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EDITORIAL

On Scholarship, Swords, and Scalpels

— J. V. Fesko —

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All or nothing" is a phrase that appears in different contexts such as finance, entertainment, psychology, politics, and sadly even theological scholarship and discourse. Some might quizzically wonder why an all or nothing approach to theological scholarship falls into the sad category. Is not theology about truth, and claims are either true or false, thus theological scholarship is an all or nothing discipline? If we are talking about the difference between the truth and a lie, right versus wrong, or Christ versus anti-Christ, then yes, we must take an all or nothing approach. However, while the discipline of theology is full of truths that we must affirm, there are also many things that are difficult to understand. The apostle Peter famously said of Paul's letters, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand" (2 Pet 3:16). The Westminster Confession (1647) echoes this sentiment when it admits, "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all" (1:7). In the face of the inspired admission that some things in Paul's letters are hard to understand and a confessional acknowledgement to the same end, can we take an all or nothing approach on every disputed point of theology? Can we draw the lines of right versus wrong and assume that our own position is always correct and thus excommunicate every element emanating from another's views? The lion's share of prudence would advise against such an all or nothing approach, since who among us can guarantee that we are correct all the time on every point and our foes are wrong because they profess truth mixed with error?

Yet despite the dictates of common sense, in some quarters theological scholarship shows signs of embracing an all or nothing approach. To put this in more colloquial language, if a person advocates one wrong idea, they get cancelled. While such a pattern is certainly not novel to our present cultural moment, its rise and popularity is cause for concern. If we get one thing wrong, does it invalidate everything that we say? Is the sword the right metaphor for describing our attitude towards the perceived significance of error? Do we swing and chop away to eliminate an entire body of thought because of one error? While people may swing swords with reckless abandon, the preferred metaphor is the surgeon's scalpel. If we perceive an error in someone's thought, we should instead excise the problematic element and retain the rest of the body of truth. The scalpel has been the preferred instrument of choice in previous ages of the church, and our present cultural moment beckons us to retrieve its use for the sake of improving our theological scholarship and discourse to the betterment of the church's corporate life.

In order to understand how we arrived at an all or nothing approach to theological scholarship, I first briefly survey some of the causes behind this mindset. Second, I explore opinions of theologians from the early modern period to show how they took an eclectic approach to their theological scholarship. Third, and finally, I reflect upon the need for using scalpels as a tacit admission of our own intellectual

limitations—that we need to pursue our scholarship in humility rather than the arrogance of an all or nothing approach.

1. On the Origins of the Sword

Whence the origins of the all or nothing approach in theology? Diagnosing the sources of a historical and cultural phenomenon can be a tricky business. Nevertheless, I propose several different founts of the present streams of certitude in our theological discourse: the rise of worldview, philosophical holism, and groupthink driven by tribalism.

1.1. Worldview

Despite the popularity that the worldview concept enjoys in our present-day theological scholarship and discourse, the concept is of Enlightenment origins. In his *Critique of Judgment* Immanual Kant (1724–1804) put forth the idea that people needed to dig beneath the substrate of the world's appearance and our understanding of it, or worldview. We need to unite our perception of the world entirely under one concept that explains the whole.[1] Other philosophers took this idea and posited the notion that different races of people developed competing explanations of the world and that each worldview was unique to each race.[2] There was no universal human, no commonly shared existence, and thus the different worldviews were incommensurable, or incompatible. An imaginary Venn diagram illustrates this point. According to a common notion of worldview, the two circles representing the different systems of thought do not at all overlap—there are no shared interpretations of the world. The two circles are hermetically sealed systems, allergic and incompatible to any and all competing claims.

Presbyterian theologian and apologist James Orr (1844–1913) embraced the worldview concept and the notion of incommensurability in his own theology: "The Christian view of things forms a logical whole which cannot be infringed on, or accepted or rejected piecemeal, but stands or falls in its integrity, and can only suffer from attempts at amalgamation or compromise with theories which rest on totally distinct bases."[3] He promotes the idea that Christianity is an all or nothing venture and cannot in any way be mixed with any other theories. If Orr means that Christianity cannot be mixed with pagan religious notions, then he is correct. The Bible itself proposes this type of all or nothing approach: "What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever" (2 Cor 6:15)? Yet, theologians applied worldview incommensurability not merely for the doctrine of salvation but to all departments of knowledge.

Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) argued that Christ had to be the starting point for all knowledge, and on this basis "the Christian life and world view … presents the *only true* interpretation of human experience."[4] To admit any principle from unbelieving thought compromises the purity of truth, but Van Til even extended this idea to Christian thought. In other words, the only true form of knowledge is that which is found in Reformed theology, not Greek pagan philosophy, Roman Catholicism, or

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment: Including the First Introduction*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, reprint ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 111–12; cf. David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 58–59.

[2] Naugle, *Worldview*, 68–107, 187–208.

[3] James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation*, reprint ed. (Edinburgh: Elliot, 1907), 16.

[4] Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1976), 38, emphasis added.

Arminianism. These other systems of thought were compromised, and thus to admit any of their corrupt elements committed a theologian to synthesis thinking—trying to combine the knowledge of Christ with unbelief. Van Til was explicit in his agreement with Kant on this point: "This is the significance of Kant's 'Copernican Revolution.' It is only in our day that there can therefore be anything like a fully consistent presentation of one system of interpretation over against the other. For the first time in history the stage is set for a head-on collision. There is now a clear-cut antithesis between the two positions."[5] Theologically shaped worldviews are now on the course for a head on collision rather than a meeting of the minds. Van Til rejected entire systems of thought if he found one misinterpreted fact.[6]

1.2. Philosophical Holism

A second contributing factor comes from the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and his notion of philosophical holism. Hegel argued that any one individual idea requires understanding the greater whole for its proper comprehension. There is no truth except for the whole truth.[7] Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) illustrates this point when he states the proposition: John is the father of James. Before we can understand this claim, we need to know who James and John are. To know John means to know everything about him. Who are John's parents, wife, and children? Is he a good or bad person? Russell rightly points out that this process eventually leads to trying to define the whole universe rather than to say something true about John. To use the word *John* intelligently, we do not need to know everything about him but only enough to recognize him.[8] Hegelian holism fits like a hand in a glove with Kant's notion of worldview. All theological claims are part of wider seamless systems of thought, and the system cannot be broken apart, nor can parts of the system be used in other systems.

Holism flowered with the onset of the Enlightenment, where philosophers looked upon earlier generations with disdain because they believed their own systematic and holistic approach to philosophy was superior to the eclecticism of the past. Eclectic philosophers were disinterested in schools of thought and were willing to think for themselves and embrace the truth wherever they found it.[9] Systematic philosophers rejected eclecticism because of its perceived mongrel nature and instead preferred systems defined by one central concept, one concept to bind all others, and by the power of reason to define and characterize the whole worldview.[10]

1.3. Groupthink Tribalism

A third contributing factor is the rising tide of groupthink tribalism. First, what is groupthink? Groupthink is when a group of people collectively embrace the same set of ideas and outlook over and against opposing points of view. There are three defining rules of groupthink. (1) A group of people share a common view, opinion, or belief that they believe is inerrantly correct. (2) The group's belief ignores facts that do not fit their collective idea, and thus their conviction is largely subjective. Their

[5] Cornelius Van Til, introduction to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by B. B. Warfield, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1948), 23–24.

[6] E.g., Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, reprint ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1967), 74.

[7] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 730.

[8] Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 743–45.

[9] Pierluigi Donini, "The History of the Concept of Eclecticism," in *The Question of "Eclecticism": Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, ed. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 15–33.

[10] Leo Catana, *The Historiographical Concept "System of Philosophy": Its Origin, Nature, Influence, and Legitimacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–10, 283–329.

collective conviction makes them part of an "in-group." Anyone who does not agree with them can be ignored. And (3) the in-group must treat anyone else's views as wholly unacceptable. Opposing views must be mercilessly caricatured and attacked as inferior and erroneous.[11] Groupthink is not confined to theological scholarship and discourse but appears in all sorts of different places in life: in politics, war, or foreign policy. Recall the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Imperial Navy. American military leaders believed that an attack was unthinkable until it actually happened and crushed the groupthink conviction.[12] A generation earlier the collective groupthink of American naval leadership believed that battleships were the unassailable kings of the sea until in 1923 they shed literal tears as they watched General Billy Mitchell drop a bomb from an airplane and sink a naval warship. Groupthink about the battleship was sunk by one tiny bomb.[13]

Groupthink is not restricted to our present cultural climate. As long as humans have existed in a fallen world, they have created in-groups and cliques. The apostle Paul battled this mentality at Corinth when he opposed the various factions (1 Cor 3:4). Nevertheless, communication technologies, the internet, and social media have only fanned the flames of groupthink and tribalism. Identity politics has come upon Western culture in its efforts to base unity on various perceived and constructed identities.[14] Groupthink tribalism can be easily verified through anecdotal evidence. Do an internet search on the phrase, "While I do not agree with everything," combined with the world "theology," to see how many times it is invoked when positively citing or quoting a source. Authors regularly invoke this phrase to ensure that no one questions their tribal loyalty when they quote someone outside of the tribe. It begs the question, however: When does anyone ever entirely agree with another person? Yet, in the present all or nothing climate of theological discourse, people rush to the conclusion that to quote someone means that one totally agrees with the quoted author on everything.

Worldview, holism, and tribal groupthink do not exhaust the causes for our all or nothing context in which we presently find ourselves, but these three trends help us to see why theological discourse suffers. These three trends also stand in stark contrast to theologians of the past.

2. On the Use of the Scalpel

If current-day theological scholarship and discourse is prone to using a sword to cleave views asunder, then past generations used a surgeon's scalpel either to excise problematic elements or carefully extract ideas for use in their own theology. We can briefly examine three examples: Francis Turretin on Roman Catholic baptisms, Stephen Charnock on natural theology, and Francis Cheynell on philosophy.

2.1. Turretin and Baptism

Polemics between Reformed theologians and Roman Catholics in the seventeenth century were certainly intense. The Westminster Confession, for example, calls transubstantiation the source of

[11] Christopher Booker, *Groupthink: A Study in Self Delusion*, ed. Richard North (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020), 2–3.

[12] Booker, *Groupthink*, 2.

[13] H. Paul Jeffers, *Billy Mitchell: The Life, Times, and Battles of America's Prophet of Air Power* (Duluth, MN: Zenith, 2006).

[14] Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019); Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why It Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020).

"gross idolatries," the sacrifice of the mass as "most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice," and the pope as the anti-Christ (29:2, 6; 25:6). Francis Turretin (1623–1687) swims in this stream and believed that the Roman Catholic Church was the great whore of Babylon mentioned in the book of Revelation (Rev 17:1–18), the city that lures and leads people astray into idolatry.[15] Given these blunt assessments of Roman Catholic claims on the Lord's Supper and on papal and church authority, we might quickly conclude that Turretin would reject everything related to Rome. Yet, he takes a scalpel to the question of what truth might still be present in Rome: "It is one thing to retain something of the true church; another to be the true church simply; as it is one thing for the body to have some sound parts, another for the body to be sound simply." Turretin then illustrates this point from the Old Testament and church history: "The Pharisaic church retained something of the true church in the time of Christ, nor yet on that account was she a true church. The same is the judgment concerning the Arian, Donatist and other factions whose baptism and ordinations the Catholics never repeated."[16]

Turretin therefore believed that the Roman Catholic Church still had elements of truth in its theology, such as the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. He admitted that Rome retained the fundamentals of Christian truth, but this did not mean that Rome was a true church or that they had the gospel right.[17] Given his scalpel approach, Turretin, like the other Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564), was willing to accept Roman Catholic baptisms:

> The verity of baptism proves indeed that truth of a church with regard to Christianity in general, in opposition to assemblies of unbelievers; but not with regard to Christianity pure and purged from the errors of heretics. For true baptism can be found among heretics who are not the true church; as true circumcision and sacrifices to the one God were consecrated in the church of the ten tribes, which was not on that account a true church.[18]

Turretin could acknowledge the acceptability of a Roman Catholic baptism even if Rome had numerous doctrinal errors. Turretin and early modern Reformed theologians did not take an all or nothing approach to doctrine.

2.2. Charnock and Natural Theology

Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) is well-known for his *Existence and Attributes of God*, a monumental work of titanic proportions. The work began life as a series of doctrinal sermons on theology proper but morphed into a massive theological treatise on the doctrine of God. Charnock has been described as a "diligent student, specializing in biblical languages, Reformed and scholastic theology, patristics, and philosophy."[19] Thus, readers expect that he gives a Reformed treatment of the doctrine of God. In the present day, Reformed theologians have claimed that natural theology may have a place in Arminian or

[15] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–1997), 18.14.1–23.

[16] Turretin, *Institutes* 18.14.24.

[17] Turretin, *Institutes* 18.14.25–26.

[18] Turretin, *Institutes* 18.14.27.

[19] Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 142.

Roman Catholic theology, but certainly not in a theology that would be Reformed.[20] An all or nothing approach colors this claim: there is supposedly no overlap between Rome and the Reformation. Yet, Charnock presents a different take. Charnock's first discourse is on the existence of God, where he employs natural theology to demonstrate God's existence. Unlike some contemporary Reformed theologians who refuse to appeal to Roman Catholic authorities, Charnock positively appealed to medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Roman Catholic theologian Domingo Bàñez (1528–1604), and early medieval Eastern theologian John of Damascus (ca. 675–749).[21] For example, he appeals to the human perception of creation's perfection and asks who can see this attribute and not look to the cause, namely, God. He then positively cites Aquinas's five ways to demonstrate God's existence.[22] And unlike contemporary theologians, Charnock does not wave the flag of tribalism. He does not say, "Now while I do not agree with Aquinas on everything…" Charnock crossed historical and confessional boundaries to appeal to authorities to argue for a natural theology for God's existence. He used a scalpel rather than a sword to excise truth and employ it in his own theology.

2.3. Cheynell on Philosophy

Unlike some contemporary Reformed theologians who are tribally committed to certain philosophical or theological views, Francis Cheynell (1608–1665) took a different approach. Cheynell was a Presbyterian, but he was also, like his early modern peers, theologically eclectic. Concerning philosophy, Cheynell writes:

> We ought not to swear allegiance to any sect of Philosophers, whether Stoicks, Epicures, Platonists or Peripatetiques, but we must select and embrace whatsoever is true and faithfully delivered concerning God by any Sect; and the Truth selected out of all Sects is not vaine Philosophy, but Natural Divinity. There is something of the Image of God & Law of Nature written in our hearts and consciences, as is evident by common experience and plain testimonie of the word of God, and therefore the Scripture doth not condemn all Philosophy, but vain Philosophy.[23]

Cheynell was convinced that no one philosophical school of thought had cornered the market on truth. Rather, he eclectically gathered truth from wherever he found it. He did not believe he was imbibing from pagan claims but rather discovering naturally revealed truths in the creation. Cheynell did not take an all or nothing approach but rather used his surgeon's scalpel carefully to remove and redeploy truths that he found, no matter their source.

[20] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6–16," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 103–24, here 124. More recently, see Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology: A Critical Appraisal of the Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press Academic, 2021); cf. David VanDrunen, "Thomistic Natural Theology and Its Implications: A Review Article of Jeffrey Johnson's *The Failure of Natural Theology*," *Journal of International Reformed Baptist Studies* (2023): 109–26.

[21] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, ed. Mark Jones, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 67, 69, 70.

[22] See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province, repr. ed. (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948), Ia q.2 a.3.

[23] Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (London: Gellibrand, 1650), 1–2.

3. On Tacit Admissions of Humility

To be clear, some theological issues call for a sword. The apostle Paul, for example, rebuked the Galatian churches for abandoning the gospel. He drew a clear line between truth and falsehood and taught them that there was no compromise between them (Gal 1:8–9). There are times when we must reject a position entirely, such as when theologians compromise the gospel for the sake of cultural acceptability. To say that God has changed his mind on matters of sexuality is a view that runs completely against the grain of Scripture and the historic witness of catholic confessional conviction.[24] Thus the notion of God's mutability must be rejected.

However, given the various philosophical and cultural influences (worldview, holism, and groupthink tribalism), to use a sword more widely in theological scholarship and discourse seems more common these days than a scalpel. While using a sword may give the impression of truth and satisfy one's tribe, the all or nothing approach in theological scholarship and discourse breathes the air of arrogance and division rather than humility and peace. To take an all or nothing approach assumes that we have cornered the market on truth; it assumes that we alone possess the Spirit of truth. It places us in the dangerous position of assuming that we have all the answers and no errors. We can sit high on the perch of truth and look down upon other views held down by the gravity of error. While Kant's worldview theory and Hegel's holism is not the sole cause of today's all or nothing approach, we should not fail to recognize that both philosophers' theories grow from the soil of Enlightenment rationalism. They run with reason's confident stride in all things rather than acknowledge that reason walks with a limp due to the noetic effects of sin.

Early modern theologians took an eclectic approach to theology because they recognized their own limitations. The fact that they were not averse to appealing positively to sources outside their tribe was not an effort at politicking or seeking greater influence but was a tacit admission of humility. They came to the banquet of knowledge as hungry beggars rather than confident masters.[25] The person who takes an all or nothing approach to theology makes his own opinions the canon by which he measures truth.[26] Instead, like Cheynell who gleaned truth wherever he encountered it, we should acknowledge the truth in what others write and say. To admit the truthfulness in the views of others is not a sign of weakness but rather humility. We humbly acknowledge that God has suffused the world with his truth and we alone neither master nor possess it. When we appeal to authorities outside our tribes, we do not wager on the brilliance of another theologian but instead seek God's truth in another image-bearer, even among those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:20 KJV).

4. Conclusion

The apostle Paul instructs us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:2). Theological scholarship and discourse seem at times to be pressed into the mold of the all or nothing approach. There are certainly times when truth must stand in stark antithesis to the lie. In such cases we must cleave truth from the lie with a sword. But these days people seem more

[24] See, e.g., Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Deepening of God's Mercy Through Repentance: A Critical Review Essay of *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality Within the Biblical Story*," *Themelios* 49.3 (2024): 536–53.

[25] Alan Jacobs, *Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader's Guide to a More Tranquil Mind* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 80.

[26] Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 90.

prone to drawing their swords and casting aside their scalpels. If theologians of the early modern period have anything to teach us, it is that we should probably be prepared to draw our scalpels more often than our swords. In many cases, drawing and using a scalpel calls for wisdom, but we should be mindful of the forces that shape and distort the church's scholarship and discourse. Rather than always cleaving with a sword, we must instead make careful and deliberate incisions with a scalpel so we can recognize and use the truth no matter where we encounter it. Using scalpels in our scholarship and discourse can be one way to reduce the damaging effects of theological tribalism and taking one step closer to greater unity and love within the body of Christ at large.

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STRANGE TIMES

On (Not) Considering Theological Training

— Daniel Strange —

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> *Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"*
> *For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.* (Ecc 7:10)
>
> *Remember the days of old;*
> *consider the years of many generations;*
> *ask your father, and he will show you,*
> *your elders, and they will tell you.* (Deut 32:7)

In two previous columns, I have offered some observations on *approaching* theological training and then on *finishing* theological training. To complete the trilogy, here is a prequel on *considering* theological training, or more accurately, on *not* considering theological training.[1] Last year the UK transdenominational ministry recruitment charity *9:38*[2] held a consultation day with several stakeholders involved in theological training and ministry within the UK Reformed evangelical constituency. The aim of the day was 'to identify the building blocks that will need to be put in place to build an approach to recruitment over the next decade which is responsive to both the urgent needs in the harvest field and the changing cultural landscape all around us.'[3] Accompanying this day was a basic report undertaken by *9:38* entitled *Unblocking the Pipeline: Identifying and Addressing Obstacles to Ministry Recruitment in UK Reformed Evangelical Churches.* This basic research included two surveys, 'Ministry Aspiration Outcomes', consisting of a targeted questionnaire of 792 individuals between the ages of 23–34,[4] and 'Routes into Pastoral Ministry', surveying 407 men and women in pastoral ministry positions. Additional data was gathered including historic student numbers from training institutions

[1] Can a prequel be part of a trilogy? Don't contact me, but I'm sure the other editors of *Themelios* would love to hear from you….

[2] As in, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' (Matt 9:37–38). See https://www.ninethirtyeight.org/.

[3] Orlando Saer, introduction to 'Unblocking the Pipeline: Identifying and Addressing Obstacles to Ministry Recruitment in UK Reformed Evangelical Churches', https://www.ninethirtyeight.org/938-consultation-day/.

[4] 'Respondents were asked whether at some point they had seriously considered, or been encouraged to consider, pursuing a paid ministry role. 61% indicated 'yes' (against 39% no). Of those who indicated 'yes', 50% were

and mission agencies, together with anecdotal comments and analysis from stakeholders. The report covers several areas including: the level of concern about pastoral ministry uptake among young adults;[5] diagnosing the hesitancy in terms of declared disincentives; stakeholder commentary in understanding the disincentives; possible building blocks for the future; and some inspirational examples. I don't want to parrot the findings of the report here. It is readily available and well worth reading.

This report was a helpful data point when I was asked recently to give a brief presentation and 'discussion starter' to a group of ministers in Edinburgh with the following brief:

> *How do we equip and enthuse the next generation of church leaders?* What are some of the concerns that are stopping people considering vocational ministry as a viable option? What do we need to be thinking through as church leaders? That kind of thing.

Thinking about this myself and consulting with wise and learned colleagues,[6] I jotted down some reflections in terms of diagnosis and possible remedies, some of which overlap with the findings of the *9:38* report. Given the international readership of *Themelios*, it might be interesting to compare and contrast my own observations within my own cultural context and constituency in the UK with your own.

First, variations on the theme of *cost* seem to be a common refrain when it comes to obstacles for ministry recruitment. There is what might be called the 'well-being' cost. Vocational ministry can be, and often is, costly and painful. In a culture which often views discomfort and pain as a lack needing to be avoided at all costs rather than an occasion for learning and growth, there can be anxiety and hesitancy. Then there is the reputational cost. Observing ministers and leaders we have known and loved (or even just read about) and who have been in the firing line means we don't want to become the poster-boy or poster-girl for prejudice, intolerance, and cancellation from those outside the church. Moreover, looking on the inside, people don't want to face conflict within the church. Being accused of being overbearing, or the thought of experiencing what it's like to be under an overbearing leader, is quite simply too much to bear. Then of course there is the financial cost. Anecdotally, we've noticed that particularly men are coming forward for vocational ministry later in life rather than being in their early-mid 20s. Being a bit older, they often have much more significant financial commitments and attachments, including children and mortgages. In the UK, we know that a supported ministry is not about being 'shown the money' and will involve financial sacrifice. However, many ministry jobs are still very poorly paid. As a result, some people will certainly be staying out for fear of lifelong financial insecurity, especially given the greater political and economic instability of the present time. Older leaders might want to say that youngsters should be willing to be more sacrificial and risk-taking, but it is worth recognising that Covid and its aftermath, a cost-of-living crisis, and general geo-political 'craziness' means the world and future seems scarier and more uncertain now than it did for a previous generation.

Second is a *communication* gap between an older and younger generation. In summary, the younger generation are turned off by the overwork and burnout that they see in an older generation of leaders. Meanwhile this older generation thinks the younger generation are, well, flaky and a bit 'lightweight'.

still exploring a ministry path. The remaining 50% were asked to list the four most significant factors in reaching that decision, i.e. the issues which dissuaded them from pursuing a ministry pathway.' 'Unblocking the Pipeline', 5.

