrows the world’s stories…. The gospel fulfills in that it connects with our deepest longings and is shown worthy of our hopes and desires.”\(^\text{45}\) Keller also asserts, “Jesus fulfills each of these universal human longings in ways no other world religion can match.”\(^\text{46}\) Strange summarizes, “The gospel of Jesus Christ, while confrontational, costly, and sacrificial, is wonderful enough, trustworthy enough to exchange old desires and hopes for new ones.”\(^\text{47}\) Christ himself is the subversive fulfillment of the magnetic points.

With these descriptions and definitions in place, the article now turns to a biblical and theological analysis of Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels. The gospel confronts the insufficiency of Vajrayana’s system of works and rituals. Only Jesus Christ provides the salvation and deliverance Tibetan Buddhists attempt to attain on their own.

### 4. Biblical and Theological Analysis

To perform a biblical and theological analysis, this article employs Bavinck’s magnetic point of “I and salvation,” what Strange calls Deliverance. The rituals of Tibetan Buddhism demonstrate a clear recognition of the personal need for salvation. In using this magnetic point to examine Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels, their mantras, and their use for merit-making, Christianity subversively fulfills this religious practice, showing that Jesus alone brings deliverance.

#### 4.1. Subversive Fulfillment of the Prayer Wheel as a Religious Object

Tibetan Buddhists value prayer wheels as essential to their rituals. Because of the magnetic point of “I and salvation,” the faithful adherent believes the wheels provide a more effective way for...
gaining good karma, ending rebirth, and achieving nirvana. However, Christianity confronts a vain trust in religious objects rather than God himself.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrews employed ritual objects for religious practice but only to increase their trust in God. Peter Adam states that these objects were to remind Israel and express their covenant relationship with God. However, Israel often focused on the objects rather than on God. A primary example is the Ark of the Covenant. Although God commanded its construction and use, the Hebrews experienced a stunning defeat in battle when they trusted the Ark's presence rather than God. First Samuel 4:3 records Israel's misplaced hope. “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies” (ESV). Israel was then soundly routed by the Philistines. Andrew Blackwood summarizes, “The means of grace became the ends in worship.... First, men said that God was in the Ark. Then they insisted God was the Ark. Later they assumed that the Ark was God. Hence they relied on the Ark as a substitute for the God of their fathers.”

Another Old Testament example is Nehushtan, the bronze serpent Moses made as a public antidote for snake-bitten Israelites to look upon and live (Num 21:4–9). The southern kingdom later devolved into worshiping Nehushtan, but King Hezekiah confronted this popular idol during a time of reformation and revival. “He broke in pieces the bronze serpent Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel” (2 Kgs 18:4–5 ESV). As Adam points out, one of the two major sins in the Old Testament was using the religious objects God provided to turn away from him. These objects were never to be ends of worship in themselves. The Bible teaches that God alone deserves worship.

There are no New Testament examples of religious objects used in Christian worship, nor are there any commands from Jesus or the apostles to use such. D. E. Aune states the contrast of first-century Christianity with other religions at that time “in that it had no cult statues, temples, or regular sacrifices.” Early Christian worship was not tied to a specific place or object but was practiced anywhere. Unlike other religions, Christianity calls for trusting a living person for salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. Strange writes, “Christians are in the business of offering people the Lord Jesus, and it is he who brings forgiveness and who gives peace.” I. Howard Marshall identifies Christ’s exalted position to the Father’s right hand as shared with no one. Thus, Christ is the only savior. No one else and nothing else can save.

Christianity fulfills the perceived need for deliverance by trusting a person, not an object, for salvation. The apostle Paul identifies this person, “There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5 ESV). Philip Towner asserts, “His position

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50 Adam, *Hearing God’s Word*, 152.
relates him both to God and humankind and qualifies him to negotiate the transaction."54 William Barclay adds that neither Jewish nor Greek thought provided direct access to God, but Christians, through the work of Christ as a mediator, can approach God.55 Jesus has done what no religious object could ever do, bearing God’s wrath and demonstrating God’s love. Colin Kruse notes that Christ not only pleads mercy for sinners but also provides the sacrifice necessary for them to receive mercy.56 Christianity confronts trusting in religious objects rather than God alone. The gospel fulfills the desire to be delivered from guilt and shame. Only Jesus Christ can make people right with God.

4.2. Subversive Fulfillment of Prayer Wheel Mantras

Christianity also subversively fulfills the mantras of Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels. In mantras like “Om Mani Padme Hum,” the focus is not on what is said but on how many times it is said. The deep-felt magnetic point of “I and salvation” emerges in Tibetan Buddhist prayer practice for spiritual blessings. Harold Coward explains,

On set occasions, people will gather to chant Om Manipadme Hum as many times as they are able, with the number of repetitions being counted. At the end of the week, each person's total is forwarded to the monastery in charge and the grand total calculated as an accumulation of blessings that might be dedicated, for example, to the well-being of the Dalai Lama…. Repeated chanting of the mantra, Om Manipadme Hum, keeps one's mind focused on the goal to be realized and simultaneously removes obstructing karma.57

Because of a recognized need for deliverance, Tibetan Buddhists trust repeating mantras as a means toward good karma and nirvana.

The Christian Scriptures stand in sharp contrast to these prayer rituals. The Mount Carmel narrative of Elijah and the prophets of Baal demonstrates the futility of mindless, repetitive prayers. The prophets of Baal “took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, answer us!’ But there was no voice, and no one answered” (1 Kgs 18:26 ESV). The prophets then tried more desperate measures of cutting themselves, but Baal never answered. Gary Inrig points out the great contrast between the prophets’ magic-like incantations and Elijah’s brief and straightforward plea. The prophet did not attempt to force or coax his God like the prophets of Baal, and the God of Israel answered Elijah’s prayer with fire from heaven.58

The New Testament also confronts vain repetitions of prayer. Jesus taught during the Sermon on the Mount, “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matt 6:7 ESV). Jesus emphasized God as a personal father who hears his children’s prayers, and as Craig Blomberg describes, this God is “accessible as the most

58 Gary Inrig, I and II Kings, HOTC 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 149.
loving human parent.” In contrast, to whom are Tibetan Buddhists praying? Marcus Bach notes that Buddhists do not have a personal God in the traditional way of thinking. Walter Martin states that all Eastern religions carry the same theme: a denial of a personal God who knows, cares, and hears those who call upon him. However, Israel’s God says, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit” (Isa 57:15 ESV).

Christianity fulfills the cries for deliverance in every way that the prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhism never could. First, unlike the dead gods of the nations, Christianity reveals a living God who hears. The Psalmist writes, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell” (Ps 115:4–6 ESV). The next psalm finds the writer rejoicing that the living God hears prayer: “I love the Lord, because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath” (Ps 116:1–2 NLT). The Lord is vastly different from created idols. Derek Kidner states, “A God too great to tie down to any image or even to earth itself, who is not the prisoner of circumstances but their master, is a God to glory in. And he is our God, not in the petty sense in which the heathen have their idols—all their work!—but in the personal bond of ‘steadfast love and ... faithfulness’.”

Second, the living and true God hears the prayers of his people because he has changed their relational status with him. Scripture teaches that every person is born dead in sin, separated from God, and existing as his enemy. By God’s grace, those who repent and believe the gospel exhibit a change of heart through the miracle of regeneration, and God adopts them as his children. Christians can pray to their Father because he makes them spiritually alive. Christianity offers reconciliation, forgiveness, and a living relationship with God for all eternity.

Third, the New Testament presents the living God as a loving Father who hears his children when they pray. In teaching on prayer, Jesus says, “Pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.... Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt 6:6–8 ESV). Scripture further testifies that God answers his children’s prayers. Jesus continues in the Sermon on the Mount, “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him” (Matt 7:11 ESV). The apostle John later writes, “And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:15 ESV). According to Daniel Akin, this verse means God hears and answers his children’s prayers favorably, even if they do not see the answers instantaneously. Christians can thus pray in bold confidence because God is their Father.

Fourth, Christianity offers a savior who prays for his people. On the eve of denial, Jesus tells his disciple Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32 ESV). Jesus’s current

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63 See Eph 2:1–3; 2 Cor 5:18–20; and Rom 5:10.
64 See Gal 4:4–7; Rom 8:14–17; 2 Cor 5:17; and Titus 3:4–7.
ministry in heaven is one of prayer, for Hebrews 7:25 states, “He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (NASB). As Robert Murray M’Cheyne remarks, “I ought to study Christ as an Intercessor. He prayed most for Peter who was to be most tempted. I am on his breastplate. If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.”66 This Jesus is unlike anyone else. He is the true Jewel and Lotus, the true incarnation of the invisible God.

4.3. Subversive Fulfillment of the Merit-Making Purpose of Prayer Wheels

The magnetic point of “I and salvation” resurfaces again in the agent of liberation. For Tibetan Buddhists, the individual is central to their deliverance and nirvana. E. A. Burtt notes Gautama’s words to his followers before dying, “Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help…. Look not for assistance to any one besides yourselves.”67 To achieve ultimate deliverance in nirvana, the Tibetan Buddhist strives to earn merit for their salvation.

Christianity subverts Tibetan Buddhism's use of prayer wheels to make merit in several ways. First, the Bible teaches that all people possess no righteousness on their own. The apostle Paul, quoting Psalms, writes, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom 3:10–12 ESV). Job asks, “How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?” (Job 25:4 ESV). Jeremiah affirms, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9 NASB). Tremper Longman III asserts that the spiritual sickness of the heart causes self-delusion and self-deceit because each person believes their actions are morally acceptable regardless of God’s commands.68 Jesus pointed to the problem of the heart being the heart of the problem: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:20–22 ESV). No one possesses innate righteousness because all are sinful.

Second, not only are all unrighteous, but all cannot do righteousness. The prophet Isaiah bemoans, “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa 64:6 NASB). Gary Smith observes that the term, “filthy garment,” illustrates that the sinner “is more repulsive than a vile and rancid menstrual cloth.”69 Isaiah also laments, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way” (Isa 53:6 ESV). Job states the same reality, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one” (Job 14:4 ESV). The story of Cain and Abel’s offerings in Genesis 4 illustrates this truth: Abel came with a blood sacrifice of an animal, but as Gary Herion suggests, Cain offered the work of his hands, which came from the cursed ground of Genesis 3:17–18. Therefore, God did not accept his offering.70 Man can never gain merit before God from the work of his hands.

Because man is not righteous and cannot do righteousness, nothing he ever does is enough to make him right before God. Romans 3:20 states, “For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (ESV). James adds, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (Jas 2:10 ESV). To break only one of God’s commands does not make someone ninety-nine percent righteous; breaking a commandment makes them one hundred percent unrighteous. Jesus stated God’s standard in the Sermon on the Mount, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven…. You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:20, 48 ESV). R. T. France shares that the kingdom of heaven does not call for keeping a few rules but imposes all of God’s perfection on all who attempt to enter.71 Furthermore, Paul adds that to rely on self-effort to achieve God’s standard brings a curse: “For all who rely on work of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’ ” (Gal 3:10 ESV). God demands absolute perfection.

Christianity not only subverts the merit-making purpose of prayer wheels, but the gospel of Jesus Christ alone fulfills what these rituals attempt in vain. Because people cannot earn merit before God, they must become right with God through the merit of another. Christ says in Matthew 5, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17 ESV). The New Testament later declares that Christ is sinless, stating, “In him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5 ESV). Jesus is completely perfect in nature, action, behavior, word, thought, deed, and motive. Because of his perfect life, God accepts his substitutionary death on behalf of sinners to pay for sin, as 1 John 2:2 declares, “He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (ESV). The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates God’s acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice, for Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:5 ESV). As Robert Mounce notes, “Without his death there would be no basis for acquittal. Without his resurrection there would be no proof of the redemptive reality of his death.”72 The resurrection guarantees redemption.

Because of Christ’s perfect life, only he is acceptable to God. R. C. Sproul emphasizes God’s acceptance of “vicarious obedience,” where Christ’s perfect life substitutes for the sinner’s lack of obedience.73 Jesus’s perfect life makes possible his substitutionary death for sinners. When someone believes in Christ for salvation, God imputes Christ’s perfect righteousness to them, and they are justified before God. Brian Vickers states, “God both creates and declares a person righteous because he now sees that person in union with his Son and so covered with the Son’s righteousness.”74 This righteousness only comes by faith in Jesus. Paul writes, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1 ESV). Wayne Grudem explains faith as being God’s chosen instrument to receive Christ’s righteousness because faith in Christ is the

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antonym of trusting in one’s works and merit for salvation. Therefore, righteousness comes not by works but through faith in Christ.

God can justify sinners because Christ suffered in their place. Paul writes, “For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21 ESV). David Garland calls Christ a stand-in for sinners, as God treats Christ as if he lived the sinner’s rebellious life. For the one who trusts Christ’s work in their place, God now regards them as if they lived the perfect life of Christ. This reality means believers “do not simply have the righteousness from God, we are the righteousness of God as a result of being in Christ.” Christianity teaches double imputation: all of Christ’s righteousness goes to the sinner who believes because all their sins went to Christ. Vickers summarizes, “The righteous status, made possible by Christ’s obedience, is applied to the believer when he puts his faith in God. Christ’s obedience ‘counts’ for the status that is secured at the cross, and appropriated by faith, through which comes the declaration of the accrual status, ‘righteous.’”

In Christ alone, God supplies the merit he demands. His merit declares a sinner right with God, and only in the gospel does God impute Christ’s merit to sinners. The merit and deliverance Tibetan Buddhists seek through prayer wheels are only found in Jesus Christ.

5. Missiological Application

So, what must Christians now do? Christopher J. H. Wright correctly touches a deep nerve when he writes, “We ask, ‘Where does God fit into the story of my life?’ when the real question is where does my little life fit into this great story of God’s mission…. I may wonder what kind of mission God has for me, when I should ask what kind of me God wants for his mission.” There are two main missiological applications for Christians when analyzing a religious ritual like Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels. First, the Christian church must possess a godly urgency. Nearly 500 million people worldwide adhere to some form of Buddhism, all heading toward a Christless eternity. These millions will perish without the knowledge of the gospel, which alone proclaims how to possess right standing before God. The Christian church must take the rituals and practices of the Religious Other seriously. Tibetan Buddhists genuinely believe they can accrue and gain merit for salvation through their works. Such actual, spiritual deception calls for a Great Commission response from Christians everywhere. Christians must not only boldly and compassionately share the gospel’s truth with their mouths but also show the gospel’s power with lives of holiness and grace before all peoples, including Tibetan Buddhists.

Second, the Christian church must examine her own ranks for beliefs and practices that theologically or practically deny the gospel. Do Christian sermons proclaim the gospel of costly grace or a works-based legalism? Do Christian churches demonstrate the sacrificial nature of Christ in their ministries or most closely model a country club membership? Christians can often critique the false beliefs and practices of the Religious Other yet practically function just like them. As Peter wrote, “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God” (1 Pet 4:17 ESV). Only when the church removes

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the logs of gospel contradictions from her own eyes can she offer the unreached world the gospel of God’s unlimited grace for their salvation.

6. Conclusion

This article aimed to show how Christianity subversively fulfills the prayer wheels of Tibetan Buddhist rituals and practices. The gospel of Christ confronts the merit-making of Tibetan Buddhism as incapable of gaining the perfect righteousness of God. Christianity also grants what Tibetan Buddhism can never provide: peace with God, assurance of forgiven sins, and ultimate rest. The magnetic point of deliverance disturbs the Tibetan Buddhist conscience to show Buddha’s Middle Way never brings liberation. As Chesterton concludes regarding the Buddhist dharma and the gospel of Christ,

They are in one sense parallel and equal; as a mound and a hollow, as a valley and a hill. There is a sense in which that sublime despair is the only alternative to that divine audacity. It is even true that the truly spiritual and intellectual man sees it as a sort of dilemma; a very hard and terrible choice. There is little else on earth that can compare with these for completeness. And he who does not climb the mountain of Christ does indeed fall into the abyss of Buddha.79

Jesus Christ alone fulfills the longing of every Buddhist heart for salvation.

79 Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas, 91.
APPENDIX A
DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRAYER WHEELS

Fixed Prayer Wheels, Swayambhunath, Nepal80

Motion Prayer Wheel, Thimpu, Bhutan81

Hand Prayer Wheel82

81 Ladner, The Wheel of Great Compassion, 58.
APPENDIX B
CONSTRUCTION OF HAND PRAYER WHEELS

Filling the mani wheel—Step 1: Place the earth wheel inside the wheel, on the bottom facing up. The central shaft or “life-tree” of the prayer wheel passes through the circle at the center of the earth wheel. Similarly, attach the sky wheel inside to the top facing down with the central shaft passing through its center.

Filling the mani wheel—Step 2: Bless the central shaft or “life-tree” of the prayer wheel by writing *Om, Ah*, and *Hum* on it and then writing the appropriate mantras beneath each of these syllables. These mantras can be written in Sanskrit, Tibetan (see page 92), or romanized script (see page 44). Also, they can be written on the central shaft or on paper and then wound on clockwise, facing out, as pictured here.

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Filling the mani wheel—Step 3: Begin winding the pages of mani mantras into the prayer wheel. Following the method of the Fourth Panchen Lama, connect the side with the *Om* to the central shaft, with the mantras facing out, and then wind the mantras on clockwise until the prayer wheel is filled. At the end, one can wrap the mantras in cloth or paper of various colors as described in the commentaries.
APPENDIX C
TURNING PRAYER WHEELS IS EQUIVALENT TO PRAYING MANTRAS

Prayer wheels at the Dalai Lama Temple Complex,
McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh, India

Book Reviews

— OLD TESTAMENT —


Kenneth A. Mathews. Genesis 1–11. Reviewed by Dustin Burlet 198

Jeffrey Pulse. Figuring Resurrection: Joseph as a Death and Resurrection Figure in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism. Reviewed by G. Kyle Essary 201

Andrew G. Shead. Walk His Way: Following Christ through the Book of Psalms. Reviewed by David R. Jackson 203

— NEW TESTAMENT —


Takamitsu Muraoka. Why Read the Bible in the Original Languages? Reviewed by Steve Walton 210


— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Paul Avis, ed. The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology. Reviewed by A. T. B. McGowan 214
Matthew Barrett. *Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.*
Reviewed by Stephen Brett Eccher

Elesha J. Coffman, *Turning Points in American Church History: How Pivotal Events Shaped a Nation.*
Reviewed by Kenneth J. Stewart

Reviewed by J. C. Whytock

Reviewed by James L. A. Morrison

Andrew F. Walls. *The Missionary Movement from the West: A Biography from Birth to Old Age.*
Reviewed by Kenneth J. Stewart

— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Kevin W. Hector. *Christianity as a Way of Life: A Systematic Theology.*
Reviewed by Amritraj Joshua Paul

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Reviewed by Meagan Stedman

Reviewed by Fleur Letcher

Reviewed by Emily J. Maurits

Reviewed by Mark Stephens

Oliver O'Donovan. *Begotten or Made?*
Reviewed by Robert S. Smith and Andrew J. Spencer

Reviewed by Annabel Nixey

Reviewed by Sarah Allen


— MISSION AND CULTURE —


Jairo de Oliveira. *Hope for the Afflicted: A Framework for Sharing the Good News with Asylum Seekers and Refugees.* Reviewed by Jessica Udall


Perry Shaw, César Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano and Bob Heaton. *Teaching Across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective.* Reviewed by David W. George


Bill T. Arnold is the Paul S. Amos Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, where he has served since 1995. He has published widely in Old Testament studies, including work on Biblical Hebrew, introductory and background material, various commentaries, and a wide selection of articles and essays. Arnold is also general editor (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) for the New Cambridge Bible Commentary series (NCBC), editor of the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch (BCOTP), and series editor of the New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT).

In the volume under review, Arnold tackles the unenviable task of replacing Peter C. Craigie’s excellent contribution on Deuteronomy in the NICOT series. Despite being concise (just over 400 pages) and nearly 50 years old, Craigie’s commentary has stood the test of time and remains an important volume on Deuteronomy that rewards its readers. As intimated above, however, Arnold is well placed to proffer a fresh NICOT volume on Deuteronomy.

There is one note of caution to raise in what will otherwise be a very positive review. Arnold’s discussion of authorship (pp. 9–18) implicitly weakens a robust evangelical doctrine of Scripture. He advocates a move from Mosaic authorship to Mosaic origin of Deuteronomy (p. 10), concluding: “It has become increasingly clear that compositions like the book of Deuteronomy were produced by many hands over a period of many years in a process” (p. 11). Later he endorses the proposal that Deuteronomy was largely written by “Mosaic scribes” who serve as the “voice of Moses” by placing words on the lips of Moses (p. 17). The implication of such a view of the composition of Deuteronomy is a weakened authority in the application of Scripture (pp. 65–66), exemplified in Arnold’s persistent designation of Deuteronomy as Divine Will—surely a stronger designation would be better. While it is not impossible that the Spirit sovereignly overrules in the lives of many different authors to produce an inspired, inerrant document—consider the Psalter, or the canon itself—authors placing their thoughts and words on the lips of another (arguably superior) individual is ethically dubious. It is not unlike the approach of the apocryphal Gospels. It seems to me that even if Moses did not personally write Deuteronomy, it should be viewed as faithful reportage of what he actually said, much like the Gospels and Acts record of Jesus’s and the apostles’ teaching. Otherwise, its presentation as the words of Moses is disingenuous (Deut 1:1).

The above note of caution taken, there remains much in this commentary to commend it. Arnold is a tremendous writer. Few introductory sections of commentaries are compelling, fast paced, and innovative, but this is. This commentary will not bore its reader. Arnold’s ability with prose is further applied in a fresh translation of the Hebrew text. It is important to consult Arnold’s rationale for judging text critical issues (pp. 39–47), but his fresh translation provides a productive friction for those familiar with a single translation. The extensive notes on translation are an excellent resource on their own. Indeed, the notes on translation are but one example of the thoroughness of the commentary—which should be unsurprising given it is the first volume and runs to more than 700 pages (almost double the
length of Craigie’s volume on the entirety of Deuteronomy). As further examples of its meticulousness, see the beautifully nuanced discussion of genre that presses beyond the mere vassal treaty designation (pp. 2–3) or the extensive treatment of the Shema (pp. 376–404). Furthermore, all these features are enhanced by the breadth of Old Testament knowledge Arnold exhibits and applies to his work on the text of Deuteronomy. Indeed, in light of the centrality of Deuteronomy to the Scriptures, both Old and New, it is vitally important to witness and comprehend its influence elsewhere. Arnold’s commentary, and particularly the introduction, enables the reader to see this more clearly.

I am yet to be left disappointed after engaging Arnold’s work. I am certainly not always in agreement with him, but he is a fruitful conversation partner. As a result, I am convinced that this new NICOT volume (and its forthcoming companion) will be the new standard for engaging Deuteronomy. While the size of these volumes might restrict their usefulness for the preacher, going forward they will undoubtedly serve as essential readings on Deuteronomy for scholars and students alike. Given the fundamental nature of Deuteronomy for all of Scripture, we must be grateful for Arnold and his contribution to Deuteronomic studies with this volume.

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Appreciation of the creativity, beauty, and rhetorical power of Israel’s Scriptures continues to enjoy a resurgence. Andrew Davis, associate professor at the Boston College School of Theology, commendably continues this trajectory with respect to the poetics of Amos. The Book of Amos and Its Audiences builds on Robert Alter’s notion of entrapment—that is, a bait-and-switch method by which readers “are lured into sharing the poet’s gaze at the addressees, but when the trap is sprung, they find they have also been targets all along” (p. 42). The device is common in prophetic texts, including Amos 1–2 which, finally, indicts Israel and Judah. It is the prominence of this double horizon in Amos, whereby the text addresses both northern and southern contexts simultaneously, that fuels Davis’s study. Although this aspect of Amos is often explained (away) by appeal to interpolation or Fortschreibung, Davis argues that multiple audiences and meanings are in-built to the rhetoric from the beginning (p. 8). Indeed, “multiple horizons are what give Amos … its rhetorical force” (p. 6). Thus, any attempt to classify parts as secondary only serves to dismantle “the particular instantiation of the oracle that is available to us” (p. 14). There is an intrinsic complexity to the rhetoric of Amos that invites exploration.

Davis proceeds to use what he terms “overreading.” The concept is adapted from the idea of overhearing in lyric poetry. Essentially, some forms of speech (written or oral) are intentionally communicated to be overheard by an audience other than the direct addressee(s). Davis illustrates with
public prayer which, while overtly spoken to God, is designed to be overheard by the congregation. In this, “the congregation’s overhearing is not accidental but integral to the prayer’s purpose and rhetoric” (p. 28). The same attribute is demonstrated in English poetry (pp. 24–31) and Roman satire (pp. 31–38). From this, Davis crystalizes three principles that inform his “overreading” of Amos (p. 22):

1. Overhearing is a poetic tool for engaging multiple audiences, sometimes entrapping them.
2. There is some continuity between addressees within a poem and overhearing audiences outside the poem.
3. A poet’s own community (and even the poet) is often implicated in the discourse directed at addressees and overhearers.

Chapters 3–5 apply these principles to Amos 6:1–7; 3:9–11; and 7:10–17 respectively (addressed in order of proposed provenance). Pericopes are selected based on intractable difficulties posed by multiple addressees. Amos 6:1, for example, is spoken to both “Zion” and “Mount Samaria.” Davis suggests this is not an accident of diachronic development but a key feature of the oracle (p. 51). Davis evaluates each pericope similarly. First, he situates the passage historically through detailed and extensive engagement with textual and archaeological data, informed by his previous monographs—Tel Dan in Its Northern Cultic Context (Atlanta: SBL, 2013) and Reconstructing the Temple: The Royal Rhetoric of Temple Renovation in Ancient Israel and the Near East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). This survey of socio-economic and political landscapes is, by itself, invaluable. Davis concludes that 6:1–7 is best set in 760–730 BC, 3:9–11 in 713–711 BC, and 7:10–17 in the early postexilic period (pp. 75, 87, 114). Davis then explores the rhetorical ends achieved by triangulating addressees within the text with proposed audience(s). Again, using 6:1–7 as an example, Davis concludes that the list of “misused cultic paraphernalia” entraps overreading audiences (identified as temple elites and the prophet’s own community [p. 45]) by exposing revelers’ self-indulgence in using cultic vessels for ordinary feasts (pp. 58–59). Thus, the oracle is constructed to inform the tradents’ own community regarding identity and values (p. 81). Davis offers this study to demonstrate the utility of his method for exegeting other passages made difficult by the presence of multiple addressees, whether in Amos or elsewhere (p. 145).

The Book of Amos and Its Audiences demonstrates why and how analyses of biblical texts should consider “overreading” audiences. Thus, Davis challenges readings of Amos (and, by implication, other OT books) that too quickly default to diachronic solutions or that fail to appreciate poetic means of persuasion. Nevertheless, there is a tension that runs through the volume. Davis attempts to distinguish a text’s crystallization point (coalescing prior oral and written traditions) from its reception history. That is, he is not so much interested in how Amos’s oracles were appropriated by later communities of readers; rather, he tries to isolate original function by linking each oracle to the historical moment that accounts for all features of the extant text. However, the spectrum of dates proposed (from mid-eighth century to the postexilic period), coupled with the executive role assigned to redactors/tradents in reshaping prior material for new rhetorical contexts (e.g., pp. 17, 114–24), raises questions. On what basis can 3:9–11, for instance, still be read through an early-eighth century lens if 7:10–18 (and, indeed, the final book, according to Davis) is a product of the Persian era? Why does this provenance not overwrite the purpose of prior compositional stages? Determining the rhetorical function of the final-form book (a matter left unaddressed) seems to be a crucial missing piece.
Davis has produced a fascinating exploration of select pericopes in Amos which artfully blends historical and rhetorical analysis. Even if readers disagree with the answers given, the questions cannot be ignored.

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Ecclesiastes is often viewed as one of the more difficult or problematic books in the Bible. Nonetheless, there is no shortage of people willing to provide their interpretation of the book. These interpretations can generally be classified based on the interpreter’s approach (historical or philosophical), the book’s theology (orthodox or unorthodox), and its tone (optimistic or pessimistic). T. F. Leong’s book fits in the categories of philosophical, orthodox, and optimistic. It is philosophical, evinced in part by its title, “*Our Reason for Being*,” as well as the sources drawn upon. It is orthodox, in that the gospel of Jesus is presumed and Ecclesiastes is read as orthodox Christian Scripture from the outset. It is optimistic because it views the teaching of Ecclesiastes as pointing to trust and faithfulness in YHWH. As such, this is an exposition of Ecclesiastes which understands Qoheleth as not just grasping for, but indeed finding meaning.

There are two key differences between this and other Ecclesiastes commentaries. First, out of the book’s four parts, only part 2 is a commentary proper. There is a brief introduction, and then, after the lengthy exposition, two essays—one on the teaching and the other on the interpretation of Ecclesiastes. This means the book has multiple paces across the different parts, but it also slows down at several points within the commentary proper due to the multiple excurses on key or “problem” verses, as well as the footnotes delving into the quirks of the Hebrew.

The second, and more striking, difference between this and other recent commentaries is not so much what it focuses on, but what is not discussed at all. This book has a particular interest in reading philosophically, but this focus clearly betrays a disinterest in issues that might otherwise unlock the book for others. The book is read as “a persuasive speech” (p. 7), each paragraph flowing into the next from the beginning until the end. As a reader interested in structure (see my *Seeing What Qohelet Saw: The Structure of Ecclesiastes as Alternating Panels of Observation and Wisdom* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019]), Leong’s commentary on a largely undifferentiated block of speech occasionally felt like an even longer block of undifferentiated speech. Attention to recent essays and books on the structure of Ecclesiastes would have helped give this reading of Ecclesiastes, and hence this book, more shape. Furthermore, the predominantly philosophical approach reveals a disinterest in situating Ecclesiastes in history and seeking to understand Qoheleth’s illustrative examples according to their potential historical referents. Many recent interpretations of Ecclesiastes have found value in this historical contextualization; for example, George Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).
Perhaps the apparent disinterest in structure and history can be explained by the book’s more philosophical bent, but it may also be a result of this being in part a reworking of a twenty-year-old master’s thesis and an expansion of a chapter from a partner volume, *Our Reason for Hope* (CreateSpace, 2018). The majority of conversation partners are hence older volumes, and much recent scholarship on Ecclesiastes does not seem to have made much of an impact. This strikes me as a perennial challenge when reviving and expanding upon older work rather than starting completely from scratch.

I appreciate many of the little asides, such as the contextual reading of לכה not as broadly “everything” but specifically “both of these” (pp. 149–50). The reading of יברחי as a financial metaphor, one’s “fiscal gain” (p. 18, cf. p. 58), is also an insightful way of describing Qoheleth’s way of adjudicating meaning in this world. These are just two of myriad examples that demonstrate a clear desire to dig into the text to understand as well as apply the teaching of Ecclesiastes.

There is a clear desire to make this book approachable for non-Hebraists, so there is no Hebrew text and only rarely is transliteration provided. This makes it occasionally a little unhelpful where there is a discussion on “the word translated as x” without identifying the word. I am not sure of the thinking behind this choice; non-Hebraists will likely skip these footnotes dealing with more intricate questions of the Hebrew text, while those with Hebrew proficiency will have to refer back to the Hebrew text to confirm that the word is indeed what they guess it is.

Such minor quibbles aside, this book is a joyful reading of Ecclesiastes from a philosophical, evangelical, optimistic perspective. The focus on the justice of God, the goodness of work, enjoying the fruit of one’s labor, and the coherence of this creation despite the presence of evil, will be an encouragement to readers who share Leong’s presuppositions. There will, of course, remain many who read this book otherwise, but they too will surely appreciate the challenges and thoughtful readings presented in this book.

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The Book of Genesis stands “second to none” concerning its import for understanding God’s plan(s) and purpose(s) for creation (p. 5). Kenneth A. Mathews asserts that Genesis “presents the literary and theological underpinning of the canonical Scriptures. If we possessed a Bible without Genesis, we would have a house of cards without [a] foundation” (p. 5). Originally released over twenty-five years ago as part of the New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), Mathews has reworked his esteemed commentary for a new generation.

The Christian Standard Commentary (CSC) aims to “embody an ‘ancient-modern’ approach” (p. ix). This involves bringing together careful exegesis, theological insight, and rigorous scholasticism alongside practical relevance and application to the “building up of Christ’s church and the Great Commission to which all are called” (p. xii). One may say that this commentary has thoroughly succeeded!
Akin to its predecessor, *Genesis 1–11* is arranged according to six major sections: (1) The Creation of Heaven and Earth (1:1–2:3); (2) The Human Family in and outside the Garden (2:4–4:26); (3) Adam's Family Line (5:1–6:8); (4) Noah and His Family (6:9–9:29); (5) The Nations and the Tower of Babel (10:1–11:9); and, lastly, (6) Shem's Family Line (11:10–26).

Regarding the commentary proper, Mathews skillfully arranges the content into clearly defined, funnel-shaped *pericopae*. He starts with a broad literary unit, such as, “Creation of Heaven and Earth” (Gen 1:1–2:3), and then subdivides it into smaller segments, such as “Creator and Creation” (Gen 1:1–2), and even smaller units, like “In the Beginning” (Gen 1:1).

Important text-critical and lexical details are readily accessible. Key literary and narratival links (intertextuality) are also clearly elucidated. Pastors and other ministry leaders will appreciate the author’s emphasis on application. Mathew’s poignant and thoughtful comments on spiritual formation (alongside the text’s relationship to certain socio-political/cultural matters, such as abortion, capital punishment, gender dynamics, and racism, for example) are evenly interspersed throughout the commentary. By way of example, concerning Genesis 9:1–7, Mathews states: “Human life must be treated with special caution … because it is of singular value as life created in the ‘image of God’ (v. 6)…. The basis of the prohibition against taking human life is rooted in the transcendent value of human life conferred at creation” (pp. 377–78).

Concerning revisions, one notes the not insignificant change in Bible translation from the New International Version (1984) to the Christian Standard Bible. There is also a new five-page “select” bibliography (see pp. xiii–iv), some welcome modifications to various charts, tables, diagrams, and graphics, enhancing their readability and user-friendliness. The language and terminology have been updated throughout, and most importantly, new footnotes and five new excursuses (roughly fifty pages!) provide effective summaries on topics including “The Interpretation of Genesis in the Modern Period,” “Genesis 1–11 and Ancient Literature,” “Creation Narratives and Modern Science,” “Life Spans of the Patriarchs,” and “The Flood Narrative.”

Despite Mathew’s careful attention to detail alongside his enviable pastoral and pedagogical sensitivity, it is unfortunate that his astute insights may, unfortunately, only be appreciated by those already within the so-called “conservative” camp. Concerning “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (TIS) Mathews argues that the Bible is theological revelation “through Sacred Writ” so that we may “know about God and know God” (p. 15, italics original). Elsewhere, Mathews explicates: “The character of Genesis requires me to read it as reporting in narrative true historical events. Indeed, it requires such an approach if I am to let Genesis speak on its own terms. The search for meaning involves the tandem of biblical content and the literary genre that conveys the message” (pp. 6–7, italics original).

As per the original *Genesis 1–11:26* commentary, there is often an acute awareness of the pronounced difference between various verbal stems (Qal, Piel, Pual, Hophal, etc.), coupled with substantial engagement with standard Hebrew reference grammars (*IBHS*, *GKC*, Davidson) and informed nomenclature (one notes, for example, the concerted use of the term wayyiqtol). While the author does not refer to David J. A. Clines’s *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2016, now appearing in its second edition), several other prominent lexicons are cited (*TDOT*, *TWOT*, *HALOT*, BDB). It is rather strange, though, to see BAGD cited instead of BDAG (cf. p. 332).

A more disconcerting matter, however, is the absence of any references to *BHQ*. Other noteworthy volumes absent from Mathew’s commentary include the work of David M. Carr, Georg Fischer, Julie
Galambush, J. C. Gertz, Dru Johnson, Carol Kaminski, Thomas Keiser, James Chukwuma Okoye, Horst Seebass, and Andrew Steinmann.

Mathews’s discussion of the relationship between the beaker and the Bible is easy to appreciate, as he consistently and effectively avoids *ad hominem* attacks and “strawman” arguments, particularly in his excursus, “Creation Narratives and Modern Science” (pp. 532–44). Concerning JEDP and the documentary hypothesis, Mathews judiciously states that “duplicates” in the Flood account are “better attributed to rhetorical effect than different literary sources” (p. 573). Despite these strengths, some readers may still quibble with his assertions on the Flood:

If read as a literal description, there can be no dispute that the narrative depicts the flood in the language of a universal deluge…. Some believe, however, that the passage is using hyperbole … or is a phenomenological depiction … permitting the possibility of a local flood. In either case, the meaning is not substantially altered: all that Noah and his generation know is swallowed up by the waters so that none survives (pp. 349–50).

In contrast, esteemed Hebraist and biblical commentator Bruce K. Waltke (with Cathi J. Fredricks), observes that, while many “evangelicals favor a local flood,” the Genesis “narrator, even allowing for oriental hyperbole, seems to have in mind a universal flood” (*Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 314). Waltke further states: “The geological arguments favoring a local flood assume that the history of the earth’s geology is uniform, but the text represents a geological cataclysm and a re-creation of the earth” (p. 315). Viewing the Genesis Flood account as depicting a local or regional flood also raises certain questions about how best to interpret the (universal) covenant God made with Noah and all future generations (see Dustin G. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah’s Flood in Genesis* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022]).

These minor criticisms notwithstanding, many preachers, pastors, Christian ministry leaders, Bible college and seminary students, and (one hopes!) invested laypeople will find this commentary a helpful resource at multiple levels, particularly those unfamiliar with the first edition.

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More words are given to Joseph and his story than any other character or narrative in Genesis. Despite this, Joseph disappears from most of the Old Testament. After his burial (Josh 24:32), only Psalm 105:17–22 directly references the events of Joseph’s story. Despite his “fade from the pages of Scripture” (p. 252), Joseph somehow becomes a major character in Second Temple literature. What explains this resurrection of interest in Joseph? After the fall of Jerusalem, the people of Israel sought to establish their identity and evaluate their situation, both culturally and theologically. Instead of establishing a new identity, they returned to their Scriptures. Narrative portrayals of death and resurrection offered hope for a future resurrected identity as God’s people. This led to a new appreciation of the Joseph narrative (p. 261).

However, these Second Temple texts needed to overcome a perceived negative characterization of Joseph found in the Masoretic Text (pp. 147–62). In a fascinating study of narrative and historical interpretation, Jeffrey Pulse argues that editors and translators were willing “to polish and restore the image of Joseph” (p. 162). But the ways that they polish Joseph’s image portray certain convictions about his character. This leads Pulse to conclude that “Joseph is not primarily a moral and ethical example, an excellent statesman, or a salvific character…. [Joseph instead is a] death-and-resurrection figure” evident through reading the text as a unified theological narrative (pp. 279–80).

Chapters 1–2 argue for reading the Joseph narrative as a unified theological narrative. Pulse argues that historical-critical, form-critical, and tradition-critical methods have failed to provide adequate interpretations. Instead, he argues for a canonical reading focused on theological motifs evident across the narrative.

Chapter 3 provides a close reading of the MT of Genesis 37–50. He pays close attention to theological motifs—particularly the motif of death and resurrection. He concludes that “the life of Joseph, with all its ups and downs, [gives] example after example of death and resurrection” (p. 145). These examples are further highlighted in chapter 5.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the various negative portrayals of Joseph’s character evident in the MT. The negative portrayal of Joseph, widely recognized among Joseph scholars, poses problems for those who read Joseph as a hero of the faith (p. 161). Thus, extrabiblical and pseudepigraphic literature arose in the Second Temple period to resurrect Joseph’s portrayal (p. 162).

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of twelve potential death-and-resurrection motifs in the Joseph narrative—from separation-and-reunion and slavery-and-freedom to stripped-and-clothed garments. Whereas a few of these motifs are not as evident as others, the cumulative case argues persuasively that “no other character and no other narrative in the Old Testament ... brings together so many of the themes of this motif” (p. 195).

Chapters 6–7 look at interpretations of the Joseph narrative evident in the Septuagint and Targum Onkelos translations of the passage. Pulse argues that the Egyptian context of the Septuagint translators may have led them to supplement Joseph’s image to emphasize that an ancient Jew had blessed Egypt.
He argues that Targum Onkelos gives a significant makeover to Joseph's characterization to “polish the image of Joseph, making him more palatable to rabbinic tastes” (p. 226). Although their emphases are different, neither of these ancient interpretations removes the death-and-resurrection motifs in their resurrection of Joseph's character.

Chapter 8 gives a brief discussion of Second Temple literature that shows Joseph's resurgent popularity. The main reason, according to Pulse, comes through the death-and-resurrection shape of the story that gave hope for restoration and redemption (pp. 260–61).

Chapter 9 gives an even more brief discussion of Joseph's use in Philo and Josephus. He notes that these appropriations of the Joseph narrative argue against rigid uniformity of interpretation (p. 262). As with the previous chapter, one wishes Pulse would have said more. The fascinating glimpse of the interpretation of Joseph noted in these chapters begs for additional commentary.


Samuel Emadi's From Prisoner to Prince: The Joseph Story in Biblical Theology, NSBT 59 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022) argues that the Joseph story, though seemingly absent from most of the Old Testament, typologically influenced a series of later narratives and even shaped how biblical authors narrate redemptive history. Pulse has made a more nuanced claim and shows that the post-exilic Israelite community found new hope for a new context through reviving theological motifs found in Joseph's story. As a result, “Joseph was resurrected into a new life of prominence among the Second Temple people of Israel” (p. 261).

Both pastors and seminary students will profit from reading this book. Pastors will find much worth considering the close readings of the biblical text, as well as its reflection on a variety of theological motifs. Seminarians will find an exceptional example of theological interpretation. In chapter 1, Pulse quotes Brevard Childs as suggesting that “proper appreciation of the canon directs the reader's attention to the sacred writings rather than to their editors” (p. 21). Figuring Resurrection has accomplished this goal. Through a close analysis of canonical and historical interpretation, Pulse has drawn the reader's attention more closely to the sacred text of the Joseph story.

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Shead argues that the editors put the songs together by theme, not necessarily by date of origin. His treatment of this process helps the reader step into the emotion of each period. He begins by addressing the reader’s ability to read poetry. He explains, “The first purpose of poetry … is to make the reader slow down” (p. 2).

Chapter 1 deals with Psalms 1–2 as the gateway to the collection. He sets out to investigate the path of the king and those blessed to walk with him through weakness to glory. In chapters 2–6 he selects a representative psalm from each book, closing with a chapter on the Hallelujah songs (Pss 146–150). He notes, “Praise is the king’s destination, as it is ours, and it is the journey that creates the destination” (p. 121).

Shead sees replicable patterns in Israel’s history, the experience of Jesus, and the life of the believer. He sees the tension between the references to an eternal kingdom and Israel’s experience as prophetic. He refines the distinction between old and new covenants. “To know the law—whether through Moses or the New Testament—is to know God, and to delight in the law is to delight in God” (p. 6). In this way he engages the reader with “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Chapter 2 treats Psalm 32 as a model of the movement from confession to forgiveness and thanksgiving. He pictures Jesus singing this song as the representative of his people. He notes that “God knows it all, but we must tell it to him anyway. This is not a charade. It’s a surrender” (p. 28). He sees Psalm 32 as calling us to recover the life God gave in the joy and security of his love.

Chapter 3 deals with Psalm 69 as a model of prophecy. He notes the frequency with which the NT writers refer to it as a description of the person and work of Jesus. While “it’s not impossible that it describes a crisis during David’s reign” (p. 39), he sees a “first fulfilment” (p. 51) in the life of the prophet.
Jeremiah. He then demonstrates how it also fits the life of Jesus. There is no attempt here to spiritualize: “When you lament, you discipline yourself to step back from your trouble and reflect on the character of the God you are praying to” (p. 49).

Chapter 4 deals with Psalm 88, the final psalm in Book 3, responding to a time when “we see the nation die as God makes himself its enemy.” He speaks of “living with the absence of God,” noting that “even despair is something we can express wisely or foolishly” (p. 61). This is a chapter that digs deep into the realities of the believer’s experience. He cites a grieving friend who said of this psalm that “it gave him permission to be devastated” (p. 76). This chapter stands as a rock of integrity against the winds of emotional denial and kerygmatic euphemism.

Chapter 5 focuses on Psalm 91 as “an ‘emergency’ psalm [punning 91:1] for people in trouble” (p. 83). Writing during the COVID-19 pandemic, he rejects any attempt “to reduce the promise of Psalm 91 to spiritual blessings” (p. 89). Rather, the focus is on the advance of God’s rule as God’s agents on active service (p. 96).

Chapter 6 wrestles with Psalm 118. He describes this song as “a noisy and dramatic re-enactment” not only of the return from exile as a second exodus, but also “of Christ’s resurrection” (p. 101), “a prophecy to be performed in anticipation of the real thing” (p. 102).

Chapter 7 focuses on Psalm 147, visualizing it “as a photo album in which the poet has collected some of the favourite things he’s noticed about God.” He concludes, “Praise rests on the art of noticing things” (p. 123). He advises the reader to include images of life’s disappointments and confusions “and remember that your trouble is an integral part of God’s plan to perfect the universe” (p. 134).

Out of a culture of cliches, acronyms, and jargon, Shead delivers a workshop in effective communication and faithful teaching. He shows us how head can move heart to action. He brings a depth of scholarship to the surface in a style that is accessible to a high school student. The emotion of the psalms comes through in language that is both memorable and moving. In this little book he delivers a masterclass in how to read the psalms, tuning heart, mind, and character to God’s.

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Anyone who has worked on the Greek text of Acts knows that the author often uses complicated grammatical constructions and word forms rarely found elsewhere in the New Testament. He especially like the pluperfect tense. Having a tool to help translation and analysis would be welcome. This two-volume work is such a tool. It is a revised and significantly expanded version of the first edition, which had 21 pages of front matter and 556 pages of analysis. This new version is almost twice that size. The series “offers an accessible and comprehensive, though not exhaustive, treatment of the Greek New Testament, with particular attention given to the grammar of the text” (p. ix). Beyond grammar, the series offers textual criticism, lexical semantics, discourse analysis, and more. Students and scholars alike should be aware, therefore, that Culy, Parsons, and Hall address topics such as these and assume readers understand the topic and the special vocabulary that is used. This is not a book for first-year Greek students. Users should be familiar with the contents of intermediate grammars, such as Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), for maximum benefit. The revised and expanded edition cites others much more often and has longer discussions of many textual and grammatical issues.

The introduction discusses several topics. The text used in this revision is not NA28/UBS5, but the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM). Eschewing traditional text-critical principles, the ECM, and therefore this handbook, use the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM). Most of the ECM’s differences from NA28/UBS5 derive from this newer approach. The book also briefly discusses grammatical labels and phrase structure, discourse flow, and “More on the Functions of Participles.” Reading the introduction will be helpful for understanding terms and symbols in the book. Several times within the two volumes, reference is made to the view of a commentator or Greek grammarian, such as C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994–1998). However, this is not a commentary; it focuses on grammar. Sometimes, there are descriptions that can be debated. For example, the handbook uses “attendant circumstance” for many participles. Culy (in private correspondence), stated that he disagrees with others over the traits
necessary to identify a participle as attendant circumstance. That is something to be aware of as you read the analysis. It might not always match what you have been taught previously.