[5] Within the RIPM survey, '43% of respondents were either "really concerned" or "alarmed"' (the highest two categories) about the issue. Only 13% indicated 'not worried.' 'Unblocking the Pipeline', 9.

[6] For whom I give thanks.

One colleague had some perceptive insights as to where we pitch the idea of 'urgency' in gospel ministry. Defined and characterised by our 'activism', an earlier generation of evangelicals may well have erred on the side of 'we're in a war, people are going to hell, Jesus may come back soon, let's give it absolutely everything and leave it all out there'. While this is not wrong by any means, it has led to a tendency to neglect one's creaturely needs. It's a cliché, I know, but I did overhear recently a 'I'll sleep when I'm dead' from one minister. The result is unsustainable, and at times idolatrous, patterns of ministry with consequences for health and family. On the other hand, a younger generation has been brought up in a (secular) culture which has strongly emphasised self-care and living within limits, *but only up to a point*, and it's an important point. As my colleague notes, the model many young people have grown up with is a rhetoric of self-care but a lifestyle of hyper-stimulus. However, there are models of an older generation who have been able to emphasise the urgency of gospel ministry but often allied with patterns of life which are slightly healthier (admittedly not always) because they are rooted in older, less 24/7 modes of being. Here's the communication gap. When the younger generation hear an older generation's rhetoric, they may hear it as a call to urgency (challenging the world's rhetoric) but try to fit it into a frazzled and over-stimulated lifestyle and think 'that's not doable.' Meanwhile the older generation hear the talk of 'self-care' and 'well-being' as self-centred apathy (which in the world's rhetoric, frankly, it often is), think that people just aren't committed enough, and so ramp up the rhetoric. This has created something of a 'Mexican standoff', with no-one willing to budge.

Third, and more briefly is what I will call *convention*. Maybe it's just my own constituency and perhaps I'm mistaken (you'll detect a nervousness in what I'm about to say), but there has been a culture of conservatism, or maybe more a traditional*ism* in how we conceive of theological training. 'We've always done it this way' has been accompanied with an attitude of 'build it and they will come', even when the numbers suggest they are not coming. The metaphor of the 'pipeline', whether blocked or unblocked, conveys that sense of straight lines and rigidity. Having tunnel-vision and focusing on the usual and well-trodden routes into ministry, we've lacked a curiosity and so have both under-observed and under-oxygenated new and innovative training and learning initiatives that might be taking place off the beaten track.

What might be some ways forward here to counter these obstacles of cost, communication, and convention? Here are a few unoriginal thoughts, unoriginal in that most have been echoed in J. L. González's *The History of Theological Education*,[7] thus confirming his statement that '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'.[8] Tradition is not the same as traditionalism.

First, and perhaps most straightforwardly, we need to get to grips with *the cost of learning*. Churches need to face up to what it actually costs someone in their mid-thirties to live, move, and minister in the area they've be called to, whether it's rural or city, and work on how to fund that. Funds tend to follow vision if the vision is legitimate,compelling, well-articulated and prayerful. I know that in my context there is some good work being done by individuals, churches, and organizations to collaborate and create training funds to support people, particularly those who might not have access to the usual sources of funding.[9]

[7] J. L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015).

[8] González, *The History of Theological Education*, xi.

[9] For example, one newer fund that I am personally involved with is *The Sychar Gospel Fund* (https://www.stewardship.org.uk/sychar-gospel-fund-what-we-do).

Second is the need to both democratize and demystify theological learning. We must defrock an implicit, and sometimes explicit, clericalism that theological training is only for the brightest and the best. Our churches need to develop a culture of learning and catechesis which is appropriate for all believers and where there are always opportunities to go higher and deeper.[10] This is important directly, both in terms of individuals' discipleship and apologetic witness in our chaotic cultural moment, and also indirectly. If a church aims to equip the many to some level, then the ministry and mission of the whole church is enriched, and in that process we end up discovering and nurturing those who are able to go further into more senior leadership roles. A rising tide lifts all the boats.

Third, and closely related, is the need for flexibility in learning. Our metaphor should not be about one 'pipeline', where you can pretty much predict the candidates who will be pushed through it, but rather many 'pathways'. While in no way lowering the normative bar of the New Testament qualifications for presbyteral ministry in terms of character, competencies, and knowledge, 'many pathways' thinking can work with the assumption and enjoy the surprise that we have no accurate idea who might end up coming through into senior, supported church leadership.

Fourth, alongside equipping and enthusing whole congregations, we need to have leaders who themselves are equipped and enthused and who can be models and mentors for the next generation.[11] As one colleague observed, a younger generation shouldn't be looking at an older generation and see a lot of burnout, leadership failure, and the leaving of frontline ministry. Positively, this younger generation are much more attracted to working alongside others than to the idea of carrying the burden of leadership as the single senior leader. If this younger generation see today's leaders pacing themselves better, accepting their created finitude, more obviously continuing to be equipped for the changing demands of ministry, and having peer support amid the really knotty issues they encounter, supported ministry might be a lot more appealing. To circle back on what I observed above, what a younger generation needs to see and hear from an older generation is the urgency of the gospel call allied with patterns of life which are sustainable, human, rooted, and healthy. The latter is perhaps the failing of that older generation—either we haven't lived that way or we've not publicly talked about healthy ways of life for fear of being accused of 'selling out' or 'compromising with the world'. But it's incumbent on an older generation both to model gospel urgency—because we are talking here about eternal realities and because Jesus did say the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few—*and* to model gospel living—which means healthy human patterns of life, not hyper-stimulated ones.[12] Spiritually, we need to build resilience, creating new models of leadership and ministry that are neither over-active nor flaky but men and women who are resilient because they are abiding in Christ and experience daily Witsius's wonderful definition of that theologian, one who '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

[10] Early on in *The History of Theological Education,* González notes that the distinction that we make between theological education for the church as a whole and the training for the pastorate 'did not exist in the early church' (p. 7). Returning to this in his conclusion and facing what he sees as the current crisis in theological education, he notes that 'we must learn that theological education must be a continuum, leading from catechetical teaching, through the continued education and growth in discipleship of the entire church, to the training of pastors and other leaders, to the most sophisticated levels of research and reflection' (p. 138).

[11] Cf. González, *The History of Theological Education*, 119, 129.

[12] We all need to be reading Kelly M. Kapic's *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022).

Spirit and the hidden manna and the sweet love of Christ—the earnest and pledge, in short, of perfect happiness.'[13] This is the kind of powerful stuff that might unblock any pipeline.

And finally, we need an encouragement of God's sovereign presence and promise as we continue to work out how the church 'does' theological training in our cultural moment. As González notes, it will be difficult, indeed impossible for us, but for God:

> God is already reforming the church. God is reforming it, whether the church wants to be reformed or not. Like it or not, that future is upon us. The Holy Spirit will lead the church along paths of theological education that today we do not even suspect. This does not depend on us but is rather the action and promise of the Lord who said that even the gates of hell—and even less the gates of the twenty-first century—will not prevail against the church. Therefore, our task for today is not so much to see how we bring about the reformation that God requires and promises but rather how we join it.[14]

[13] Herman Witsius, *On the Character of a True Theologian*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic, 1994), 36. This edition is available online: http://tinyurl.com/59bbew22

[14] González, *The History of Theological Education,* 130.

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Does the American Revision of the Westminster Confession Contradict the Original Version on the Doctrine of the Civil Magistrate?

— Kevin DeYoung —

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Abstract: This essay reflects on how Presbyterians changed their views on the civil magistrate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. My contention is that Reformed political thought has *not* been static, and, in fact, that American Presbyterianism saw itself as correcting elements of the earlier tradition.

I've written before about how Presbyterians changed their views on the civil magistrate and how this shift is reflected in the American revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).[1] When the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted the Westminster Standards in 1788, they amended the Standards in four places: WCF 20:4, 23:3, 31:3; and the Westminster Larger Catechism 109. The most significant change is in WCF chapter 23, where the third article was almost completely rewritten.

The stakes may not seem very high, and the whole debate may seem like little more than historical wrangling. But this is quite a live issue in the Presbyterian world. For one thing, all ministers and officers in the PCA and the OPC subscribe to the American revisions. If the two documents are just different in emphasis, then a minister in the PCA could say, "Sure, I agree with my own denominational standards, but they don't contradict what the Westminster Assembly decided in 1646." On the other hand, if the two versions are mutually exclusive, then a man must decide which view of the civil magistrate he affirms.

Similarly, many suggest that there was a single Reformed political theology from Calvin to Turretin to New England to the eighteenth-century Presbyterians. If these proponents can show that there was a consistent view for 250 years, then anything deviating from that view should be considered less than truly Reformed. My contention is that Reformed political thought has *not* been static, and, in fact, that American Presbyterianism saw itself as correcting elements of the earlier tradition.

[1] Kevin DeYoung, "A Tale of Two Texts: How the Westminster Confession of Faith Was Changed by American Presbyterians to Reflect a New Understanding of the Civil Magistrate," *Themelios* 49.2 (2024): 281–95.

1. How Different?

It is worth seeing once again the two versions of WCF 23:3 side by side. Everything after the initial underlined section is new in theAmerican version.

WCF 23.3Table 2. The Structure of the Book of Proverbs[2]

Historic Text (1646) Chapter XXIII of the Civil Magistrate	**American Revision (1788)** Chapter 23 Of the Civil Magistrate
The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.	**Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven**; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

[2] My structure largely adopts the demarcations identified by Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 9–28; Garrett, *Proverbs*, 39, 43–46; Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 42–44; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 5; Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 280; Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 290–91; Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, TOTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 22; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 441–42. Note, however, the following distinctions: Waltke subdivides Proverbs 1:1–9:18 into 1:1–7, 1:8–8:36, and 9:1–18; Garrett, Steinmann, and Kidner each split Proverbs 31 into 31:1–9 and 31:10–31; Fox takes Proverbs 30–31 as a series of four appendices (30:1–14, 15–33; 31:1–9, and 10–31).

Since publishing my article in 2024, several responses have argued that the difference between the two versions of WCF 23:3 is only a matter of emphasis and not an actual contradiction. Other ministerial colleagues in the PCA have argued that although the American version of WCF 23:3 is significantly changed, the new version does not entail a denial of anything in the original. These brothers assert that the Westminster divines and the American Presbyterians agreed with the magisterial Reformers that the civil magistrate may not interfere *in* matters of faith (*in sacra*). This, however, is not the same as saying the magistrate does not have authority *around* matters of faith (*circa sacra*). Thus, it is argued that the American Presbyterians prohibited the magistrate's involvement "in matters of faith" without rejecting what the original version of WCF 23:3 said about the magistrate's duties "around matters of faith."

Central to this argument is the recognition that America at the end of the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth century, continued to uphold blasphemy laws, Sabbath laws, and religious tests for office. Moreover, Presbyterians—including those responsible for drafting the American revision—were often in favor of these provisions. Like their British counterparts in 1646, American Presbyterians believed the civil magistrate should maintain "piety, justice, and peace" (WCF 23:2). Some have maintained, then, that American version—while perhaps not a hard establishmentarianism, is still a "soft" establishmentarianism. In short, the two versions of the Westminster Confession may not be identical, but they are, in the end, not mutually exclusive.

2. Must, Must Not, May (1646)

What should we make of this argument that the two versions are merely different, not contradictory? To answer this question, we have to go back to the original 1646 version. We can break apart WCF 23:3 into three lists: what the civil magistrate *must* do, what he *must not* do, and what he *may* do.

The civil magistrate *must*:

1. Take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church.
2. That the truth of God be kept pure and entire.
3. That all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed.
4. That all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline be prevented or reformed.
5. That all the ordinances of God be duly settled, administered, and observed.

The civil magistrate *must not*:

1. Assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments.
2. Assume to himself the powers of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

The civil magistrate *may*:

1. Call synods or be present at synods.
2. Provide that whatever is transacted at synods be according to the mind of God.

Notice that although the Westminster divines prohibit the magistrate from preaching, from administering the sacraments, and from enacting ecclesiastical discipline, they do give the magistrate considerable authority in matters related to the church. In fact, the first thing the magistrate must do is ensure that "unity and peace are preserved *in* the Church." Likewise, he must ensure that doctrine is kept pure and that the worship and discipline of the church are reformed. He is responsible not only for

the establishment of the ordinances of the church, but for ensuring that these ordinances are observed by the people. Finally, we are told that the civil magistrate has power to call ecclesiastical synods *and* power to determine whether the decisions of the synod are "according to the mind of God."

In short, the civil magistrate, according to the Westminster divines, should be involved in maintaining the welfare of the church, should root out false expressions of the church, should reform the church (when corrupt), should prevent the church from being corrupted (when already reformed), should oversee the establishment of the church, and should make sure that his people attend church services. Some may call this involvement only *circa sacra* (because the magistrate is not an officer in the church), but clearly the Westminster Assembly was calling for a very active magistrate with respect to matters of faith.

We can see how the Confession was understood in its own day by looking at the book *Truth's Victory Over Error* by David Dickson (1589–1662). Based on lectures given in the early 1650s, Dickson's work (released posthumously in 1684) was the first published commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. In his section on the civil magistrate, Dickson asks,

> Is it the duty of the Civil Magistrate, to take order, that all Blasphemies and Heresies be suppressed, all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed; all abuses in worship and discipline reformed, all Idolaters, Gainsayers, and other obstinate dissenters, being obliged and forced to quit their tenets and opinions, and conform themselves to the true worship and service of God, according to his Law?[3]

Dickson answers "Yes," and then seeks to confute those who disagree. The first half of Dickson's question comes directly from WCF 23:3, while the second half gives Dickson's gloss on what the first half entails. According to Dickson, idolaters, gainsayers, and dissenters should be forced to quit their beliefs and conform themselves to the true worship and service of God.

In the next paragraph, Dickson further insists:

> Quakers and other Sectaries err, who judge it Antichristian, and the practice of the Church of Rome, that the Civil and Supreme Magistrate, with the assistance of the Church and her Censures, should by his coactive power, force and oblige all his subjects, to a Reformation of Religion, and to a conformity to the true worship, sound doctrine, and discipline of the Church.[4]

In Dickson's estimation, the Westminster Confession requires the civil magistrate to exercise a coercive power in matters of faith. The magistrate is obliged to reform religion and should force all his subjects to conform to the true worship, sound doctrine, and discipline of the church. Dickson considers it an error held only by Quakers and sects that the civil magistrate should *not* do all these things.

3. Must, Must Not, May (1788)

Having looked at the original version of WCF 23:3, now we need to look at the American revision. Again, we can break apart the doctrine in terms of what the magistrate *must* do and *must not* do (there is no corresponding category of *may*).

[3] David Dickson, *Truth's Victory over Error: Or the True Principles of the Christian Religions Stated and Vindicated* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1764), 186.

[4] Dickson, *Truth's Victory over Error*, 187.

The civil magistrate *must*:

1. Protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest.
2. Ensure that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger.
3. Protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever.
4. Take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

The civil magistrate *must not*:

1. Assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments.
2. Assume to himself the powers of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.
3. In the least, interfere in matters of faith.
4. Enact any laws that interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise [of the church's government and discipline], among the voluntary members of *any* denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and beliefs.

From the outset we should recognize that the new version of WCF 23:3 represents a *massive* change. This is not like believing the earth is round even though the Confession never says the earth is round. Of course, there are many things we can believe that the Confession does not bother to address. But when the Confession is changed in such a drastic way, we are right to think there must have been something in the original that they no longer agreed with.

Thankfully, in the case of the American revision, we don't have to wonder what they didn't agree with. The American Presbyterians tell us.

For starters, we know that American Presbyterians rejected the idea that the magistrate had power to call synods. When colonial Presbyterians adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Adopting Act of 1729, they did so

> excepting only some Clauses in the 20 and 23 Chapters, concerning which Clauses, the Synod do unanimously declare, that they do not receive those Articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil Magistrate hath a controlling Power over Synods with Respect to the Exercise of their ministerial Authority; or power to persecute any for their Religion, or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the Throne of Great-Britain.[5]

This amounts to an explicit repudiation of several elements of the Westminster Confession of 1646. Likewise, we have this crucial paragraph from the Synod minutes of 1786:

> The Synod of New York and Philadelphia adopt, according to the known and established meaning of the Terms, the Westminster confession of Faith as the confession of their faith; save that every candidate for the gospel Ministry is permitted to except against so much of the twenty third Chapter as gives authority to the Civil Magistrate in matters of Religion. The Presbyterian Church in America considers the Church of Christ as

[5] Guy S. Klett, ed., *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706–1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), 104.

> a spiritual Society intirely distinct from the Civil Government; and having a right to regulate their own ecclesiastical policy independently of the interposition of the Magistrate.[6]

There is no way to construe this self-understanding, in relationship to the historic text, as merely a matter of emphasis. Why announce in 1729 that you do not agree with Chapter 23 in the Confession, and then declare again in 1786 that you disagree with the same chapter, and then drastically revise that chapter two years later, if you are simply "leaning in a different direction" or wanting to stress a different but complementary point? In the eyes of the American Synod, the Westminster Confession gave "authority to the Civil magistrate *in* matters of Religion." The Synod did not see the Westminster divines as advocating only a *circa sacra* involvement. They believed the original edition of the Confession gave too much power to the civil magistrate, and they set out to change that mistake. When the 1788 edition says the civil magistrate must not "in the least, interfere in matters of faith," it means to reject what the 1646 edition said about the civil magistrate's involvement in the doctrine, worship, discipline, government, attendance, and assemblies of the church.

4. Soft Establishment?

To be sure, American Presbyterians did not want a nation stripped of Christian privilege, Christian laws, and a Christian ethos. Eighteenth-century Presbyterians were *for* a Christian magistrate who inculcated Christian virtues for a Christian people in a Christian nation. At the same time, the Presbyterians were *against* any interference by the state in matters of faith.

When the revision of the Confession was published in 1788 it included eight Preliminary Principles written by John Witherspoon. In the first principle, the Synod stated "unanimously" that

> they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and inalienable: They do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, equal and common to all others.[7]

This language should come as no surprise when we recall that the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 (drafted mainly by Presbyterians and approved in the New Jersey Congress by the likes of John Witherspoon), stated unequivocally that no person should ever be "deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshipping Almighty God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience," that no person should be "compelled to attend any place of worship, contrary to his own faith and judgment," nor should any person "be obliged to pay titles, taxes, or any other rates" for church buildings or church ministry. American Presbyterians equated the establishment principles with the dangers of Anglicanism and governmental interference.

The second Preliminary Principle builds on the first. The Synod affirmed secondly that

> every Christian Church, or union and association of particular Churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its

[6] Klett, *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706–1788*, 604.

[7] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1789), 133–34.

> ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed.[8]

This is a significant departure from the original Confession. The Westminster divines could not envision a land where every church and every denomination was free to determine its own system and government. American Presbyterians, by contrast, made it a cornerstone of their ecclesiastical identity that the magistrate had no business getting involved in the church's business.

Besides the minutes of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, we have almost no record of how the events unfolded at the decisive assembly in 1788. One of the few (only?) firsthand accounts comes from Ashbel Green, a young pastor at the time and a member of the adopting Synod. It is worth quoting at some length his description of the relevant events:

> No part of the Confession of Faith was altered, except that which relates to civil government and the civil magistrate. The Scotch Confession having been formed for a nation in which the church and state are united, declares that "the civil magistrate hath power to call Synods, and to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." In place of this, the Synod that adopted the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States declared, that "it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever, shall enjoy the full, free and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger." Some minor alterations were made in the Scotch Confession, but all of the same import as the above.
>
> You see, then, how unfounded and senseless has been the cry, that the Presbyterian Church has been seeking governmental patronage. This can never be done, but in open violation of an established principle of the standards of that Church. Nay, I verily believe, that if there were no constitutional article on the subject, that Church would consider any connexion with the State whatever, as a calamity and a curse.
>
> This may be as proper a place as any other to mention, that when, through mere oversight, the members of the adopting Synod were just going to take the final vote on the catechisms of the Church, without alteration, the Rev. Jacob Ker, of the state of Delaware, (I well remember his name, and think that he had very seldom spoken before,) arrested the proceedings, by calling attention to a clause in the Larger Catechism, in answer to the question, "What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?" He stated that the catechism as it then stood, specified among the sins forbidden in this commandment, "tolerating a false religion," and he made a motion to strike out this clause. My impression is, that this motion was carried without debate, and by a unanimous vote.[9]

[8] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 134.

[9] Ashbel Green and Jones Joseph Huntington, *The Life of Ashbel Green, V. D. M., Begun to be Written by Himself in His Eighty-Second Year and Continued to His Eighty-Fourth* (New York, NY: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1849), 183–84.

Green makes clear at least three realities: (1) The delegates in Philadelphia saw themselves as adopting a different understanding of church and state than existed in Great Britain. (2) The delegates did not want governmental patronage (e.g., as existed for Anglicans in England and for Presbyterians in Scotland), for they considered any connection with the state "a calamity and curse." (3) The delegates quickly and without controversy rejected the 1646 view that "tolerating a false religion" was a sin. In short, the adopting Synod in Philadelphia was not just talking about frogs instead of cats. They were saying, at least in many of the most important details, that they did not believe in cats anymore.

5. Public Decorum or Ecclesiastical Worship?

No doubt, the revised Confession of Faith still expected the civil magistrate to be a supportive friend of the Christian religion. American Presbyterians in the eighteenth century did not envision a naked public square or a neutral civil magistrate. In his 1782 thanksgiving sermon at the end of the Revolutionary War, John Witherspoon insisted that civil magistrates "are under the strongest obligations to do their utmost to promote religion, sobriety, industry, and every social virtue, among those who are committed to their care."[10] For Witherspoon, this "promotion" meant three things: guarding the rights of conscience, setting an example of Christian commitment and character, and restraining open vice and impiety. He believed, as almost all Presbyterians did, that public wickedness—drunkenness, lewdness, swearing, Sabbath breaking, blasphemy, and riotous behavior—should be punished.

But here we must not confuse the magistrate's role in maintaining public decorum with his role in maintaining the doctrine, worship, and discipline of the church. The original version of WCF 23:3 clearly gave the magistrate a duty to reform the church, to stamp out false churches, and to force his subjects to conform to the true church. The American revision explicitly rejected all of this. Now the duty of the civil magistrate was to ensure that everyone had the right to choose his own church, and that each church had the right to establish its own doctrines, government, and discipline. Likewise, the magistrate no longer had authority to call or preside over synods (a view already rejected by 1729). The magistrate's only job relative to the church was to make sure that ecclesiastical assemblies could do their business without interference.

The revised Confession still used the familiar language of "nursing fathers" to describe the work of the civil magistrate. The phrase from Isaiah 49:23 was often applied in expansive ways, with the magisterial Reformers insisting that kings should put an end to idolatry, maintain pure doctrine, and cleanse his dominion of impiety. But the phrase was not always used in this way. In his famous sermon *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants* (1744), Elisha Williams argued that when the civil magistrate protects all his subjects "in the enjoyment of this right of private judgment in matters of religion, and the liberty of worshipping God according to their consciences," then he "most truly comes up to the character of a nursing father to the church of Christ."[11] Williams believed Protestants had been inconsistent with their own principles, that some "Protestant states" had tried "to make all think and practice alike in religion by legal establishments and annexed penalties: but it never produced this

[10] John Witherspoon, *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D., L.L.D., Late President of the College, at Princeton New Jersey*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Woodward, 1802), 3:83.