One of the benefits of this series is that there is a translation offered for every verse, divided into sections. The reviewer used a similar work in another series, but that series had no translation, which made it difficult to know how to apply the analysis. In the Baylor Handbook, for example, Acts 27:13–20 has a translation. After the translation, every word of every verse is analyzed for its identity and function. In Acts 27:13, we learn that ὑποπνεύσαντος is an aorist active participle genitive singular and its function is temporal. Sometimes participles are labeled with functions such as cause, manner, or purpose. This one is identified as part of a genitive absolute construction. Readers are directed to Acts 1:8 to learn about the genitive absolute. There are many references to other verses to learn more about what is being stated about a particular word. Often, there are several sentences for one word to talk about possible interpretations of the word grammatically. In Acts 27:13, the book disagrees with BDF over the use of κρατέω in τῆς προθέσεως κεκρατηκέναι. The authors describe κεκρατηκέναι as a present active infinitive in indirect discourse with verbs of cognition. Readers should not be put off by this. It is possible to benefit from the book without having all the background knowledge that is assumed. Not having learned CBGM or not owning the ECM should not prevent a potential reader for using this book. Much of the linguistic and text-critical discussion shows up only occasionally. Culy and Parson also wrote the Baylor Handbook of the Gospel of Luke, and at times the Acts handbook points back to the handbook on Luke. The book includes a bibliography, and author and grammar indexes.

This book is excellent and definitely worth having. It does exactly what it sets out to do. Acts, especially the last several chapters, can be very challenging. It has hundreds of rare words and numerous participle constructions. (Luke seems to have set out to show off how accomplished in Greek he was!) For anyone attempting to translate all or parts of Acts, this would definitely be a valuable tool on one’s desk.

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One of the greatest challenges facing contemporary readers of the New Testament is ascertaining how the canonical writings would have been understood in their original contexts. Paul’s instruction in the first canonical writing to Timothy is one such example. Just what did he mean when he stated that women will be saved through childbirth (1 Tim 2:15)? Surely Paul was not suggesting that there is a link between a woman’s ability or willingness to bear children and her salvation. But if we are to reject this notion then what exactly was his point? A variety of proposals have been advanced over the years that attempt to account for this perplexing statement, yet no single solution has proven entirely convincing to the majority of scholars.
According to Sandra Glahn, much of the confusion relating to this passage can be resolved by an informed understanding of the influence of the goddess Artemis within the cultural context of the original readers. Glahn, who currently serves as Professor of Media Arts and Worship at Dallas Theological Seminary, is no stranger to the study of the Artemis cult. In fact, much of her academic work over the last decade or more has focused on ancient witnesses to Artemis and the relevance of this background for the study of the New Testament. In addition to her doctoral dissertation, Glahn produced two articles on the subject of Artemis: “The Identity of Artemis in First-Century Ephesus,” *BSac* 172 (2015): 316–34; and “The First-Century Ephesian Artemis: Ramifications of Her Identity,” *BSac* 172 (2015): 450–69. Those familiar with her prior research will recognize that much of the content in these articles was reproduced in the present volume.

The association of the Artemis cult with Ephesus is well known, though, as Glahn explains, there have been unfortunate misunderstandings about the origin of the goddess and her role in human affairs. Contrary to the common notion that Artemis was a fertility goddess, Glahn provides compelling evidence that she was perceived instead as “a virgin goddess specializing in several things, including painless delivery or painless deaths, especially related to childbirth” (p. 54). Rather than looking to Artemis to conceive, Glahn explains, ancient women often trusted her to guide them safely through childbirth—a significant and constant concern in the first century—or at least to grant them a quick and painless death if they were not to make it through delivery. This understanding of the cult is supported by a robust and clearly presented survey of the relevant historical evidence from literary (ch. 3) and epigraphic (ch. 4) sources as well as from ancient architecture and art (ch. 5).

Following her study of the role played by Artemis within the world of the original readers, Glahn discusses several words and phrases in 1 Timothy that may have been intended to capture the attention of those familiar with Artemis. She also considers how Paul's readers (Pauline authorship is assumed) would have understood his instruction about women. Among other things, she argues that Paul's instruction was likely addressed specifically to wives, not to women in general (pp. 134–35), that the frequently discussed prohibition in verse 12 should be understood as Paul's personal advice for a particular situation rather than as a universal principle (pp. 137–40), and that his appeal to Eve was designed to counter “a false story [about Artemis] with a true one” (p. 143). With regard to the assertion that women will be delivered or saved in some sense through childbirth (v. 15), Glahn concludes that the Greek verb σῴζω should be understood in the sense of “deliver” or “preserve” rather than in a final eschatological sense. She then concludes that Paul offers assurance to his readers that it was Jesus, not Artemis, who will preserve women of faith during the birth of their children.

The idea that Paul is referring to the deliverance of women through childbirth is not an altogether new interpretation, of course. Interestingly, some interpreters have made this conclusion without appealing to the Artemis cult. Moyer Hubbard, for example, reaches the same basic conclusions as Glahn in his article “Kept Safe Through Childbearing: Maternal Mortality, Justification by Faith, and the Social Setting of 1 Timothy 2.15,” *JETS* 55 (2012): 743–62. In contrast to Glahn, however, Hubbard focuses primarily on the use of σῴζω in other New Testament passages and the theological basis of Paul's instruction. Whereas Glahn emphasizes the contrast between the protection offered by Artemis and Christ, Hubbard places a greater emphasis on the connection between the curse related to childbearing found in Genesis 3:16 and the assertion in 1 Timothy 2:15 that those in Christ will be safely protected.

Readers are sure to benefit from Glahn's even-handed and careful analysis of the relevant background related to Artemis. However, some may wish for additional clarity on how these insights inform our
understanding of the ongoing implications of Paul’s instruction. For Glahn, the promise of protection during childbirth appears to be time-bound and limited in application to Christian women in first-century Ephesus. It is not, as she explains, “a universal statement that would be true of all women in all eras. Rather, it would be true in the case of Timothy and his congregation in the short term” (p. 146). But this raises several questions. Were Christian women in first-century Ephesus supernaturally protected in a way that Christian women in other locations or other periods of history were not? Was Paul simply making a proverbial statement that is generally true of Christian women in all contexts? In short, what, if anything, does the text assure readers today about God’s care and provision for women who continue in faith, love, and holiness, particularly with respect to childbirth? Glahn concedes in the final pages of the volume that “the author’s corrective does have universal implications” (p. 155), though readers may struggle to determine the specific ways that she believes the text applies to women reading Paul’s words in a modern context.

While Glahn does not answer every question related to this notoriously challenging passage, there is certainly much to commend in this intriguing study. In addition to her clear and wide-ranging survey of the primary sources related to the Artemis cult, Glahn provides a wealth of insight related to the historical context behind 1 Timothy and how many of the original readers would have understood Paul’s instruction. The work will serve as a valuable resource to pastors, scholars, and lay readers alike and is sure to prompt fresh discussion regarding the background and meaning of one of the most disputed texts in the Pauline corpus.

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This book is a collection of essays that Seyoon Kim, perhaps the leading South Korean New Testament scholar in the world, published as a sort of addendum to his new 1–2 Thessalonians commentary now published in the Word Biblical Commentary series. As an essay collection rather than a focused monograph, there is no single thesis that encapsulates the overall argument of the book. However, the title accurately captures the theme of the book as a whole: the gospel that Paul presented to the church in Thessalonica is the same gospel he delivered in his other epistles. For Kim, the letters to the Thessalonian Christians must be read in close concert with Romans, the Corinthian Correspondence, Galatians, and Philemon. Although he references the other Pauline letters, citations to the disputed letters are secondary, supporting rather than generating a line of argument.

The lack of unifying thesis, and the scope of topics covered in the book presents a challenge to evaluating Paul’s Gospel for the Thessalonians and Other Churches. The cornerstone essay is likely the second of the book, “Jesus the Son of God as the Gospel (1 Thess 1:9–10 and Rom 1:3–4).” In twenty-two tightly argued pages, Kim unfolds Paul’s description of God’s work in the Thessalonians and his summary of redemptive history. Paul, Kim argues, has loaded that phrase to present, in nuce, a short and
pithy description of his gospel, holding together many of the important themes that appear throughout Paul's letters: obedience, judgment, salvation, covenant faithfulness. As the Son of God, Jesus presents these realities to those who believe in him. With a particularly sharp turn of phrase, Kim writes, “Jesus Christ the Son of God is the embodiment of God's covenant faithfulness or his love (Rom 5:8–10; 8:32; cf. also Gal 2:20). Thus Jesus Christ the Son of God spells the 'gospel,' the good news of God's salvation for the whole world” (p. 65). This essay and the fourth essay, “Jesus' Son of Man Sayings as a Basis of Paul's Gospel of Jesus the Son of God (1 Thess 1:9—10 and Rom 1:3–4)” make up a single study that chart a line of continuity from Jesus to Paul. Throughout the book Kim references these two, and so they form a backbone to the rest of what he argues.

Kim has produced a remarkable piece of work, as the essays are consistently strong throughout. If this volume complements, rather than simply repeats, the commentary, then Kim has left us with a significant and worthwhile addition to literature on the Thessalonian correspondence. One notable strength is Kim's concern for the Christian life. It does not seem as if he is writing simply for the academy. For example, he concludes one of his essays with what amounts to a call to trust in Christ: “Without [Christ], human beings are left to their own finite resources (humanism), no matter whether they are atheists (since they have no God but only themselves the finite beings) or pantheists (since they have no God extra nos) or deists (since they have no God who comes pro nobis)” (p. 66). Throughout the book, Kim's piety peeks through his scholarship (e.g., p. 321) which is very refreshing in a field that often underplays that.

I have one minor quibble about the book and one more substantial criticism of Kim's interpretation of Paul. The minor quibble concerns the order in which this volume and the complementary commentary were scheduled for publication. Throughout the book, Kim refers the reader to his then unpublished commentary. Perhaps there is some logic to publishing these essays first, but the inability to read the commentary alongside the book proved frustrating at times.

The substantial criticism is directed towards Kim's rearticulation of justification. Following his earlier volume on justification, Kim follows Käsemann's understanding of justification as a Herrschaftswechsel, a lordship transfer, a shift that arguably undermines the traditional Protestant forensic understanding (pp. 53, 282). This makes justification a “present process” (p. 283 n. 8) rather than a declared reality. While Paul's use of the δικ- word group is complex and certain notions of forensic righteousness can simplify Paul's careful thought, the forensic interpretation is not without exegetical warrant (e.g., Rom 5:1, et al.). Though Kim mentions this (see p. 93), he avoids some of the exegetical implications by conflating Pauline language, such that justification, reconciliation, and sanctification all become parallel, even synonymous, terms for God's work in Jesus Christ (pp. 93, 126–28). It is not clear, though, how Kim's suggestion to identify these blessings rather than to hold them as distinct though related realities satisfies the text. If Kim is right, then Paul's letters lose much of their richness, and he becomes a rather monochromatic thinker. In addition, there is no compelling reason to read Paul's letters in this way. The text does not necessitate it, which is arguably why most biblical interpreters through the centuries have not conflated these concepts.

Although the price will be prohibitive to most individuals, anyone doing work in the Thessalonian correspondence or Pauline studies more broadly should seek to incorporate Kim's insights. Even preachers will find much of the material stimulating as they prepare sermons. Although many will find
themselves in disagreement with Kim's understanding of justification, they should not let that deter them from learning a great deal from such a productive and provocative thinker.

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Professor Muraoka is a brilliant scholar of the biblical languages: over more than forty-five years, he has published on Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. His Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, 3rd ed (Leuven: Peeters, 2009) and Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint (Leuven: Peeters, 2010) sit near my desk for regular consultation, and he has provided us with A Syntax of Septuagint Greek (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), and A Syntax of Qumran Hebrew (Leuven: Peeters, 2020). He received the great distinction of the British Academy’s Burkitt Medal for Biblical Studies (2017), the equivalent of a Nobel Prize. In “retirement” since 2003, he has been teaching in Asian countries on biblical languages and Septuagint studies for some weeks annually, as a volunteer. This is at least his tenth book published since 2003. His lifelong study has prepared him well to address the lamentable situation that many who study theology—or even focus on Biblical Studies—regard learning the biblical languages as unnecessary. The trend of seminary and theological college curricula to embrace practical theology and much else has squeezed biblical languages to the margins. This little book pushes back against this trend by making a case for the continuing significance of reading the Bible in the original languages for those who preach and teach from the Scriptures in churches, as well as those who teach in higher education.

Professor Muraoka begins with a short “My Curriculum Vitae of a Sort” (pp. 9–14), in which he recounts how he began to engage the Bible through study of English, taught by an American Baptist missionary in his native Japan. He came from a family indifferent to religion and describes his conversion and baptism. At university he wanted to study Greek and Hebrew alongside his English degree, but his request to join the classes was rejected since he was a complete beginner. Astonishingly, he taught himself the basics of both languages so that he could join the classes, and for his undergraduate dissertation wrote on the translation of Greek infinitives in English Bibles. These studies opened him up to a lifelong engagement with Scripture in the original languages, strongly motivated by his Christian faith.

After a helpful introduction laying out his approach, which includes not using Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek fonts throughout, the balance of Professor Muraoka's book walks readers through a series of biblical passages where reading the original language provides insights and understanding that are hard to see in translations, especially in English. The largest chapter (ch. 1) is on Hebrew, including helpful readings of the “sacrifice” of Isaac (Gen 22:1–19), and the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–13). This chapter highlights lexical choices, word order (particularly fronting words as the focus of a clause or sentence), repetition of nouns and verbs (and of cognates), wordplay (common with Hebrew three-letter roots), indications of the gender of verb subjects and objects, misplaced verse-divisions, naming
and not naming characters, use or absence of personal pronouns, Hebrew’s lack of a word meaning “yes,” and the use of diminutive forms of names. Throughout, Professor Muraoka explains the ideas non-technically, although he does assume a basic knowledge of English grammar.

The chapter on Greek (ch. 2) begins with helpful discussions of personal pronouns, the article, and the portrayal of past, present, and future (explaining verbal aspect). He illustrates the points by taking readers through the sinful woman’s encounter with Jesus (Luke 7:36–50) and other shorter NT passages, plus some examples from the Greek OT account of David and Bathsheba (having discussed the Hebrew in the previous chapter).

Chapter 3, on Aramaic, identifies the parts of the OT in that language and considers its importance for Jesus’s speech. A helpful discussion of singular and plural engages with words for “god” in the three biblical languages and relates this to Daniel 3 and 5. He considers words in Japanese for various kinds of wine and the way to translate key passages such as in Nebuchadnezzar’s banquet, as well as the name “Jerusalem,” which Aramaic preserves in an older form than Hebrew.

Chapter 4 then turns to the Septuagint as bridge between the Testaments, noting its importance as the Bible of the Jewish diaspora and the earliest Christians. He illustrates the translators’ handling of some key words, such as “make” and “create,” the terms for “love” in Greek, and a fascinating discussion of a nineteenth-century Japanese soldier-politician, Takamori Saigo, and his life-motto, “Revere heaven, love humans.” The latter is one of a number of such illustrations where Professor Muraoka refers to Far-Eastern culture and language in discussing biblical passages.

Throughout, the author is clear that he writes as a Christian scholar, and he thus notes the importance of justification by faith in Paul (p. 103) and invites his readers to “be saved” by accepting the gospel message of Jesus’s death for our sins and defeat of death in his resurrection (p. 105).

If you need to be persuaded of the value of biblical languages, or need to persuade others of their importance, read this book! It is clear and readable, and there are very few errors and typos. May Professor Muraoka’s tribe increase!

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This is an unusual, and unusually important, book. Dr Williams was until recently professor of ancient history at the University of West Georgia (for her fascinating account of choosing to leave academia, see “Discerning Vocation: Walking Away from Academia,” Anxious Bench, 10 May 2023, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2023/05/discerning-vocation-walking-away-from-academia/), and her learning and understanding come through clearly and lucidly in this book. She is writing in part in response to the frequent assumption that the early Christians were vastly better Christians than we are today, which she rightly argues leads to errors in discipleship in the present. She also aims to paint in key parts of Greco-Roman culture to enable readers to see the cultural sea in which the early Christians swam. A better understanding of ancient culture enables (western) Christians today to recognize Christian cultural temptations and sins in that setting. She also aims to highlight related modern (western, especially American) Christian cultural sins which show up in relation to money, marriage, sexuality, and politics. She acutely observes, “trying to fix the world through politics or just through policies on marriage … will never work. Rather, we need to pursue genuine conversion and sanctification” (p. xv).

“Cultural Christians” are those who profess to follow Jesus, but whose lives demonstrate that they follow what their culture expects. Thus “cultural sins” are “bypass[ing] God’s standards to engage in certain culturally conditioned and approved behaviours” (p. xv—I like that she names them “sins,” calling a spade a spade). Cultural religion is the norm in the Greco-Roman world: generals offered sacrifices to the gods or sought divine guidance before going to battle, and political leaders were frequently also priests of religion. “Religion” was not one sphere of life separate from others, such as politics or work, but permeated the whole of life. It was common to bargain with the gods, to find the correct sacrifice to offer to persuade the gods to give the outcome the sacrificer desired. Here is the focus of this book, for Dr Williams argues cogently that cultural sins exist among Christians in the first five centuries AD and shows how Greco-Roman cultural values and expectations are evident from sources for that period.

Dr Williams is not writing to criticize, but to alert today’s Christians to consider and act on the cultural sins which we are engaged in. She is not pointing fingers at others, but writes for all Christians, “the average church-goers not only in antiquity, but also today” (p. xxvii). Each of the chapters then considers a particular period and/or location in these five centuries to illustrate and expound Dr Williams’s thesis.

Consider the sharing of possessions in the earliest churches (ch. 1). Her case studies here are Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37), whom she considers a “cultural Jew” before his conversion on the ground that Levites were not supposed to have land, and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), who meet God’s judgement for their lies. She surveys property ownership among Jews of the period, noting Jesus’s criticism of those who are rich at others’ expense in contradiction of the (OT) scriptural commands to provide for those in need. Roman euergetism, providing from one’s wealth for a city or community, led to glory and honour for the giver. Barnabas is counter-cultural in giving so generously, whereas Ananias and Sapphira are acting with the grain of the culture in seeking honour for themselves because of their
gift. As modern examples, Dr Williams mentions the sacrificial giving in adopting a child (especially later in life, seeing taxation as a way of caring for those less fortunate), and attitudes to immigration and foreign aid.

Chapter 2 considers food and drink in similar manner, noting that some food, notably meat, could be linked to idolatry—and that meat was often luxury food in times of food insecurity. Greek symposia and Roman convivia provide cultural conversation partners, illuminating the cultural sins of the Corinthians’ Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11). Recent changes in American evangelical attitudes to alcohol and other things lead to the succinct conclusion, “Food is never just food” (p. 39).

Sexuality is a hot issue in western churches and culture today, and chapter 3 highlights how Ovid demonstrates that lust was “the quintessential Roman cultural sin ... rooted in display of power that enforced the social structures” (p. 43). Paul’s discussion of sex and marriage in 1 Corinthians shows how current the issues were, and how Christian understanding contrasted with the prevalent cultural norms, particularly in the view of singleness and the dignity of women. The Shepherd of Hermas provides an excellent dialogue partner here and leads to conversation about the way some younger American Christians (and others elsewhere, I would add) both delay marriage and embrace (!) premarital sex, immersed as they are in cultural messages as crude and blatant as in the ancient world.

Cultural pressure leading to apostasy from Christian faith follows, in the NT period and later (ch. 4). Pliny the Younger’s puzzlement over Christians in the province of Bithynia-Pontus, where he was governor early in the second century, sets the scene in a creative reconstruction of the situation he faced (pp. 64–75). A conversation with 1 Peter, written some time earlier but to the same area, is productive (pp. 75–81), leading to reflection about the cover-up of sexual abuse and abuse of power in today’s churches, which has led some away from the Christian faith.

Female martyrs, notably Perpetua and Felicity, form the next focus, particularly in conversation with Tertullian and Cyprian (ch. 5), leading into a valuable discussion of the way single women of all ages are often ill-served in today’s churches. Dr Williams makes effective points about the way some conservative Christians oppose social programmes that help women of color, who are more likely to be poor, to give birth prematurely, and to die in childbirth, as well as regarding the concern some Christian men express over modesty in female dress (not least Owen Strachan’s misguided comments on leggings [pp. 203–4]), effectively blaming women for men’s sin.

Cyprian’s leadership as bishop of Carthage in the third century is Dr Williams’s next focus, particularly his calling believers to share with each other through prayer, finance, and physical resources (ch. 6). Cyprian identifies the fear of his communities that, if they give to others, they will not have enough for themselves, which demonstrates lack of trust that God will provide for his people. Dr Williams writes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and makes acute observations about the way churches can be a counter-cultural safety net in such times.

The scary world of Christian-on-Christian violence follows (ch. 7), not least after Constantine’s declaring Christianity to be the official Roman religion. North African Christianity, divided between Roman and Donatist believers, provides a worrying example. Many white Christians today believe themselves to be a persecuted minority, casting themselves in the role of martyrs, while forgetting how recently black believers were persecuted and killed by white believers.

Christian nationalism is not a new feature in modern America (and other countries—the Church of England is still the established church), for it faced a crisis with the fall of Rome in AD 410 (ch. 8). Up to that time, the Roman empire was the only cultural and political context Christians had ever known.
Augustine’s *City of God* is a fascinating conversation partner, read as a critique of Christian nationalism. After a fine survey of religion and culture in the Roman empire, Dr Williams reads Augustine as offering a careful reading of this history as an antidote to mistaken belief that God is on the side of the Romans. This has significant implications for how American history is taught in schools (and that of other nations, too).

Finally, Dr Williams considers the desert fathers and mothers, and identifies them as a phenomenon in tune with ancient tourism, as people came from far and wide to visit such believers (ch. 9). This provides a fine conversation with modern believers who abandon meeting in churches and individualise the expression of their faith. Dr Williams rightly observes that many of the key Christian virtues can only be practised in community, rubbing along with other believers different from us.

A brief conclusion reviews the overall argument and calls readers to be alert and attentive to their cultural milieu, so that they can seek to avoid cultural sins.

This is a fine book which deserves wide reading by church leaders and lay people. The cultural pressures facing modern western Christians are not the same as those Dr Williams relates so well, but her work sensitizes us to seek and recognise those pressures, and to resist them.

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**HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY**


Like the other volumes in the Oxford Handbooks series, this is a significant contribution to the academic study of its subject area, in this case, ecclesiology. The editor, Paul Avis, is an Anglican priest and theologian who has served both the church and the academy. He is widely published in the area of ecclesiology and also edits the academic journal *Ecclesiology*. In addition, he has committed much of his life’s work to the ecumenical movement, including a period as General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England. For all these reasons, he is an ideal editor for this volume, and he has brought together a stellar cast of writers, resulting in a book that is already becoming a standard reference in ecclesiology.

After an initial essay by Professor Avis outlining the nature and content of the discipline of ecclesiology, the Handbook is divided into four parts: (1) ‘Biblical Foundations’; (2) ‘Resources from the Tradition’; (3) ‘Major Modern Ecclesiologists’; and (4) ‘Contemporary Movements in Ecclesiology’. Each part has several chapters, and each chapter ends with a reference list of the books and articles quoted, together with a useful guide to ‘Suggested Reading’.


These chapters provide an excellent summary of ecclesiological images and themes throughout Scripture, including Moberley’s teaching on the ‘remnant’, Alexander’s emphasis on ‘eschatology’, and Adams’s analysis of ‘rituals’ and ‘meeting places’. Although dealing with the text in a scholarly and ‘technical’ manner, these chapters are also very practical and challenging, not least Lincoln’s point about Jesus’s prayer for unity in John 17 and the continued failure of the church to reach that unity.