[11] Elisha Williams, "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants," in Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730 –1805, 2 vols.*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998) 1:97.

effect."[12] (91). He was calling for a level of religious liberty that did not exist in the Protestant nations of the Old World.

If the magistrate of 1646 had much he was *supposed to do* in matters of religion, the magistrate of 1788 had much he was *supposed to prevent others from doing* in matters of religion. According to the revised text, magistrates must protect the person and good name "of all their people" so that no one is made to suffer "indignity, violence, abuse, or injury" on account of "religion or infidelity." The word "indignity" almost certainly refers to the various forms of public humiliation that existed in colonial America. As late as 1768, an observer in Boston noted that those who refused to go church could be put in the stocks or otherwise confined. Stocks and pillories were common forms of temporary confinement, often for religious offenses, and a mechanism designed to encourage public embarrassment. The American revision insists that not only does the magistrate have no right to inflict these punishments on religious grounds, he must also ensure that no one—no matter their religion, or even if they practice *no* religion whatsoever—is treated in such an abusive manner. While public decorum should be maintained (e.g., laws against blasphemy, lewdness, and swearing), no one was to be punished for what they believed, what church they went to, how their church worshiped, whom their church admitted into membership, what doctrines their church taught, or whether they went to church at all.

6. An American Church

The difference between 1646 and 1788 cannot be explained as a matter of emphasis. The two doctrines of the civil magistrate contain elements that are mutually exclusive. To put it bluntly, the American Presbyterians embraced the error of Quakers and sects that David Dickson thought the original Confession confuted. Either the civil magistrate must reform the church, cleanse the land of heretics, establish pure doctrine and pure worship, see to it that churches are settled, administered, and attended, **or** the civil magistrate must ensure that no one is punished for his religious commitments (or lack thereof), that every church can teach its own doctrine and regulate its own affairs, and that every person has unquestioned liberty to discharge his sacred responsibilities as he sees fit. Those are the options presented to us in the 1646 edition and in the 1788 edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I am not suggesting that American Presbyterians of the eighteenth century would approve of the political arrangement of the twenty-first century. Surely, in many respects they would not. They assumed an overwhelmingly Protestant nation where Catholics and (more so) Jews could be tolerated, but without all the rights of Protestants. I would argue that the principles of 1788 regarding the rights of conscience and liberty of worship should be extended to non-Christians in our day, but I grant that they did not conceive of the religious pluralism we now have in America.

In the end, we have no access to what eighteenth-century Presbyterians think about the world of the future. We can, however, know something of their thoughts about the world of the past. And here my argument is that they believed they were doing something new. That's why Presbyterians were such staunch supporters of Independence and of the Constitution.[13] Of course, one cannot help

[12] Williams, "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants," 1:91.

[13] Alexander MacWhorter, *A Festival Discourse Occasioned by the Celebration of the Seventeenth Anniversary of American Independence* (Newark, NJ: John Woods, 1793). MacWhorter (usually spelled McWhorter) was a Presbyterian pastor and a member of the committee responsible for amending the Westminster Confession. Be-

but blush to read Presbyterian pastor Alexander McWhorter (a member of the Westminster revision committee) praise "our glorious" and "wonder-working Constitution of the United States," but American Presbyterians thought God had done something amazing in the birth of their denomination *and* in the birth of their country. And that amazing thing was liberty. That's what was new—not brand new as a concept, but new as an organizing principle for a people and new as a religious right for everyone.[14]

Looking back, a century later, Philadelphia pastor Thomas Murphy noted the many similarities between the formation of the General Assembly and the formation of the Constitution. Both were organized under a similar process, at the same time, in the same place, by the same kind of men, having the same principles, and having the same prospects. Murphy saw the hand of providence at work to set up a great nation on the earth, and to establish a great scriptural church to influence and sanctify that nation. In both cases, God had done something new. Just as the national government was "adopted for a new people, formed out of the best elements of the old lands," so was the national Presbyterian Church. It was a "new Church formed out of the best elements of the Reformed Churches of other lands," but, make no mistake, Murphy insists, this was "not an Irish Presbyterian Church or a German or a Dutch Reformed or a Welsh, but an American Presbyterian Church."[15]

sides celebrating American independence and the cause of liberty, MacWhorter repeatedly praises "our glorious" and "wonder-working Constitution of the United States" (p. 12).

[14] A case can be made that the First Amendment religion clauses (free exercise and no establishment) are rooted in the revised Westminster Confession of Faith. See Leah Farish, "The First Amendment's Religion Clauses: The Calvinist Document that Interprets Them Both," *Journal of Religion and Society* 12 (2010):1–22.

[15] Thomas Murphy, *The Presbytery of the Log College; or, The Cradle of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1889), 306.

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Was David Overreacting? Analyzing 1 Samuel 25 in Light of the Ancient Hospitality Code

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Abstract: Was Nabal's refusal to give food for six hundred people such a terrible wrong that David in 1 Samuel 25 would have been justified in seeking vengeance by killing Nabal's entire household? Did David simply overreact? This paper demonstrates that an acquaintance with the hospitality code of the Ancient Near East aids in the understanding of the events in 1 Samuel 25. First, part 1 analyzes the ancient hospitality code, examining typical scenes of hospitality along with observations from social anthropologists who study Mediterranean culture. Part 2 exhibits how the hospitality code answers the questions raised from the narrative in 1 Samuel 25.

In 1 Samuel 25, David sends ten of his men to request food from Nabal to feed six hundred men for two reasons: (1) it was a festive time of sheep-shearing in Nabal's household, and (2) David's men have been protecting Nabal's shepherds and animals in the wilderness (25:4–9).[1] Yet Nabal responds severely, insulting David and refusing to provide food and water. With no hesitation, David retaliates, calling 400 men to take their swords and kill the entire household of Nabal (25:22, 34).

First Samuel 25 is sandwiched by two narratives in which David spares Saul's life (cf. 1 Samuel 24 and 26), so readers may wonder whether the Lord's anointed acts rashly as he prepares to attack Nabal and his entire household. Granted, Nabal was a harsh and evil man, but is a refusal to provide a meal for visitors not Nabal's prerogative? Was Nabal's reasoning not legitimate? He said, ""Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" (1 Sam 25:11). How can one explain David's rash and violent reaction against Nabal and his household?

[1] Shearing sheep is a "good day" (יום טוב) or a season of celebration as described in 1 Samuel 25:8. Ronald F. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, revised ed., EBC 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 243.

1. Main Views on 1 Samuel 25

One view explains that David was running a protection racket. David promised not to harm Nabal in exchange for protection money. Baruch Halpern posits that

> David himself soon succumbs to the outlaw ethic of his subordinates. 1 Sam. 25 finds him extorting payment from Nabal of Carmel, a gentleman in the wilderness of Judah. David is working a protection racket. His claim is that he has refrained from preying on Nabal's sheep. Nabal refuses to pay, and David angrily disclaims his intention to kill Nabal. This view reads more into the text than what was written there.[2]

A slightly different view suggests that Nabal cheated David of his wages. In turn, David plans to kill Nabal and his entire household. According to Firth, "David's claim is that the service he rendered is worthy of payment, perhaps as something for which Nabal should have prepared." Bergen proposes that Nabal was "withholding due payment for services." This explanation addresses David's rashness for vengeance and Abigail's sense of urgency. Nabal has done wrong by not providing proper wages for David's protective services. Several indications, however, point to the fact that no prior agreement existed for David to provide protection for Nabal's shepherds and animals. First, David sent an envoy to ask for provision because there was a feast at Nabal's house, implying that he would not have asked on an ordinary day. Second, David's men had to explain to Nabal what they had done on his behalf. Such an explanation would not be necessary if Nabal had already hired David to protect his men. Lastly, Nabal claimed not to know who David was, which would be unlikely if a prior arrangement had taken place. What David was expecting from Nabal was evident in his soliloquy: "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good" (25:21). David felt that his kind gesture was not reciprocated, not that he was cheated of his wages.

The third and most prominent view explains that Nabal's insults provoked David to overreact and plan a violent massacre against an entire household. In David's mind the harshness and rudeness of Nabal deserved death for his entire household. Tsumura suggests that David was indeed wrong for reacting too strongly against Nabal. He observes,

> This is probably David's overreaction toward Nabal. In 1 Sam. 24:7, when he had an opportunity to take revenge against Saul, David avoided appealing to a human method and entrusted the matter to God's hand. Now, however, he seems to have lost control over his feelings and behavior. Even David needs God's gracious intervention on such occasions. God sent Abigail to him at the right time.[3]

Tsumura's answer is not necessarily wrong; David uncharacteristically acted rashly (20:33–34). Gehrke adds that "Nabal's response is marked not only by base ingratitude and brutal insults, but more important, by a complete lack of understanding for David's position and destiny."[4] Certainly, Abigail prevented David from committing bloodshed by taking vengeance in his own hand. Seeking vengeance,

[2] Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 21–22. He further comments, "David plies the 'protection' racket and demands premiums from Nabal of Carmel for his vigilance with Nabal's shepherds and flocks. This is where he acquires Abigail, his second wife, who shares the name of his own sister" (p. 284).

[3] David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 585.

[4] Ralph David Gehrke, *1–2 Samuel,* Concordia (London: Concordia, 1968), 195.

however, implies that he was greatly wronged by Nabal. Was Nabal's insult and refusal to give food such a great wrong that it provoked David to kill an *entire household*? Furthermore, why did Nabal's servant and Abigail expect David to return with a vengeance? Abigail knew that Nabal's household was in trouble because with haste and a sense of urgency she gathered food, met David, and apologized for Nabal's response (25:25–28). But how did she know that David would come back?

The first two views attempt to make David's plans for massacre more justifiable than an overreaction to a fool's insults, but these views have details that appear to be inconsistent with the biblical text. While the final view seems to take the biblical text straightforwardly—that David simply overreacted against Nabal—a few questions from the narrative remain unanswered.

Perhaps David's violent reaction can be explained in another way. An often-overlooked factor in interpreting 1 Samuel 25 lies in an understanding of the Ancient Near East (ANE) practice of hospitality. This practice is assumed in the text and made sense for an original reader. This paper demonstrates that an acquaintance with the hospitality code of the ANE aids in understanding the events in 1 Samuel 25. The approach in this study is in two stages. Part 1 analyzes the hospitality code in the ANE, demonstrating its basic practices. Part 2, then, demonstrates how the ANE hospitality code provides the fitting historical context to understand 1 Samuel 25.

2. Part 1: An Analysis of the ANE Hospitality Code

In the ANE, hospitality was a common practice, and it was essential for survival. Travelers in the Middle East relied on hospitality among locals for food, water, and lodging as they journeyed through the desert and arid land. Three main sources provide key insight on the ANE hospitality code. First, literature from the ANE provides stories, poems, and epics that include typical scenes of hospitality, reflecting their own culture.[5] Second, social anthropologists who study Mediterranean culture attest to the nonwestern-like hospitality practiced in the Near East. Speaking about the Al Murrah, a Bedouin tribe, sociologist Edward Cole observes, "The household in Al Murrah culture and society is especially associated with three aspects of their life—hospitality, herding, and the special domain of Al Murrah women. Generous hospitality is one of the strongest of Al Murrah values."[6]

Third, the most overlooked source for the hospitality code in the ANE is the Bible as a historical document. The Old Testament Scripture records extant writings of narratives, laws, and poems that reflect the culture of the ANE. Several passages depict hospitality as it was practiced in the ANE, including, but not limited to: Abraham's hospitality to the angels (Gen 18); Lot's hospitality to the men who warned him about Sodom's imminent destruction (Gen 19); hospitality laws regarding relations with foreigners in the Torah (Deut 10:17–19); the hospitality of the father-in-law towards the Levite

[5] For example, one of the tablets in the *Archives Royale de Mari* (ARM) provides a few details of guest-host relationships. It tells of an episode in which Ibni-Addu, a friend of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, learns about a spy in the palace while being a guest of Kunnam in Šubbat-Enlil. Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 295. Mari, a city on the west bank of the Euphrates River, was destroyed by King Hammurabi (or Hammurapi) of Babylon in 1760–1757 BC. In 1933, Bedouin found antiquities at Mari to the French colonial government of Syria. Between 1933–1938, archaeologist André Parrot excavated 15,000 tablets mostly at the royal palace of Mari. These tablets are known as *Archives Royal de Mari* or ARM.

[6] Donald Powell Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads: The Al Murrah Bedouin of the Empty Quarter* (Arlington Heights, IL: Davidson, 1988), 67.

(Judg 19:3–10) and of the old man in Gibeah towards the same Levite (19:16–26); the hospitality of the prophet towards the man of God (1 Kgs 13:11–23); the hospitality of a widow of Zarephath towards Elijah (1 Kgs 17); and the hospitality of the Shunamite woman towards Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8–10).

While not all hospitality practices in the ANE are identical between tribes and people groups, enough similarity can be observed that they are pertinent to understanding the narrative in 1 Samuel 25. Using these sources, this paper seeks to answer two key questions.[7] First, what is the relationship of the host to his guest? Second, what happens when hospitality is not extended by the host or is refused by the guest?

2.1. The Relationship of the Host to the Guest

Hospitality was a cultural expectation in the ANE. Hospitality could be initiated by either the host or the guest, depending on who spoke first.[8] In Genesis 18, Abraham, the host, offered hospitality, while in 1 Kings 17:11–12, Elijah asked for hospitality. When the act of hospitality is received, either the guest or the host typically bows down and greets the other with a blessing.[9] When a host extends hospitality to his guests, he is expected to greet his guests, wash their feet, and pour oil on their heads. An Egyptian proverb written in a manuscript from 1200 BC says, "Do not neglect a stranger with your oil jar, that it [income] be doubled before your brethren."[10]

The host's obligation includes providing meals and lodging to wandering sojourners. Genesis 18:3–8 captures Abraham's sense of urgency in preparing a meal for his guests:

> He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way–now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." So Abraham *hurried* into the tent to Sarah. "*Quick*," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he *ran* to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who *hurried* to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. (Gen 18:3–8, emphasis mine)

[7] For further discussion on ANE hospitality protocol, see Victor H. Matthews, "Herem versus Hospitality in the Story of Rahab," in *The Genre of Biblical Commentary Essays in Honor of John E. Hartley on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, ed. Timothy D. Finlay and William Yarchin (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 217–21. See also Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *The Social World of Ancient Isarel: 1250–587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 82–87.

[8] For a comprehensive treatment on the initiation of hospitality using speech act theory, see Rebecca Abts Wright, "Establishing Hospitality in the Old Testament: Testing the Tool of Linguistic Pragmatics" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1989), 112–47.

[9] "When a guest is received into an Oriental home, bowing between the guests and host is quite apt to take place. In Western lands such bowing would be of the head only, but in the East there is a more expressive custom of saluting with the head erect and the body a little inclined forward, by raising the hand to the heart, mouth, and forehead." Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), 72–73.

[10] A proverb found in chapter 28 of *Instruction of Amenemope*. See Bill T. Arnold and Bryan Beyer, eds., "Instruction of Amenemope," in *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*, Encounter Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 189.

Depending on their economic status, hosts may provide lavish preparations for their guests. Such extravagance is expected in an honor-shame culture where honor is highly esteemed above all else.[11] The grander the accommodation, the more honor the host receives. In *The Banquet of Ashurnasirpal II*, for example, an inscription records a grand celebration by Ashurnasirpal II, the high priest of Calah. The Assyrian high priest received 69,574 guests from various places and from all walks of life. The end of the inscription describes the host's pride in satisfying his guests: "I (furthermore) provided them with the means to clean and anoint themselves. I did them due honors and sent them back, healthy and happy, to their own countries."[12]

In the ANE, an extension of hospitality is expected even more from men of high stature. Malina and Powell explain that for strangers "it was imperative that they be under the protection of a patron, a host, who was an established community member."[13] In fact, such practice continues even to the mid-twentieth century in Mediterranean culture prior. This is observable in isolated and primitive nomadic tribes where culture runs deep and outside influence is scarce, especially prior to the internet age. Ahmed Abou-Zeid observes that men with great wealth have a place of prominence and political power in a society. They are often invited to settle disputes among the people in the civilization.[14] Men with such prominence, however, are also responsible for practicing hospitality. Ahmed further states that a wealthy and prominent person

> is also likely to offer hospitality to others, thus rallying adherents and clients both round himself and round his kin-group. It is a fact that generosity and hospitality have always been accorded a supreme value in Bedouin society and many persons have established their fame and prestige, and consequently those of their respective groups, by lavish generosity and nothing less than reckless hospitality.[15]

Not only are wealthy people placed into positions of power, but political leaders are also expected to be rich so that they are able to honorably perform their duties of hospitality. One social anthropologist makes this observation regarding the role of a Shaikh, a tribal leader in a Middle Eastern community:

> Each *bait* [extended family] and *'aila* [clan] has its Shaikh, chosen for his age and wisdom or for his prowess, though the Shaikship is generally hereditary in certain families. A Shaikh receives obedience and respect from his dependants [sic] but *ought to be rich because the demands of hospitality are considerable.*[16]

Hospitality is expected to be extended to wandering nomads and even more so towards those who have provided benefit to the host in any way. In the *Stories of Aqhat*, a metalworker, Kothar-wa-hasis,

[11] For further discussion on how the eastern honor-shame culture differs from the western right/wrong culture, see David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kingship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution*, JSOT 346 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002); and Brandon J. O'Brien and E. Randolph Richards, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 113–36.

[12] James B. Pritchard, ed., "The Banquet of Ashurnarsipal II," *ANET* 560.

[13] Malina, Bruce J., and Mark Allan Powell, "Hospitality," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell, revised ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 395.

[14] Ahmed Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame among the Bedouins of Egypt," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 250. Bruce Malina

[15] Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame," 250.

[16] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 60. Emphasis mine.

made a bow and arrow for a present to the young man, Aqhat. When Danil, Aqhat's father, saw Kothar-wa-hasis coming towards their house, he called his wife Danatiya, "Prepare a lamb from the flock. Cook Kothar-wa-hasis his favorite meal. Kothar-wa-hasis is hungry. The master craftsman wants something to eat."[17] The expectation of hospitality is intensified with familiar guests where benefits are reciprocated. The special treatment Kothar-wa-hasis receives from Danil and Danatiya was a social expectation.

2.2. Hospitality or Hostility

What happens when hospitality is not extended to guests? Or what if a guest rejects the hospitality offered by a host? When the hospitality code is broken, it signifies hostility. When a host denies hospitality, he declares war against the guest. Conversely, by refusing hospitality from a host, a guest presents himself as hostile to the community. Matthews and Benjamin observe that "hospitality in the world of the Bible was more than simply an amenity for travelers. It was a village's most important form of foreign policy. Villages used hospitality to determine whether strangers were friends or enemies."[18] According to Matthews, one of the seven codes of conduct defining hospitality in the ANE is that a stranger must be transformed from being a potential threat to becoming an ally by the offer of hospitality.[19] In other words, hospitality neutralizes the hostile threat of a stranger in a new community. In Homer's *Odyssey*, King Menelaus tells Telemachus that he condemns both hosts who urge guests to leave as being excessively hostile and hosts who are excessively hospitable, detaining guests against their will.[20]

Bratcher says that "a traveler would interpret a resident's failure to provide food and amenities as a hostile act."[21] He cites Judges 8:4–17 as a biblical example. Gideon and his three hundred men were exhausted but still pursuing the kings of Median, Zebah, and Zalmunna. When they crossed the Jordan, they asked the men of Succoth for bread, but they refused. And when Gideon reached Penuel and asked for bread, the men of Penuel refused as well. Gideon threatened both the men of Succoth and the men of Penuel.

> Then Gideon replied, "Just for that, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers." From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Sukkoth had. So he said to the men of Peniel, "When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower." (Judg 8:7–9)

[17] Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., "Stories of Aqhat," in *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, rev. and exp. (New York: Paulist, 1997), 69–70.

[18] Matthews and Benjamin, "Stories of Aqhat," 82. See also Michael Herzfeld, "As in Your Own House: Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David D. Gilmore (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 75–81.

[19] Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *BTB* 21.1 (1991): 13–15. See also Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22.4 (1992): 3–11; Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, "Invitation to Murder: Hospitality and Violence in the Hebrew Bible," *ST – Nordic Journal of Theology* 73.1 (2019): 89–108; and Nathan MacDonald, "Hospitality and Hostility: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of 2 Samuel 10," in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pirson,* ed. D. Lipton (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2012), 185–95.

[20] Homer, *The Odyssey* 15:69–74.

[21] Dennis Bratcher, "Travelers and Strangers: Hospitality in the Biblical World," *Christian Resource Institute: The Voice*, 2018, https://www.crivoice.org/travelers.html

True to his word, after defeating the kings of Median, Gideon returned from the battle, learned the names of the elders of Succoth, and confronted them (Judg 9:15–17). One of the most despicable acts of betrayal in the ANE is when guests turn their back against a host (cf. Obad 7; Ps 41:9). Thus, in the ANE, a refusal of hospitality, by either the guest or the host, is an act of hostility.

In fact, in the ANE, even enemies can be received as guests. Describing one of the Bedouin tribes, Cole observes, "The greatest praise they bestow on a person is to say that he is a man who is generous and who kills an animal—whatever he has—for his guests. A guest is a sacred trust and is highly honored, even if he is from an enemy group."[22] By extending hospitality, a host turns a stranger into a guest in his home. The stranger no longer becomes a threat. The enemy is a friend, as long as he is entertained by the host.[23]

Not only is the stranger's status changed, but the host becomes obligated to protect the guest from other threats, even from threats in the community. This is the case in Genesis 19 with Lot and his guests in Sodom. Lot was not willing for the men of the city to take his guests. He would rather give his daughters to the crowd instead. In Genesis 19, Lot was more protective of his honor as a host than of his own daughters.[24] When appealing to the mob, Lot appealed to the code of hospitality, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, *for they have come under the shelter of my roof*" (Gen 19:7–8, emphasis mine).[25] Drawing from the work of Ahmed Abou-Zeid, Persistiany observes,

One of the most important ways of displaying the honour of the *beit* is by granting the 'right of refuge', so that a man pursued by his enemies may find here asylum. By granting asylum a man publicizes his honour and that of his kinsmen. The highest grade of honour … is attained when the idea is realized at the expense of the performer himself. The best example of this is the obligation of honour to grant sanctuary to an enemy.[26]

By taking in a guest, the host obligates himself to protect the guest as part of his household.

[22] Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads*, 67.

[23] Some even suggest that not only does the stranger turn into a guest, but the guest turns to be the actual lord of the home. Wight asserts that "an Easter proverb runs thus: 'The guest while in the house is its Lord.' This is a true statement of the spirit of the hospitality of the East. One of the first greetings a Palestinian host will give his guest is to say, 'Hadtha beitak,' i.e., 'This is your house.' This saying is repeated many times. Thus the guest during his stay is master of the house. And whenever the guest asks a favor, in granting it the host will say, 'You do me honor'" (Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, 77). This seems to be the case with Abraham's hospitality towards the three strangers. In Genesis 18:3, Abraham said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant."