In part 2, ‘Resources from the Tradition’, we have nine chapters: Mark Edwards on ‘Early Ecclesiology in the West’; Andrew Louth on ‘The Eastern Orthodox Tradition’; Norman Tanner on ‘Medieval Ecclesiology and the Conciliar Movement’; Dorothea Wendebourg on ‘The Church in the Magisterial Reformers’; Paul Avis on ‘Anglican Ecclesiology’; Ormond Rush on ‘Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent’; Paul S. Fiddes on ‘Baptist Concepts of the Church and their Antecedents’; David M. Chapman on ‘Methodism and the Church’; and Amos Young on ‘Pentecostal Ecclesiologies’.

These chapters represent a variety of styles and objectives. Edwards and Tanner provide an analysis of the earliest periods of the church. Louth focuses on the credal four marks of the church but does not tell us much about the different strands of Orthodoxy (Russian, Greek, Constantinopolitan, Ukrainian, etc.) which might have helped to identify different ecclesiologies, although he does note that Zizoulas, one of the best-known Orthodox theologians, is at odds with some of the tradition. Wendebourg deals with the Magisterial Reformers, although the greater emphasis is on Luther, with Calvin’s ecclesiology given less space. Avis and Rush provide detailed descriptions of the Anglican and Roman Catholic views on ecclesiology, with Avis arguing that Anglicanism is both Catholic and Reformed. Fiddes provides a fascinating analysis of Baptist ecclesiology with a strong emphasis on ‘covenant’, a theme more usually identified with Calvinistic ecclesiology. Chapman’s chapter on Methodism is perhaps more critical of his tradition than the others, not least in its failure (as he sees it) to embrace more fully an ecumenical agenda. Yong’s chapter provides some helpful descriptions of various Pentecostal ecclesiologies, but his main objective is to argue for a ‘pneumatological ecclesiology’.

The major problem with part 2 is the astonishing absence of a chapter on ‘Presbyterian Ecclesiology’. With 75 million Presbyterians around the world, a large number of books published on the subject, and the serious engagement of the Presbyterian churches ecclesiially and ecumenically, this is a gap that ought to be explained.


It is in these chapters that the main theological analysis of ecclesiology takes place. We have Barth’s insistence that ecclesiology must be viewed theologically before turning to any sociological analysis, with a particular emphasis (as we would expect) on ecclesiology viewed from the perspective of Christology. In ‘Yves Congar’, the church is viewed as a ‘sacrament’, and he develops what he calls ‘communion ecclesiology’. His influence on Vatican II is emphasised, arguing that he was responsible for much of its theological direction. This emphasis is continued by Henri de Lubac, also a leading influence at Vatican II with his understanding of ‘total ecclesiology’ and his joy when Lumen Gentium was reworked, bringing the laity to the centre of the nature of the church. In dialogue with Eastern
churches he argued that ‘the Eucharist makes the Church.’ Karl Rahner also viewed the church as a sacrament, although his main contribution was to see the church as the product of grace, centred upon the revelation of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Joseph Ratzinger, both as a theologian and later as a Pope, focussed on the church, even from the time of his doctoral dissertation on Augustine. His was a eucharistic ecclesiology, with a particular interest in the unity of the church, based on his understanding of communio and on the relationship between the universal church and the local church.

After four Roman Catholic theologians, we turn to John Zizoulas. He, too, was a leading exponent of eucharistic ecclesiology but followed a somewhat different line from the others. This was partly due to his views on the Trinity, where he emphasised the monarchy of the Father such that the unity of the Persons was not guaranteed by a common ‘substance’ but from the Person of the Father. Ecclesiology was defined as an aspect of Christology and the church as the creation of the Holy Spirit. A significant contribution to ecclesiology was his insistence on the bishop as the focus of unity. Wolfhart Pannenberg’s ecclesiology followed the lines of his Lutheran tradition while making some significant contributions as well. He viewed the disunity of the church as a major issue, especially disunity at the Table. He saw ecclesiology as an aspect of pneumatology and noted that the Spirit’s work in individual salvation and in constituting the church were the two key effects of his work. Whereas Ratzinger might argue that the ‘people of God’ is a core metaphor, Pannenberg’s focus was on the church as the ‘body of Christ.’ The final theologian chosen for consideration is Rowan Williams. He taught that the love of God in Christ leads to transformation, made visible in the life of the church. The church, then, is a community but it is a community where there may be differences in doctrine and practice. Here we are drawn into his practice as Archbishop of Canterbury and his insistence on listening to one another rather than dividing. This was a core element of his ecumenical impact. Once again, we have no Presbyterian in view. One might make a strong case for the inclusion of T. F. Torrance, not least for his work in bringing Eastern theology to bear on Western theological discussions, for his publications, and for his involvement in ecumenical dialogue.


Graham highlights the work of a number of feminist and womanist theologians, arguing for a recasting of ecclesiology by throwing off patriarchal narratives and even rejecting canonical material which does not affirm or prioritise the place of women in the church. Ormerod argues that the separation of the social sciences from theological reflection is deeply damaging and that the many problems faced by the church, especially in ecumenism, cannot be solved without the contribution of, and explanatory power of, the social sciences. Gonzalez has a fascinating essay on Liberation Theology, both his historical origins and its current influence in Latin America. Perhaps the most interesting section is the analysis of the differences between the growing influence of Pentecostalism in Latin America, alongside the declining influence of Liberation Theology, and what these two schools can learn from each other. Chan’s essay is deeply stimulating. He does not focus on the debates between Asian theologians and churches but rather looks at the indigenous and locally grounded work of Christians who may not be professional theologians but certainly have a contribution to make regarding the nature of the church. He also discusses ‘churchless Christianity,’ debates around distinctness or assimilation (cf. Newbiggin’s work), and the work of writers such as Watchman Nee. Chu Ilo’s chapter is perhaps the
most disappointing, being too narrowly focused. The title suggests an analysis of African ecclesiologies, but his preoccupation is with Roman Catholic ecclesiologies in Africa. This means that the largest Anglican community in the world escapes with barely a mention, the Protestant work in East Africa is ignored, and Pentecostalism is only sparingly mentioned.

This Handbook has much to offer and much to provoke thinking. To bring so much together inside its covers is quite an achievement and means that it will be of immense help to those who are interested in ecclesiology. One suspects that most readers will ‘dip in’ to the chapters that interest them rather than read it through, but either approach will be rewarding.

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In *Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, Matthew Barrett undertakes a sweeping look at a wide variety of sixteenth-century sources in the hopes of showing how the Reformers maintained an intellectual indebtedness to the broader Christian tradition that preceded them. Rightly rejecting the assumed and all too often held belief that the Protestant Reformers rejected in total the theology of the Medieval era, *Reformation as Renewal* seeks to demonstrate that the threads of continuity between the theological convictions of those two eras are much stronger than many people might otherwise think. Barrett’s efforts to unveil the important theological links that exist between the various streams of Reformation thought and the scholastic writers before them are not driven by mere academic curiosity or philosophical speculation. At the heart of his desired redress is the author’s larger, pastoral aim of helping Christians today, both in the renewal of their own faith traditions and in reconnecting with an orthodox heritage that extends back to the faith of the apostles.

Following in the line of some of the best correctives to the historiography of Reformation studies from the twentieth century, Matthew Barrett, Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, helps readers to identify mistaken assumptions about the nature of any supposed Reformation schism. The author resituates the idea of a so-called Protestant division while also recasting earlier arguments from noted historians like Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, and Richard Muller in a continuing effort to push back against the incorrect notion that the Reformers made a wholesale break from the Medieval tradition. Instead, Barrett stresses that any attempts to unhitch the Reformers from their scholastic forebears are overblown and historically untenable.

As an overall theme, Barrett wants to make clear that “the Reformers did not think the Reformation was primarily a revolution for new, modern ideas, but a retrieval and renewal of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church” (p. 3). This stated thesis allows Barrett to contend that the Protestant Reformers were not interested in theological innovation. Rather their primary goal was a restoration and recovery of a certain type of “catholicity” that was not rooted in a strict succession of ordination but was theological
in nature, extending back through Medieval and Patristic thinkers to the teachings of the apostles. Therefore, according to Barrett, any attempts by the Reformers to purify the late-Medieval Catholic Church did not include the complete destruction of Rome’s thinking. Instead, the Reformers jettisoned only certain aspects of Medieval theology, especially later tainted forms, according to Barrett. In the end, the Reformers sought to adorn their new Reformation churches with beliefs and practices that were not only founded on an apostolic taproot but also included earlier forms of the scholastic tradition, most notably those associated with Thomas Aquinas.

The book is structured around four main sections. Part 1 is an in-depth look at the Medieval world that helped give birth to the Reformation. Here, Barrett repositions Medieval thinking in such a way as to move beyond a flattened or singular reading of spiritual, mystical, and scholastic sources. As you continue further in the book, readers will likely recognize Barrett’s end game regarding his pursuit of such nuance. The author hopes to establish a certain historical reading, perhaps even a portrait of what he deems a true or normative form of Medieval thought. This effort, alongside Barrett’s rejection of an arbitrary divide between the Medieval and Early Modern worlds, is designed to help readers see that the Reformation bridge into Modernity was deeply grounded in a particular type of scholastic thinking.

Part 2 looks mostly at the German Reformation, especially situating Martin Luther as a late-Medieval man in the vein of Oberman. Once again, Barrett tells the riveting story of the early days of the Reformation while also showing how emerging Protestant doctrines that related to everything from salvation to the Lord’s Supper had deep moorings in Medieval thought. Even the divisive matter of justification, which drove much of Martin Luther’s theology, according to Barrett, “showed signs of debt to the scholastic and monastic traditions” (p. 391). In essence, the author contends that although figures like Luther established a Reformational language for theology that was biblical in nature, this new articulation remained both conversant and in agreement with certain voices from the scholastic tradition.

In part 3, Barrett explores other forms of Reformation in the Swiss Confederation, the British Isles, and even among several radical groups whose dissent grieved the Magisterial Reformers in their renewal efforts. Much of the focus in this section is on how the Reformed tradition that emanated from places like Zurich, Strasbourg, or Geneva had deep theological ties to classical catholic orthodoxy through things like revised church liturgies, soteriological focuses on Covenant, and theological definitions for the Trinity and the *imago Dei* in humanity.

Part 4 is a strikingly brief section, less than forty pages in length, outlining key places where the Catholic or counter-Reformation tapped into the apostolic faith and noting where it deviated from it. Here, Barrett contends that while the theology that emanated from Trent intended to shield the Nicene faith from heresy, its use of nominalist ideas derived from William Ockham and Gabriel Biel, for instance, left the Tridentine Catholic Church associated with the later forms of scholasticism that the author rejects. Through this repositioning, the author subsequently establishes the Protestant Reformers, not Rome, as the successors of both Aquinas and Augustine.

The prose of *Reformation as Renewal* is crisp and engaging. The expansive yet purposefully selective use of primary source quotations helps to push toward the book’s thesis. But perhaps more importantly, these quotations allow the Reformers to speak from their own unique historical contexts. Focusing on the Reformers’ own words helps Barrett to bring the otherwise distant and disparate world of the sixteenth century closer to the reader’s own. And this just may be where the book shines brightest.
When it comes to critiquing *Reformation as Renewal*, two of the project’s greatest strengths ironically raise a pair of problems. First, though Barrett’s focus on the continuity that existed between the Medieval scholastic thinkers and the Protestant Reformers is a welcomed corrective, the author swings the pendulum too far in his assessment. In short, the discontinuity that helped facilitate the Protestant Reformers’ unique breaks from Rome gets veiled by Barrett’s approach. This over-corrective appears connected with the author’s desire to move beyond caricatures and polemical distortions of Aquinas, whom he calls a “sounder scholastic,” in the tradition of Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and others. Such motivation appears connected to the author’s efforts to make Thomistic philosophy more palatable to modern evangelical audiences. Of course, the danger in such an approach is that history can quickly become apologetic. For example, to make Renaissance humanism not appear as a reactionary movement to scholasticism, the author must apply a reductionistic definition for humanism, framing the movement as merely cultural in nature rather than one rejecting both the style and substance of scholasticism (pp. 288–90). To provide welcomed theological nuance in one area, Barrett minimizes the complexities of other areas, all in pursuit of what he sees as a normative reading of the sources.

Second, the voluminous nature of this work which helps elucidate the wondrous and volatile world of the Reformation also gives rise to another shortcoming. Readers may quickly find the book divided in its overall focus, ultimately leaving the project with too many aims. As a work of historical theology, the book does help track the development of Christian doctrines from the Patristic, through the Medieval, and into the Reformation era. But again, there is also a specific argument that Barrett is making regarding Medieval theology, especially of a particular reading of Thomas Aquinas, and in connection with the idea of a classical orthodox theism that anchors the text. In fact, this ostensible reclamation of Aquinas drives the book’s over-stressed focus on the continuity between the Reformation and Medieval eras. Those two efforts are subsequently seated in a larger body of prose that tells the story of the Reformation as a work of history. This tripartite focus generates the cumbersome size of the text. However, this divided focus also regrettably obscures the unique contributions Barrett is trying to make on all three fronts.

Despite these issues, Matthew Barrett’s *Reformation as Renewal* serves as a useful introductory primer to those uninitiated to the Protestant Reformers’ connections with the Medieval world, just as it also serves as a helpful resource for audiences with more contextual familiarity regarding the complex world of the Reformation. Moreover, this book is a helpful tool that will challenge modern believers to ponder more deeply the connections that their doctrine and practices have with Christians who have gone before them. It also cleverly encourages Christians to consider their own role in maintaining the faith given once for all.

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The idea of turning points in the history of the Church is already familiar to readers of Mark Noll’s earlier volume, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), which is now in its fourth edition. Elesha Coffman has taken up this concept (evidently with Mark Noll’s blessing) and utilized it to explain the story of the American Church. The *Turning Points* format selects thirteen representative themes or events. It lends itself to use in settings as varied as a college, seminary course, or the basis for a series of group studies at home or church. It goes without saying that the effectiveness of this approach hinges on selecting themes that adequately encapsulate developments in the centuries covered.

Coffman, now at Baylor University but earlier at Dubuque Theological Seminary, conceived of this volume as a means of filling a gap in the church history instruction she offered to seminarians in that ecumenical Iowa setting. There Methodists and Presbyterians teach side-by-side, and the student body enfolds students from those churches and others. The volume—as she then conceived it—was intended to supplement other materials used in a semester-long course.

This work has a number of strengths. From the start, Coffman determined that marginalized groups would receive overdue attention in the telling of the American church’s story. Accordingly, from the first theme onward, “The Old World Order Upended”—which unfolds the significance for North America of the cresting of Spain’s international reach in 1588—the author wants the reader to realize that indigenous populations would suffer displacement, epidemic, and decimation whether under Spanish, French, or British jurisdictions. Chapter three, which focuses on the plight of the Christian Indian population in the rebellion known as “King Philip’s War” (1675–1676), carries this theme forward. The obstacles standing in the path of enslaved African Americans even hearing (let alone preaching) the gospel provide the theme of a fifth chapter. The perils faced by African American Christians in the Civil Rights era gain our attention in chapter twelve. The reviewer found this material thought-provoking.

Closely related to the above is Coffman’s focus on Christian minorities who found the hoped-for religious liberty of the new world elusive. Chapter 2 explores the opposition faced in the Massachusetts Bay colony by Roger Williams, opposition necessitating his migration to the eventual Rhode Island. Chapter 6 explores the situation of American Catholics who, in the initial aftermath of the Revolutionary War, enjoyed an era of quasi-independence from Rome only to see post-1800 Irish and continental Catholic immigrants pressing for greater papal deference. A tenth chapter explores the Azusa Street revival of 1906 (quite properly linked to its foreign antecedents), gradually overcoming the initial disdain of more mainstream forms of Christianity to become a recognized “third force” in American and world Christianity.

In quite a different category is the superb chapter 13, “Religion Moves Right.” Read in the context of our current vitriolic political climate, this chapter goes far to explain that evangelicalism’s current over-identification with one political party is something traceable to the Reagan era.
A few weaknesses and omissions should also be noted. One would fully expect that a volume on American Christianity would pay close attention to the era of religious awakening in pre-Revolutionary America. *Turning Points* does this in its fifth chapter. While Coffman acknowledges that there had been awakenings in earlier decades, these American events are viewed in isolation from earlier events in Wales, Scotland, and central Europe. Though the term “revivalist” is a nineteenth-century term connoting the formulaic reduction of revival to a repeatable method, Coffman follows others in applying this terminology anachronistically to evangelists such as Whitefield. I noted no use made of the important volume by Robert Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017).

The sixth chapter, “The Benevolent Empire” is a useful survey of the early nineteenth-century Second Awakening. But as with the treatment of the first awakening, there is inadequate recognition that many of the new enterprises (Bible, Tract, and Missionary Societies) followed patterns provided by longer-established societies in London. A seventh chapter—detailing the destructive consequences of the American debate over slavery upon the churches—concentrates chiefly on Methodism. The latter, while containing a large percentage of the planter class, did not itself provide the barrage of biblical and theological arguments in support of slaveholding. Presbyterians, who did provide that artillery, divided over slavery in 1861 (not, as Coffman has it, 1858). American responsiveness to the call to global evangelization (chapter 9) is treated in connection with the Student Volunteer Movement of the 1880s. This movement is shown to have eventually unraveled in the face of the moral and spiritual confusion that followed the 1914–1918 war. Yet the arguably more foundational initiatives taken by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (founded 1810), soon followed by Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian initiatives, receive scant attention. The impetus for these had been supplied by William Carey.

Chapter 11, “Science Versus Religion,” helpfully places the Scopes trial of 1925 in a larger context of American population changes (shifting from rural to urban) and in the proportion of citizens completing secondary education. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for an understanding of the ongoing polarization of Christians regarding the teaching of science. It is regrettable that Charles Hodge, an admitted anti-Darwinian, was selected as a representative of Christians suspicious of science (p. 221); Hodge was, after all, the theologian who acknowledged that “Science has in many things taught the church how to understand the Scriptures” (*Systematic Theology* 1.171).

As far as omissions, Coffman, while repeatedly taking up the themes of marginalization, racism, and discrimination, has shown almost no interest in exploring two turning points that readers of *Themelios* will consider critical. First is the widely acknowledged resurgence of evangelicalism after WW2. One might suggest that this development is assumed by the book; this reviewer would disagree. Second is the change in American attitudes to the Bible and to Christian doctrine across the twentieth century. Were it not that chapter 9 (on the Student Volunteer Movement) acknowledged that by the 1920s, this movement (along with the YMCA and YWCA) had moved away from earlier commitments to the authority of the Bible and the need for evangelization, we would find almost no discussion in *Turning Points* of what might be called theological trends. The crisis epitomized by the literary and personal career of the missionary to China, Pearl S. Buck (pp. 189–90), was, in fact, the crisis facing the entire American church. Did the Christian faith require drastic adjustment in order to face changed times? The decline of Christianity in American society over the past century cannot be understood without reference to the markedly different answers given to that question.
Elesha Coffman has provided us with an eminently readable and highly informative approach to the course taken by American Christianity. Its great strength is its concerted attention given to the marginalized and excluded. Designed to attract the widest possible readership, it does not pretend to be a history of evangelicalism. Its single greatest weakness is its avoidance of questions bearing on biblical and theological integrity.

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This wonderful collection is sorely needed in the English-speaking world. It is partly a corrective to an imbalanced narrative of over-attention to English awakenings and global connections. This welcome new work focuses upon the neglected, the overlooked, and bypassed Genevan *Réveil*, a nineteenth-century evangelical awakening which spread from Geneva to French-speaking areas of Switzerland and France and then into the Rhine lands of Germany and to the then-combined lands of today’s Belgium and the Netherlands and also into the Piedmont of Italy. True, some names are known and spoken of, such as Merle d’Aubigné and Louis Gaussen. But very little attention has been given to the real framework of understanding the *Réveil*, socially, spiritually, politically, theologically, philosophically, ecclesiologically, and missionally, at least in the English-speaking world.

The book has twenty contributors, and the promotional material tells us it was ten years in the making. The editors have crafted five useful divisions to the work: first, the excellent introductory chapter by Jean Decorvet; second, “The *Réveil* Spreads from Geneva,” containing eight chapters which clearly help readers to understand the international nature of the awakening; third, “Leading Figures in the *Réveil*,” with nine biographical chapters; fourth, engagement with “How the *Réveil* Affected France and Switzerland” in three focused chapters; and fifth, the work ends with Henri Blocher’s “Afterword: Of Revival and Revivalism.”

Readers will benefit greatly from the introductory chapter, which briefly looks at historical research in this field of study, and deals with definitions, periodization, events, and Geneva “as cradle.” Further, the main body of the book will not only show readers that the magisterial reformation is ever in the background, as well as the tensions that emerged, but also that these tensions are not that unique and have much in common with relations between national/state Churches and free/voluntarist Churches elsewhere.

The scholarship in this work supports the general thesis that the theme of international influence is, as with tracing most influences, both direct and indirect. Readers will undoubtedly be drawn to certain regions depending on their regional identities or interests. I was drawn to the *Réveil* as it spread in France, the Low Countries, French-Speaking Canada, and the Missionary Societies of Francophone Europe that emerged.
The biographical chapters are rich with surveys, details, and bibliographical information. Mark Noll commented in his foreword that he was surprised by the connections between Charles Hodge and Robert Baird (p. xiv). For myself, I found it most interesting to learn about John Mason and his connections with the Réveil. There is certainly a wonderful range of connections that one encounters while reading through this book.

I might also add, rarely does one find a book having two forewords. However, it is appropriate and very wise on the part of the editors for such a book as this to have a foreword by an American church historian (Mark Noll), as well as a foreword by a French academic professor of Christianity (André Encrevé).

A curious detail that I have been pondering over was the pejorative term of abuse that some hurled against the proponents of the Réveil, namely, calling them “Methodists” (p. 77). This was not new as I have encountered this before with other revivals in chiefly Reformed contexts of revival, so I found it most interesting, especially given the Reformed roots and theological formulations of many within this Réveil. Populist imagery is a fascinating sub-study alone.

As expected, Rationalism and Romanticism are trajectories often explored in many of the chapters in an effort to establish influence and context for the Réveil. It is not an easy trajectory, as several writers show the complexities of this.

There was one chapter I was hoping to see: a full survey-type chapter relating the Réveil to Africa and mission societies and their work in Lesotho, Madagascar, Senegal, Mauritius, South Africa, and Zambia as pertains to the nineteenth century. There are select references to such in Jean-François Zorn’s chapter, “The Missionary Societies of Francophone Europe,” but it is not a full chapter in which a deeper survey focusing upon Africa is presented. It would have helped the thesis of the book greatly on the international side. Also, on this African theme and the international theme, I was surprised not to see at least some passing reference to the Réveil and its impact upon the brothers Andrew Jr. and John Murray. The Murray brothers were clearly impacted by the Réveil as mediated through student associations in Utrecht. This does present a whole other trajectory of exploration.

Nevertheless, the limitations of any such collection are completely understandable. Any gaps will serve as a call for more work to be done. This book has a maturity of research and writing style that make it a very worthy contribution which will lead to the advancement of further studies on the Réveil. Hopefully, future editions might also include a map or two that would strengthen engagement with the various chapters and topics.

I was intrigued by the references to hymn singing and the Réveil, and I could list several other such examples of particulars that aroused my interest. I certainly came away with a thirst for more, and my own prior, limited acquaintance with this movement was greatly improved through this valuable work—The Genevan Réveil in International Perspective. Full thanks to the editors and writers for a book which will be of use for many years.

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To many readers of this journal, John Locke (1632–1704) may be best known for his political thought. After all, his writings are widely considered to be some of the most influential in the development of Western democracy. Locke’s contributions were not limited to questions of political science, however. He was a polymath and, as was typical of so many of the seventeenth century’s leading intellectuals, his efforts regularly extended beyond the boundaries of any one discipline into others, including theology. This is reflected in the abundance of secondary literature on Locke’s life and thought (once described as the “Locke industry”), which in the last few decades has taken a notable turn to include an increasing number of studies on his Christianity.

To the growing body of literature on Locke’s theology can now be added this monograph by Jonathan S. Marko, associate professor of philosophical and systematic theology at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The volume is one of the latest releases in the Oxford Studies in Historical Theology series edited by Richard A. Muller. Comprising expanded and reworked versions of previously published articles and papers, the book constitutes something of a culmination of the author’s research on Locke to date.

Marko makes clear that he has not sought to provide a comprehensive analysis of Locke’s theology. Instead, he has limited the focus of his study to Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695, hereafter *ROC*), together with two further works that Locke went on to write in defense of *ROC* during the extensive debates that followed its publication. After an introductory chapter, Marko provides an overview of Locke’s major writings, arguing that his key “non-theological” works show a significant preoccupation with biblical Christianity (ch. 2). “Theology in general and soteriology in particular are leitmotifs that cannot be ignored in studying Locke’s corpus” (p. 19). This provides evidence of the internal coherence of Locke’s theology, which has tended to be overlooked due to the siloed approach of much Locke scholarship.

This leads Marko to consider Locke’s soteriology within *ROC*. The author suggests that the doctrine of justification presented by Locke does not necessarily reflect his own personal views (ch. 3). In particular, Locke’s notorious argument that there are only two articles of belief necessary for saving faith—namely, (1) the existence of one God, and (2) that Jesus is the Messiah—is born out of a desire to include all “Christian” views on the topic, except antinomian ones. Although some of Locke’s closest contemporaries seem to have appreciated this, Marko is the first modern commentator to have distinguished between Locke’s theological program and his personal views.

Indeed, it is this contention that forms the basis of Marko’s main argument in the book. Although many have commented on Locke’s doctrinal minimalism over the last three centuries, Marko breaks new ground in showing the integration of this position across Locke’s major writings and in connection with his writings on other issues, not least religious toleration (chapter 4). Strikingly, the author highlights the synthesis between Locke’s understanding of the fundamental articles on the one hand and that of the reasonableness of God’s character and the frailty of human nature on the other. The significance of these latter two aspects comes to the fore in Marko’s discussion of Locke’s views on scriptural revelation. Whether in Locke’s emphasis on the Bible’s vital role in preserving morality in society (ch. 5) or his
emphasis on the role of miracles in the faith of the believer (ch. 6), Marko seeks to show that “Locke has a great interest in maintaining the Bible’s status of authority” (p. 134). This flies in the face of the common suggestion that Locke’s efforts to propagate Christianity were either insincere or intentionally divisive. Indeed, this is just one of a number of important points that Marko develops in the book’s first and second sections in support of his main argument for the internal coherence of Locke’s theology.

Sadly, the same cannot be said about Marko’s analysis in the third section of the volume. Marko seeks to highlight other areas of Locke’s work where he appears to have taken a similarly irenic and ecumenical approach in relation to theological controversy, namely those relating to free will (ch. 7), the categorisation of propositions (ch. 8), and the Trinity (ch. 9). While Marko makes numerous points that will no doubt prove helpful to those wanting to engage with Locke on these subjects, the final three chapters seem somewhat divorced from the book’s main thesis. After demonstrating so ably the integration of Locke’s religious thought around his concern for eternal salvation, the final part of Marko’s analysis suffers—somewhat ironically—from a lack of integration with that earlier theme.

The above comment should not detract from this reviewer’s recommendation of the volume, both for those interested in Locke and those working on the religion of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Marko has provided a historically sensitive study that evidences a strong command over the varied and extensive literature on Locke and his complex intellectual context. The author has done the church a great service in highlighting a previously overlooked but nonetheless major theme in the religious thought of one of the most influential thinkers of the early modern period.

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Andrew Walls (1928–2021) stood at the forefront of evangelical and general Christian missiological studies in the period 1970–2020. English by birth and Oxford-educated, his academic associations variously linked him with Tyndale House, Cambridge (where he was briefly a librarian), two African universities (where he functioned in theology and religious studies), and eventually the universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh (where he began as a historian of the early Church and then focused on the history of the missionary spread of the Gospel). Initially trained in patristics, Walls was versatile enough to contribute to the volume on 1 Peter in the original Tyndale series of NT commentaries (1959). (Editor’s note: Andrew Walls was also the first editor of Themelios in 1962). Identifying early with the student work of the InterVarsity Fellowship, over time, Walls, the broad evangelical, became a mentor to a much wider range of Christians in the global church.

Walls was remarkably productive over more than half a century, lecturing (as well as writing) well into his retirement years, in which he was associated with Liverpool Hope University. The volume under
review, kindly edited by Brian Stanley (eventual successor to Walls at Edinburgh), consists of lectures given at intervals in Ghana, New York, and New Haven, Connecticut, from 2005 to 2008. The redacting of these, from manuscripts and recordings, has clearly been a work of tribute.

The reader takes up this book already aware of certain broad realities. There has been a notable decline since 1970 in the sending of foreign missionaries from Western lands; in the same period, there has been a corresponding increase in the sending of foreign missionaries from countries not long ago looked on as mission fields. We have come to accept the slogan that “mission is from everywhere to everywhere.” But what is the broader picture frame within which developments like these fit?

Those who have encountered Walls’s writings beforehand, notably The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), will find clear continuities between Walls as they have already understood him, and this 2023 volume. Briefly stated, Walls’s perspective is that missionary initiative from the Western world crested some decades ago in the cascading effect of the end of the European domination of the globe post-1945. Missionary effort from the West was not simply the child of this European domination, which began in the age of Da Gama and Columbus; in fact, in the initial stages, some European powers, such as Britain, obstructed missionary effort. We know not only from Walls but also from others that the missionary enterprise, originally largely dependent on recruits from the artisan classes, had an increasingly troubled relationship with this European (and eventually American) imperial expansion. Were missionaries in developing countries there as representatives of Christ or of their homelands, from which many other representatives lived in ways that contradicted the gospel? Slavery and land seizures epitomized this conflict of interest.

This new volume, The Missionary Movement from the West, improves on this platform by the use of a clever literary device, namely, the narrating of the story of Western missions as if it were the biography of a single life lived over a 500-year period. This is to say that mission as we have known it experienced birth, youth, middle age, and also the decline that comes with old age. This literary device has a clear advantage. It allows Walls, the storyteller, to show that there were previous missionary “lives” or phases of the missionary story that came well before the era of European expansion, which has dominated the last half-millennium.

These earlier missionary “lives” have all expired, only to be succeeded by others. The fall of Jerusalem brought one expiry; later expiries came with the barbarian conquest of Rome from the north, then the eventual military spread of Islam and the intermittent Chinese hostility toward foreigners. After each civilizational upheaval, a new missionary initiative followed. Missionary effort from the Western world—which began in the era of European transoceanic discovery—is now giving way to missionary effort emerging from indigenized Christian movements planted by Western initiative.

It is a significant part of Walls’s narrative that the Christianity of Western Europe, which arose after previous disarray, accepted the trade-offs that followed from the embrace of the idea of Christendom—a civilization or territory outwardly and structurally Christian which all the while did not require that Christianity be lived out wholeheartedly. In Walls’s estimation, Christian missionary efforts during the last 500 years have mistakenly sought to reproduce this kind of Christendom abroad. Not until the late nineteenth-century rise of a more culturally pessimist missionary force (associated with a surging premillennialism) was this outlook seriously questioned.

The non-European reader may be taken aback by Walls’s rather stark post-mortem approach. He makes abundantly plain that in Western Europe, the missionary cause is already very far gone because the church itself is wasting away. He provides painful examples from the UK of this malaise (pp. 22–24).
The need is no longer for the revival of the church but for the fresh planting of it. And the missionary force most likely to accomplish this is one—arising in the developing world—which represents the next missionary “life.” And by the mass migrations of population in our time into both Western Europe and North America, there are already the seeds of this next missionary cycle, as many migrants are bringing their Christian faith with them.

Does Walls’s stark portrayal of things in Western Europe perfectly correspond to what we see elsewhere? In the USA (for example), there is ample evidence that large evangelical denominations are far from scaling down large foreign missionary commitments. But his general point remains: the missionary movement from the West is no longer as central as it once was; it has been too inextricably linked to the Western domination of the world, and the Western domination of the world crested in the WW2 era. Already by 1938, the Indian Tamburan meeting of the International Missionary Council (ch. 12) made plain that the churches in the developing world of Asia and Africa had a momentum of their own which had hitherto not been properly recognized.

The Missionary Movement from the West is not a pessimistic work. Looking into the future, Walls foresaw a vigorous Christianity in the developing world already undertaking world evangelization and the production of newer theology free from some of the cultural trappings that had encumbered the Christian faith as taught to them. Here is a stimulating book, a disturbing book, a forward-looking book that is worthy of a wide readership by Christian leaders, missiologists, and all concerned for world evangelization.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —


Kevin Hector’s Christianity as a Way of Life: A Systematic Theology is a fine addition to contemporary works on Christian theology. Hector is the Naomi Shenstone Donnelley Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Combining the expertise of a theologian and a philosopher, Hector captures the contents of this monograph in a simple yet loaded title. Christianity, Way, and Life, all call for deep and sustained engagements and deliberations—and hence an exercise in Systematic Theology. Hector’s objective is crystal clear: to present a “clear, understandable interpretation of Christianity” and to highlight the wisdom Christianity offers to conduct one’s life well in this real world with real challenges amid real relationships (p. ix). Beyond the verbal and the propositional, Hector argues that Christianity as a way of life conveys this wisdom practically, more specifically, through spiritual practices (p. x). With the modest aim of proposing a form of systematic theology that engages “a set of practices designed to transform one’s way of perceiving and being in the world” (p. 2),
the book renders itself suitable for lay people and scholars alike, who are interested in discussions on theology and wisdom irrespective of one's socio-cultural and geographical location or gender identity.

A categorical thread which runs through all seven chapters of the book is that of “orientation.” By a *way of life*, Hector means “a constellation of practices designed to orient a person's life toward that which is taken to be ultimate” (p. 10). The seven chapters revolve around the good of theology, the way of the world, deliverance from sin, reorientation towards God, spiritual practices of transformation while being in the world and while in relationship with others, and eternal fulfillment as the ultimate purpose of the way of life.

Beyond the stereotypical approach to themes of systematic theology, Hector demonstrates much creativity and relatability in engaging with them vis-à-vis our contemporary context. An example of this is how he discusses the potential of Christianity as a way of life to produce and contribute “epistemic goods” to the world of academic knowledge, irrespective of its religious affiliation. Hector insightfully discusses two epistemic goods, viz., “Understanding” (pp. 16–25) and “Wisdom” (pp. 25–27).

Orientation to the way of the world discusses the Christian view of sin. Engaging the theology of sin in the thoughts of Augustine (sin as disordered love), Luther (sin as misplaced trust), and contextual theology (sin as the absolutization of worldly standards), Hector observes that the common denominator to all three approaches is that sinfulness is orientation to the world, intrinsic to which is the aspect of bondage to sin. The realistic way Hector addresses this truth renders it relatable and non-offensive, considering that in today’s world, this is one reality humanity finds hard to reckon with.

Given the undeniable reality of sin, Hector moves to the discussion of orientation towards Jesus as the one who inaugurates a new way of being in the world, and as the one who breaks “the power of Sin and Death” (p. 67). Hector argues that Jesus’s orientation “wholly by and to God” (p. 82) is the way to be free from our bondage to sin. The whole discussion is reminiscent of Schleiermacher’s idea of God consciousness, which is understandable considering that Hector is a critical admirer of Schleiermacher (see especially Kevin W. Hector, *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015]). The fascinating side of the discussion, though, is his portrayal of the human ability to have this orientation to God.” In an interesting, unconventional, and deeply engaging manner, Hector creatively discusses sacramentology in Christianity as a way of life by highlighting the practices of baptism, confession and forgiveness, and friendship and self-narration. The point here is that in and through these practices, a person who orients herself afresh to God hears and is assured of God's affirmation (see pp. 117–18).

The thread of orientation leads its way into being reoriented via homemaking practices, practices of imitation, and practices of becoming one. The themes of community worship, eucharistic communion, Christian fellowship, emulation and mimicry, and church unity and fellowship are the core focus of this chapter. Orientation, in relation to “Being in the World,” discusses our relationship to the world around us. The focus is “Being” through the practices of prayer and wonder, vocation, and laughter and lament. A highlight in Hector’s book is his discussion of orientation in relation to “Being with Others.” The attention is given to practices of interpersonal relationships, which are especially understood as “Christian love,” at the core of which is the aspect of justice. An aspect of the book that deserves special attention is the in-depth exploration of “Love and Justice” (pp. 225–41). The discussion of the “image of God” (pp. 211–15) calls for special attention, considering that we are living in an age where there is much division in the name of creed, color, and gender. Hector references and critically engages with diverse contextual theologians, including James Cone, Kazoh Kitamori, C. S. Song, and some feminist
theologians. His daring claim that Jesus’s “suffering is itself an act of devotion” (p. 74) evokes the theology of Sadhu Sundar Singh, who was captivated by the “Lord of the Cross” (see A. J. Appasamy, ed., *The Cross is Heaven: The Life and Writings of Sadhu Sundar Singh* [London: Lutterworth, 1956]). Hector’s work is influenced by a wide variety of thinkers and perspectives, and it does not align with any single ideological stance. He concludes by noting that, from beginning to end, the telos of Christian orientation is God and God alone, that is, “communion with God” (p. 243). Hector has done the global community of faith a great service in keeping alive the promise of thinking through the faith systematically by engaging it with day-to-day practical issues. If anyone shares this concern, this is a book one must read.

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —


Theological discussions about the nature of gender sometimes appear to be at an impasse as the “sides” of the conversation often struggle to find common ground. In *Gender as Love*, Fellipe do Vale enters this contentious dialogue and insightfully paves a way forward. Do Vale observes that many scholars have mistakenly assumed that gender must be either a social construct or an essence. Further, theologians often fail both to take the discussion of gender seriously and to provide a truly theological account of gender (pp. 4–5). In view of this, do Vale’s aim is to correct these unnecessary bifurcations by providing a theological account of gender that “moves beyond the overly simplistic division between social constructs and essences” (p. 9).

There are four concise theses that do Vale defends throughout his work:

1. Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism.
2. The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin, and the current conditions of systemic oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender essence. All the same, we can be assured that issues surrounding gender will be rectified in the eschaton.
3. Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.
4. Gender is concerned with selves or identity and with the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies. (p. 23)

Part of what makes do Vale’s contribution unique is that he both critiques and commends aspects of each “side” of typical dialogue about gender. Chapter 2, for example, offers a description and evaluation of social constructionist views of gender. Do Vale sympathizes with perspectives that emphasize that
there are genuine epistemic difficulties in discerning the traits that constitute the essence of manhood and womanhood, and cautions that universal traits are not necessarily natural traits (p. 32). At the same time, he also argues that the social construction approach is deeply flawed, not only because it inevitably produces “as many genders as contexts that construct them” but because it results in “an incoherence in gender theory and renders particular genders morally unevaluable” (p. 48, [esp. n. 67], emphasis original). In chapter 3, however, do Vale not only introduces his constructive proposal but offers an equally incisive critique of many essentialist views of gender, charging that they often “deflate” notions of cultural gender expression “to the point where they are irrelevant to manhood and womanhood” (p. 74).

A particular strength of do Vale’s approach is his emphasis on the importance of both the body and cultural context in defining gender. He utilizes the work of feminist theorists Charlotte Witt and Mari Mikkola to argue that gender is neither solely cultural nor solely biological. He posits a modest essentialism that emphasizes epistemic humility and recognizes that statements about gender are always situated in a particular context and clouded by sin (pp. 98–99). Do Vale describes gender as “the appropriation of social goods that pertain to our biologically sexed bodies, an appropriation that enables sexed bodies to acquire social meaning” (p. 104).

He begins to lay the theological groundwork for his model of gender by observing that humans acquire social goods according to what they love. The work of Augustine provides do Vale’s foundation for an understanding of human identity that is tied to both natural features and the love of social goods. This enables him to make the case that “human identity is a bundle of many loves, and included in that bundle are the complex social identities we bear, like gender” (p. 114). In fact, because Augustine argues that loved goods and people form the one who loves (p. 132), do Vale concludes that one should not dissuade people from identifying with categories like gender (p. 141).

Chapter 4 provides the central proposal of Gender as Love: “gender is about the formation of identities by means of our love for social goods according to the sexed body” (p. 142). What do Vale means by this is that “gender is ultimately about the organization of goods by which the sexed body is socially manifested, in which the lover identifies with the beloved, shaping who she is” (p. 161). In this model, goods are not inherently gendered; rather, they are gendered when people give them a social meaning by loving them as sexed beings (p. 163). Theologies of gender must then descriptively evaluate the gendered goods by making sense of the gendered lives that are already being lived, and then normatively evaluate whether these goods are loved rightly (p. 165). Put more simply, “the point is not to come up with a list of what defines masculinity and femininity but to witness the particular contexts in which we already encounter these positions and bring Christian moral theological tools to bear on them” (p. 168). This aspect of do Vale’s model provides a helpful corrective to many essentialist accounts that can sometimes be overly occupied with which goods are properly masculine or feminine. The task of gender, for do Vale, is then the cultivation of virtue in light of the love of gendered goods. This means that “rightly loved gendered goods are those we recognize as gifts from God, to be used according to the specifications of the gift giver, which is to say for the flourishing of humanity” (p. 169).

A potential weakness of do Vale’s proposal is its lack of specificity. He readily acknowledges this and states that his model is “useful for virtually nothing other than the prevention of gender skepticism; it does not say which social goods are properly masculine or feminine” (p. 170). While this vagueness may frustrate some readers, the humility of do Vale’s approach is commendable and, given the noetic effects of the fall, appropriate. Furthermore, the prevention of a gender skepticism is a worthwhile
endeavor given the Christian affirmation of the goodness of male and female in God’s creative design. By providing a theological model of gender that takes seriously the significance of the body and the significance of cultural context and expression, do Vale provides a valuable contribution to theological discussions of gender.

Another strength of Gender as Love is do Vale’s charity and compassion as he explores a difficult topic. He empathetically engages with theologians and gender theorists alike as he seeks to provide greater theological clarity to the discussions at hand. He handles sensitive issues with gentleness, truth, and hope. This is particularly evidenced in the consideration he displays towards those who have experienced distortions of gender.

Part 3 of the book (“Gender in the Story of God”) uses the previously established model to articulate a theological account of gender shaped by the four stages of the biblical narrative: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Beginning with creation, do Vale is alert to danger of invoking this doctrine “without recognition of the ways it has been distorted by sin and without seeing eschatology as a surplus to it” (p. 181). Moreover, as a result of the fall, many people do experience tragic and difficult realities, such as intersex conditions, sex discrimination, and sexual violence. Do Vale, therefore, is careful to affirm that a properly theological understanding of gender will prioritize justice and affirm the worth and dignity of all individuals. It will likewise provide hope that while gender will persist in the eschaton, it will also be sanctified and transformed (p. 230).

Throughout the book, do Vale expertly navigates complex philosophical and theological waters and succeeds in providing readers with a compelling theological alternative to the bifurcations that commonly trouble discussions about the nature of gender. As such, Gender as Love makes a rich and valuable contribution to the theological conversation about gender and provides a firm foundation for further dialogue.

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Do Christians parent differently than non-Christians? Sometimes it can be hard to tell. Often our discussions with other parents reveal our real priorities: our children’s academic achievements, musical or sporting success, and popularity with peers. Perhaps we think more like the world than we care to admit! In light of this, Ed Drew’s Raising Confident Kids is a timely offering that seeks to identify the ways in which Christian parents have succumbed to worldly views. Drew attempts to reorient us back to God’s perspective on parenting our children.

Drew has his finger on the pulse of the issues currently facing parents. This is not only due to his extensive experience with families, both as a long-term children’s worker and as a parent to his own three children, but also because of
his role as the Director of Faith in Kids (UK), an organization that helps parents and churches raise kids to trust Christ.

Although the book’s title, *Raising Confident Kids in a Confusing World*, might initially suggest that Drew is a proponent of the self-esteem movement, its subtitle, *A Parent’s Guide to Grounding Identity in Christ*, encapsulates what the book is really about: helping Christian parents “to raise kids who are confident that they’re forgiven by Christ and that his Spirit is at work in them, rather than raising little Pharisees who behave well, especially when others are watching, and are proud that they’re good” (p. 85).

To this end, he aptly diagnoses how the search for identity drives both parents and their children, and each chapter gives parents the opportunity to think deeply about different aspects of their parenting.

In chapter 1 (“This Is Me”), Drew goes to the heart of society’s most pressing need: identity. He contrasts the “spirit of our age,” which encourages you to “be the person you want to be”—“Follow your own path. Create your own path. Follow your heart” (p. 16)—with the path of “the Shepherd-King,” Jesus Christ, who gives us “the promise of life to the full” (p. 18, emphasis original). For this reason, Christians “have a better story to tell: one of redemption, hope and purpose” (p. 17). Because our identity is grounded in Christ, our kids can “be confident in *who* they are because they know *whose* they are” (p. 22, emphasis added).

In chapter 2 (“What They Do Is Not Who They Are”), Drew begins by distinguishing between “religious” and “Christian” parenting. While “religion makes an identity out of actions and behaviours” (p. 28) and says that “good behaviour is what matters most” (p. 29), the Christian gospel insists that “behaviour change will never be enough without a change of identity” (p. 31). Otherwise put, Jesus “is not primarily in the business of behaviour improvement…. He is in the salvation business” (pp. 31–32). Drew stresses that “Christianity is not about what we do but who we are” (p. 36) and behaviour is an outworking of that.

In the third chapter (“Made to Belong”), Drew highlights how parental love and the acceptance of our children “is a shadow of their heavenly Father’s love” (p. 52). Moreover, “if we do our job properly,” he writes, “our children will learn to obey us because we will be modelling the steadfast love that God offers them” (p. 52). While this result is not, of course, guaranteed, the importance of faithful parenting is further emphasised in chapter 4 (“Made to Love”), where Drew explains how the gospel of Christ is diametrically opposed to “the ‘gospel’ of the Western world.” The former shows our kids that their “biggest problem is *following* their sinful desires,” while the latter tells them that “their biggest problem is *not following* their own desires” (p. 56, emphasis added).

In chapter 5 (“It’s Ok to Not Feel Ok”), Drew names what many parents may have already, and often painfully, realised: “Parenting exposes the sin in our own lives in a magnified way” (p. 78). Christian parents, therefore, need to rely on the work of the Holy Spirit, not only to change the hearts of their children, but also their own hearts. When it comes to children, however, Drew’s counsel to parents is clear: “focus on the heart, not on the behaviour” (p. 75), for it is out of the heart that good behaviour comes.

Drew addresses the difficult issue of seeing our children suffer and struggle in chapter 6 (“Truly Body Positive”). He wisely advises that what they need is not always solutions, but to know that “there is one who does understand them” (p. 102); namely, the Jesus who walks with them. Refreshingly, Drew urges us not to “see suffering as a deviation” (p. 103), but as part of God’s purpose to train in Christlikeness (p. 104).
In chapter 7 ("I Am Forgiven"), Drew urges parents to be “the front line” when it comes to having conversations with children about the beauty and goodness of the bodies God has given us (p. 108). In a world full of body-confusion, he helpfully reminds readers that “we have a better story, a positive story, to tell about our bodies, about sex and about gender” (p. 111). “Everybody, however broken … is fearfully and wonderfully made” (p. 114).

Chapter 8 ("I Can Change") deals with issues surrounding friendship. While “every parent wants their child to have friends,” this can also create challenges as their children are exposed to the values of other families. For example, “Christian parents will see that popularity was never a goal for Jesus,” and so we “might need to care less” about many of the things that other parents do (p. 133, emphasis original). In a similar vein, the brief discussion about sex, marriage, and singleness that concludes the chapter ends with an encouragement to parents to never lose sight of the fact that “what our kids need most is Jesus” (p. 143).