[24] T. Desmond Alexander vindicates Peter calling Lot "righteous" despite the negative portrayal of Lot's righteousness in the Genesis account (2 Pet 2:7–8). For Alexander, one of the signs of Lot's righteousness is his hospitality. He cites 1 Clement 11:1, indicating that Lot was saved out of Sodom because of his hospitality and piety. See T. Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *JBL* 104 (1985): 289–91.

[25] A similar situation is found in Genesis 19 with the old man from Gibeah taking in the Levite as his guest.

[26] John G. Peristiany, "Introduction," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 16.

3. Part 2: Reading 1 Samuel 25 with an ANE Lens

A more satisfying reason for David's war-like response against Nabal is Nabal's failure to uphold the hospitality code expected in an ANE culture. From the biblical text—without reconstructing the narrative—several clues demonstrate that Nabal and David fit the role of an ANE host and guest.

3.1. Nabal in the Role of a Host

The narrator of 1 Samuel 25 portrays Nabal as a suitable candidate for an ANE host. Several details in the text indicate that Nabal is capable of performing the role of a host. First, the narrator describes Nabal as a wealthy man. He is a businessman with 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats (25:2). He has more than enough food to provide for his own household and for David's men. Second, it was a feast day, a day of celebration (25:8).[27] The shearing of sheep (or the shearing-festival) is a public feast in the agricultural regions of Palestine.[28] Thus, this is a time of excess food and drinking. Third, when Abigail gathered food for David, the text says that she did it with haste (מָהַר) and secretly—she did not tell her husband Nabal (25:18–19).[29] There was so much food in Nabal's household that gathering food with haste could take place discreetly; Abigail had to tell Nabal what took place the next day (25:37). The amount of food that Abigail gave to David and his six hundred men was small enough in comparison that the missing food was hardly noticeable. Lastly, towards the end of the feast, Nabal was drunk and he conducted the feast "like a feast of a king" (25:36).[30] Hence, Nabal's reasoning that his bread, water, and meat are sufficient only for his men is not legitimate. David was not asking too much when he asked for food for six hundred men. Surely, Nabal had more than enough food to provide for David and his men.

Furthermore, not only is Nabal capable of performing the role of a host, he is also obligated to be a host. There are at least three reasons indicated in the text. First, Nabal, as a wealthy businessman, is a tribal leader responsible for the practice of hospitality in the community.[31] He is "the Calebite sheikh."[32] Second, Nabal is of the same tribe as David. There is a reason the narrator indicated that Nabal was Calebite (25:3), which is from the tribe of Judah. Nabal is David's kin. This is evident in the young men's speech to Nabal: "Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to *your son David*" (25:8). If hosts are obligated to extend hospitality to total strangers, how much more to those who are of the same tribe? The third reason is the benefit that Nabal received from David. One of the reasons Nabal can celebrate the shearing festival with his household is the fact that David and his men protected

[27] Literally, the phrase is a "good day" (יוֹם טוֹב), which is an idiom for celebration (cf. Esth 8:17; 9:19, 22).

[28] Andrew Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016), 194.

[29] The use of the same verb, מָהַר, implies that Abigail's sense of urgency mirrors Abraham's urgency for his guests in Genesis 18.

[30] Ralph W. Klein observes that Nabal's "gluttonous eating and drinking are in stark contrast with his denial of David's request for provisions for his starving, thirsty band. Nabal feasted like a king but rejected the legitimate request of the future king." Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC 10 (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 251.

[31] Abou-Zeid observes that "the role which livestock plays in determining the political power of a person or group is shown in the fact that a wealthy man, *i.e.* a man with a large number of animals, is likely to be invited to look into disputes and adherents and clients both round himself and round his kin-group." Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame among the Bedouins of Egypt," 250.

[32] Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 194. This is an alternate spelling for "shaikh."

Nabal's shepherds and sheep in the wilderness so that none of the sheep was missing (25:7).[33] One of Nabal's servants even testified about the protection David gave:

> Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. (25:15–16)[34]

Ordinarily, it is in the culture of the ANE for anyone to extend hospitality within his economic means to any traveler. But the details in 1 Samuel 25 even heighten the obligation of Nabal—as a tribal leader, kinsman, and recipient of protection—to extend hospitality to David. Was refusing to provide a meal to David Nabal's prerogative? According to the ANE culture, the answer is in the negative.

3.2. David in the Role of a Guest

The biblical narrative demonstrates that David was in the role of a guest throughout the account. David, with calculated diplomacy, sent his envoy to greet Nabal with a blessing characteristic of a guest requesting hospitality (25:5–6). In a polite way, appealing to the services they provided, David's men asked for whatever Nabal desired to give. David's request is nothing close to demanding a premium for providing services.[35]

When Nabal refused to extend hospitality, David's vengeful response was not surprising in the ANE culture. Nabal's denial of David's request was an act of hostility. This is hinted at in the text by the fact that one of Nabal's young men felt the need to report the incident of his master's misconduct to Abigail. He urges Abigail to do something about the situation and protect the household since "evil is determined against our master and against all his household" (25:17). How did the servant know that David planned to attack Nabal? David's violent knee-jerk reaction was only known to David's men *after* they reported Nabal's denial of their request. Additionally, the young man was not the only one who feared David's potential attack; the entire household of Nabal acknowledged this imminent danger. In verse 17, the servant comments that Nabal is "so ill-tempered that no one can even talk to him!" (NLT).[36] What the text implies is that the whole household knew that they were in danger, but none of them dared to rebuke their master Nabal. Furthermore, Abigail's sense of urgency reveals that she was convinced of the threat to her household because of her husband's misconduct (25:18). It is therefore safe to assume, grounded by the details of the text, that David's hostile response to Nabal is a natural expectation based on the hospitality code culture of the day. This reaction is consistent with 2 Samuel 12:1–6, where Nathan told a parable of a host who stole another man's sheep to offer to his guest in order to confront David for his sin with Bathsheba. David's reaction against the host was a violent one. He swore an oath that the man would surely die and repay fourfold.[37]

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[33] "The value of David's protection is suggested by a previous narrative account, which noted that after the Philistines attacked nearby Keilah, they were in possession of livestock (23:5)." Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 246.

[34] The fact that the servant testifies that David's men were "very good to us" indicates that David's protection was not a "protection racket." (Contra Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature," 19; and Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 21–22.

[35] Contra Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 284.

[36] Baldwin suggests that Nabal's shepherds were in fear, "*guessing* David's reaction to Nabal's rebuff." Joyce G. Baldwin, *1–2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary,* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 159.

[37] Compare 1 Samuel 25:13, 21–22 with 2 Samuel 12:5–6.

Nabal is clearly the antagonist of the passage. He was culpable for his violation of the culture's hospitality code and for insulting the Lord's anointed. The point of view of the narrator attests to this. Beginning with the opening of the narrative, Nabal is already depicted negatively—he was "harsh and badly behaved" (25:3). The ending of the narrative confirms this. Abigail called him a wicked man and a fool and pointed out that his name literally means "fool." After hearing Abigail's hospitality towards David, Nabal had a stroke (25:37). Then the narrator explicitly reveals the divine viewpoint concerning Nabal's inhospitality: "And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died" (25:38).

4. Conclusion

Was David overreacting? An awareness of the hospitality code in the ANE helps us understand David's response, not as an overreaction but as a natural reaction. David acted according to his culture's norms and would have been considered righteous in killing Nabal. What Abigail protected David from was the killing of Nabal's entire household, who did not deserve to die because of Nabal's foolishness. Nabal's death in the end shows judgment from God against Nabal for his lack of hospitality to God's anointed.[38] Others, however, recognize that while David's vengeful response was expected in the culture, it is not necessarily the right response. Reacting within the cultural norms of the day does not excuse David for his vengeful spirit. Bergen comments, "Nabal had violated the Torah … and wronged David. Nevertheless, the Torah reserved for the Lord alone the right to avenge wrong in this case (cf. Lev 19:18; Deut 24:15; 32:35)."[39]

Applying the cultural practice of hospitality to the interpretation of 1 Samuel 25 best explains the incidents that may seem strange and puzzling for a western, twenty-first-century reader. In the treatment of hospitality in 1 Samuel 25, the cultural background serves the details of the text instead of altering the text in order to accommodate the data found in the historical-cultural background. It illuminates the text. The biblical text continues to be the priority over the details provided by the cultural research. The greatest danger in the use of historical backgrounds is to force history, archaeology, or literature into the biblical text. Instead of illuminating the text, it eliminates the text.[40] If this danger is avoided, however, historical-cultural background provides valuable insight in discovering the meaning of the biblical text that benefits the church of Christ.[41]];

[38] This was the opposite of what the priests of Nob did, who even gave David bread only meant for priests (1 Sam 21:1–9), which Jesus did not consider unlawful (Matt 12:1–4).

[39] Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 250. Contra Hoffner, who argues that Nabal did not break any laws by his rudeness. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *1 and 2 Samuel,* EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), pp. 805.

[40] Proper use of historical background or cultural context "does not *eliminate* the text; it *illuminates* it." Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 163.

[41] This article was first presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, 2021.

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Contextualizing the Controversial Instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Response to Sandra L. Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*

— *G. K. Beale* —

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Abstract: This article critically engages Sandra L. Glahn's book, *Nobody's Mother*, which attempts to offer further evidence from the ancient Greek world that supports the arguments that Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 are temporary restrictions and statements addressed only to a very specific occasion in first-century Ephesus. The author concludes that Glahn does not convincingly prove her argument and that 1 Timothy 2:11–15 still has ongoing validity for understanding the role of women in the church of the present day.

It is widely known that, beginning especially in the 1970s, there were proposals that worship of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus fomented an atmosphere of female libertarian spirit. Reflections on this theory led to an argument that Paul's prohibition against women "not teaching nor having authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12) was a temporary restriction due to the situation of the egalitarian Artemis spirit, which motivated a group of women to assume authority over men and to teach falsely in the Ephesian church. Accordingly, 1 Timothy 2:11–15 should not be taken to be true for the church at all times and in all places. Paul was only restricting women from false teaching.[1]

In 1992, Richard C. Kroeger and Katherine C. Kroeger wrote a book called *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence*,[2] which further fostered this general view by appealing to widespread ancient literary writings and archeological evidence.

Since it is difficult to find a clear summary of the overall argument by the Kroegers in their book, it is helpful to cite that of Steven M. Baugh's:

> The actual argument of *I Suffer Not a Woman* has many parts; its main lines run as follows. The Kroegers begin from what is now a standard egalitarian assumption that all distinctions between men and women are erased in Christ. When Paul forbade women

[1] See Steven M. Baugh, "The Apostle Among the Amazons," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 153, who summarizes some of the representative sources here.

[2] Richard C. Kroeger and Katherine C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

> from exercising the authority of the pastoral and teaching office ("teaching and ruling over a man," 1 Tim 2:12), he was addressing only the Ephesian situation because of its feminist religious culture where women had usurped religious authority over men. Paul's real purpose was only to prevent *Ephesian* women from teaching men. More specifically, he was only forbidding women from teaching a particular gnostic notion concerning Eve. They conclude in light of this scenario that women should be ordained to pastoral ministry.[3]

The Kroegers proposed that there was an amalgam of gnostic tradition and elements of influence from Artemis worship in the Ephesian church. In light of a proposed gnostic background, the Kroegers believed that women were assuming an authoritative role in teaching that men were created second in the creation[4] and that Eve was an enlightener of men.[5] According to this view, Paul wants to correct this erroneous teaching[6] by saying that, indeed, Adam "was first created, then Eve" and that "Adam was not deceived but the woman [Eve] came about in transgression, as a result of having been deceived" (1 Tim 2:13–14).[7] But this explanation (as the basis for v. 12) was only Paul's response to a temporary situation of false teaching, so that his statement, "I do not permit a woman to teach nor to have authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12), is also only a temporary restriction.

Rather than evaluating their exegetical conclusion or their understanding of Gnosticism, which has been done by others,[8] Baugh's review mainly criticized the Kroegers' book for trying to argue that matriarchy in religious affairs was prevalent in first-century Ephesus. They had argued that "the writer of the Pastorals was opposing a doctrine which acclaimed motherhood as the ultimate reality,"[9] which,

[3] Baugh, "The Apostle Among the Amazons," 155–56. Baugh cites other helpful reviews of the Kroegers' book, which give critiques of their exegesis and their treatment of Gnosticism (p. 156).

[4] E.g., Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman,* 103, 119–20; cf. 156 (where Eve is said to be "mother of all that live") and similarly 167.

[5] E.g., Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 103, 119, 146 (citing Philo), 123–24, 151.

[6] See Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 168–71, for a brief critique of the gnostic and Artemis background proposed by the Kroegers and others.

[7] These translations of 1 Tim 2:12–14 are mine and not those of the Kroegers with whom I disagree, especially their rendering of v. 12. Their preferred translation, reflecting the gnostic teaching about Eve, is "I do not allow a woman to teach or proclaim herself author of man" or "I do not permit a woman to teach or to represent herself as originator of man" (Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 103). Alternatively, they also suggest that an "appropriate" translation be, "I categorically forbid a woman to teach [anyone] to maintain that she is responsible for man." But, if there is not a gnostic background, then the translation of "author [or "originator," "responsible for"] of a man" loses its significance. The gnostic sources appealed to by the Kroegers are from later centuries and not from the first century AD or directly prior centuries, so that one cannot be confident that the ideas found in these sources was extant in the first century AD. As another possibility they suggest that, "beside the notion of dominance," αὐθεντέω intimates the early lexical meaning of "murder" in the sense that Eve brought death to Adam. Accordingly, apparently, they see Paul telling women not to act in a way that would bring spiritual and, ultimately, physical death to men (pp. 85–86). All of the above meanings piled into one Greek word is an example of "illegitimate totality transfer" (on which see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 62).

[8] E.g., Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15," 168–71; Robert W. Yarbrough, "I Suffer Not a Woman: A Review Essay," *Presbyterion* 18.1 (1992), 25–33.

[9] Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 31.

along with a background of Amazon influence,[10] contributed to "a monopoly on religious power by women"[11] in the Ephesian church. He contended through detailed research of the relevant sources that matriarchy was not widespread in first-century Ephesus. Baugh concludes his critique of the Kroegers by saying, "The Ephesian religious and cultural situation was not, in fact, marked by matriarchy of any sort,"[12] and also, "that Ephesus was a 'bastion of women's rights' or 'matriarchy' should be dropped once and for all. It was not."[13] Baugh's critique showed that most of the significant claims made by the Kroegers about the Artemis cult in Ephesus were either erroneous or were based on inaccurate interpretation of the ancient sources.

Now enter Sandra L. Glahn's book, *Nobody's Mother*, which attempts to offer further evidence from the ancient Greek world that supports the arguments that Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 are temporary restrictions and statements addressed only to a very specific occasion in first-century Ephesus. Glahn agrees with the Kroegers about the widespread influence of Artemis in Ephesus, but she does not agree that Artemis was portrayed as a sovereign mother. Rather, Artemis was widely known as a midwife, who delivers women through childbirth or enables them to have a painless death through it. As far as I am aware, no one had tried to show how verse 15 was directly related to the Artemis background. Glahn does this by attempting to show that Paul's expression, "She will be saved through childbearing," refers to a slogan in Ephesus about Artemis delivering women through childbearing. Accordingly, Paul reverses the slogan to show that only Christ can truly deliver through physical childbirth. Since Glahn sees that Paul's reference in 2:15 is relevant only for the temporary situation in Ephesus, this strongly implies for her that what Paul says in 2:11–14 is also only temporarily relevant and not true for the church throughout the ages.

Glahn offers a brief survey of 1 Timothy 2:11–14, where she does not attempt to argue anything exegetically original. She merely shows agreement with past egalitarian views that Paul is addressing a unique local situation in Ephesus about false teaching and that his instructions are not to be universalized for all churches in all times.[14] However, she makes the original suggestion that the phrase, "She will be saved through childbearing," in 1 Timothy 2:15 was a "popular saying that Paul was co-opting for his own purposes."[15] She first argues that in his letters "Paul borrowed local sayings with some regularity."[16] In this respect, she cites only 1 Corinthians 6:12 (so also in 10:23[17]), 6:18, and 7:1–2. Scholars generally agree that 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me," was a local slogan among the Corinthians. Likewise, the expression in 1 Corinthians 7:1, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman," could be a slogan.[18] In addition to these, Glahn also sees the phrase in

[10] Within which circle women purportedly ruled over men (Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 93).

[11] Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 93. The Kroegers deduce that the fact there was a priestess of the Artemis cult was evidence that "the primary religious power lay with women by the first century" (p. 196). But this does not follow, since there were priestesses throughout the Greco-Roman world "where no matriarchy was present" (Baugh, "Apostle Among the Amazons," 169).

[12] Baugh, "Apostle Among the Amazons," 170.

[13] Baugh, "Apostle Among the Amazons," 171.

[14] Sandra L. Glahn, *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 136–43. In so doing she agrees with commentators such as Linda Belleville.

[15] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 147.

[16] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 147.

[17] Though Glahn does not cite this text.

[18] More precisely, the majority viewpoint is that the phrase is a quotation from the Corinthians' *letter* to Paul, not a local slogan (e.g., see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, revised ed. (Grand Rapids:

1 Corinthians 6:18, "Every sin a man commits is outside the body," to be a Corinthian slogan, though significant commentators disagree with this.[19] This is not sufficient evidence that "Paul borrowed local sayings with *some regularity*."[20]

Next, she adduces in support of this the repeated formulas by Paul, "It is a trustworthy statement" (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8). After showing that sometimes the formulas introduce a statement (as in 1 Tim 1:15 and 2 Tim 2:11) or conclude a statement (as in 1 Tim 4:9 and Titus 3:8), she argues that the formula should be seen as concluding the statement in 2:15, "She will be saved through childbearing," and should not be viewed as introducing the statement in 3:1 about bishops. This is possible, but it clearly could just as easily have an introductory function as a part of 3:1. No translations, of which I am aware, see it as referring to the preceding in 2:15.[21] Both could qualify as "trustworthy statements." Glahn compares all the other "trustworthy statements" in the Pauline epistles to the purported one in 1 Timothy 2:15, but none of the other "trustworthy statements" refer to local slogans, as far as commentators have been able to discern. So, if the "trustworthy" formula concludes and refers to the purported local saying, "She will be saved through childbearing," this would be the only example of such a thing in the Pauline epistles. Finally, perhaps the greatest problem with seeing "She shall be saved through childbearing" as a slogan referred to by the "trustworthy saying" is that the following phrase, "If they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control" separates it from the "trustworthy saying" formula. None of the other formulas in the Pauline epistles are separated by a phrase from their referent, making it improbable that the formula concludes 2:15. If it was concluding, it would have to refer to the whole of 2:15, not just the supposed "slogan."[22] One would have to see all of verse 15 as the slogan, and the entire verse does not have a slogan-like ring.

Furthermore, Glahn formulates the local slogan, "She shall be saved through childbearing," as meaning that a woman would be delivered physically through childbirth and not die. But the problem with this is that Paul never uses σῴζω to refer to physical salvation *in this life* but to an end-time salvation[23] from sin and death and to being consummated with physical, eternal, resurrection life (so 26x outside of 1 Tim 2:15).[24] The verb is used this way in the Pauline epistles (7x), and the noun as well (2x), and this is its use in verse 15. Why does Glahn limit her word study of σῴζω to the third person future passive indicative verbs, and why does she expand the word study to the whole NT, where she is able to find the meaning of "physical salvation or deliverance" twice? She never gives a rationale for these two procedural moves in her word study, though I suspect that doing so makes her think there is a

Eerdmans, 2014), 304.

[19] E.g., Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 289–90; so also David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 236; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 263, expresses caution about accepting the statement as a Corinthian slogan.

[20] Though Glahn could have added to her list the local slogan in Titus 1:12: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" But, unlike the Corinthian expressions, it is crystal clear that this is a local saying in Crete.

[21] I checked over twenty English translations, and all say the "trustworthy saying" follows in 3:1 (though the HCSB has a marginal note observing that the "trustworthy saying" could be in v. 15; so, likewise, the ASV).

[22] This is an observation made by my research assistant, Ethan Preston.

[23] I would argue that the "salvation in this life" is *a beginning spiritual resurrection*, as evident from my discussion on 1 Timothy 1:16; 4:8 (*Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming]).

[24] See BDAG 982–983, s.v. "σῴζω"; σωτηρία also has the same sense throughout Paul, on which see BDAG 985–986, s.v. "σωτηρία."

closer link to the use in 1 Timothy 2:13. But it would be dubious to think so on the basis solely of a third person future passive indicative verb form. Glahn then says physical deliverance is the meaning of σῴζω in 1 Timothy 2:15. In fact, the uses in Paul (which are numerous, including the noun forms) always refer to so-called end-time salvation, which, as noted above, includes seven uses of the verb and two uses of the noun in the Pauline epistles. Paul's uses should trump uses by other NT authors, especially since he uses the word so often. It is a well-tested lexical principle that, when an author uses a word a sufficient number of times elsewhere in his writings, and if the word means the same thing, then that meaning should have supremacy over other NT authors' uses in determining the meaning in the focus passage in question. But, as we will see, physical as opposed to spiritual "salvation" is crucial to Glahn's argument, which likely led her to this lexical conclusion.

Glahn argues that physical deliverance is the best meaning of σῴζω because of the mythology of "Artemis's role as midwife" (either in delivering women physically or sedating them to give them a painless death). Consequently, she draws the conclusion "that Paul may well have been quoting a local proverb about childbirth, perhaps a familiar Artemis-related saying about being [physically] delivered—giving the phrase his own Christianized meaning."[25] "A conflict existed between her [Artemis's] followers" and the Christians in Ephesus.[26] Paul's purported point was "to replace a human-made idol of a midwife [Artemis] with Christ the King,"[27] thus employing the local proverb as a polemic against the Artemis cult. But is there any inscriptional, papyrus, or literary evidence of such a saying in Ephesus or the ancient Greco-Roman world outside of Ephesus? The answer is "no." No such saying can be found in any of Glahn's many numerous ancient citations about Artemis. Such an interpretive approach by Glahn is equivalent to saying that Paul's phrase, "She will be saved through childbearing," is an early Jewish saying, though we have no evidence of it. Or it is like some scholars who conclude that a NT author's paraphrase of an OT text that does not comport with any Hebrew or LXX texts must represent some non-extant text, no longer available. All of these are possible conclusions, but they are not "probable" without further forthcoming evidence. In my own work on 1 Timothy, I do argue that a repeated phrase in 1 and 2 Timothy, "fight the good fight" (1 Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7) is a borrowed saying from the Greco-Roman world ("fight the fight" [sometimes "fight the good fight"]) based on inscriptional, papyri, and literary sources. However one may evaluate my argument, I would not have concluded this unless I had found *not merely the concept* but the very same lexical combination (same verb plus cognate noun) numerously from these extra-biblical sources.[28] This is a general rule, for example, in determining the validity of OT allusions in the NT: there needs to be not only a conceptual correspondence but a unique lexical correspondence.[29] Conceptual correspondences by themselves are harder to determine because the enterprise becomes more subjective. This is why Glahn's conclusion that her interpretation (about the saying of 1 Tim 2:15) is "probably" correct[30] is not persuasive. *If she had found not merely the concept but the exact verbal combination in Greek of "save" (σώ ζω) plus "in" (or "through" []διά],*

[25] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 150.

[26] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 155.

[27] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 157.

[28] See G. K. Beale, "Background to 'Fight the Good Fight' in 1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12, and 2 Timothy 4:7," *ZNW* 113 (2022): 202–30; and "The Greco-Roman Background to 'Fighting the Good Fight' in the Pastoral Epistles and the Spiritual Life of the Christian," *Themelios* 48.3 (2023): 541–51.

[29] E.g. see G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 31–35.

[30] Glahn, *Nobody's Mother*, 256.

*or synonymous prepositions or syntactical expressions) plus "childbirth" (*τεκνογονί α *or verb form) in several sources, her view that this is a definite reflection of an Artemis background would have been more convincing.* Indeed, her view is "possible," but not "probable."

It is surprising that she could write a monograph on 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and cite so few secondary sources focusing on those verses (essays, books, and commentaries).[31] Since the topic of her book is such an important issue for her (and for many in the church on both sides of the issue), one would think she would have wanted to be more thorough in her interaction with secondary literature and in her own exegesis of the passage (though she could claim this was not her aim, which would be a misjudgment on such an important issue). She never seriously engages the heft of the opposing views on 1 Timothy 2:11–15. Her response might be that she wanted to write a popular book, but she still could have interacted in footnotes with much of the more relevant material, and the book could have been 30 or 40 pages longer (as it is, the book is only 140 pages of relevant discussion, the first 15 pages or so being introductory material).

There are a few other issues I cannot pass by. The treatment of Paul's allusion in 1 Timothy 2:13 to the order of creation from Genesis 2 and of his allusion to Genesis 3:6, 13 in 1 Timothy 2:14 is also too cursory (she dedicates only two pages to this!). She says that verse 13 "should not be understood as a male-first creation order that equals hierarchy";[32] rather, the point of Paul's allusion there is to "restore interdependence in a context in which pride of creation order in a goddess-first context emphasizes preeminence and autonomy. In the Ephesian origin story, Artemis is first; it's one of her titles. In her own creation story, with its female-male pairing, she is firstborn."[33] Thus, accordingly, "the apostle corrects a false story with a true one. He is using a narrative to counter a competing narrative."[34] This is Paul's only purpose in referring to the creation narrative. Again, she is presupposing that the Artemis background is why Paul alludes to the order of creation in Genesis 2. This is possible but not probable, without adducing further evidence. There is *no clear* wording in 1 Timothy 2:13–14 or elsewhere in the Pauline epistles that reflects an Artemis background. She deals with the "deception" issue of verse

[31] Especially surprising is the omission of interaction with the most important recent monograph on this theme: Elif Hilal Karaman, *Ephesian Women in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Perspective*, WUNT 2/474 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). Likewise, though older sources, the lack of mention of James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) and Gilbert Bilezekian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) is unfortunate (the latter source would have given further support to her overall argument). Also a bit startling is omission of Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis?" *JETS* 35.3 (1992): 341–60, whose essay argues better and more thoroughly for the notion which Glahn herself contends (see *Nobody's Mother*, 133–36), that 1 Timothy 2:11–15, based on a parallel with 1 Peter 3:1–7, is about "wives" and "husbands," and not generally about "women" and "men." Omission of these two sources is just the tip of the iceberg of Glahn's inadequate awareness of and interaction with relevant bibliography. For a thorough bibliography she could have consulted the bibliography at the end of Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 360–90.

[32] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 142.

[33] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 142.

[34] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 143.

14 in one brief paragraph,[35] which is not adequate, especially since she never attempts to relate how the concept of "deception" relates in any way to the purported Artemis background.[36]

Also, Glahn never discusses the various ways γάρ (often rendered as "for") is used to introduce verses 13–14. There are, at least, four possible functions of γάρ, of which ground and clarification are the most viable. How one takes the γάρ is decisive for the interpretation of verses 13–14. She appears to understand the γάρ as giving reasons (a ground) for verse 12.[37] Furthermore, she is not clear how the Genesis 1–3 narrative relates specifically to Paul's command in verse 12 that women should not teach so as to usurp the authority of men[38] (so that "both husbands and wives in the assembly" should "calm down"[39]). Her contention that Paul's use of the Genesis 1–3 narrative counters the competing Artemis narrative in verses 13–14 is possible, but one major difference between the two narratives is that Genesis 1–3 is about the creation of the original world and the Artemis narrative is only about the creation of two twin gods, Artemis being firstborn of the pair. This dilutes to some degree the comparison. These are just a few examples of a lack of exegetical precision and emphasis in her book.

Generally, the contribution of Glahn's book is to make available to readers in a convenient form all the many references to Artemis from more recent primary sources (inscriptions, papyri, and literary sources now published online) or ones ignored in the past. But most of these sources do not speak of Artemis as a midwife who delivers through childbirth or gives a painless death through it, though some of the references to Artemis do. Indeed, out of 48 primary *literary* sources, only four are relevant:

1. "Artemis" is the one "who eases all our labor pains."[40]
2. With regard to "the cities of men I [Artemis] will visit only when women vexed by the sharp pain of childbirth call me to their aid. Even in the hour I was born, the Fates ordained that I should be their helper forasmuch as my mother suffered no pain either when she gave me birth … but without travail put me from her body."[41]
3. "It was no wonder the temple of Artemis was burned down, since the goddess was busy bringing Alexander [the Great] into the world."[42]
4. A still birth and the death of a mother were blamed on "Artemis," who "wert busy with thy beast-slaying hounds." It is implied that if she had not been so diverted with her dogs, she would have aided in the birth and saved the mother.[43]

Of the 31 primary source *inscriptions* cited by Glahn, only one refers to Artemis as a "midwife and augmenter of mortals … full of joy: she will provide deliverance from your afflictions…." [44] Finally,

[35] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 143.

[36] She conceivably might say that verse 14 is just a concluding part of the Genesis narrative to which Paul wants to appeal, and his main concern is to highlight the part in verse 13, but this leaves a whole verse without any viable explanation. For example, why did Paul not stop with citing the Genesis narrative in verse 13, leave out the deception part, and then move immediately to the childbearing verse?

[37] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 141–142.

[38] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 137–146.

[39] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 139.

[40] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 52–53, citing Euripides, *Hippolytus* 9–30, within which the quotation is contained.

[41] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 54, citing Callimachus, *Hymn* 3.1–45, within which the quotation is contained.

[42] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 72, citing Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 3.3, in *The Parallel Lives*.

[43] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 77, citing Diodorus of Sardis, *The Greek Anthology* III, xlv.

[44] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 88. The primary source reference is cited from an essay in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 92 (1992): 269. It is not clear that the final two phrases quoted above for this reference refer to

in Glahn's description of art and architecture there is no reference to Artemis being a midwife, saving through childbearing, or painless death. Thus, out of all the ancient sources cited by Glahn, at best, there are five references to Artemis in some way aiding in the birth of women. In all of the 79 literary sources and inscriptions, plus reference to art and architecture, nowhere does the phrase, "saved through childbearing," appear, and only once is she called a "midwife." Thus, there is no evidence that "saved through childbearing" was a slogan, much less that Artemis was widely known as a goddess who aided in some way in childbirth. Glahn cites many sources that give the appearance that her argument is stronger than it is. Glahn herself mentions the idea of Artemis as a midwife, savior in childbirth, or anesthesiologist 19 times and hinges her interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 on this idea, an idea faintly found in the original sources.[45]

The ancient references certainly show how influential in Ephesus was the worship of the goddess Artemis. So, it is true that Paul would have been quite aware of this influence in Ephesus, but it is quite a different issue to say that Paul intended to make polemical references to Artemis in his letters to Timothy.

Glahn's contention is similar to others who find, for example, polemical references to Caesar in Paul's and other NT writings, since Caesar as a divine king was so widely known in Palestine and in the ancient world in general in the first through third century AD.[46] Scholars debate whether such polemical references really exist. It is hard to know, though there is a little more lexical evidence for this from the ancient primary sources. For example, the phrase "peace and safety" (εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια) in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 is sometimes viewed by significant scholars to be a well-worn Roman propaganda slogan concerning their ability to establish "peace and security" in society. Accordingly, these scholars view Paul as employing the slogan to subvert the Thessalonians' belief in this Roman ideology. The notion that the phrase was a *slogan*, however, has been seriously questioned.[47] Nevertheless, the exact phrase does occur three times in Greek (from sources in the first century BC, second century AD, and third century AD [in reversed form]), which pertain to the *general* subject of the consequences of Roman sovereignty (though the last source may not pertain to Rome). In addition, the two Greek words occur very closely as a description in another first-century BC source. Furthermore, the Latin equivalent (*pax* and *securitas*) occurs as a phrase in three sources (dating from first century BC to first century AD), though not in the exact order and not separated by a conjunction (except possibly for the phrase *Pax Augusta* together with *securitas*). While it is true that this evidence is not enough to establish that the phrase in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is a *slogan*, it does occur enough as a unique phrase or combination of words to indicate that Paul may be making an allusion. The allusion may merely and generally indicate that the "peace and security" that the Thessalonians may have assumed from the welfare of the Roman

Artemis doing the work of midwifery.

[45] I am grateful to my research assistant, Ethan Preston, for his statistical research into Glahn's work.

[46] E.g., see N. T. Wright, "Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans," in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Craig Bartholemew, The Scripture and Hermeneutics 3 (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 2002), 173–93, though he makes a better case for Paul's intentional interaction with a Caesar background than does Glahn for Paul's purported polemic against Artemis in 1 Timothy 2:15. Wright sees a broad influence and does not attempt to see Paul making precise polemical phraseological allusions to ancient sources referring to Caesar. Indeed, Caesar was more well-known or influential in the Roman Empire, including Ephesus, than were other gods (including Artemis), though Caesar sometimes came to be identified with some of the other gods (e.g., Greek gods).

[47] Joel R. White, "'Peace and Security' (1 Thessalonians 5:3): Is It Really a Roman Slogan?" *NTS* 59 (2013): 382–85.

empire, representing the world's security, will be exploded through judgment on unbelievers at Christ's final coming.

But, in 1 Timothy 2:15 the wording σώζω plus διά plus τεκνογονία does not occur in any of the many sources Glahn cites, whether as an exact phrase or as a combination of the words or combination of cognate words. Therefore, in contrast to the examples in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and 1 Timothy 1:18 ("fight the good fight"), the phrase, "saved through childbirth," can neither be considered a literary allusion to an Artemis saying, much less can it be viewed as a "slogan" to which Paul is responding.

Glahn states in her conclusion that her objective has been twofold:

(1) To discern whether a local situation was likely on Paul's mind when he wrote to Timothy about women, especially about childbearing; and

(2) To know whether a woman with a teaching gift is limited to applying it in childbearing.[48]

Her first objective is understandable, but her second is difficult to understand: What does it mean that a "teaching gift is limited to applying it to childbearing"? How can you "apply a teaching gift to childbearing," unless she understands "childbearing" to refer figuratively to the context of raising children? This could be possible, but Glahn understands "childbearing" to refer to the literal event of giving birth to an infant. So, this could not be her meaning. To conclude a book on such a confusing note without further explaining her second objective is, to say the least, infelicitous.

More issues raised by Glahn need discussion (e.g., her discussion of widows in relation to the Artemis cult background[49]), but the above is sufficient for my purposes in this essay.

Sandra L. Glahn's book, *Nobody's Mother*, attempts to offer further evidence from the ancient Greek world supporting the arguments that Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 are temporary restrictions and statements addressed only to a very specific occasion in first century Ephesus. Since Glahn sees that Paul's reference in 2:15 is relevant only for the temporary situation in Ephesus, she also sees that this strongly implies that what Paul says in 2:11–15 is also only temporarily relevant and not true for the church throughout the ages. If Glahn is correct, it means that 1 Timothy 2:11–15 cannot be used by the church today as a normative understanding for the role of women in the church. However, since I believe that she has not proved the probability of her argument, then 1 Timothy 2:11–15 still has ongoing validity for understanding the role of women in the church of the present day.

[48] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 156.

[49] Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 123–24, 128. Likewise, note her discussion of the significance of Paul's present tense, οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω ("I am not permitting"), as indicating only a local situation and not a command "for all people, in all places, and for all time" (Glahn, *Nobody's Moth*er, 137). She does not even acknowledge that there are arguments against this by significant commentators (e.g., see the discussion on 1 Tim 2:12 in my forthcoming *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan]).

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Fighting to the Finish: Five Roles for Endurance in Revelation

— Todd R. Chipman —

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Abstract: This essay is the second of a two-part analy sis of John's use of the articular substantival participle. John uses this grammatical form in various ways across his diverse literary contributions to the New Testament. One common use portrays roles humans might embrace or reject. In a previous essay, I investigated nine of the nineteen uses of πιστεύω as an articular substantival participle in the Gospel of John. In those places, John collocates this role-portraying grammatical form of πιστεύω with eternal life (3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25, 26). Here, I use five headings to describe John's use of the articular substantival participle, noting roles humans might embrace or reject in Revelation: [1] The One Who Reads and Hears God's Word (1:3; 22:17, 18); [2] The One Who Conquers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 15:2; 21:7); [3] The One Who Is Oriented Toward God or the World (2:7, 11, 17, 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:18; 17:9; 18:19; 20:6); [4] The One Who Is Slaughtered for The Testimony of Jesus (6:9; 18:24; 20:4); [5] The One Who Thirsts for God (21:6; 22:17). These roles identify the many practical ways that Jesus's followers demonstrate their allegiance to Jesus, serving as a corrective to fatalism or passivity in the last days.[1]

The majestic scenes John recalls in Revelation can overwhelm even the thoughtful reader. How should overwhelmed believers respond? Many will say, "Trust God. That's the point." To some degree, yes. Craig Blomberg reflects that the shortest summary of Revelation he has heard is that Jesus wins: "Here is the climax of any truly Christian theodicy. God *will* make all things right, it is crucial for us to be with him on the winning side."[2] God is faithful and will see that he is glorified through his faithful ones. So trust God and be faithful. That is the point.

But how? Analyzing John's lexical and grammatical choices provides a concrete path for how believers might faithfully respond to God and participate in the drama John sketches in Revelation. The Gospel of John, 1–3 John, and Revelation offer readers a coherent portrait of theology through variegated literary styles. John presents Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as decisive events in world

[1] This essay is the result of research presented in the New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis Section at the 2023 ETS Annual Meeting in San Antonio on 14 November, and a series of blog entries titled "Roles in Revelation," *For the Church*, 22–28 January 2024, https://ftc.co/blog/resource-library/series-index/roles-in-revelation/

[2] Craig Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 683.

history, establishing a movement that has implications for all humanity. John's worldview and doctrinal framework exhibit great consistency.

Even John's linguistic choices remain stable across his vast literary output. One of these grammatical pillars is John's use of the articular substantival participle. John employs this grammatical form predominantly for human agency. Often, beneath the English translation, "the one who…" in John's texts lies an articular substantival participle. Important theological phrases in John's language, like the one who believes, the one who loves, and the one who conquers, are verbs whose adjectival sense is so strong they are substantivized and replace what would typically be a noun. This kind of participle concretizes the verbal action, portraying a role.[3]

In this essay, I employ five headings to summarize John's use of the articular substantival participle regarding roles humans might embrace or reject in Revelation:

5. The One Who Reads and Hears God's Word (1:3; 22:17, 18)
6. The One Who Conquers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 15:2; 21:7)
7. The One Who Is Oriented Toward God and not the World (2:7, 11, 17, 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:18; 17:9; 18:19; 20:6)
8. The One Who Is Slaughtered for The Testimony of Jesus (6:9; 18:24; 20:4)
9. The One Who Thirsts for God (21:6; 22:17)

1. The One Who Reads and Hears God's Word

John uses participles to establish the formal roles of reading and hearing Revelation, the final book of Scripture, so the word of God will forever guide the church. John thus begins Revelation by noting two streams of communication.

1.1. The One Who Reads God's Word[4]

Μακάριος **ὁ ἀναγινώσκων** καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. (Rev 1:3)	Blessed is **the one who reads aloud** the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. (Rev 1:3)

The first communication stream in Revelation 1:1–2 could be labeled spatially as a descending communication stream. The second stream is horizontal, described in Revelation 1:3. John's grammatical choices portray reading, hearing, and following (what was heard in the reading) like roles believers

[3] In Ronald D. Peters, *The Greek Article: A Functional Grammar of* ὁ*-Items in the Greek New Testament with Special Emphasis on the Greek Article*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 9 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 67, Peters states that an author can use the article to effectively move a nominal to various positions on a stage. Peters writes, "In the case of the article, when a Greek speaker wishes to move a participant to the background of the stage, he or she may do so in part by characterizing the participant as abstract. Conversely, when a speaker wishes to bring a participant to the foreground of the stage, the participant will be characterized as concrete. Thus, even in a single episode, participants will move in and out, to the front and to the back, based on their immediate role" (p. 190).

[4] ἀναγινώσκω (33.68: Communication in Trust in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1989], 396) in Revelation 1:3.

should embrace as a part of their Christian life: "Blessed is **the one who reads aloud** (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων) the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it."

The link between Revelation 1:2 and 3 is a text, words in some material form. John envisions believers embracing the role of a public reader. The public reading of Scripture that John expects pre-dates the synagogue communities and churches of his day, finding its early precedent in Moses's reading of the law to Israel as the nation prepares to cross the Jordan River in Deuteronomy 27–32. After the exiles return to Jerusalem, they gather to hear the law read publicly (see Neh 8). When the synagogue communities in Palestine and throughout the Mediterranean region gather for worship, reading Scripture is a part of their agenda (Luke 4:16–21; Acts 13:13–15, 27, 42–44; 15:21). Paul exhorts Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13) and instructs the Colossians to exchange letters with the Laodiceans so that both letters could be read in both churches (Col 4:16).[5]

The one taking up the role of reading Scripture is not only blessed; he is a blessing. Since most of the ancient world could not read, the one reading Scripture was not simply a blessing; he was necessary.[6] Therefore, those who read Scripture to the community enabled God's people to hear his word and be blessed by what they heard.

1.2. The One Who Hears God's Word[7]

Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ **οἱ ἀκούοντες** τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. (Rev 1:3)	Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are **those who hear**, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. (Rev 1:3)
Καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ νύμφη λέγουσιν· ἔρχου. καὶ **ὁ ἀκούων** εἰπάτω· ἔρχου. (Rev 22:17)	The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let **the one who hears** say, "Come." (Rev 22:17)
Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ **τῷ ἀκούοντι** τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· ἐάν τις ἐπιθῇ ἐπ' αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ. (Rev 22:18)	I warn **everyone who hears** the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, (Rev 22:18)

Those faithful in the role of hearing God's word read to them, John notes in Revelation 1:3, are indeed blessed. The gnomic predicate nominative "blessed" (μακάριος)[8] recalls many points in the storyline of Scripture, including Psalm 1 and Jesus's Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3–12) and Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20–22). The faithful enjoy God's blessing because of many activities—including hearing Scripture.

The role of hearing John's prophecy—the culmination of Scripture—is not to be a one-off endeavor. Those who hear God's word and enjoy its blessing stand on the stage not once but repeatedly—with the

[5] "Although the 'scripturalization' of Christian worship certainly became more formalized and regularized across time, both the importance and the impact of corporate reading of scripture writings are evident from the outset of the Jesus-movement" (Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016], 108).

[6] See especially Harry J. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[7] ἀκούω (24.52: Sensory Events and States in L&N 1.281–82) in Revelation 1:3; 22:17, 18.

[8] This is the first of seven beatitudes that John writes in Revelation (see also 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

company of hearers. The axiomatic portrait of hearing and blessing in Revelation 1:3 is carried not only by the use of μακάριος as the predicate nominative but also through the present tense form of ἀκούω in the articular substantival participle οἱ ἀκούοντες—**those who hear**, and hear, and hear.[9] "Play it again!" John envisions hearers of Revelation exclaiming. John describes a crowded stage of actors that includes a reader and many hearers who respond to what they have heard by keeping their testimony of Christ to the end. This testimony they will keep despite danger and opposition that may come upon them precisely because they are hearing and heeding John's prophetic message.

And at the end of Revelation, John returns to the role of hearing God's word. In Revelation 22:17, he writes, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let **the who hears** [ὁ ἀκούων] say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." The one who hears is the first of three roles that John would have his readers embrace. The placement of the role of hearing in Revelation 22:17 is noteworthy for two reasons. First, at the broader discourse level of Revelation, the hearing role returns us to Revelation 1:3 and further accentuates the communicative string John describes in Revelation 1:1–3. Anyone who has heard the Apocalypse has heard God's message through Jesus, an angel, and John.[10] Second, at the micro discourse level of Revelation 22:17, the one who hears is the first of three roles, including desiring and thirsting. That hearing is listed first in this string of roles implies that hearing what John has written stimulates the hearer's senses to seek God.

John portrays the role of hearing such that those embracing God's word as it is read undertake two specific tasks. First, they long for John's message to be actualized. The hearer is to say, "Come!" John likely has in mind that those hearing his prophecy of Jesus's victorious return in Revelation 19:11–21 long to see the rider on the white horse arrive to conquer evil and consummate his kingdom. Second, they act as stewards of God's word. In Revelation 22:18, John admonishes those hearing his prophecy and states, "I warn **everyone who hears** [παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι] the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." Because John has truthfully written what the angelic messengers revealed to him from Jesus from God (recalling the authoritative communicative string outlined in Rev 1:1–3), those in the role of hearing John's prophecy must maintain God's word to the next generation unchanged. They must heed it faithfully, adding or subtracting nothing.

[9] If, as David E. Aune states, "ancient authors not only chose words to convey the meanings they intended but also chose words whose *sounds* effectively communicated those meanings" (David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52A [Dallas: Word, 1997], 21, italics original), we would expect no less concerning the final installment of Holy Scripture. Ancient rhetoricians arranged words to communicate ideas through sounds. This practice was referred to as *elocutio* or style. See Book 3 of Aristotle's *Rhetorica* and Books 8–9 of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. For the analysis of the auditory character of the New Testament and especially Revelation, see Margaret Ellen Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott eds., *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2009); Kayle B. de Waal, *An Aural-Performance Analysis of Revelation 1 and 11*, StBibLit 163 (New York: Lang, 2015); Kayle B. de Waal, "A Sound Map of Revelation 8:7–12 and the Implications for Ancient Hearers," in *Sound Matters*, ed. Margaret Ellen Lee (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 179–92; and John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters*, ETS Studies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

[10] Though Aune offers that the singular articular participle ὁ ἀκούων in Revelation 22:17 may have an implicitly distributive perspective that places an emphasis on each individual hearer in the larger group portrayed via οἱ ἀκούοντες in Revelation 1:3 (David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52C [Dallas: Word, 1998], 1228).

2. The One Who Conquers

A second role John uses participles to advocate for in Revelation is that of a conqueror.[11] Grant R. Osborne notes, "One of the most important messages of the book is the challenge to be a 'conqueror.'"[12] John's language should shape how we view God, our local churches, and ourselves.