Chapter 9 ("Boys, Girls and Gender") gives parents a good grounding for discussions with their children about the very current, and often confusing, topic of gender. Grounding gender in the body, Drew exhorts us to realize that “God has given us that body as a good gift, and so we thank him for the distinctives of our gendered body, because if he chose and made them, wonderfully and fearfully, then we can learn to share his delight in his handiwork” (p. 149).

Drew’s book is sensible, practical, and liberally dosed with good humor (starting with a hilarious apology to American readers) and is strewn with numerous vignettes of his own parenting successes and shortcomings. He consistently supports his conclusions with Scripture and provides good questions for reflection at the end of each chapter, making the book suitable for group discussion as well as personal rumination. Drew’s conclusion gives parents both comfort and confidence: “Jesus is not surprised or defeated by the 21st century, and his people needn't be either” (p. 159).

No parenting book can be all things to all parents! This is a book for the average Christian family and, as such, may be inadequate for those struggling with serious family dysfunction. For example, there is no remedy offered for those whose children steadfastly reject the prescribed heart-training. Similarly, the tension between training the heart and expecting obedience from our children could have been more fully explored.

Nevertheless, Raising Confident Kids in a Confusing World is a good “all-rounder” and will be helpful and accessible for most parents bewildered, as we often are, by the baffling nature of parenting in this current age.

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*The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* is a beautiful, complex work, as much a meditation as an argument. Abigail Favale weaves robust logic and up-to-date research with personal narrative and a deep awareness of the goodness of creation. As she presents an analysis of the gender paradigm from her perspective as a Catholic theologian and gender studies lecturer, Favale stops along the way to marvel at the intricacies of the body and the organic nature of one’s journey through life. It is this literary pacing which makes this book a refreshing offering amidst the current Christian responses to the transgender challenge. Rather than rushing off to battle her opponents after a few cursory remarks on Genesis 1–2, Favale has the confidence to revel repeatedly in the dignity and physicality of God’s good design of humanity. This imbues her arguments with an earthiness which lends them weight as well as provides a constant reminder of what is at stake in the gender debate—the rejection of something that is very good.

One has only to turn to her chapter titles (‘Heretic’, ‘Cosmos’, ‘Waves’, ‘Control’, ‘Wholeness’, ‘Gift’, to name but a few) to recognise that Favale has a mind capable of perceiving universals amid the particulars. That is to say, while her argument includes her own personal experience of womanhood, pregnancy, and mental health, as well as the friends and students she has encountered along the way, she never loses sight of her main thesis: ‘the gender paradigm is feminism’s offspring, and it has proven ... to be an Oedipal one’ (p. 32). A rigorous academic, Favale’s conviction on this matter is also a personal one. Prior to her conversion (detailed in her first book, *Into the Deep: An Unlikely Catholic Conversion* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018]) she dabbled in manifestations of feminism which led her naturally and inevitably to embrace the gender paradigm, which argues that “woman” and “man” are language-based identities that can be inhabited by anyone. Because truth is just a story we tell ourselves, all self-told stories are true’ (p. 31). It is here that she balked—and it is here that we can learn from her journey.

In ‘Cosmos’, Favale points out that the man in Genesis 2 recognises several things about the woman simply from her body. He notices that she is similar to him, different from him, and also that together they are able to unite in a unique way, making a whole (p. 39). Not only is this a moment of rapturous dignity, but for Favale it holds out a principle which the gender paradigm disregards: the body reveals the person. And what sort of bodies has God made? Bodies that, although contrasting, together create a union which trumpets inclusivity—at its very heart, a binary view of gender is not one of sterile, defensive survival, but life-producing expansiveness. She goes on to point out that it is only once Adam sees Eve that he renames himself as man: ‘it is through encountering her nature that he is able to truly understand his own’ (p. 43). Thus, the gender paradigm and the Genesis paradigm stand in stark contrast: the former argues that reality is created by human words, the latter that human words describe what God has already spoken into existence. It is no surprise to Favale that many of us today are at war with ourselves, for we have ‘lost sight of the truth that to see a body is to see a person, a person made in the image of God; and so we can be tempted to try to erase ourselves (p. 46, emphasis original). What fig leaves once sought to accomplish (Gen 3:7), surgical knives now seek to effect.
‘Waves’ is an insightful overview of the various waves of feminist thought. ‘Control’ argues that for many the culturally valued ideal of ‘autonomy’ is threatened by feminine ‘bodily fertility’, and so the latter is feared and suppressed (p. 111). Indeed, as a central tenet of modern feminism, Favale argues, autonomy has contributed to a rise in ‘consumer sex’ (p. 110). Ultimately, however, this ideal of bodily autonomy ‘is fashioned from the norm of male embodiment’; autonomy becomes the ability to have sex without falling pregnant (pp. 112–13). It has also had the consequence of altering ‘a woman’s sense of herself as a fertile being, cultivating instead a consciousness of assumed sterility’ (p. 104). This alteration of the idea of what it means to be female, alongside the separation of sex from procreation, has ‘prompted a cascade of disconnection that has brought us to the gender bedlam of the present. Biological sex has been split off from gender, woman from female, man from male, body from desiring will’ (p. 114). Wherever one lands on the topic of contraception, and Favale holds the traditional Catholic view, it is difficult, after reading this chapter, to argue that the ensuing bodily disconnection has done society much good.

In a chapter entitled ‘Sex’, Favale gives her answer to the question, ‘What is a woman?’ A woman, she argues, is a human with the potential to gestate (p. 128). By focussing on potentiality rather than ability, she holds that a woman is more than a function; she is a person. This might seem obvious, but Favale rightly recognises that this way of thinking is a bulwark against the ‘fragmentation’ and ‘Potato Head doll’ thinking offered by the gender paradigm (p. 122). If someone’s biological sex is inextricable from their personhood, it cannot be changed or rearranged; a person cannot become another person. For Favale this is tied to her understanding of the body as a sacrament, where ‘the visible reveals the invisible’ (p. 136), and while her language may be distinctively Catholic, all Christians should indeed seek to see ‘every human being, through the illuminating mystery of the Incarnation’ (p. 139).

In ‘Gender’, Favale examines the way in which the word ‘gender’ has become something subjective, something with which one can identify based ‘on how one “feels”’ (p. 155). She argues that when this happens, individuals are actually identifying with a collection of stereotypes (p. 158). It has to be this way, because a man cannot know what it is to feel like a woman, and so he can only ever identify with what he imagines it feels like (p. 157). This, in turn, simply solidifies existing stereotypes, which leads to further confusion. Characteristically, Favale ends her chapter in a celebration, here of the beauty of female-only spaces (like the women’s locker room at the local pool), where women can see other women’s bodies in all their diversity, a ‘concrete image that can contradict the harmful fictions displayed everywhere else’ (p. 163).

The final three chapters linger over the importance of embracing one’s humanity and, in particular, one’s sexed embodiment. Viewing the largely female phenomenon of rapid-onset gender dysphoria as a form of protest against hypersexualisation, Favale states that ‘the better rebellion, and the more difficult one, is learning to see one’s beauty and dignity as a woman amidst a culture that denies it’ (p. 174). Even more important, however, is realising that to be embodied is to be the recipient of a divine gift (p. 239).

There is much to applaud in Favale’s book. While Protestant readers may find the emphasis on the sacramental and the iconographic aspects of the body unfamiliar, her arguments are lucid, up-to-date, and retain a sense of beauty and wonder that is much needed in the Christian response to the transgender phenomenon. I thoroughly recommend it.

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More than two decades ago I meandered into philosophy at a secular university. I had started as a psychology major but could not shake the intuition that I was not able to help someone heal as a person if we never talked about what a person is. None of my friends and family ever spoke against my decision. Nevertheless, I still sensed that, for some, the entire discipline of philosophy was regarded as impractical, a distraction, and potentially dangerous to my spiritual health.

Ross Inman’s *Christian Philosophy as a Way of Life* is written for just such circumstances and to counter such misunderstandings. As a teacher of philosophy in a theological seminary, he well knows the standard canards about philosophy’s impracticality and impenetrability. Accordingly, Inman’s goal is to argue that philosophy is essential to a “human life well lived” (p. 113).

As gestured in the subtitle, Inman grounds his defense of philosophy in the human capacity to wonder. Drawing first from the insights of psychology, Inman posits that regular experiences of awe and wonder are profoundly beneficial, humbling the soul and drawing the self outward into engagement with the reality we inhabit (ch. 1).

From there Inman advances that philosophy constitutes a uniquely human practice for fostering wonder about reality and appropriate wisdom for living within it (ch. 2). Humans are, by definition, “meaning-seeking animals” (p. 18), who not only want but need to make sense of it all. Philosophizing is a design feature, not a bug. Indeed, philosophy is a crucial tool for enabling us to understand what the world is, and what the world should be. For the Christian, such philosophizing is entirely illuminated and completed by the “radiance and light of God in Christ” (p. 24). The ultimate wonder which drives philosophy is the contemplation of a wondrous Creator, whose glory, goodness, and beauty shine through all of creation.

Chapters 3–4 move us from wonder to wisdom. Inman examines the claim that philosophy is impractical by replying that good philosophy has always been intimately tied to the practices of everyday life. With the help of Pierre Hadot, Inman contends for the wisdom of Greco-Roman tradition of philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Plutarch, and Seneca), wisdom which can heal us by disciplining our minds to both see truly and live well (ch. 3). For Inman, this practical and therapeutic approach to philosophy finds its consummation in Christian philosophy. Through the grace of Christ, the philosophical quest of the ancients is fully satisfied. In Christ, we can see the world truly, and can find the empowerment to live accordingly. Crucial to Inman’s approach is that good philosophy requires regular practices, a fact the Greeks and Romans recognized. But for the Christian, the practices of philosophy are necessarily spiritual exercises (ch. 4).

Having argued that philosophy is for wonder and wisdom, Inman moves to consider how it might address our contemporary “existential ailments” (ch. 5). These include our Promethean desires to master the world, and over-saturated minds that can no longer perceive well because they are filled with meaningless junk. Christian Scripture steps into this existential malaise, providing us with the fundamental truth about ourselves: that we are finite and sinful creatures (contra Prometheus) and that a core feature of new life in Christ is disciplined attention to the renewing of our minds (ch. 6). For the latter, the specific practices of solitude, silence, self-examination, and meditation are vital. But...
these disciplined remedies for our ailments do not terminate with the individual. They ultimately lead us to spiritual friendships, relationships of virtue where we commit to the well-being of others through intentional philosophizing together.

The final four chapters (chs. 7–10) work together as an integrated whole, both reiterating and extending what has already been said. Inman knows that the popular-level problem with philosophy remains the belief that it is impractical and unproductive. But Inman points out that such criticism assumes a particular understanding of productivity, where what really matters for human flourishing is economic output. But this is to adopt a materialist, rather than a Christian, anthropology. If human beings are made not just for money and stuff but instead for the truth, beauty, and goodness of their Creator, then philosophy is necessarily valuable and practical, because it guides and shapes the human self towards that which is “ultimately worth pursuing” (p. 127). Such words need to be addressed not only to non-Christians, but also to Christians, for even our visions of “practical” discipleship easily eschew the intrinsic value of truth, beauty, and goodness for merely instrumental “results” (be it church attendance, giving campaigns, or whatever other metric might take our fancy). To counter this tendency, Inman draws deeply from both Scripture and Christian tradition to promote the intrinsic value of a contemplative life. But contrary to some approaches to contemplation, Inman posits that philosophy is crucial to the enterprise.

Inman’s book is a most helpful word in a context of shallow distraction and pragmatism. It functions as something of a prolegomenon to the study of philosophy, an “invitation” as the book’s subtitle announces. If we ever needed reminding that the life of the mind matters to God, this book amply displays it. In particular Inman demonstrates the wealth to be discovered in the thinkers of late antiquity and the medieval world. This is at once both the book’s greatest strength, and perhaps also its greatest weakness. With some notable exceptions, such as the German Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper, Inman draws far less upon the insights of thinkers from the last 400 years. Indeed, early in the book Inman commends “an older vision of philosophy as a way of life” (p. 2). As much as modern and postmodern philosophies have their problems, the thought that the best Christian philosophy is mostly found in “classic” texts could be regarded as reverse chronological snobbery.

A somewhat related criticism would be the conceptual, and even practical, distinction between philosophy and theology. Are they versions of the same thing? Is philosophy a sub-discipline within theology? Inman cites historical examples where philosophy was helpful in leading a person to God, such as Cicero’s work Hortensius in the conversion of Augustine (pp. 169–70). But strictly speaking, is philosophy necessary if one is already studying theology? Inman points to the example of Aquinas as one who saw theology and philosophy as complementary paths to “the vision of God” (p. 159). But the distinct categories and associated practices that are native to philosophy, in particular questions of epistemology and logical argumentation, do not appear much within this volume. For that one might seek to consult the recent work of Dolores Morris (Believing Philosophy: A Guide to Becoming a Christian Philosopher [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021]) as an alternative starting point.

These critiques aside, Inman has produced a work that will serve a wide audience. It will be particularly useful for tertiary students, as they seek to appreciate and integrate philosophy into their
wider learning. But it would also function well as something that could be used in small groups within churches, particularly for those who desire to think more clearly and coherently about their faith.

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For the last few decades, Oliver O’Donovan’s *Begotten or Made?* has been difficult to find and expensive to buy. Thanks to the foresight of the Davenant Institute, an organization aimed at renewing the intellectual life of contemporary Protestantism, that is no longer the case. This “New Edition for the 21st Century,” published some thirty-eight years after the original, is now both readily available and affordable—at least, on Kindle, and for those in the US and Canada in paperback also. What is more, it comes with a new introduction by Matthew Lee Anderson, which helpfully highlights the significance of the work, and a fresh afterword from O’Donovan himself.

*Begotten or Made?* is the published version of the London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity, delivered by O’Donovan in 1983. As he explains in the 1984 preface, he had been invited to tackle a bioethical theme and, as IVF was still a novel technology, “it was not difficult to settle on the area of artificial human fertilization” (p. xiii). Importantly, however, he was less concerned to deal with the *technique* of artificial reproduction than he was with the *theology* behind it. Consequently, although reproductive technology has developed considerably since that time, by penetrating through the mechanisms of IVF to the ideas that enable it, O’Donovan produced a theo-ethical treatise that remains highly relevant today. As Matthew Lee Anderson writes in his introduction, “O’Donovan’s work is both timeless and timely because he digs beneath the concrete practical questions into the manner of thinking embedded within the new technologies of ‘making’ human life” (p. iii).

In chapter 1, O’Donovan both explains and contrasts his use of the terms “begetting” (by which he means the *natural generation* of a being *like* ourselves) and “making” (the *artificial creation* of a being *unlike* ourselves) in order to prepare for later discussions of “particular technical undertakings which promise to transform our human begetting into making” (p. 6). This leads to a consideration of the purpose of medicine and medical technique, which traditionally was not thought to be that of “interfering in a healthy body” but of “curing a sick one” (p. 8). For Christians, the recognition of “limits to the appropriateness of our ‘making’” is a necessary entailment of our “faith in the natural order as the good creation of God” (p. 15). This is important because it helps us differentiate the process of repairing that which God has created from attempts to alter or overcome his design. Much of the technology around artificial reproduction was devised to circumvent nature rather than to restore it.

In chapter 2, “Sex by Artifice,” O’Donovan deals with what he calls “transsexual surgery” (now termed “sex reassignment surgery” or “gender confirmation surgery”). This, as he sees it, is another form of technology primarily oriented toward thwarting or changing nature rather than healing or restoring it. As such, it cannot be regarded as a form of medicine in any meaningful sense. His discussion of
this subject was primarily intended to show where divorcing reproduction from intercourse between a male and a female would lead, and how, conversely, “the general program of artificializing procreation is furthered by the artificializing of sex” (p. 22). However, O'Donovan's analysis of the “philosophical decision” to collapse “the distinction between the physical sex and the psychological sex” of a person, can now be seen as prophetic (p. 27). In fact, forty years on, his treatment of the subject remains one of the clearest and most penetrating that has yet been written. Anderson agrees, describing it as “the single most incisive theological treatment of the subject to date” (p. iii). The book is worth reading for this chapter alone!

Chapter 3 explains why the involvement of a donor in the procreative process is inherently unethical. O'Donovan outlines the moral deficiencies of replacing one of the parents within the family with (potentially) a stranger. In making his case, he deals carefully with possible objections raised by the Old Testament practice of levirate marriage, which he argues is significantly different from the contemporary practice of AID—i.e., “artificial insemination by donor” (p. 37). An analogy with adoption likewise fails. He writes: “To take another's child into one's family is a totally different kind of act from taking another's gamete into one's act of procreation” (p. 45). One aspect of this chapter that needs further development (due to its increasing popularity today, rather than any lack in O'Donovan's reasoning) is the renting of wombs through surrogacy. But even here, he has provided the necessary groundwork for an ethical evaluation (and rejection) of this practice.

Chapter 4 wrestles with the meaning of personhood (in general) and the personhood of the embryo (in particular). Contemporary medical ethics requires the subject's consent for experimentation, which an embryo obviously cannot give. And yet, so much reproductive technology—from freezing embryos to genetically modifying them—is experimental and has at least some risk of damage or death. Therefore, even if (contrary to the scientific evidence) one concluded that the personhood of an embryo is ambiguous, the logic of Roman Catholic thought should prevail: “declare ignorance about the beginnings of personal existence and then protect the child from conception on” (p. 69). But instead, our generation has committed “the new and subtle crime of making babies to be ambiguously human, of presenting to us members of our own species who are doubtfully proper objects of compassion and love.” In O'Donovan's mind, this is “the clearest possible demonstration of the principle that when we start making human beings we necessarily stop loving them.” Why so? Because “that which is made rather than begotten becomes something that we have at our disposal, not someone with whom we can engage in brotherly fellowship” (p. 79, emphasis added).

The final chapter wraps up the book's larger argument, making the case for nature and against artifice by means of an imaginative but highly instructive fairy tale. One of the most significant aspects of moral reasoning about artificial reproductive technologies that arises from O'Donovan's discussion is that many of those who participate in such techniques likely do not consider the moral implications of their actions. The clinical nature of IVF, for example, eliminates the mutual relationship and cooperation normally required for natural conception. It also seeks to overcome the element of “randomness,” which is “one of the factors which most distinguish the act of begetting from the act of technique” (p. 87). While this may not invalidate all uses of IVF technology, it is, on the whole, something significantly different from natural procreation.

_Begotten or Made?_ is slender, with its five main chapters coming to a little over a hundred pages. But while compact, it is carefully and cogently argued, even if those not familiar with O'Donovan’s style of moral reasoning may find it dense and difficult at points. It is a book that should be read slowly
and pondered deeply. But it is well worth the time it takes to read it and, we would recommend, to re-read it. In producing a second edition of this increasingly important work, the Davenant Institute has performed a valuable service for the body of Christ. This is indeed a book, as Carl Trueman writes in his commendation, that “deserves to be widely read by a new generation of theologians, philosophers, and pastors.”

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The opening question in our first birth class was “what qualities would you like your child to have?” As we went around the group, people shared their various aspirations. They wanted their kids to be smart or sporty, and one (I remember) wanted their child to have “good knees.” However, one Christian parent (not me!) said, “I want them to be humble.” The answer fell to the ground a bit like a lead balloon. Humility. In a society that is more and more proud of pride, it is an increasingly distinctively Christian virtue. But what is Christian humility exactly? And what does it actually look like in practice? In light of these questions, I was very thankful for the opportunity to read Gavin Ortlund’s *Humility: The Joy of Self-Forgetfulness*.

This book is the first in the Growing Gospel Integrity series by Crossway. This series seeks to unpack how a particular quality (in this case, humility), is grounded in the gospel and what it looks like in the life of the believer. In *Humility*, Ortlund recasts what we usually think Christian humility is in order to more faithfully reflect the Scriptures. He defines humility as “self-forgetfulness leading to joy” (p. xxvi) and grounds its pursuit in the incarnation (and death) of Christ. Hence he prays,

> LORD, we marvel at your stunning display of humility. You, the Most High, have not refrained from taking the lowest and worst position imaginable. O LORD, how foolish all our pride seems when we remember the cross! Help us to follow your example, LORD. Teach us the pathway of humility. (p. 7)

Prayers such as these are scattered throughout the book and provide a helpful prompt to engage with the content before the throne of God.

A significant goal of this book is to engage the heart. Ortlund wants the reader to see the delicious goodness of humility. He wants us to want to be humble, not merely to know that we should be humble. His aim, therefore, is to move humility from being seen as a drab, dour, dreary virtue, which we pursue as duty, to a life-giving, freeing virtue, which brings joy. He explains: “Humility opens our eyes to the wonders all around us: it is sensitivity to reality, the turning of our narrow selves to the vast ocean of
externality, and ultimately to God himself. In this way, humility is, in every circumstance, the key to joy, flourishing, and life itself” (p. xvi).

Ortlund goes on to unpack what humility actually looks like in the personal life of the believer and then in the corporate life of the church (considering humility as a leader, as a peer, and towards our leaders). This means that the book lends itself both to use as a means of personal encouragement (perhaps with a careful explanation if you’re giving it as a gift!) and also as a tool for training those stepping into leadership roles.

_Humility_ is not an in-depth analysis of all the scriptural passages on humility, but it is a sure-fire encouragement to be humble. Ortlund outlines his target clearly and hits it cleanly. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I was convinced of the freeing and joy-filling impact this virtue can have when we listen to what the Scriptures say about it.

Another strength of the book is the way Ortlund unpacks what humility can actually look like. In this regard, the third chapter, “10 Practices to Kill Pride,” is worth a re-read. Likewise, in his chapter on humility in leadership, Ortlund warns that “if you are in a position of authority, you will become either a servant or a bully” (p. 46). But he does not stop there. He goes on to outline practical ways in which humility will be evidenced in the life of a leader, providing helpful litmus tests along the way. For example, when encouraging his reader to trust others with ministry responsibilities, he suggests: “If you are a leader and you are not regularly feeling vulnerable because of how much authority you are giving away—how much trust you are placing in others—you are probably not leading with humility” (pp. 47–48). Humility often has a “you-know-it-when-you-see-it-but-you-can’t-describe-how-to-be-it” quality. This book steps into that gap and adopts the tone of a trainer, both encouraging the reader to want it and spelling out how to be it.

On first reading, I found myself wishing that Ortlund had brought more scriptural engagement into his introduction, as it is here that he deals with misconceptions and sets out his definition. But this comes in later chapters. So, if you have the same reaction, fear not and read on. The scriptural riches are coming, and the wait is worth it.

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American philosopher, Judith Butler, is widely regarded as the preeminent architect of queer theory. The influence of her thought is enormous, having extended beyond the academy to schools, government policy, and the entertainment industry. Daniel Patterson's *Reforming a Theology of Gender: Constructive Reflections on Judith Butler and Queer Theory* is an important contribution to Christian cultural and ethical studies, as it is the first thorough scholarly engagement with Butler's work from a conservative Christian perspective. The book provides a detailed explication of and searching interaction with Butler's key ideas, and thus offers opportunities both for understanding the nature of sex and gender, and for engaging with queer discourse. Beyond that, it supplies resources for developing a much-needed biblical theology of gender and for deepening Christian anthropology.

The book is structured around three themes central to Butler's work, which progressively reveal the complex structures of her thought: subjectivity, violence, and life (i.e., ethics). Patterson alternates between chapters that exegete her thinking and explore her philosophical sources, and chapters that bring Scripture and a variety of theological interlocutors into conversation with her ideas. However, while this approach allows him to identify areas of common ground, the multiplicity of interlocutors, the back-and-forth nature of the chapters, and his generous tone, have the effect of quietening aspects of Patterson's disagreement with her ideology, as I discuss below. Here, I first bring together Patterson's elucidation of Butler in chapters 1, 3, and 5, before reviewing his theological interaction with her in chapters 2, 4, and 6.