2.1. Conquerors in Every Church

Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (Rev 2:7)	**To the one who conquers** I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Rev 2:7)
Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου. (Rev 2:11)	**The one who conquers** will not be hurt by the second death. (Rev 2:11)
Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκήν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων. (Rev 2:17)	**To the one who conquers** I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it. (Rev 2:17)
Καὶ **ὁ νικῶν** καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν (Rev 2:26)	**The one who conquers** and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations (Rev 2:26)
Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς. (Rev 3:5)	**The one who conquers** will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. (Rev 3:5)
Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν (Rev 3:12)	**The one who conquers**, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. (Rev 3:12)
Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. (Rev 3:21)	**The one who conquers**, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:21)

Jesus formulaically describes the role of the conqueror in his messages to the churches in Revelation 2–3. In the conclusion of each letter, Jesus uses articular substantival participles of νικάω either in the nominative (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) or dative (2:7, 17), followed by a first-person future indicative verb, via which Jesus promises a personal reward to the one conquering. The dative references signify the victors as those to whom Jesus promises some reward. The nominative references communicate a similar idea

[11] νικάω (39.57 Hostility, Strife in L&N 1:500) in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 15:2; and 21:7.
[12] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 122.

via the hanging nominative in which the participle is the antecedent of a subsequent pronoun to whom Jesus promises reward or blessing. These uses of νικάω shape the literary structure of their respective letters and cast an ideological frame for Revelation as a whole.[13] Jesus calls believers in every church to embrace the role of conqueror by remaining faithful to him despite earthly temptation and opposition.

Jesus calls for believers in local churches to take up the role of conqueror, and this should shape how we view ourselves and our brothers and sisters in our local churches. Our refusal to compromise doctrinal and moral integrity is an act of conquering the spiritual forces that oppose us.

2.2. The Conqueror and Eternal Rewards

Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ **τοὺς νικῶντας** ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἑστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. (Rev 15:2)	And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also **those who had conquered** the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. (Rev 15:2)
ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός. (Rev 21:7)	**The one who conquers** will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. (Rev 21:7)

What might motivate those taking up the dangerous role of a conqueror to be faithful to Jesus despite opposition and even the threat of death? Brian J. Tabb writes, "The Apocalypse presents the people of God ironically as conquered conquerors, who experience present suffering and defeat yet await ultimate victory."[14]

In the letters to the churches, Revelation 15:2, and Revelation 21:7, John promises rewards for those who conquer. In John's vision of the heavenly throne room in Revelation 15, he sees the souls of **those who were victorious** (τοὺς νικῶντας) over the beast standing on the sea of glass gathered around the throne to praise God. Language and imagery from Revelation 4–5 and 6:9–11 (the fifth seal) punctuate John's vision in Revelation 15 and contribute to the narrative framework of the book. Those who conquer the beast and his image (15:2) do so because the slain Lamb also stands to show that he has been victorious over death and redeemed them (5:6–10). In Revelation 15:2, John portrays how the followers of the conquering Lamb themselves conquer the beast and his image. John writes parallel prepositional phrases (ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ), emphasizing the spatial separation between the conquerors and the demonic forces opposing them. The conquerors are those who have separated themselves from demonic influence through Jesus's victory for them. The conqueror is free because of his flight from Satan's domain.[15] The reference to the conquerors in Revelation 15:2 recalls the

[13] Matthijs den Dulk suggests that the sequence of Jesus's promises presents a review and fulfillment of the storyline of the Old Testament (Matthijs den Dulk, "The Promises of the Conquerors in the Book of Revelation," *Bib* 87 [2006]: 516).

[14] Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 109.

[15] BDF notes the peculiar use of ἐκ here, placing it under the general category of extension (Friedrich Wilhelm Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], §212). G. K. Beale comments, "The phrase τοὺς νικῶντας

repeated reference to the victorious ones in the concluding lines of the letters to the seven churches.[16] Having been presented with the costly role of the conqueror, John's readers may have been asking, Will victory be worth the sacrifice (sometimes unto death) required to resist Satan and earthly forces? John's vision of heavenly community and reward reported in Revelation 15 answers in the affirmative.

In Revelation 21, John describes the new creation. John uses apocalyptic imagery to build his narrative to this point. Along the way, he tells his visions and sets out God's promises of reward to those who remain faithful. Throughout Revelation, John frames the promise of reward in relational terms as God comes to dwell with his people in the new creation. In Revelation 21:7–8, John contrasts all of humanity, placing them into one of two categories. He uses the term conqueror as the heading for the faithful ones, stating that **the one who conquers** (ὁ νικῶν) will have a heritage and enjoy intimacy with God as God's son (21:7). The one in the role of the conqueror is the one who has remained faithful, participating in the victory of the One on the throne and the Lamb. The human victor referenced in Revelation 21:7 has been victorious over Satan and the worldly forces under Satan's delegated authority.

3. The One Who Is Oriented Toward God and not the World

John's audience in Revelation faces seasons of danger and deception. Therefore, John uses the articular substantival participle of ἔχω to portray the role of one who is oriented toward God.[17] John explains that such a one is protected from Satan's lies and assured of rule with Christ in the age to come.

3.1. Spiritual Ears in Every Church

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 2:29; 3:6, 3:13, 22)	**He who has an ear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 2:29; 3:6, 3:13, 22)

In the letters to the churches in Revelation 2–3, Jesus describes the role of being oriented toward God. The letters differ in length and use of metaphors and literary features, but they all display a general introduction-body-conclusion framework. The repeated phrase, "**he who has** [Ὁ ἔ χων] an ear, let him hear," calls the recipients of the letters to orient themselves toward God. Jesus's formulaic expression effectively establishes a concrete role he expects believers to embrace so they might fulfill his instructions. In the broader discourse of Revelation, those oriented toward God have rejected the false teaching propagated by the beast, the false prophet, and Satan (see Rev 13).[18]

Jesus's statements in the conclusion of these letters echo his point in the parable of the soils (Matt 13:1–15; Mark 4:1–12; Luke 8:4–10). There, Jesus cites Isaiah 6:9–10 to explain that God has

ἐκ may be a compressed expression for 'the ones coming off victorious [by separating themselves] from'" (G. K Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 790).

[16] Buist Fanning notes, "Such victory or 'overcoming' is what John has summoned Christians to do throughout the messages to the churches (cf. 2:7, 11, etc.; also 12:11; 21:7)" (Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020], 406).

[17] ἔχω (13.2: Be, Become, Exist, Happen in L&N 1:149) in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:18; 17:9; 18:19; 20:6.

[18] Tabb writes, "Those with 'an ear' rightly grasp that the Spirit of God and the exalted Christ address the churches in and through this book of prophecy. They also test the spirits and resist the siren song of the false prophet and its emissaries such as Balaam and Jezebel (2:14, 20; 16:13–14)" (Tabb, *All Things New*, 223–24).

enabled those who hear and accept the kingdom's message while he has hardened others who hear the same message and reject it.[19] Regardless of the specific imagery Jesus uses to introduce himself at the beginning of each letter or the various metaphors and Old Testament themes Jesus employs in the body of the letters, Jesus concludes his address to each church by identifying the role of the recipient. Those in the recipient's role are called to heed the message and respond faithfully. They are to embrace the role of being oriented toward God.

3.2. Protection of the Mind

Ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. **ὁ ἔχων** νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου, ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν, (Rev 13:18)	This calls for wisdom: **let the one who has** understanding calculate the number of the beast, (Rev 13:18)
ὧδε **ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν.** Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσίν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν. καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτά εἰσιν· (Rev 17:9)	This calls for **a mind with wisdom**: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated (Rev 17:9)
καὶ ἔβαλον χοῦν ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἔκραζον κλαίοντες καὶ πενθοῦντες λέγοντες· οὐαὶ οὐαί, ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη, ἐν ᾗ ἐπλούτησαν πάντες **οἱ ἔχοντες** τὰ πλοῖα ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ ἐκ τῆς τιμιότητος αὐτῆς, ὅτι μιᾷ ὥρᾳ ἠρημώθη (Rev 18:19)	And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where **all who had** ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste." (Rev 18:19)

The role of being oriented toward God includes having ears that hear spiritual truth and a mindset that filters spiritual propaganda. In Revelation 12–13, John records his visions of the spiritual forces that oppose God and his people on earth. The dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth described in Revelation 13 employ their delegated authority against believers, taking some captive and killing others (13:10). They arrange the structures of the world to intimidate and coerce humanity to worship them, establishing an earthly kingdom. Everything about the nature and activity of the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth in Revelation 13 mimics and mocks the triune God of heaven and his rule over the cosmos. Satan and his forces establish a system for the members of their kingdom—captive by fear and force—to receive a branding mark visible on the right hand or forehead (13:16–17). In Revelation 13:17, John writes about the role of earthly identification, stating that no one can buy or sell unless **he has** (ὁ ἔχων) the beast's mark, his name visibly displayed. This mark, the symbol of power for the beast and Satan's earthly kingdom, ironically portrays weakness because it identifies the deceived and beguiled with Satan and his impending doom. Then, in Revelation 13:18, John urges "**the one who has** [ὁ ἔχων] understanding" to resist Satan's lies.

In the letters to the churches in Revelation 2–3, ears (οὖς) are the object of ἔχων and signify that one's faculties are sensitive to God. Ears convey spiritual discernment that one's entire body will carry out. The same idea is communicated via mind (νοῦς) in Revelation 13:18 (cf. Rev 17:9). The one

[19] Beale suggests that the parallels between the conclusion of the seven letters and the parable of the soils imply a mixed congregation in the churches with the result that each hearer's spiritual state will be made public by how they respond to Jesus's message (Beale, *Revelation*, 234). Yet, as George Beasely-Murray states, Jesus has in view the one who reacts faithfully, overcomes, and receives God's blessing (George Beasely-Murray, "Revelation," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition,* ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 1428).

oriented toward God heeds Jesus's instructions in Revelation 2–3 and realizes Satan's limited capacity in Revelation 13. The actor in this role is oriented toward God, responding faithfully to God's revelation about his activity and the finite domain he has entrusted to Satan.[20]

In Revelation 13:17, the one having the mark of the beast is allowed free flow of commerce. It is that free flow of economic activity that roots Satan's followers in his earthly kingdom. John resurfaces terms of economy and spiritual rooting in Revelation 18:19b. While describing the fall of Babylon, John sees the seafaring men and shipmasters, "all **who had** [οἱ ἔχοντες] ships at sea," weeping because Babylon, the anchor of their economic prosperity, was no more. Their mindset is of this world, and when its economic system falls, they fall with it.

3.3. Living in Light of Eternity

μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος **ὁ ἔχων μέρος** ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη. (Rev 20:6)	Blessed and holy is **the one who shares** in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:6)

And what does John envision for those who are oriented toward God, who walk in spiritual wisdom and resist the beast's efforts to expand Satan's kingdom? In Revelation 20:6a, John uses the articular substantival participle of ἔχω for the final time, writing, "Blessed and holy is **the one who shares** [ὁ ἔχων] in the first resurrection!" John notes that this holy and blessed role of sharing in the first resurrection is consistent with a life of spiritual fidelity. The role of sharing in the first resurrection befits those who have resisted the mark of the beast and maintained their witness of Christ even unto death (20:4). Those who enjoy a share in the first resurrection offer spiritual service to God and reign with Christ (20:6b). The concept of participation in resurrection life rests upon the spatial dualism between heaven and earth that surfaces throughout Revelation. The believer's share in eternal life anticipates the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in Revelation 21. In that domain, every creature is oriented toward God and the Lamb, the source of light itself (21:22–23).[21]

4. The One Who Is Slaughtered for The Testimony of Jesus

Some of the roles John sets forth in Revelation lack appeal for modern readers, just as they would have for John's original audience. As creatures, humans tend to avoid pain—not embrace roles that

[20] Robert Mounce notes the cognitive labor believers must expend to orient themselves toward God amid spiritual battle, stating, "What is crucial at this point is to recognize the true nature of the struggle. While the Lamb was victorious on the cross, the full and public acknowledgment of that victory awaits a final moment. Believers live in the already/not yet tension of a battle won but not quite over" (Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 263).

[21] Ian Paul writes, "Spatial references function as an extended metaphor for humanity's spiritual state, and the descriptions of the heavenly realm suggest a spiritual, prophetic perspective on the mundane realities of the earthly realm. The consummation of John's vision report is the coming of the New Jerusalem down from heaven to earth, where the two realities finally converge" (Ian Paul, "Introduction to the Book of Revelation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. Colin McAllister [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020], 43).

might lead to suffering or death. John exhibits pastoral concern in Revelation, compelling him to esteem those taking up the role of being slaughtered for Christ. The general hue of Revelation places believers in the crosshairs of spiritual war. In Revelation 6:9, 18:24, and 20:4, John uses articular substantival participles to laud those who have embraced the role of suffering for their faith, even to the point of death.[22]

4.1. The Slaughtered Ones Heard in Heaven

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγῖδα, εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς **τῶν ἐσφαγμένων** διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. (Rev 6:9)	When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of **those who had been slain** for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. (Rev 6:9)

Revelation can be seen as a protracted answer to the saints' question John hears when the fifth seal is broken, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (6:10).[23] John notes that the ones crying out to God for justice are those who had been slaughtered because of God's word and their testimony of Christ ("**those who had been slain** [τῶν ἐσφαγμένων] for the word of God and [καὶ] for the witness they had borne [ἣν εἶχον]," 6:9b). The role of being slaughtered or martyred (σφάζω) in Revelation 6:9 (and in 18:24) expresses the highest degree of faithfulness to Christ. Beale states it clearly: "Since the symbol of identity for all Christians is the slain Lamb, they all also can be referred to by the same metaphor."[24]

Two grammatical features in Revelation 6:9b underscore the saints' devotion to God as they cry out for justice. First, John's choice of the perfect tense form of σφάζω, "**those who had been slaughtered** [τῶν ἐσφαγμένων]" accords with the linguistic nuance of the verb[25] and portrays the violent means of the martyrs' deaths as yet vivid and in full color. Even if their deaths were decades before, the effects and violent frame of those deaths would cast a shadow extending to the very moment when they cry out for God to avenge their blood. The slaughter they endured was thus an antecedent action that placed the saints in the resulting state implied by their slaughter. They are there as worshippers of God, having submitted life and death to him. In this position, they can rightly cry out to God for justice.

Further, the nearness and proximity of the violent death of the martyrs anticipates John's description of why the saints were slaughtered. At the end of Revelation 6:9, John employs the imperfect tense

[22] σφάζω (29.72: Violence, Harm, Destroy, Kill in L&N 1:235) in Revelation 6:9; 18:24; πελεκίζω (20.80: Violence, Harm, Destroy, Kill in L&N 1:236–37) in Revelation 20:4.

[23] Beale, *Revelation*, 28, 392.

[24] Beale, *Revelation*, 391.

[25] Of the ten occurrences of σφάζω in the New Testament, six are participles—all in the perfect tense form. Because the act of being slain or slaughtered moves the object from one state to another, the perfect aspectual frame of stativity matches the lexical designation of σφάζω. For analysis of grammatical forms in relation to lexical nuance, see Matthew Brooke O'Donnell's discussion of lexicogrammar in *Corpus Linguistics and the Greek of the New Testament*, NTM 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 30–33. Regarding the perfect tense form, see D. A. Carson, ed., *The Perfect Storm: Critical Discussion of the Semantics of the Greek Perfect Tense Under Aspect Theory*, SBG 21 (New York: Lang, 2021); Todd R. Chipman, "What Is the Perfect State? Investigating the Greek Perfect Tense-Form in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 15.2 (2016): 1–25; Francis G. H. Pang, *Revisiting Aspect and Aktionsart: A Corpus Approach to Koine Greek Event Typology*, LBS 14 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016); and David L. Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John's Apocalypse*, LBS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

form of ἔχω (εἶχον) to note that the saints had been martyred because of their continuous, consistent testimony of Christ. Those who acted faithfully, even to the point of being slaughtered, did so after fulfilling the role of testifying to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The saints were not one-offs or kamikaze-like actors; instead, regularly as believers, they were holding fast in the role of witness.[26]

Second, the slaughtered ones' testimony was related to the word of God. The conjunction καί (and) can have several nuances, and in the syntax of Revelation 6:9b it links God's word and the testimony of the slaughtered ones in a coordinated, explanatory sense.[27] God's word and the testimony of the martyrs, in this context, must be understood not only as two sides of one coin but the latter as the expression of the former. The martyrs personally testified God's word as revealed in Christ, and they, not God's word, shed blood for that testimony.[28] God's word guided their lives and was worth their lives.

4.2. The Slaughtered Ones Rejected on Earth

καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα προφητῶν καὶ ἁγίων εὑρέθη καὶ πάντων **τῶν ἐσφαγμένων** ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. (Rev 18:24)	And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all **who have been slain** on earth. (Rev 18:24)

John's descriptio of the fall of Babylon underscores God's just wrath. In Revelation 18:21–23, John employs a series of emphatic negations to note that Babylon's attractive characteristics would cease at the moment of God's judgment.[29] Everything earthly in her would be condemned. Why? Babylon is portrayed not only as the city of neon and glitz but also of blood and gore—of God's people. "In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and [καὶ] of **all those slaughtered** [πάντων τῶν ἐσφαγμένων] on the earth" (18:24).

Just as in Revelation 6:9, here in Revelation 18:24 the interpretation of the conjunction καί plays a formative role in the exegesis of the verse. Does it coordinate three separate groups of humanity or three labels/functional roles for one group of humanity? The flexibility of descriptors like saints, prophets, and slaves, with not only martyrdom but also general suffering in Revelation (11:18; 12:11; 16:6; 17:6; 19:2), portrays a broad spectrum of persecution that the single people of God have endured across the ages (à la Heb 11). Thus, Revelation 18:24 refers to one group, and God's people, the saints, are faithful in their prophetic calling; they fulfill the role of suffering for their testimony, sometimes unto death.[30]

[26] Fanning, *Revelation*, 246–47.

[27] See καί in BDF §§442, 449. This is not an equative use of the epexegetical καὶ, but one that notes that the word of God was the source and framework for the martyrs' testimonies: no word of God, then no testimony worth one's life. Commentators vary on the nature of testimony in view here. I agree with Osborne (*Revelation*, 285) that it is the martyr's testimony, contra Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to John,* NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 108), Beale (*Revelation*, 390), and Mounce (*Revelation*, 147), who understand the word of God as Jesus's testimony transmitted to John and held by John's audience.

[28] J. Scott Duvall writes, "These Christian martyrs suffered and died specifically because of their witness" (J. Scott Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016], 109).

[29] The aorist passive subjunctive is proceeded by οὐ μή to note that Babylon will never be found again (Rev 18:21), the sounds of musicians will never be heard again (18:22a), craftsmen will never be found again (18:22b), the sound of a mill will never be heard again (18:22c), lamp light will never be seen again (18:23a), and the voice of bride and bridegroom will never be found again (18:23b).

[30] "Throughout Revelation, God's people are not simply called to avoid evil and endure suffering, they are pictured as faithful witnesses and called to faithfully bear testimony to Jesus Christ, conquering by being faithful even

4.3. The Beheaded Raised to Reign

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς **τῶν πεπελεκισμένων** διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. (Rev 20:4)	Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of **those who had been beheaded** for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God. (Rev 20:4)

In John's vision of the fifth seal (Rev 6:9–11), I noted that the slaughtered ones suffered because of God's word and their testimony. In Revelation 20:4, John writes that the testimony of believers and God's word are why believers are beheaded. On the spectrum of suffering, slaughter (σφάζω) and beheading (πελεκίζω) rank on the high extreme.[31] And in Revelation 6:9 and 20:4, those faithful in the role of suffering even unto death are rewarded, in the former with white robes and in the latter with thrones upon which they will rule and reign with Christ.

5. The One Who Thirsts for God

Thirst for God is an acquired taste. Perhaps that is why John uses participles of διψάω and θέλω to emphasize this characteristic of the believer in the last two chapters of the Bible.[32] We acquire a taste for God's satisfying presence as we encounter him. Do you see the logic? God satisfies our thirst so that we thirst for him. It is a cycle of satisfaction that, in eternity, will find no interruption.

5.1. God's Desire to Satisfy

καὶ εἶπέν μοι· γέγοναν. ἐγώ [εἰμι] τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος. ἐγὼ **τῷ διψῶντι** δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν. (Rev 21:6)	And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. **To the thirsty** I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. (Rev 21:6)

Revelation does not become less theological as John writes. The initial scenes of the book's drama in Revelation 1–5 portray God's centrality in history and the cosmos. In the final two chapters, John describes God's eternal dwelling among his people in the new creation. The vision John enjoys in Revelation 21:5–8 recalls Revelation 4. The one seated on the throne in Revelation 4 still is in Revelation 21. Though the universe has changed, God has not.

Central to the message John receives in Revelation 21:3–4 is the statement that God will now dwell with his people. Death and tears will no longer have a place in the human experience. All this is personal for God. In Revelation 21:5–6, John writes that he hears the voice of God speaking from his throne and

to the point of death" (Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023], 681).

[31] Aune notes that in the ancient world, beheadings were a public affair signaled by a trumpet so that the crowd could observe the punishment for the crime (Aune, *Revelation*, 1086–87).

[32] διψάω (23.39: Physiological Processes and States in L&N 1:253) in Revelation 21:6; 22:17; θέλω (25.1: Attitudes and Emotions in L&N 1:287) in Revelation 22:17.

announcing, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To **the thirsty** [τῷ διψῶντι] I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (21:6b).[33]

The concept of thirst in Revelation 21:6 is a physical metaphor that expresses a desperate spiritual need. In light of the throne room imagery of Revelation 21:1–5, John's readers would likely recall scenes from the throne room visions recorded in Revelation 4–5 and the content of the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9–11. At the breaking of the fifth seal, the martyred saints cry out for justice. Their cries speak in heaven what their contemporaries in John's audience on earth cry in their hearts as they long for God to vindicate them. Thirst in Revelation 21:6 portrays God's people longing for him to vindicate himself and his people. The one who thirsts in Revelation 21:6 enjoys fellowship with the martyred saints described in Revelation 6:9–11—those who received a white robe as a temporary token of what would come. In Revelation 21:6, the thirsts of God's people longing to be vindicated are finally satiated because God will now dwell with his people in the new creation. Beale writes, "This fellowship is reserved for those who have maintained their faith in the Lamb's atoning death and their testimony to his redemptive work."[34]

5.2. Satisfaction for All

Καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ νύμφη λέγουσιν· ἔρχου. καὶ ὁ ἀκούων εἰπάτω· ἔρχου. καὶ **ὁ διψῶν** ἐρχέσθω, **ὁ θέλων** λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν. (Rev 22:17)	The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let **the one who is thirsty** come; let **the one who desires** take the water of life without price. (Rev 22:17)

In the drama of Revelation 22, John receives first a vision of the river flowing from the throne of God (22:1–5), then a message from an angel instructing John to seal the prophecy (22:6–11), and finally a message from Jesus himself (22:12–16). Jesus promises his presence and eternal satisfaction to his followers. Then, in Revelation 22:17, John records responses to this narrative progression: the Spirit, the Bride, and those who hear invite those thirsty and desiring to come and partake freely of the water of life.