The first theme Patterson explores is subjectivity, that is, human consciousness constructed by social context. He shows how Butler diverges from Foucault in admitting greater agency to the subject who may, to some degree, resist or submit to cultural norms, “performing” them through mostly unconscious repeated behaviours. Patterson identifies desire as fundamental to personhood within this scheme. Indeed, for Butler, gender itself is an expression of desire, implying an incoherence within the person, which Patterson describes in terms of “lack” (p. 37). What the individual lacks and desires is recognition by the other; they want to feel seen. Patterson then introduces Butler’s important concept of the “originary”—the accepted sexual and gender norms that shape our consciousness and condition the way we understand our bodies, which individuals must either reject or re-enact, and which either do or do not allow the recognition by others we all crave.

In chapter 3, Patterson explains Butler’s idea of “gender violence.” Her claim is that heterosexual norms not only exclude those whose sex, gender, or sexuality do not conform, but also harm these individuals by not offering them recognition and by actively persecuting them, whether they repress or express their subjectivity. Although queer theory is commonly thought to ignore the material body, Patterson shows that Butler understands the body as existing but as impossible to understand in itself, as it has been overlaid with notions and expectations constructed by both society and the individual. In this way, Butler seeks to reframe gender, and even sex, not as natural, but as artificial (p. 142).
Moving to Butler’s ethics in chapter 5, Patterson demonstrates how her thinking is rooted in Spinoza’s notion of *conatus* (the idea that all things strive to persevere in their being), a doctrine that she found validated her homosexual attractions when she was a troubled teenager. In her secular version of Spinoza’s pantheism, all that is exists in relationship and is in a state of eternal becoming. Her ethical project, Patterson argues, “does not fit into the usual ontologically averse mold of the secular ethicist” (p. 166), suggesting that it is about mutual responsibility and care for the other, rather than atheistic individuality, as many assume.

This detailed explication of Butler shows us something of the genealogy of her thought and equips Patterson for the task of interacting with those elements which he finds connect with Christian thought. He turns first to the Christian “originary,” Genesis 1–3. His subtle interpretation of these chapters (pp. 61–76) leads to a discussion of the intersubjective nature of human consciousness. Like Butler, he stresses the social source and meaning of gender. “What is good,” he writes, “is human existence that is found in a particular embodied relationship in the world with God and with this other (as opposed to another) human creature” (p. 62, emphasis original). Patterson’s orthodox reading of Scripture leads him to conclude that this originary is in itself “very good” (Gen 1:31), but because body, mind, and relationships are significantly harmed by the fall, we are now in danger of turning it into an idol. Because we live outside of Eden, he believes Butler is right that we experience a “desire-induced incoherence” (p. 35), identifying this with both Paul’s experience described in Romans 7 and Augustine’s in his *Confessions*. Nevertheless, while Patterson insightfully portrays the frustration that characterises our desires, and rightly insists on the importance of the body, his treatment of the significance of sex is unpersuasive. If the body is central to being human, then surely “what is a male or female” cannot help but “be at the center of discussions about gender” (p. 207).

Provocatively labeling Butler as “prophetic” (p. 2), Patterson calls upon Christians to unmask the idolatry “latent in theologies of gender that are characterized by a disordered orientation to Adam and Eve” (p. 116). Such idolatry ignores the “inherent sinfulness of all human sexuality” (p. 136) and can bring about cruelty, or even violence, towards those who do not conform to the ideal. But unlike Butler, who sees the originary as something which needs to be continually reformed, Patterson insists that the law of Eden remains good. However, it should not be “misconstrued as a means for self-justification and a means by which some can condemn the troubled bodies of others” (p. 117). Therefore, while there is common grace to be found in living according to “the law of Adam and Eve,” ultimately it is a law that points us to Christ and our need to be saved by him alone (p. 118). There is great strength here, theologically and pastorally. In some evangelical cultures, marriage and rigid codes of masculinity and femininity have been seen as pseudo-salvific with very damaging effects, and the failure to acknowledge the fallenness of sex has meant that sin has been excused or covered up. However, it is one thing to say that we are all fallen in our sexuality, and another to speak of “the inherent sinfulness of all human sexuality” (p. 118, quoting Geoffrey Rees, *The Romance of Innocent Sexuality* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011], 4). Such a confession appears to undermine the ectypal nature of marriage, the reality of common grace and general revelation, and the distinction between righteousness and wickedness. At the very least, Patterson could have brought more precision and nuance to this section.

Patterson’s final chapter offers us the “scarred and bloody body” of Christ (p. 189) as a better model for the “troubled bodies” (p. 117) of our postlapsarian world. By considering ideas of the image of God in light of the idea of the originary he has investigated, Patterson argues that Christ is the true image of God to whom we are called to be conformed, and our horizon is the new creation with its non-marital
resurrection bodies. This is a rich exploration, resolving some of the concerns which arose for this reader in earlier sections of the book. Through an examination of Matthew 19:12, Patterson presents Jesus as the God-man who did not conform to the law of Adam and Eve, but, obeying his Father’s will, made himself “a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven,” while awaiting the formation of his bride, the church. We are thus provided with a new originary: union with him. The Holy Spirit is shown to be the one who can grant power to the individual to live according to this pattern, a power that is absent from Butler’s world of constantly changing norms, which only ends in deathlike “homelessness” and “fragmentation” (p. 29).

_Reforming a Theology of Gender_ is unequivocal about some of the dangers of queer theory. Patterson acknowledges that it has no means of establishing limits around sexual behaviour and provides no rest. He is also clear that the Christian gospel and Butler’s “gender theory are not allies” (p. 3), and yet the book is unerringly (and, in my view, overly) irenic. So, while to many of his conclusions this reader voiced a resounding “yes,” to others this was followed by an almost immediate “and no.” Nevertheless, I commend Patterson’s work as a brave and creative engagement with one seminal theorist (and a range of other thinkers) whose work is both complex and important. I hope that it spurs others to further critical engagement with Butler.

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The culture wars have been raging hard for the past ten years. They ramped up even more in 2020 as the Black Lives Matter protests and riots tore through America (and elsewhere), leading to much destroyed public and private property, as well as many lives lost. At the same time the transgender movement has become ever-more assertive, as its advocates establish new laws and corporate protocols making, for instance, the acknowledgement of people’s “preferred pronouns,” mandatory. Along with all of this, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion officers seem to have taken over many HR departments, resulting in the introduction of racial sensitivity programs and pro-LGBTQ posters all over workplaces. Some have called our cultural moment “the Great Awokening.”

In light of these developments, many have asked why they are happening and where they have come from. The answer is partly ideological, in that the ideologies that have powerfully shaped universities for decades have now spilled out onto the streets and to society in general. These ideologies, though distinct, overlap and include Marxism, postmodernism, and varieties of critical theory (CT).

For some years now, prominent public intellectuals like Jordan Peterson, James Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose, and Douglas Murray have written books and given talks uncovering these theories. What has been missing, however, is a comprehensive and distinctively Christian explanation and appraisal of them, notwithstanding some very helpful contributions on particular themes; e.g., Peter Jones (Whose
But in terms of exposing the ideas that lie at the heart of “Wokeness,” Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer’s *Critical Dilemma* is exactly what many in the church have been waiting for: an exhaustive, comprehensive discussion of where these ideologies have come from, what they teach, where they manifest, and to what extent they are (and are not) compatible with Christianity, and evangelical Protestantism in particular.

Shenvi and Sawyer are concerned with the broader phenomenon of *critical theory* (CT), an intellectual tradition stretching back as least as far as Karl Marx and branching off into various other intellectual traditions and forms of social theory—including the Frankfurt School, postmodernism, critical race theory, gender theory, and queer theory (p. 16). Early in the book the authors eschew the use of the term “cultural Marxism,” not so much because it has no analytical purchase—theirs and other such studies show that it clearly does—but because the controversy generated by the term is too much of a distraction (p. 22).

The first sections of the book offer an unsurpassed account of the origins of CT, contemporary manifestations of CT, the nature of critical race theory, and gender theory. The final sections show how these ideologies have crept into evangelical Protestant churches and offer a theological critique of the theories.

Shenvi and Sawyer summarize CT in four points:

1. The social binary: “Society is divided into dominant/privileged/oppressor groups and subordinate/marginalized/oppressed groups” (p. 92). This derives from the social thought of Karl Marx.

2. Hegemonic power: “Oppression and domination … include the ways in which dominant social groups impose their values, traditions, norms, and ways of being and doing on society…” All of this is “structural” or “systemic” and “applied via social institutions and systems” (p. 92).

3. Lived experience: “The lived experience of minoritized and oppressed groups rivals and at times is prioritized over objective evidence and reason when it comes to understanding the world” (p. 92).

4. Social justice: “Social justice is concerned with the transformation of society via the emancipation and empowerment of marginalized and disenfranchised groups.” This means we must “dismantle the systems, structures, and hegemonic norms that create and perpetuate the social binary” (pp. 92–93).

The authors bring the reader through an exploration of crucial concepts including systemic racism, intersectionality, queerness, and lived experience. For example, the four central tenets of critical race theory are:

1. Racism is endemic, normal, permanent, and pervasive;
2. Racism is concealed beneath ideas like color blindness, meritocracy, individualism, neutrality, and objectivity;
3. Lived experience is critical to understanding racism;
4. Racism is one of many interlocking systems of oppression, including sexism, classism, and heterosexism.

Similarly, the four central tenets of queer theory are:

1. Sex and gender are distinct;
2. Gender is a complex category that is socially constructed;
3. Sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, etc., are interlocking categories;
4. All sex and sexuality norms are oppressive and should be deconstructed.

Chapter by chapter, Shenvi and Sawyer explain the scholarly origins of the present-day woke phenomenon. Their research is exhaustive, easily rivaling any other similar study. They dive not merely into general treatments of the topics, but into the scholarly journal articles, often obscure, in order to show beyond a shadow of a doubt the origins and meaning of the theories and ideologies that shape and inform contemporary wokeness.

There is also a whole section that outlines those aspects of CT that contain significant truth and are actually helpful in terms of understanding the nature of modern injustice. In this respect *Critical Dilemma* is by far the fairest critical treatment of the themes available. At the same time, the authors are clear that CT and biblical thought are incompatible.

The final section of the book argues that the specter of CT must be exorcised from the church if it is to remain united in truth and love. In terms of direct contradictions of Scripture, CT harbors at least four huge incompatibilities with the Bible:

1. Christianity sees the universe as created by a good God and with a good, albeit now fallen, order. CT and postmodernism reject this understanding as a hegemonic metanarrative espoused solely to perpetuate oppression.
2. The Bible makes it clear that humankind’s fundamental problem is internal: sin. On the other hand, CT—ironically following the Enlightenment, which CT rarely has a good thing to say about—sees humankind’s fundamental problem as external: oppressive institutions that must be overthrown.
3. The Bible says that many prevailing social norms (e.g., the family, heterosexuality, and certain virtues) are expressions of God’s created good order—even if imperfectly so. In Marxist fashion, CT declares that all prevailing social norms are mere constructs of white, heterosexual, male oppressors for the purpose of maintaining domination.
4. CT says that all hierarchies necessarily oppress, whereas biblical Christianity teaches that certain ordered relationships (e.g., between humankind and the earth; governments and citizens; employers and employees; husbands and wives; parents and children; elders and congregants), while prone to sin’s corruption, are themselves very good.

*Critical Dilemma* is the best Christian analysis of wokeness and CT presently available. As someone who has regular interactions with tertiary-educated young people, I am constantly encountering the influence of these ideologies on Christian youth. Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer have given a marvelous gift to the church with this book. I strongly urge pastors and parents to put copies of it into the hands of their university-aged youths, not merely to expose the lies and half-truths in CT and wokeness, but also
to train them to think biblically and constructively about the complex reality of injustice in our fallen world.

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Steven D. Smith has a knack for understanding, retelling, and probing the grand stories that guide us. In *The Disintegrating Conscience and the Decline of Modernity* he does just this for one of the key “theological themes” of our Western grand narrative: conscience. The story Smith tells about conscience is complicated but also clear and compelling. It moves from Thomas More through James Madison to the present day, represented by the figure of William Brennan.

Once upon a time, Renaissance man and English political leader Thomas More chose conscience over life. His daughter Meg, his famous intellectual complement, begged him to reconsider. She appealed to his reputation; she informed him that (quoting Smith) “even his friends looked upon him (as his wife Alice openly did) not as some paragon of courage and integrity”—as he would later be portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*—“but rather as a pig-headed fool” (p. 14).

More would not budge, however. He regarded both the individualist approach to conscience that led his theological enemy, Martin Luther, to prefer his private exegetical opinion over that of the church, and the individual preference King Henry VIII felt for the Leviticus passage that justified his divorce as acids threatening to disintegrate the body politic. More, therefore, would stick with the judgment of the Catholic Church. Smith expresses the contrast this way: “To Luther, conscience had an individualist or subjective (and hence, potentially, radical or socially disruptive) character. Whereas for More conscience had a primarily communal (and hence conservative) quality” (p. 32).

But there was a contradiction hiding inside More’s view of conscience: by standing against the king, he himself was standing against practically all England and threatening to disrupt its body politic. This reveals, as Smith adeptly shows, that the faculty of conscience almost unavoidably tends toward the individualistic. Conscience is not merely sensing what God wishes; it is sensing what the individual believes to be what God wishes.

This brings us to the middle figure of the three waypoints in Smith’s story: James Madison. Madison lived in a very different world from that of More. Indeed, the proliferation of opinions, even Christian ones, prevalent in Madison’s day, suggests the arrival of the very world that More feared Luther would bring about.

Madison was tasked with helping form a body of laws that would “hold a religiously pluralistic nation together” (p. 152). But in his efforts to do so, he not only produced rights language that would reverberate through American history, but he unwittingly furthered the Western disintegration of
conscience. This is apparent in the Madison-amended version of Virginia’s Declaration of Rights (1776), which states:

Religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience. (p. 62)

Smith shows that this apparently anodyne statement actually represents a significant disintegration of the Western Christian conscience, for it employs a non sequitur that many thoughtful people of the past, Thomas More prominent among them, would have rejected utterly. The premise is correct: true religion cannot be coerced. But it simply does not follow that “therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion.”

Christian thinkers had previously argued that maintaining an established Christian church taught unbelievers the truth, kept heretical and anti-Christian ideas from spreading, and maintained social order. But Smith argues that Madison’s approach to the role of religion in public life—despite his own repeated appeals to Christian theism—undercut Christianity and replaced it with a new religion, Madison’s religion, the Gospel of Conscience.

Madison took what for More was a sort of peripheral corollary of the Christian faith and made it the centerpiece of his credo. For More, it was Christianity that consecrated conscience. For Madison, it was conscience that consecrated Christianity—and that consecrated other sincerely held faiths as well. (p. 126)

In a lynchpin statement for his book’s argument, Smith incisively expands on the significance of this change:

Both More and Madison could affirm: “I must do what (I believe) God wants me to do.” But the emphasis is subtly shifting, from an accent on “God” to an accent on the “I.” “I must do what (I believe) God wants me to do” is becoming “I must do what I believe (God wants me to do).” Might someone complete the transformation by just lopping off the final clause—so that conscience means something like “I must do as I believe”? Get rid of the “God,” in other words, and save only the “I believe”? (p. 126, emphasis original)

This brings us to US Supreme Court Justice, William Brennan, who did just this. Brennan, a practicing Catholic, both elevated conscience and, as it were, etiolated it.

Brennan, like “Al Smith before him and John Kennedy shortly after him” (p. 140), had to explain to a still predominantly Protestant nation how he could perform his judicial duties faithfully given his allegiance to the pope. He reached directly for a compartmentalized, privatized view of his own religion, a religion (he insisted) that would not tell him what to do as a judge.

But what sense does it make for someone to say, “I believe in the normative criteria provided by my Christian faith, but only when it comes to religious matters”? What moral criteria can a Christian judge draw from apart from Christian ones? How could Brennan unite his now very much fragmented public and private personas? Smith shows that this union was made by an appeal to conscience.

A minor weakness in Smith’s argument may be that Brennan did not actually write the infamous words his “successor and admirer,” David Souter did: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (p. 181). But
Smith shows that the “sovereign self” whom philosopher Charles Taylor describes, the self of expressive individualism, is very much recognizable in the thinking of William Brennan. In this view, what matters is not whether a person’s beliefs are true but instead whether the person is acting sincerely. And, increasingly, this version of what conscience means and requires would come to be described in the vocabulary of—and would modulate into—a new concept: “authenticity,” (p. 174)

Conscience has traveled a long way, and down a broad road.

It is bracing and sobering as an American Christian to read Smith. One discovers that the stories and laws undergirding us are not as solid as many of us have assumed. Some are fictions, if necessary ones (see his book *Fiction, Lies, and the Authority of Law* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021]). Some are running on the final fumes of Christendom.

But the whole road has not been traveled. There is yet more disintegration to be had. The reader feels a sense of impending doom at the end of Smith’s book, because the road away from God is both terrifying and unstable. Smith calls this instability, rather cleverly, “The Insolvency of the Sovereign Self” (p. 183).

The idea of personhood or self as chosen also poses an awkward conceptual question: If I get to choose my own self, who is the “I” that does the choosing? Doesn’t the proposition that every person does or should choose who he/she/they/it is contradict itself by (necessarily) positing a chooser (presumably with some sort of identity) to begin with? (p. 198)

To watch very intelligent Westerners, from More to Madison to Brennan, stumble further and further away from God is a painful experience for someone who knows where the conscience came from and to what it is supposed to point (Rom 2:14–15).

If I have a criticism of *The Disintegrating Conscience of the Modern West*, it is the same criticism I have of Smith’s other books: it seems odd for him to eviscerate false views (and then to efficiently and gleefully burn the viscera) but not to propose much in the way of solutions. In this, Smith is very much like Stanley Fish. My encouragement to him is to write a book telling us what he really thinks, positively speaking, or where we can find out.

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The driving concern of Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones's *The God Who Goes Before You* is that much of what is written on the topic of Christian leadership fails to adequately take into account the Christ-centered, kingdom-focused, gospel-grounded metanarrative of Scripture. Indeed, the authors contend that a fair amount of the contemporary, popular Christian leadership corpus, while making appeals to Scripture, is often presenting secular, leader-centric models. While undoubtedly well-meaning, such projects tend to approach the Bible as a moralistic leadership sourcebook from which we can pick and choose principles that fit our particular preferences or correspond to prevailing paradigms. In contrast, Wilder and Jones hold that the Scriptures are a grand story about God—a God who goes before and leads his people.

Given such a view of Holy Writ, the authors observe three important themes across the whole of Scripture that undergird their argument: (1) leaders are not sovereigns over but stewards of God's community, of which they, too, are members; (2) leaders are to exercise God's delegated power and authority by his prescribed means and for the sake of his community; and (3) leaders must declare God's truth rather than their own vision. The foundational premise that unifies these key suppositions and forms the thesis of this book is that “the leaders’ pursuit of God always takes precedence over the leaders’ positional authority. Before we are leaders, we must be followers—followers of a God who goes before us” (p. 10). Wilder and Jones aim for nothing less than advancing a distinctly Christian model of the leader-as-follower, informed by a rigorously employed biblical theology.

They divide their project into three sections. The first presents their leader-as-Christ-follower construct in contrast to prevailing notions and in light of God's intent for leadership. To accomplish this task, they examine the opening books of the biblical corpus (i.e., Genesis and Exodus), expounding upon the key concepts of vicegerency, sonship, rulership, and stewardship, as well as God's presence and power. In the book's second section, Jones argues that it is mistaken to view the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, judge, and king as new covenant leadership typologies. Rather, he maintains that God would have us see these offices as fully and magnificently fulfilled in Christ. Then, as one follows Jesus—the archetypal prophet, priest, judge, and king, as well as Immanuel—in the context of the redeemed community, the leader's entire life and approach to leading are transformed. In part 3, Wilder traces the thread of the leader-as-shepherd through the entire canon. He rightly contends that Jesus is the paradigmatic shepherd to whom all earlier shepherds point. Furthermore, he submits that all new covenant leaders are first sheep needing to follow and be shepherded by the Chief Shepherd. Only as contemporary church leaders learn from and follow after the one true shepherd will their lives and leadership mimic Christ's.

Much contemporary Christian leadership literature not only reflects an individualistic bias and leader-centric focus but often neglects the communal orientation of the Scriptures. Wilder and Jones avoid these mistakes. First, they hold that the phenomenon of leadership should only be leader-centric inasmuch as Christ is recognized as the singular leader. Second, they emphasize the pastoral leader’s
place within and as part of the broader community of Christians. Thus, congregational leaders are mindful of their status as followers of the one true leader, Jesus, and as fellow followers among many.

The authors also adroitly avoid the “romance of leadership” error, so prevalent in much older leadership literature, by emphasizing the importance of followers and recent followership research. Nonetheless, they carefully evade “reversing the lens” and presenting a purely follower-centric model of followership, as neither outlook comports fully with Scripture. Rather, their Christ-centered leadership-as-followership model coincides with several core suppositions shaping much of contemporary followership theory: (1) followers are equally important as leaders in leadership; (2) the self-perceptions (i.e., identity markers), traits, and behaviors followers exhibit in their relations with leaders are just as important to outcome creation as those of leaders; and (3) followers and leaders relationally engage with each other in the coproduction of outcomes.

Wilder and Jones stress the equal importance of pastoral leaders and congregational followers along with their shared identity as the basis of that undifferentiated significance. As people created by God in his own image, leaders and followers possess a fundamental similarity that grounds and supersedes any differences in individual characteristics, traits, or roles. In addition, both are united to and follow the resurrected Christ. The central identity markers common to both Christian leaders and followers establish their ontological equality, orient their behavior toward each other, and ground the basis of their relations.

The authors also point out that kingdom leaders (i.e., Christ-followers who lead other followers) are vested with God-given identities that define their role and ought to govern their actions. The key identity monikers and roles the Scriptures place upon leaders are vicegerent, son, ruler, slave, steward, and shepherd. Wilder and Jones also argue that leader-followers are called to exercise their delegated power justly and to proclaim and instruct the truth as given to them through the Scriptures in submission to Christ for the benefit of the community of fellow followers.

The God Who Goes Before You emphasizes the importance of the follower-leader relational dynamic in the production of God-glorifying outcomes. Wilder and Jones again and again stress the centrality of the relationship between Jesus and the leader (i.e., the pastor). The nature and quality of the Jesus-pastor relationship directly affects the nature and quality of the pastoral leadership expressed in the ministerial context. Similarly, the pastor-parishioner relational dynamic becomes critical for the realization of biblical imperatives and outcomes within the church and through its ministries. The authors, however, do not suggest abolishing authoritative leadership hierarchy in favor of some purely relational, distributed egalitarian model. Rather, their schema of leadership as Christ-oriented followership calls leaders and followers to approach leading, following, the exercise of authority, the use of power, and the execution of duties on the basis of God-granted and defined identity as well as motivational and behavioral norms.

For all of its strengths and thoughtful integration of followership theory into a biblical leadership construct, this volume lacks an extensive study of the apostle Paul. Only brief references are made to his embodiment of Jesus’s instructions regarding humble service on behalf of God’s people, and only a few lines are devoted to the imitation motif and the important pedagogical role it played alongside Paul’s emphasis on instruction and teaching (pp. 152–53). Had the authors engaged Paul’s teaching, as they did Peter’s, their biblical theological analysis would be far more complete.

Despite these shortcomings, Wilder and Jones masterfully accomplished their goal of addressing the topic of pastoral leadership by studiously grounding their reflections in a well-applied biblical
theology. In so doing, they demonstrate the Christocentric nature of pastoral leadership and explicate its meaning and significance for the church. Furthermore, they present a distinctly Christian followership construct, reflecting familiarity with followership theory and a judicious integration with Scripture. In sum, they have produced a biblical, Christ-centered, and carefully nuanced model of pastoral leadership as primarily that of followership.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —


“What would happen to your idea of God ... if you found that your work was useless?” (p. 398). If we are honest with ourselves, we have asked this difficult question or will at some point in the future. Lucy Austen provides a tragically hopeful account of one of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries’ most well-known evangelical Christian missionaries, writers, and speakers—Elisabeth Elliot.

Austen spent a decade closely examining the personal correspondence, journals, and writings available to the public, in addition to interviews with Elliot’s family and friends. She skillfully weaves her research into the three-part biography Elisabeth Elliot: A Life. Of the nearly nine decades Elliot lived, Austen devotes the most pages to the eleven years Elliot spent as a missionary in Ecuador. Austen admits, “This is how she is best known and most often remembered. It is neither the beginning of her story, nor the end” (p. 7).

Part 1 of the biography lays out many of the characters and events that formed the foundation of Elliot’s life. The strong Christian heritage of her family and education provided a framework for her developing intellect and relationships. The latter—interpersonal relationships—proved to be a lifelong struggle for the introverted thinker. She felt called to a missionary life during this early period (1952–1963). She also began a painfully uncertain relationship with the man who would become her first husband, Jim Elliot. Elliot wrote at the close of her years at Wheaton College, “I tremble to realize the price that we must be at least willing to pay” (p. 74). Her pondering leaves readers to wonder if this was God preparing her for what would come.

In part 2, Austen chronicles Elliot’s evolving theology and missiology through her encounters with diverse cultures and the harsh realities of her years as a missionary. Austen paints Elliot’s life in Ecuador as extremely challenging. However, the nearly two years and three months married to Jim seem full of love and excitement, especially with the birth of Elliot’s only child, Valerie. However, Austen writes, “The idea that she would be required to suffer at some point in the future because of the blessings she had received crops up repeatedly in Betty’s letters” (p. 163). And suffer she did, for decades to come.
In Elliot’s own words, in January of 1956, “What had been quiet work in an undistinguished corner of the world was now the focus of widespread attention” (p. 226). Her husband and four other missionaries were murdered by a famously fierce tribe among whom Elliot and her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter would later live for three years. Elliot told the martyrs’ story in Through Gates of Splendor. Austen discloses that while writing this book, Elliot “realized she was a writer” (p. 238).

Austen begins part three with Elliot’s return to the United States and an official start to her life as a full-time writer. During the fifty-two years covered in this portion of the book (1963–2015), Elliot marries twice more and experiences more joys and sorrows. Through her immersion in Elliot’s journals, letters, writings, and relationships, Austen reprises the seemingly ever-present theme of suffering. Austen’s description of Elliot’s inner struggles evokes sympathy and kinship with her subject. She lays bare the “roller coaster of hope and fear” Elliot experiences, especially in the last years of her life (p. 451).

Through her narration of Elliot’s complex experiences and convictions, Austen guides the readers through Elliot’s personal development in faith, relationships, and discernment. The raw, yet kind, approach demonstrates Austen’s clear admiration for Elliot but does not lift her unduly to a saintly pedestal. A significant strength of the book lies in its use of Elliot’s own words describing her thoughts, her decision process, and her theology. Austen chooses to devote nearly half this book’s content to only eleven years of Elliot’s life, which may leave some readers longing for a more thorough treatment of both the early and late years of her life.

Anyone wishing to witness a beautiful and often paradoxical life of loneliness and love, doubt and confidence, confusion and clarity, suffering and joy, cast beneath the Shadow of the Almighty will find satisfaction in this biography. Anyone confused when the promises of God, the clarity of his call, and the visible results of your sacrificial offerings do not seem to merge (or, more realistically, seem to clash) will find kinship and encouragement in Austen’s telling of Elliot’s story. Finally, this book provides students of evangelical theology insight into one who shaped popular theology over the past three-quarters of a century, by a woman who mused that she had “opportunities I never sought, platforms I never asked for, and influence I hardly know about” (p. 499).

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When asylum seekers and refugees arrive in a new land, they come carrying stories—not just about what made them leave their homeland, but about the origin and meaning of life, how they make sense of the world, and what is most important to them. For those who seek to welcome foreigners and desire the story of Jesus the Messiah to take root in the soil of every people group—even if that group is transplanted in a new place—it is essential to listen to those people's stories.

In *Hope for the Afflicted*, Jairo de Oliveira seeks to tell the story of the Fur people of Darfur, Sudan, by sharing their stories in their own words through his ethnographic interviews. Theirs has been a story that involves much suffering, both in their homeland and continuing into their asylum and refugee experiences in Jordan, where they have struggled to be accepted or flourish after resettlement. Because of these negative experiences at the hands of fellow Muslims, some Fur find themselves questioning Islam and are open to following Jesus. In these pages, de Oliveira proposes a contextualized evangelism and discipleship model for Christian workers involved with the Fur people. Furthermore, his proposal is relevant for those working with other displaced people.

As the title suggests, the theme of de Oliveira’s work is hope. Chapter 1 examines the God-centered hope that remains even for the displaced, and how the church can be involved in carrying that hope to the hurting. Chapter 2 discusses church planting contextualization issues related to the culture and language of the Fur people, and points out the implications of Oliveira’s research for Sudanese, Jordanian, and international believers around the globe. Chapter 3 delves into Sudan’s cultural and religious history, particularly focusing on the ongoing conflict in Darfur. Chapter 4 explains the current challenging circumstances of the Fur people living in Jordan as asylum seekers and refugees, where their hope for a better future has been frustrated by discrimination.

Chapter 5 is an account of de Oliveira’s ethnographic interviews with the Fur and concludes with drawing out themes of discrimination, war, displacement, exile, and suffering, which were deeply relevant to all interviewees. “Before the war, my life was wonderful,” reminisced one. “My sisters would help my mother cook for my family, and I would play with my brothers. It was when the war broke out that everything changed” (p. 93). These stories do not yet have a happy ending: “Some people say the Sudanese [in Jordan] are doing well because we no longer face the war in Darfur. This opinion reveals a simplistic look at our situation. In general, people don’t know the day-to-day adversities we face here in Jordan. The trust is that we are still on a journey of daily survival” (p. 98).

The final two chapters describe a contextualized model of evangelism and discipleship that considers themes pertinent to the Fur, asks how God is reaching out to meet them in those areas, and mentions areas where further research is needed. Oliveira examines how the Bible addresses these themes and how Christians can communicate these biblical truths to “constructively engage the Fur people’s worldview” (p. 125) and offer hope in their daily realities. This is accomplished by drawing principles and applications from specific Scripture passages and addressing apologetic issues likely to surface. He also looks forward with hope towards a discipleship process involving continued growth in grace for Fur
believers and believers of other nationalities who are connected with this community. De Oliveira also shares “fruitful practices,” such as “praying with Fur individuals for peace in Sudan and throughout the world” (p. 179), which will help Christians from other nationalities connect meaningfully with the Fur.

This book was originally a doctoral dissertation; therefore, it contains robust research and academic inquiry. Still, it is eminently practical and capably written by someone involved in ministry among the Fur people in Sudan and the Middle East for many years. The strength of this work is the culturally-aware, exegetically-thorough breakdown of how biblical truth can be contextually communicated in ways that bring hope to the afflictions that the Fur—and others who have experienced similar life circumstances—have endured. While reading the book, I wondered what is being done in local Jordanian congregations to welcome and share the Gospel with the Fur people. Further research may evaluate the perspectives of Jordanian believers to determine whether discrimination is or will be a problem within the Jordanian Christian community for the Fur who may decide to follow Jesus.

While the specificity of the ethnographic research means that some particularities of the findings will not be broadly applicable, de Oliveira has provided a strong example of how ethnography and exegesis can provide synergy when seeking to share the gospel with people on the move. I recommend this book to those working among asylum seekers and refugees from Darfur and other war-torn areas, those involved in migration studies, and those interested in the crucial intersection of ethnography and exegesis in cross-cultural church planting ministry, particularly among Muslims.

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For those interested in understanding how missions relates to the heart of theology, Lalsangkima Pachuau, Professor of Christian Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary, helpfully offers his recent work, *God at Work in the World*. Pachuau cogently and concisely argues for founding our theology of mission in the Trinitarian God’s work in the world, namely in the salvific mission of Christ, sent by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pachuau looks at the central tenets of theology through the lens of mission.

Pachuau’s aim, presented in the introduction, is to show that, “Theology of mission is an essential part of theology itself, and any theology that does not deal with God’s mission cannot be fully regarded as theology proper” (p. 2). Successive chapters build this connection by assessing five theological fields: the Trinity, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and the Christ-culture relationship.

In chapter 1, Pachuau overviews the concept of the Trinity and its relation and effect on missional theology. Appealing mainly to Barth, he locates the source of missional theology in the economic Trinity, the triune God’s work and revelation in the world. Pachuau argues that the *Missio Dei*, the Father’s sending the Son and Spirit to the world, irresistibly forms the foundation for missions today.
Chapters 2–3 assess the missional implications of Christology and soteriology. Pachuau argues that salvation is the core component of Christian missions because salvation is at the core of God’s missional sending of the incarnate Son, Jesus (p. 51). With special attention to the global church, Pachuau calls believers to approach the incarnation holistically, embracing and encouraging many different denominational perspectives on salvation, ranging from Pentecostal healing ministry to theosis in Eastern Orthodox theology. Chapter 3 closes with a discussion of the scope of salvation, concluding with Pachuau tentatively maintaining that salvation is through Jesus alone, but leaving the door open for a more universal salvation, appealing to the mysterious mercies of God (pp. 108–10). He writes, “In this light … being open to the ‘possibility’ of universal salvation makes sense. It is a possibility, but the definitive answer belongs to God” (p. 109).

Chapters 4–5 focus on the people of God by addressing missional ecclesiology and the Christ-culture relationship. Seeing the church as a pivotal component of God’s mission, Pachuau argues that “the church, therefore, is mission before it does mission” (p. 122). He analyzes the missional connotations of three scriptural images of the church: the church as covenant people, as Christ’s body, and as the spirit-led servant-herald of God’s kingdom. Drawing from the Council of Chalcedon and the Synoptic Gospels, Chapter 5 couches the importance of culture in the Son who, in taking on flesh and dwelling among us, naturally imbibes and legitimizes human culture even as he transcends it in his divinity (p. 155). Pachuau concludes by explaining that every culture has equal potential for the gospel to take root and for unique, culturally specific theological insights.

Pachuau’s work has significant strengths and makes valuable contributions to the discussion of missional theology. First, he advances the importance and cause of missions in serious theological study. Essentially, he reads theology with an eye toward missions. For example, this is clear in his analysis of the incarnation in chapters 2 and 5, where he demonstrates that missions and culture matter because Jesus, being sent on mission and taking on human culture, validates both. A second strength is Pachuau’s use and appreciation for the best global Christian scholarship, regardless of denominational tradition or culture. He references Orthodox theology, Catholic theology, Korean theologians, Hindu-background Indian theologians, liberation theology, and many others. These references help form an ecumenical view of missional theology that validates the positive contributions of almost every church branch.

Some readers may find it helpful to know that Pachuau, while committed to Scripture and the church, often takes a more progressive theological perspective. For example, he is uncomfortable with the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians (p. 135). He is also critical of theologians who reject the possibility of any universal offering of salvation in Scripture (pp. 103, 108–9).

In terms of constructive criticism, Pachuau helpfully encourages global scholarship, but shows a slight bias against traditional confessional Protestant and Catholic perspectives. For instance, when discussing salvation, he references feminist and liberation theology without critique (pp. 52–53). Yet, he claims the satisfaction theory, the predominant perspective of Protestantism and Catholicism alike, has “significant limitations and problems” (p. 65). Additionally, it would have been helpful for Pachuau, considering the space devoted to the particularism/universalism debate, to address the value of missions if universalism is possible. If many/all can be saved apart from confessing faith in Jesus, then what is the need for missions?

While the book is predominantly for theological students and scholars, thoughtful laypeople will also benefit from studying it, particularly those interested in a general primer on some of the central tenets of theological study through a missional lens. In our globalized era, Pachuau provides a clear
and thoughtful call to remember the church’s mission and that we are missional only because God was missional first.

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In the landscape of theology, the region between cultural contextualization and fidelity to Scripture is fraught with difficulty. The contemporary shift toward global theology only further enhances this reality. In *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church,* Stephen Pardue charts a path for an evangelical contextual theology. His approach appreciates the blessing of local cultures while maintaining an unflinching faithfulness to the timeless truths of God’s Word.

In chapter 1, Pardue begins by addressing three common challenges to the legitimacy of contextual theology. The first is that theology is a scientific enterprise that should be independent of cultural influences, to which he responds that scientific inquiry itself is culturally-rooted and practices differ across contexts. The second objection is that cultural accommodation runs the risk of syncretism, therefore such influences must be minimized. Pardue responds by appealing to the value of contextualization, drawing from New Testament examples, including Paul in the book of Acts. The final objection is that cultural context may be helpful, but theological content should remain unchanged. Pardue observes that even the process of principlizing or abstracting theological truths is a contextual practice.

In chapter 2, Pardue argues that culture ought to serve a ministerial role to the magisterial authority of Scripture in the task of theology. His brief introduction to the recent history of contextual theology and key taxonomies concludes that culture permeates the theological process and ought to be a valued resource in theology, not merely a tolerated reality.

In chapter 3, the previous thesis is advanced one step further to argue that culture should be considered a desirable resource for the task of theology. Pardue draws from Dyrness to conclude that cultures are dynamic realities through which people express their identity. He then explores biblical themes, centering the concept of culture around the redemption of Babel, thus affirming cultural distinctiveness as a blessing from God that will last into eternity. Theologically, Pardue sees culture as a gift of common grace that, though subject to sin and the fall, can be redeemed and cultivated to yield new, theological fruit. Culture, therefore, is a gift that brings God’s people together as long as it is carefully held up to the penetrating light and judgment of Scripture.

Chapter 4 moves from the what to the how, as Pardue establishes ecclesiology as the anchor for contextual theology. Before investigating ecclesiology, Pardue looks at globalization, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of the incarnation and finds each helpful but ultimately insufficient for the task at hand. The doctrine of the church is where New Testament authors turn to “define the nature of
Christian unity in diversity” (p. 107) and, therefore, is the most promising locus upon which to ground contextual theology.

Drawing from the Nicene Creed, Pardue casts a vision for a contextual theology marked by holiness, apostolicity, unity, and catholicity in chapter 5. Holiness and apostolicity establish that the church is set apart for God’s purposes and committed to the inspired teaching of the apostles and the prophets. By bringing their unique cultural gifts to the worldwide Christian community, local churches can contribute to universal growth in understanding the riches of God’s wisdom and grace. A grasp of catholic wholeness inspires “confidence that every cultural soil is fundamentally capable of nourishing the vine of Christian faith” (p. 129). Catholicity and unity, therefore, protect against the flaws of fragmentation and isolation by drawing the worldwide church together in pursuit of the triune God.

To complete his case for an evangelical contextual theology, Pardue contends that catholicity points the church not only outward but also backward to draw from the Great Tradition. Instead of building local theologies that inherently reject traditional frameworks, contextual theology ought to be devoted to retrieving the theological riches of the past. Engaging with tradition provides case studies of past explorations, gives a unique perspective from a different era, guards against contemporary imbalances, and marks vital doctrinal boundaries.

There are many strengths to Pardue’s case for an evangelical contextual theology that are worth mentioning. The first is how Pardue brings a charitable and irenic tone that does not compromise its incisiveness and nuance. His clarity and pacing are other qualities that stand out. Far from being verbose, each chapter moves along briskly without feeling like any key points were omitted. Though there may be times when deeper exploration is warranted, it was not the intent of this work to do so. Finally, Pardue’s use of case studies is illuminating. Each chapter concludes with an example demonstrating the value of practicing contextual theology in the way he espouses or the pitfalls of imbalances he warns against.

Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church is a compelling case for a nuanced practice of contextual theology. Pardue successfully outlines the value and riches of local cultures and roots them within the worldwide church and the Great Tradition. He writes in a way that is both accessible and precise, making this a good fit for an advanced undergraduate or introductory seminary course, but documenting well enough to direct a seasoned theologian to further avenues of inquiry.

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Teaching theology is difficult. Teaching theology in other countries complicated by their individual cultural needs and nuances is even more difficult. The need for theological education combined with the ease of travel has meant expanding opportunities for Western-trained theologians to teach short-term intensive courses or serve as long-term missionaries. Yet, methods and structures effective in Western contexts do not always translate to the recipient’s culture or meet the needs of those they seek to serve.

Teaching Across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective will aid those called to teach cross-culturally to bridge cultural divides. The authors stated purpose is “to provide cross-cultural teachers with good theory and practical insights that can guide them towards making their educational endeavors personally transformative and relevant for the students and those whom they serve” (p. 1). The authors accomplish this objective by providing the necessary theories and tools to communicate theological material cross-culturally. Written as a collaboration, this book critically analyzes teaching methods successful in a Western context that may be foreign, ineffective, or impossible in other cultures. One example is the sense of time and punctuality. In a Western context, time is a precious commodity. Yet, as illustrated in the story that opens the book, time is relative in most parts of the world as it is the relationship that matters, not whether class starts and ends on time (pp. 9–10).

The authors presuppose that the audience’s culture must not be ignored because “culture is the backdrop against which teaching and learning actually happen” (p. 68). Therefore, culture must be researched and considered in preparing and transmitting theological truths. Just as an individual’s worldview will affect their perception of religion, the cultural background and norms of the student will dictate the most beneficial teaching methods. Just as individual students have different learning styles and preferences, each culture has unique facets to consider.

The authors dedicate the book’s first half to an exploration of the importance of understanding an audience’s culture. After an introductory chapter using a story to illustrate the tension of cross-cultural teaching, chapters 2–8 are dedicated to the nuances of non-Western cultures, impacting how the material is presented and evaluated. Some common cultural roadblocks may be traditional assessments like tests, research papers, course grades, the role of gender in the classroom, and the need for humility in presenting the material. The contributors argue that many of the tools of traditional theological education may need to be revised, reinterpreted, or removed to fit the context. This can be accomplished by taking the necessary time—before entering a different culture to teach—to study and process barriers to overcome and/or other approaches to present material to best transmit the message.

In many of the opening chapters, the authors provide a section for reflection and discussion, which offers the reader a space to process the material. This reflection is beneficial to encourage understanding of the text and the issues presented for more effective cross-cultural communication. For example, chapter 8, which deals with gender issues, asks, “If you knew someone who was planning to teach cross-culturally and you had only five minutes to advise that person on teaching women in that context, based
on the material given here what would you say to him or her?” (p. 99) These discussion opportunities take the theoretical and help the reader to process the information practically.

The second half of Teaching Across Cultures presents country and region-specific examples of cultural issues to consider in preparing to teach. Shaw and the other contributors provide thirty-one chapters representing a broad swath of cultural expressions from Latin America to Asia, each with sections dedicated to what one should know before preparing and presenting material. Local theologians and religious leaders write these country and regional profiles to provide an insider’s perspective on the culture. Each of these profiles includes sections that explore what is most important to consider before transmitting information. For instance, the chapter on Teaching Cross-Culturally in Pakistan contains sections on social, cultural, religious, educational, language, and practical considerations unique to Pakistan (pp. 187–90).

This book is written to introduce culture and its effect on cross-cultural teaching. Though the contents of this volume will not be sufficient to understand culture completely as many aspects are not treated in depth—such as power distance, honor/shame dynamics, or the need to communicate in the heart language—the practical insights are what set it apart. The target audience is given in the introduction: “While the primary target audience is cross-cultural theology teachers, most of the material given in the collection relates equally to anyone teaching cross-culturally” (p. 1). The authors competently demonstrate the power and influence that culture can have on the educational process. The hidden rocks of culture can shipwreck even the most accomplished communicator if they are not navigated wisely. The content is made more compelling by practical examples and first-hand advice that will help communicators navigate the potentially rough waters of cross-cultural teaching.

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Christopher Wright’s purpose in writing The Great Story and the Great Commission is to “enrich readers’ appreciation of the great narrative drama of the Bible and help both individual believers and churches to integrate every dimension of our missional life and witness around the centrality of the biblical gospel” (p. x). Readers familiar with Wright will recognize themes from his more extensive work, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

In the first of three foundational chapters, Wright summarizes the missional hermeneutic of Scripture. He argues that the Bible must shape and direct our participation in God’s mission. In chapter 2, Wright shows how the Scripture’s various parts tell a single story by outlining the biblical narrative, a “drama in seven acts” (p. 15). Chapter 3 describes how a missional hermeneutic directs our participation in the
drama by telling us where we fit in God’s mission, challenging us on how to live, governing our doctrinal constructions, and sending us out as participants.

In chapter 4, Wright first summarizes the church’s mission by focusing on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) as programmatic. He identifies the following three dimensions of missions from this text: building the church (evangelism and teaching), serving society (compassion and justice), and caring for creation. Chapters 5–8 expand on these and how they relate to the Great Commission.

Chapter 5 is about building the church through evangelism and teaching; the connection to Matthew 28 is explicit. Chapter 6 on serving society (compassion and justice) emphasizes Jesus’s words, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (v. 20). Then, based on Jesus’s declaration of his Lordship over heaven and earth (v. 18), Wright describes the goodness and glory of creation (ch. 7), the place of creation in God’s redemptive purpose (ch. 8), and the resulting missional demands the Scriptures place upon the church to care for creation.

Wright concludes in chapter 9 by emphasizing that the whole mission belongs to the whole church. Everyone can’t do everything, but everyone can do something. All should be prepared to share their faith and teach others; some are specifically gifted as evangelists and teachers. All should be ready to do good, show compassion, and speak up for what is right; some have the calling and training to pursue these things professionally. All should live responsibly in their use of and care for creation; some have the calling and training to pursue these things vocationally (pp. 148–49).

There is much to appreciate in this book. Wright emphasizes a theocentric view of missions by reminding readers that the mission is God’s, the story is God’s, the gospel is God’s, the Great Commission is God’s, the creation is God’s, and the glory is God’s. He provides the big picture with the missional hermeneutic and biblical narrative, then “zooms in” to the Great Commission before “zooming out” to show how the different dimensions of mission nestled in the Great Commission are reflected throughout the biblical narrative.

Advocates of both sides of the Prioritism-Holism debate might feel challenged by this book. Wright advocates for holistic missions by articulating how compassion, justice, and creation care are legitimate and indispensable dimensions of Christian missions alongside evangelism and teaching. Yet, he insists, the gospel must be the nonnegotiable center of all, not in a way that makes these “other things” peripheral, but in a way that holds everything together, like the hub of a wheel. This is a helpful analogy because it does not legitimize other dimensions of missions at the expense of the centrality of the gospel.

Wright’s view of missions may be broader than others’, but he does not advocate an “everything is missions” approach. Instead, he challenges the church to recognize it exists for God’s mission. God is working to rid his creation of evil and redeem for himself a people from every tribe and nation (p. xiii) who know, love, praise, and worship him (p. 74). Therefore, God’s people seek to align everything they do with his mission, and do everything for his glory (p. 144).

Wright’s commitment to the Scriptures, the gospel, the Great Commission, and its implications is clear and emphatic throughout the book. His arguments are biblical, balanced, helpful, and compelling. True, Wright gives significant attention and space to creation care, but it seems necessary to make his point, especially to those hesitant to embrace creation care as missional. Even so, his emphasis remains rooted in a “biblical theology of creation” rather than the current cultural and political arguments regarding ecology and creation care (pp. xiv, 110).

Readers will likely feel the need to discern where to focus. The biblical mandate for evangelism and discipleship is explicitly church-centered, and resources (gifts) for the missionary task are given
explicitly to the church. Compassion and justice are clear implications of the gospel; the mandate for creation care, while legitimate, is less explicit. Keeping the gospel central is a challenge while also seeking to steward creation and live out the implications of the gospel.

This book is a concise, accessible, and engaging summary of how the Great Commission relates to the larger biblical narrative and to the mission of God to redeem his creation. Anyone interested in any dimension of missions will be encouraged and challenged by reading it.

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