My concern is with the breadth of the offer to find satisfaction in God. John portrays his readers as the special recipients of this final revelatory sequence in Revelation 22:1–16. Anyone who hears—and therefore understands the satisfaction God provides his people in his word—is to exhort all others who would hear to come and be satisfied as well. In the last clause of Revelation 22:17, John collocates thirst (διψάω) and desire (θέλω). These two verbs have a high degree of semantic overlap when διψάω is used as a metaphor. John ensures that his readers catch his symbolic use of thirst by describing "the water of life" (ὕδωρ ζωῆς) as the object of θέλω. The one who thirsts is to come as one who desires to satisfy his thirst in a specific way: by drinking from the water of life. John's vision in Revelation 22:1–5 begins with the river flowing with the water of life and transitions to the end of the chapter in Revelation 22:17 by bidding those thirsty and desiring drink to come to Jesus. The role of thirsting and desiring satisfaction in God is one John would have his readers embrace.

[33] "Scripture often employs the figure of thirst to depict the desire of the soul for God. 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God,' sang the Psalmist (Ps 42:1; cf. 36:9; 63:1; Isa 55:1). God is a spring of living water (Jer 2:13; cf. Ps 36:9) that assuages thirst and wells up into eternal life (John 4:14)" (Mounce, *Revelation*, 385).

[34] Beale, *Revelation*, 1056.

6. Conclusion

We must remember that for the biblical authors, grammatical choices were the way they got things done with words. I have argued that Revelation is a practical book. John uses the articular substantival participle to establish roles he would have his readers embrace to participate faithfully in the eschatological drama begun in Jesus.

John intends for the recipients of Revelation to read and hear the text he wrote repeatedly. John's use of ἀναγινώσκω and ἀκούω in Revelation 1:3; 22:17, 18 are all in the present tense form. Those who embrace the role of reading and hearing position themselves to embrace other roles in Jesus's drama.

In Revelation, John esteems the role of the conqueror. John's formulaic use of νικάω as an articular substantival participle at the conclusion of each of his letters to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) and in Revelation 15:2 and 21:7, portray the conqueror as an actor who, despite opposition, overcomes the temptation to compromise fidelity to God and is rewarded. The conqueror's victory and reward derive from standing with the Lamb who was slain and who redeems men from every nation for God. The hortatory effect of this role is that believers stand firm, resist the devil, and cling to the Lamb, who will return and reward the faithful.

Reading Revelation compels believers to consider whether we are oriented toward God. Is our compass fixed on the due north of the New Jerusalem and life with God and the Lamb? We who have (ἔχω) ears (2:7, 11, 17, 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22) must respond faithfully to the message we have received. We who have (ἔχω) spiritual minds (13:18; 17:9) must recognize Satan's lies and help God's people guard God's truth. John has no hesitancy to divide humanity into two groups: those who have (ἔχω) their heart's share in the economic structures of the present world system (18:19) or the first resurrection (20:6).

The degree of the believer's commitment to God is displayed in their willingness to suffer, even unto death. John portrays the role of the martyr as the one who is slain (σφάζω, Rev 6:9; 18:24) or beheaded (πελεκίζω, 20:4). What gives believers the courage to embrace extreme, life-ending suffering? Those who embrace the role of the martyr have already embraced the role of finding satisfaction in God, recognizing that what he offers is of more excellent value than any pleasure we could enjoy by human experience apart from him. The one who drinks of God (διψάω, 21:6; 22:17) and desires to receive from him (θέλω, 22:17) will find all they need to finish the fight.

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Hardier than Supposed: The Resurgence of Calvinism Across the 20th Century

— Kenneth J. Stewart —

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Abstract: The past quarter-century's upsurge of interest in Calvinism has shown a strong tendency to under-value movements from the first half of the twentieth century. These earlier movements provided resources which in fact undergird what we have witnessed in our own lifetimes. These earlier efforts were international, transatlantic, and trans-denominational. They were not dominated by marginalized groups or isolated individuals on the fringes of Protestantism but included thinkers and writers drawn from both doctrinally comprehensive and self-consciously conservative churches.

In the first two decades of this century, we witnessed a significant resurgence of Calvinism. In recalling this, we can admit that it is probably for the good that the frenzied publicity of the first decade has faded. That was the era in which *New York Times* writer, Molly Worthen, focused on one particular "new Calvinist" leader in a story with the eye-catching title, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down?"[1] Only weeks later, *Time* magazine announced to its readers that this same "new Calvinism" was one of the ten forces most directly shaping the world.[2] While *Time's* curiosity was friendlier, journalist David Van Biema's evaluation of this movement was nevertheless inexact. In trying to explain the origins of this modern resurgence, his article leap-frogged from Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening era to John Piper; it implied that in-between times Calvinism had been pretty-well off the stage.

Yet the problem displayed by these journalists is, on closer examination, also the problem which has handicapped writers with obvious affinity to today's Calvinist resurgence. They, too, have attempted to account for this resurgence by looking back. The purpose of this essay is two-fold: (1) to illustrate that evangelical Christians across the English-speaking world have a somewhat clouded understanding of how modern Calvinism has emerged, and (2) to point towards a superior explanation of the fortunes of Calvinism across the last century.

Mainstream journalists and their evangelical counterparts have agreed upon at least one idea, that is, the common assumption that Calvinism—whether considered chiefly to revolve around an insistence on the sovereignty of God in salvation (this emphasis can be designated "soteriological Calvinism") or to involve a conformity to and transmission of the doctrinal summaries (catechisms and confessions) of the Reformation era (designated "confessional Calvinism")—was languishing *until* it underwent recovery

[1] Molly Worthen, "Who Would Jesus Smack Down?," *New York Times*, 6 January 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html

[2] David Van Biema, "Ten Ideas Changing the World Right Now: The New Calvinism," *Time*, 12 March 2009, https://tinyurl.com/3c6rpcsv.

in recent decades.[3] Let us survey some attempts at explaining the origins of resurgent Calvinism, beginning with the most recent attempts from within the movement.

1. Post-2000 Explanations

First in a *Christianity Today* article of September 2006, "Young, Restless and Reformed," and subsequently in a fascinating book of the same name, Collin Hansen led the way in this kind of investigation.[4] Witnessing a resurgence of Calvinism while a college student provoked Hansen to ask questions about where this resurgence had come from; two ideas emerged. *First*, it did not come via Grand Rapids (home of traditionally Calvinist publishers and a university and seminary bearing Calvin's name), or via Philadelphia (in whose suburbs stands Westminster Theological Seminary); the influence of such traditional strongholds he designated as "quarantined."[5] *Second*, it had something to do with a growing familiarity with the reprinting and sale of theological books authored during the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.[6] The two ideas, when taken in combination, go some distance towards explaining the character of the "new Calvinism" that Hansen witnessed in various American cities: this is a movement driven by theological convictions transmitted not so much through existing Christian denominations or institutions but through literature—and more often than not, literature from a bygone age.[7]

In the same years, a Scottish writer, the late John J. Murray (1934–2020), was asking similar questions. Yet his concern was not to explain the emergence of the "new Calvinism" then blossoming in North America but to explain the re-emergence of a more traditional conservative evangelical Calvinism, which he believed to have originated in the United Kingdom in the post-World War II period. This, according to Murray, was a story extensively centering around Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), successor to G. Campbell Morgan (1863–1945) at London's Westminster Chapel. Having been exposed to the writings of the late B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) in Toronto in 1932,[8] Lloyd-Jones (already a conservative evangelical) became a kind of an engine driving a recovery of Reformed theology in Britain and the wider English-speaking world. Lloyd-Jones encouraged the republication of classic

[3] The two expressions of Calvinism named, soteriological and confessional, are featured here because they are the strands of Calvinism which have attempted to interpret the resurgence. There is a third expression, "cultural Calvinism" (the application of Reformation principles to society, the arts, and politics) which has not been so directly involved.

[4] Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *CT* (September 2006): 32–38, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2006/09/young-restless-reformed/; Hansen, *Young, Restless and Reformed: A Journey through the New Calvinism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

[5] Hansen, *Young, Restless and Reformed*, 19. It is important, however, to note an acknowledgement of the influence of R. C. Sproul (1939–2017), the Presbyterian theologian associated with Ligonier Ministries (p. 40). In this connection, Tim Challies and Josh Byers presented "a visual history" of "The New Calvinism," https://s3.amazonaws.com/Challies_VisualTheology/new-calvinism-timeline.html.

[6] Hansen's observations of what he found in the bookstore maintained by the Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis are highly suggestive (*Young, Restless and Reformed*, 34).

[7] Hansen returned to assessing the state of the "new Calvinist" movement in "Still Young, Restless, and Reformed? The New Calvinists at 10," *9Marks*, 5 February 2019, https://www.9marks.org/article/still-young-restless-and-reformed-the-new-calvinists-at-10/.

[8] The story of this encounter with Warfield's writings, while in Toronto, is provided in Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899–1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth,1982), 285–86.

theological books upholding the Reformed theological tradition and later lent his support to those who founded the *Banner of Truth* magazine and range of publications.[9] In the constellation of others associated with Lloyd-Jones in this resurgence in his preaching and publication ministry stood the Anglo-Canadian Anglican theologian, J. I. Packer (1926–2020), and the Scottish-American Presbyterian theologian, John Murray (1898–1975), for so long associated with Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia. Deep in the background lay J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) and the Princeton theology. That seminary had experienced an administrative re-organization in 1929, followed by the withdrawal of some of its leading conservative professors in order to found an alternative seminary.[10]

John J. Murray's focus was primarily upon the United Kingdom and almost entirely upon a generation of leaders whose greatest influence had been exerted after 1950. For these churchly Calvinists, the Reformed faith had been in serious eclipse in denominations claiming Reformation roots but was now experiencing a definite resurgence. Though a "new Calvinist" counterpart to that which was arising in the USA was also arising in the United Kingdom in these same years, one could never have guessed this by reading Murray's *Catch the Vision.* UK parallels to the American "new Calvinism" were not explored. This book was out to establish a "line of succession" regarding who were the true leaders of post-World War II Calvinism.[11] Any developments not emanating from this succession held little interest for John J. Murray. In sum, we have observed attempts to account for two distinguishable Calvinist recoveries, recoveries which—though both benefitting by the same reprinted literature—seem to have been at pains to differentiate themselves from the other.

2. Post-1970 Explanations

What will be the effect of our pressing this same question of the roots of recent Calvinist resurgence among representatives of an earlier generation? James M. Boice (1938–2000), long the pastor in Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church, laid out his opinions in a *Christianity Today* article in March 1975. The Boice-initiated *Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology* was then anticipating its second meeting—after a gratifying first conference in 1974. As Boice surveyed the American religious landscape, he saw vital signs of life. The Philadelphia conferences themselves had drawn support from a conservative movement (Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns) within his own United Presbyterian Church USA,[12] and not only Presbyterians but also Anglicans and Conservative Baptists

[9] For example, Lloyd-Jones took the initiative in seeking to have Calvin's *Institutes* republished in the U.K. in 1949. He lent his own edition to the publisher, James Clarke, for reproduction. Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 194–95.

[10] John J. Murray, *Catch the Vision: Roots of the Reformed Recovery* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007). Murray offers interesting information about how the writings of the Princeton theologians circulated in the UK in the 1930's and 1940's through the agency of the Evangelical Bookshop, Belfast (pp. 40–43).

[11] An interesting smaller book, emerging from the same constituency reflected in *Catch the Vision*, was the title, *The New Calvinism Considered* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). Author Jeremy Walker, standing within the succession highlighted by John J. Murray, worked to highlight the excesses of the other, newer movement. See also the stimulating Evangelical Library lecture of Robert W. Oliver, *A Glorious Heritage: The Recovery of the Reformed Faith in Twentieth Century England* (London: Evangelical Library, 1997).

[12] Fellow UPCUSA conservatives, John Gerstner (1914–1996) and R. C. Sproul (1913–2017) were participants in the early PCRT events.

were featured as conference speakers.[13] Writing for *Christianity Today,* Boice saw clear evidence of growth. In addition to the Calvinist enterprises centered in Grand Rapids (which he characterized as "holding"), he observed numerical growth in the recently founded Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, and at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. He noted that nearby Westminster Theological Seminary had just recruited its largest intake of new students in years.[14] Boice foresaw a robust future for Reformed theology in the USA. He was contemplating a movement that would re-orient churches after a period of doctrinal indecision and weak teaching.[15]

3. Post-1950 Expectations

However, less than twenty years before, fellow United Presbyterian, John Gerstner (1914–1996) had observed a much bleaker landscape as he surveyed the American religious scene. Writing for *Christianity Today* in 1959, he addressed the question, "What are the status and prospects of Calvinism in the United States four centuries after the release of Calvin's last edition of the *Institutes*?" Gerstner replied in somber tones: "They are not good. In fact, they are very, very bad." Reflecting his opposition to the absorption of his own denomination (the United Presbyterian Church) into the larger Presbyterian Church, USA, in 1958, Gerstner argued that ecumenical theology (which papered over doctrinal differences) and neo-orthodoxy (which, while professing to uphold the Reformation, re-interpreted it) were making the maintaining of the classic Reformed faith highly difficult.[16] It is not exaggerating matters to say that in 1959 Gerstner felt that Calvinism had been shunted to the margins.[17]

Two Americans (both Baptists) collaborated in 1963 to publish *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented.* Their work, as much as any other, popularized the widespread use of the acronym TULIP, which has since been demonstrated to be only of early twentieth century origin.[18] The 1963 book represents thinking about Calvinism that is more or less disconnected from ongoing research; it is a Calvinism existing on the margins of Protestantism, moving against a current which is at least indifferent. In the same era the British Particular Baptist writer, Ben Warburton, wrote from a vantage point akin to that of Steele and Thomas (who quoted him with approval). In his 1955 work, *Calvinism: Its History and Basic Principles,* Warburton wrote in the face of an attitude which supposed Calvinism to be "truly obsolete and worn out."[19] Like our early twenty-first century Calvinist narrators,

[13] It is significant that in the earliest PCRT conferences, cross-town Westminster Seminary played no role whatsoever. Prominent early participants were Church of England evangelicals, J. I. Packer and John Stott. The Conservative Baptist Ralph Kuiper was an early participant as was the theologian-pastor associated with Dallas Theological Seminary, S. Lewis Johnson.

[14] Westminster Seminary was not involved in the early PCRT conferences; they were hosted by a congregation (Tenth) and an organization (Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns) still within the mainline.

[15] James M. Boice, "Is the Reformed Faith Being Rediscovered?," *CT* (March 1975): 12–14.

[16] John Gerstner, "Calvinism: Four Centuries After," *CT* (January 1959): 9–12.

[17] It is significant that Gerstner's perspective was as somber as it was since he was a participant in the trans-denominational American Calvinistic Conferences described below and (later) was a featured speaker in the Boice-led Philadelphia Conferences.

[18] On Steele and Thomas and the TULIP device, see Kenneth J. Stewart, "The Points of Calvinism: Retrospect and Prospect," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 26.2 (2008): 187–203.

[19] Ben A. Warburton, *Calvinism: Its History and Basic Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955). The work had first appeared in a much more modest edition, entitled *Calvinism: Historically and Doctrinally Considered* (London: Farncombe, 1913): 12.

such mid-century writers shared the perception that Calvinism had sunk very low and been shunted to the margins of church and society. They foresaw no immediate prospect of Calvinism undergoing a resurgence of one kind or another.

4. The Pre-1950 Scene

It would be natural to assume that the somber outlook which we have found displayed in the 1950 s (but which is overcome by the 1970s) prevailed also before 1950. After all, did not the theological decline which John Gerstner and others found so discouraging exist before 1950 as well as at the time of their writing? Yet the evidence that we will bring forward suggests a very different picture. We will consider it in three respects.

4.1. The Continuing Resilience of the Princeton Theology *at Princeton*

For too long a mythology has circulated that from the departure of J. Gresham Machen and his circle from Princeton for Philadelphia in 1929, the vaunted "Princeton theology," a kind of "gold standard" of conservative evangelical and Reformed orthodoxy across the English-speaking world, was eclipsed at Princeton. The Princeton theology is widely accepted to have found its new home in the seminary founded by Machen at Philadelphia.[20] This view of things was popularized in a 1940 book by Edwin Rian, entitled *The Presbyterian Conflict*, and it has received modern expression in an article published as recently as 1980 in the *Journal of Presbyterian History.*[21] In fact the majority of the Princeton Seminary faculty, Calvinists all, remained in place.

Among the continuing faculty were Charles Erdman (1866–1960) in Pastoral Theology, Frederick Loetscher Sr. (1875–1966) in Church History, William Park Armstrong (1874–1944) in New Testament, Caspar Wistar Hodge Jr. (1870–1937) in Theology, and Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) in Biblical Theology. All these experienced educators remained at their posts and trained many students, some of whom would be their eventual successors. The one appointed seminary president in 1936, John A. Mackay (1889–1983) had been a pupil of B. B. Warfield at the time of his graduation in 1915. The church historian at Princeton between 1941 and 1974, Lefferts A. Loetscher (1904–1981), was a 1925 graduate of the seminary who returned to acquire the ThM in 1928.[22] Bruce Metzger (1914–2007), a graduate of 1938, eventually succeeded his teacher, William Park Armstrong, in New Testament. Armstrong had earlier been the mentor of Machen. It was not simply that Princeton continued in an essentially conservative stance through the employing of its own pre-1929 graduates. In the year of the reorganization (1929), Princeton Seminary appointed as professor of Missions and the History of Religion Samuel Zwemer (1867–1952), the renowned missionary to the Muslim world. The beloved teacher of homiletics and pastoral theology, Andrew W. Blackwood, joined the faculty in that same critical year. When the theologian, John Murray left the Princeton faculty after a one-year appointment and followed Gresham

[20] From the start, there were also sharp discontinuities between the new seminary at Philadelphia and the old at Princeton. This was so most noticeably in the field of apologetics, but it was true also in the marked deference paid to the Dutch Reformed theological tradition. The proportion of faculty members from this branch of the Reformed family ran much higher, from the start, in Philadelphia than in Princeton.

[21] Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); John Hart, "Princeton Theological Seminary: The Reorganization of 1929," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 58.2 (1980): 124–40.

[22] James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 451–52.

Machen to Philadelphia in 1930, his place on the faculty was filled by John Kuizenga (1867–1949), a conservative Reformed Church in America theologian from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. From 1940, Kuizenga would fill the Charles Hodge Chair of Theology.[23] Thus, for a decade or more beyond the reorganization of 1929, the theological stance of Princeton's faculty was extensively as it had been previously.[24] With this fact established, a number of tangential developments can be seen in proper perspective. These have to do with the fact that Princeton graduates from the decades prior to 1929 were themselves propagating their understanding of the Reformed faith far and wide.

4.2. Notable Pre-1929 Seminary Alumni

Gerrit Verkuyl (1872–1967), a 1904 graduate of the seminary, had gone on to gain a PhD in New Testament at Leipzig before returning to the USA to direct the Christian education division of his denomination, the PCUSA. We remember him today for the project he undertook in his retirement, the Berkeley modern language version of the New Testament (released in 1945).[25] Since 1926, the 1915 graduate of Princeton Seminary, Louis Berkhof, had been professor of dogmatics in the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids. Beginning in 1932 he released, in three parts, what would eventually be known from 1941 as his *Systematic Theology.* This textbook was used in Louisville, Columbia, and Princeton seminaries (among other institutions) from the time of its release.[26] Berkhof gladly acknowledged his indebtedness to Herman Bavinck (1873–1921) as well as his former Princeton mentors, B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos.[27] At Princeton Seminary, in the same years as Berkhof, was Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895–1960). Leaving the seminary in 1917 without graduating, Barnhouse joined the American forces in the late stages of the Great War (1914–1918) and then remained in Europe after the armistice to engage in missionary and pastoral work. By 1927, he was called as pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, where he remained until his death in 1960. Known for his premillennialism, Barnhouse was also a forthright Calvinist who made his views known in expository sermons (regularly published in book form), in his broadcast ("The Bible Study Hour"), in a magazine (*Eternity*), and (after WWII) in preaching missions which took him to Cambridge University and the British Keswick Conventions. Especially in his student ministry at Cambridge, Barnhouse's forthright Calvinistic views represented an emphasis not heard there for some time.[28]

[23] "Kuizenga, John" in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, ed. D. G. Hart and Mark Noll (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R: 1999), 139.

[24] See the implications of this fact as interpreted by James H. Moorehead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 422. The appointment of Kuizenga, a theological conservative in 1930, was noted as significant by the *New York Times* of May 7, 1930.

[25] This version was intended as an alternative to the then-in-process Revised Standard Version. The Grand Rapids publisher, Zondervan, took on the Berkeley version and provided Verkuyl with a team who produced a contemporary version of the Old Testament, with the finished product being named the *Modern Language Bible.* F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible* (London: Lutterworth, 1961), 220. Bruce termed the effort "a more conservative counterpart to the R.S.V." (p. 221).

[26] Evidently, it was Michigander John Kuizenga who introduced the use of Berkhof's textbook at Princeton.

[27] Details of Berkhof's life and written works is provided in Henry Zwaanstra, "Louis Berkhof," in *Reformed Theology in America*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 153–71.

[28] J. A. Carpenter, "Donald Grey Barnhouse" in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, 26, and B. J. Leonard, "Barnhouse, Donald Grey" in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 34–36. Barnhouse's controversial visits to Cambridge are

Overlapping with Barnhouse's years at Princeton was Floyd E. Hamilton (1890–1969). Having obtained the Bachelor of Divinity in 1919, Hamilton returned to complete the ThM in 1926. Serving as a Presbyterian missionary educator in Korea, Hamilton eventually published well-known books in theology and apologetics in English such as *The Basis of the Christian Faith* (1927) and *The Reformed Faith in the Modern World* (1932). Future Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, GA) historical theologian, William Childs Robinson, completed the Princeton ThM in 1921. Future Fuller Seminary theologian, the Hungarian Bela Vassady (1902–1992), had completed the Princeton ThM under Caspar Wistar Hodge Jr. in 1925. Future Fuller Seminary colleague Everett F. Harrison (1902–1999) graduated from Princeton in 1927. The year 1932 was notable for friends of the Reformed faith because of the release by Eerdmans of Grand Rapids of the still-widely read *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* by Loraine Boettner. The book reflected research for which Boettner had received the Princeton ThM in 1929. At the time of his book's release, Boettner was on the faculty of Pikeville College, a PCUSA institution in eastern Kentucky.[29]

4.3. Life inside Princeton after 1929

In the academic year immediately following the reorganization of 1929, seminarians at Princeton heard an interesting series of Stone Lectures delivered by Valentine Hepp (1879–1950), the successor to Herman Bavinck at Amsterdam's Free University. These lectures (published in the same year) were entitled "Calvinism and the Philosophy of Nature."[30] Princeton Seminary alumnus George Johnson of Lincoln University gave the 1931 Stone Lectures on "Evangelical Calvinism and Modern Problems." In the 1935 Stone Lectures, seminarians at Princeton heard a series of lectures from a Pittsburgh minister and professor of Pastoral Theology in Western Seminary, Allegheny, Hugh Thompson Kerr Sr. (1871–1950). These Stone Lectures, published as *A God-Centered Faith: Studies in the Reformed Faith*, offered a stirring defense of the sovereignty of God in world affairs, in salvation, and in worship.[31] In 1940, with World War being waged in Europe, Princeton Seminary students heard lectures on "John Calvin and Modern Protestantism" by British Congregationalist theologian J. S. Whale (1896–1997). The notion that at or about 1929 Princeton had raised the white flag of surrender regarding Reformed theology and evangelical Calvinism represents a serious over-simplification of a complex situation. Notable graduates from before the seminary's 1929 reorganization continued to ably defend the Reformed position. For at least a decade beyond that lamentable reorganization, Princeton continued to train soundly conservative and Reformed candidates for the ministry. And when, beginning in 1944, Princeton Seminary first granted the Th D for advanced theological study, it was evident that the seminary was a destination of choice for many theological conservatives who went on to take their places in American colleges

described in O. R. Barclay, *From Cambridge to the World: 125 Years of Student Witness* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 137–38.

[29] Boettner taught Bible and Theology at Pikeville 1929–1937. "Boettner, Loraine," Wikipedia .

[30] Published under that title in the same year by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

[31] Hugh Thompson Kerr, *A God Centered Faith* (Chicago: Revell, 1935). It would appear that Kerr represented the large moderate party in the Presbyterian Church USA as described by Bradley Longfield in *The Presbyterian Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). He cordially supported the Westminster Standards and showed himself well abreast of Reformation history, theology, and liturgy.

and seminaries.[32] It needs also to be said that Princeton Seminary was by no means a solitary long-established institution teaching the Reformed faith in the inter-war years and beyond.[33]

5. A Trans-Atlantic League of Broadly Calvinist Scholarship

Amsterdam's Free University and affiliate denomination, the Gereformeerde Kerken influenced the wider Reformed world far more in the inter-war period than is currently acknowledged. Through invitations extended to its theological professors to give Stone Lectures in Princeton Seminary[34] and partly through the fact that its American daughter church, the Christian Reformed Church, had come to look on Princeton as a trustworthy institution for its ministers pursuing advanced study, Holland's Gereformeerde Kerken pursued definite initiatives in building trans-Atlantic Calvinist relations. A prime example of this was an international speaking tour undertaken by theologian Valentine Hepp in 1924. This promoted the idea of an international Calvinist federation in a time when the transnational League of Nations was struggling to assert itself.[35] The Free University pursued a similar international interest through its invitation in 1927 to the Scottish church historian, Donald Maclean, to deliver a set of lectures later published as *Aspects of Scottish Church History.*[36] The theologians of the Free University and its supportive denomination, the Gereformeerde Kerken, also followed quite closely the growing tensions within Princeton Seminary from the mid-1920s onwards. Valentine Hepp, upon completing his Princeton Stone Lectures in 1930 journeyed to Philadelphia to visit with J. Gresham Machen and the faculty of the newly-founded Westminster Seminary.[37] From the start, the perspectives of the Free

[32] Moorehead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture,* 424. An early doctoral graduate of Princeton was Eugene Osterhaven (1915–2004), professor of theology in Western Seminary, Holland. He graduated from Princeton in 1948. In the same year, NT commentator William Hendriksen (1900–1992) also gained the Princeton ThD. Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988), long professor of theology in Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, received the Princeton doctorate in 1953. Another doctoral candidate, J. Barton Payne, found the completion of the Princeton ThD (1949) trying. See Simon Kistemaker, "William Hendriksen" in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); and Philip Barton Payne, "John Barton Payne," in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century*, 345–55.

[33] It is important to draw attention also to the ongoing role of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, which continued to train orthodox and confessional ministers well into the 1950s. Light is shed on this institution by David B. Calhoun's *Our Southern Zion: Old Columbia Seminary 1828–1927* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012) and *Pleading for a Reformation Vision: The Life and Selected Writings of William Childs Robinson, 1897–1982* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013).

[34] We have referred, above, to the 1930 Stone Lectures delivered by the Free University's Valentine Hepp. Hepp's predecessor, Herman Bavinck, had delivered the 1908 Stone Lectures, *The Philosophy of Revelation.* In 1898, Bavinck's predecessor, Abraham Kuyper, had himself been Stone lecturer, delivering his *Lectures on Calvinism.*

[35] Hepp's speaking tour brought him to the USA in 1924. It is described by George Harinck in an essay, "Valentijn Hepp in America: Attempts at International Exchange in the 1920's," in *Sharing the Reformed Tradition: The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846–1996,* ed. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU, 1996). Hepp's argument in favor of an international Calvinist federation was eventually put into printed form in a booklet of 45 pages: *Internationaal Calvinisme* (Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1929).

[36] D. W. Bebbington, "Calvin and British Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *Calvin & His Influence, 1509–2009*, ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 294.

[37] Harinck, "Valentijn Hepp in America," 129–34.

University and its supporting constituency were well represented at Westminster.[38] With such an international concern to see the Reformed faith advanced, other Dutch initiatives could be expected.

6. A New Theological Journal

It is quite well known that coinciding with the administrative re-organization of Princeton Seminary in 1929 came the demise of the *Princeton Theological Review.* The then-editor, Old Testament scholar Oswald T. Allis (1880–1973), had determined to follow Gresham Machen to Philadelphia.[39] Princeton would not have its own theological periodical again until the 1944 launch of *Theology Today;* the Princeton offshoot, Westminster, would not launch its own periodical, the *Westminster Theological Journal,* until 1939.[40] The old *Princeton Theological Review* had gained an international reputation as a forum for serious conservative biblical and theological scholarship. Would anything fill the void created by its termination?

What is much less well known is that in the year of the old *Review's* demise, there was inaugurated a new journal, *The Evangelical Quarterly*. It commenced where the old journal had left off. Two professors at the Free Church College, Edinburgh, Donald Maclean (1869–1943) and John R. Mackay (1865–1939), initially shared the editorship.[41] They would shortly be assisted by Oswald T. Allis, formerly of Princeton and now of Westminster Seminary, and another Old Testament Scholar, G. Ch. Aalders (1880–1961) of Amsterdam's Free University. Examining the *Evangelical Quarterly* in its initial decades, one finds the senior generation of Princeton scholars continuing to advance their orthodox Calvinist views in the company of other scholars from within the USA, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Hungary, and South Africa.[42] This was all consistent with its aim to provide "reverent exposition of the Reformed faith." [43]

The lead issue of 1929 featured an article by Caspar Wistar Hodge Jr. on "The Reformed Faith." Charles Erdman, Princeton's pastoral theologian, is also found there. Soon one sees articles on World Mission and World Religions by the same seminary's Samuel Zwemer and an extended series of articles

[38] J. Gresham Machen's young colleague in New Testament at the new seminary was his former Princeton student and recent Free University doctoral graduate, Ned B. Stonehouse.

[39] "Allis, Oswald T." in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America,* 17. Allis resigned from Westminster in 1935 because he would not endorse the rival mission agency which J. Gresham Machen had promoted and for support of which Machen was eventually removed from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church USA.

[40] It was highly significant that in the second installment of the first volume of the *Westminster Theological Journal* a capable article by Lawrence B. Gilmore appeared, surveying stirrings in the Reformed world of the type surveyed in this essay. See his "The Present State, Prospects and Progress of the Reformed Theology" *WTJ* 1.2 (1939): 65–88.

[41] The crucial role played by faculty members at Edinburgh's Free Church of Scotland College in the launch of the *Evangelical Quarterly* and the beginning of the 1930s international Calvinist congresses is highlighted in the present author's "In the Vanguard of the 1930s' Reformed Resurgence: Edinburgh's Free Church College," *EvQ* 95 (2024): 1–19. In preparing the latter article, I was materially assisted by access to the M Th thesis of Iain K. Macleod, "The Contemporary Significance and Continuing Relevance of the Ministry of Donald Maclean" (MTh diss., Edinburgh Theological Seminary, 2021).

[42] I am grateful to the website, biblicalstudies.org, which makes early issues of the *Evangelical Quarterly* available online.

[43] F. F. Bruce, "Evangelical Quarterly," in *Scottish Dictionary of Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 305.

on the Calvinist "ordo salutis" by a Southern theologian, Thomas Cary Johnson (1859–1936), by then retired from Union Theological Seminary, Virginia. There is fresh light on Bucer study by the German Calvin scholar of Halle University, August Lang (1867–1945), and contributions from the Calvin biographer Émile Doumerge (1844–1937).[44] Hungarian Calvinism is represented in the writing of the Budapest theologian, Jenö Sebestyén.[45] French Calvinism is represented through articles by the Calvin biographer Jean Cadiér (1898–1981) and the Paris Reformed theologian Auguste Lecerf (1872–1943).[46] We also begin to see contributions of the Free University of Amsterdam faculty of theology members, G. Ch. Aalders (1889–1961), H. H. Kuyper (1864–1945), Jan Ridderbos (1879–1960), Valentine Hepp (1871– 1950), and F. W. Grosheide (1881–1972).

Though a good proportion of contributors to the *Quarterly* were senior scholars, there are clear exceptions to this, such as the young theologian of Columbia Seminary, William Childs Robinson (1897–1982). We also find contributions from youthful faculty members of the newly founded Westminster Theological Seminary: Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) and Edward J. Young (1907–1968). On the UK side, there is the young Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007), who was not yet on the Faculty of New College, Edinburgh, and the promising Anglican Calvin scholar T. H. L. Parker (1916–2016). We also see numerous contributions from the young Geoffrey Bromiley (1915– 2009), who would later make a name as a historical theologian at Fuller Seminary and as a translator of Barth. This broadly-Reformed orientation of the *Evangelical Quarterly* underwent no significant change under its initial editors, remained the same under a new editor, J. H. S. Burleigh, in 1943 (at which time the management of the journal was assumed by British Inter-Varsity Press) and took only a slightly more eclectic turn under F. F. Bruce (1910–1990) when he assumed the editorship in 1950. It is under Bruce's editorship that we find two early contributions from J. I. Packer (1926–2020).[47]

7. International Conferences in Europe and the U.S.A.

The *Evangelical Quarterly* was hardly an isolated example of this international Calvinist resurgence. In the same spirit, an even wider international evangelical Calvinism was promoted from 1932 onward by a series of "International Calvinist Congresses" which drew delegates from South Africa, the United Kingdom, the USA, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands. The drive leading to the organization of such conferences had a humble origin in the 8020s in the annual conferences of the relatively unknown Sovereign Grace Union within the United Kingdom. A visiting Dutch minister of the Gereformeerde Kerken, Dr. J. N. Van Lonkhuysen (1873–1942), presented an academic paper at their 1928 conference and subsequently helped connect this organization with interested parties in his denomination and in

[44] Lang had first come to the attention of the English-speaking world by his contributing an essay to the 1909 commemorative volume edited by B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and the Reformation* (New York: Revell, 1909).

[45] See a helpful introduction to this Hungarian theologian in Steve Bishop, "Jenö Sebestyén: the Hungarian Kuyper," *Findings* 6 (2024): 30–36.

[46] On Lecerf, see Daniel Reid, "Auguste Lecerf: An Historical Study of the 'First of the Modern French Calvinists'" (MTh diss., La Faculté de Théologie Réformée, 1979); and Steve Bishop, "August Lecerf: The Most Important French Neo-Calvinist of the Twentieth Century," *NeoCalviniana* (2024), https://journal.neocalviniana.org/article/115324-auguste-lecerf-the-most-influential-french-neocalvinist-of-the-twentieth-century.

[47] J. I. Packer, "The Puritan Treatment of Justification," *EvQ* 24.3 (1952): 131–143; "Keswick and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification," *EvQ* 27.3 (1955): 153–67.

Amsterdam's Free University.[48] The leadership of the Sovereign Grace Union was invited to Amsterdam and witnessed in the Netherlands a more vigorous Calvinist movement than existed in the United Kingdom. From this root the concept of a truly international series of conferences sprang up.[49] In the pre-war years, these semi-annual "International Calvinistic Congresses" were held in London (1932), Amsterdam (1934), Geneva (1936), and Edinburgh (1938). These were not ecclesiastical assemblies, encompassing delegates sent by denominations, but voluntary gatherings of persons who were eager to see the Reformed agenda kept alive. In these gatherings we meet many of the individuals who have already been publishing essays since 1929 in the *Evangelical Quarterly* as well as others.[50] One fascinating aspect of this movement is the way in which these conferences drew together supporters of the Reformed faith from theologically inclusive denominations, as well as their conservative counterparts.

In the USA, news of these European conferences helped to spur the creation of events which more or less mirrored those already underway in Europe. By 1939 at Paterson, New Jersey, there began a series of interdenominational theological conferences, led by Christian Reformed minister, Jacob T. Hoogstra (1900–1979), and drawing on presenters representing the Reformed Church in America, Hungarian Reformed Church, Christian Reformed Church, and various American Presbyterian bodies. There were also European visitors on hand as presenters. Names with which we are already familiar from the first decade of the *Evangelical Quarterly* are there as participants: Dr. John Macleod (1872–1948) of Edinburgh was there alongside Prof. G. Ch. Aalders of Amsterdam. The young John Murray (1898–1975), now at Philadelphia, was on hand to give a major paper. A gathering of 500 at the initial Paterson event helped to ensure that there would be follow-up events.[51] Published remains of subsequent conferences held in 1942 (in which Harold J. Ockenga was a keynote speaker), 1946, 1952, 1956, and 1959, all edited by John T. Hoogstra, illustrate that this was a vigorous movement drawing together a steadily widening circle of Reformed sympathizers.[52]

[48] Steve Bishop has illumined Van Lonkhuysen's varied career on both sides of the Atlantic in an article, "Jan van Lonkhuysen: International Ambassador for Neo Calvinism," *CTJ* 59 (2024): 295–322.

[49] The seminal influence of Henry Atherton of the S.G.U. and the stimulation provided by his introduction to the vigorous Calvinism of the Gereformeerde Kerken in the late 1920's is narrated in D. W. Bebbington, "Lloyd Jones and the Interwar Calvinist Resurgence," in *Engaging with Martyn Lloyd Jones*, ed. Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 47, 48; D. W. Bebbington, "Calvin and British Evangelicalism in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Calvin and His Influence, 1509–2009,* ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Steve Bishop, "A History of the Reformational Movement in Britain: the Pre-WWII Years," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 80.4 (2015): 3–4.

[50] The *Evangelical Quarterly* itself provided a report on the 1938 Edinburgh Conference: S. L. Hunt, "The Fourth International Calvinistic Congress," *EvQ* 10.4 (1938): 390–96. The sequence of four pre-war bi-annual conferences is referred to in an interesting entry on the League of Nations website: http://www.lonsea.de/pub/org/934. The author has examined the published proceedings of the 1932 (London), the 1934 (Amsterdam), 1936 (Geneva) and 1938 (Edinburgh) conferences. This pre-war movement re-grouped in Amsterdam in1948 and subsequently held re-branded conferences as the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action beginning at Montpellier (1953).

[51] Details of the conference program, presenters, and major papers were circulated in a post-conference hardbound volume, Jacob T. Hoogstra, ed., *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1939).

[52] The author also has in his possession the published proceedings from 1956 (Jacob T. Hoogstra, ed. *American Calvinism: A Survey* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957]) and 1959 (Jacob T. Hoogstra, ed., *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959]). The standard of the conference presentations continued to be high during this entire two-decade period as the conferences drew on both American and European scholars.

The literary activity demonstrated in the *Evangelical Quarterly* and the conference activity just described in Europe soon encouraged the publication of a new periodical in the U SA. This was the *Calvin Forum,* which was launched from Grand Rapids in 1935. Under the editorial leadership of Calvin Seminary professor Clarence Bouma (1891–1962), there appeared a new periodical which ran from 1935–1955. A monthly magazine, the *Forum* drew on a range of writers from Reformed Church of America, Hungarian and French Reformed Churches within the USA, the Christian Reformed Church, various American Presbyterian bodies, as well as foreign churches to comment on contemporary theology, world events, and ecclesiastical affairs. Bouma, like his seminary colleague, Louis Berkhof, was a Princeton Seminary alumnus who had wide horizons. Bouma maintained ongoing contact with the editors of the *Evangelical Quarterly.*[53] The *Calvin Forum* was aimed at a slightly more popular audience than the *Evangelical Quarterly;* it had a readership abroad as well as at home. In 1936, Dr. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, still ministering in Wales, wrote to say how much he valued it.[54] Readers from as far afield as Australia, South Africa, and Scotland said the same. The *Forum* represented a commendable aspiration within the sponsoring Christian Reformed community that American Calvinists could link arms to advance the Reformed cause within North America while maintaining ties with the European movements already named.

8. What the Observers Saw

With all this transatlantic activity, there were not lacking observers who were ready to comment on this resurgence. As early as 1936, the quite liberal American historical theologian A. C. McGiffert Jr. (1893–1993) posed the question, "Is Calvin Coming Back?" While he was aware that new interest in the Reformer of Geneva was being generated by the writings of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, he did not see much of a following for the Swiss theologians in 1936 America. What he did see, however, was how formerly liberal American theologians were returning to traditional conceptions of original sin and its spread throughout a culture. It is clear that McGiffert has in mind contemporary American theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) and Douglas Horton (1891–1968), writers he describes as "religious realists."[55] From Budapest, a similar judgment was expressed in the same year by the Hungarian John Victor in an *Evangelical Quarterly* article, "The Revival of Calvinism." Victor believed he was witnessing a resurgence of both Calvinism and Lutheranism, "part of a larger phenomenon, i.e., a return to the teaching of the Reformation." This was a theological course correction in light of the hard lessons learned in the Great War.[56] The Baptist minister Ernest F. Kevan, just made principal of the London Bible College (f.1943), published an article in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, "The Re-Emergence of Calvinism," in mid-war. Kevan was able to provide five lines of explanation for the current phenomenon.

[53] Invited to speak to a July 1939 international student conference at Cambridge University (out of which movement would grow the post-war International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), Bouma lingered in the UK long enough to visit Donald Maclean in Scotland. His contribution to the Cambridge conference was published (with others) in *Christ Our Freedom* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1939). Bouma's account of the conference is provided in *Calvin Forum* 5.1–2 (1939): 7–9. He paid tribute to Maclean at his passing in 1943, recalling their meeting in the summer of 1939. *Calvin Forum* 8.8 (1943): 155, 156.

[54] See D. M. Lloyd Jones, "A Voice from Wales," *Calvin Forum* 2.4 (1936): 92.

[55] A. C. McGiffert Jr., "Is Calvin Coming Back?" *Christendom* 1 (1936): 310–22, note especially p. 319.

[56] John Victor, "The Revival of Calvinism," *EvQ* 8.1 (1936): 36–46, note especially p. 39.

One in particular stood out: in the then decade-old struggle against totalitarian regimes, the Reformed emphasis on the transcendence and sovereignty of God was never more needed.[57]

9. A Surge of Publications about Calvin and Calvinism in the 1930–1950 Period

With all this trans-Atlantic activity in theological periodicals and international conferences, it was only natural to find that—in spite of the austerities of economic depression, world war, and its aftermath—there was a surge in the publication of books and monographs. The period was inaugurated by the 1931 release of a substantial volume by Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics.*[58] A sympathetic biography of Calvin was issued by the English writer, R. N. Carew Hunt, in 1933.[59] The publishing house of the PCUSA, the Westminster Press, issued a fresh printing of Calvin's *Institutes* in 1936, complete with an introduction by the late B. B. Warfield (d.1921). From pre-war Germany came Wilhelm Niesel's *The Theology of Calvin* (1938).[60] In 1939, Hugh Thomson Kerr Sr. (whom we have already met as a Princeton Stone lecturer) released a volume which is still in print 80 years later, *A Compend of the Institutes of John Calvin.*[61]

The principal of Bristol Baptist College, Arthur Dakin, released a very supportive work simply entitled *Calvinism* in 1940. In a chapter, significantly entitled "Revived Interest in Calvinism," Dakin explained that quite apart from interest recently stirred regarding Calvin and his fellow Reformers by the Swiss theologian, Barth, there were solid reasons for reading Calvin and taking him seriously. He commended Calvin as the remedy for an "anthropocentrism" which had characterized too much theology in the previous hundred years.[62] By 1947, the young Anglican church historian, T. H. L. Parker (1916–2016), who had trained at Cambridge under Congregationalist theologian, John S. Whale, released the first of his many works on Calvin: *The Oracles of God: A Study in the Preaching of Calvin.*[63] Parker had been publishing his Calvin research in the *Evangelical Quarterly* since 1940.[64] We remember Parker today as the author of two Calvin biographies as well as studies on the Reformer's biblical commentaries.[65] He would rapidly follow up the release of *Oracles of God* with a second important work, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in Calvin's Theology.*[66] By 1949, the American scholar Paul T. Fuhrmann had

[57] E. F. Kevan, "The Re-Emergence of Calvinism," *EvQ* 15.3 (1943): 216–23.

[58] Georgia Harkness (New York: Holt, 1931). It needs to be acknowledged that Harkness was not herself keen on Calvin.

[59] R. N. Carew Hunt, *Calvin* (London: Centenary, 1933).

[60] Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1956). The 1938 *Die Theologie Calvins* was only translated into English following the war.

[61] Hugh Thomson Kerr Sr., *A Compend of the Institutes of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939). Kerr's son, Hugh T. Kerr, followed with a *Compend of Luther's Theology* in 1943.

[62] Arthur Dakin, *Calvinism* (London: Duckworth, 1940). See ch. 15.

[63] London: Lutterworth, 1947.

[64] So, for instance, T. H. L. Parker, "A Bibliography and Survey of the British Study of Calvin: 1900– 1940," *EvQ* 18.2 (1946): 123–31.

[65] Parker's two biographies of Calvin were *A Portrait of Calvin* (London, SCM,1960) and *John Calvin: A Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster,1974). An appreciation of Parker's career is published on the website of the evangelical Anglican journal, *Churchman*, https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/thl-parker-on-calvin-the-reformation-and-justification/

[66] T. H. L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in Calvin's Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1952).

translated Calvin's 1537 *Instruction in Faith,* Calvin's simplified version of his first *Institutes.*[67] That same year, the Grand Rapids publisher, Eerdmans, commenced the republication of the complete series of commentaries, tracts, and *Institutes* of Calvin first published in fresh translation in the early Victorian period.[68]

Another guide to Calvin, produced by Adam Hunter, the librarian of New College, Edinburgh, was the sympathetic 1950 volume, *The Teaching of Calvin.* It was an attempt to make the teaching of the Reformer available in an accessible form in the post-war period. Like T. H. L. Parker, Hunter had been supplying segments of this eventual book to the *Evangelical Quarterly* for a decade beforehand.[69] Specialized volumes devoted to single aspects of Calvin's teaching were rapidly appearing in these post-war years. Having alluded to Parker's volumes we can now consider the published doctoral research of the young T. F. Torrance (1913–2007), *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*.[70] There would soon follow other published dissertations such as that of Ronald Wallace's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacraments,*[71] John F. Jansen's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (1956), and Paul Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (1957).[72]

French Calvinists were not idle in this period, from 1930 to the 1950s. An active contributor to the *Evangelical Quarterly* was the Paris Reformed theologian, Auguste Lecerf (1872–1943). He left behind his *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* (1949).[73] Many of us have read with appreciation the compact biography of Calvin by Jean Cadiér (1898–1981), *The Man God Mastered* (1960).[74] Cadièr had also edited a fresh three-volume edition of the *Institutes* (1955–1958). A pupil of Auguste Lecerf, Pierre Charles Marcel (1910–1992) became increasingly well known to readers of English through his books on preaching and on the doctrine of baptism.[75] In the university of Strasbourg, François Wendel (1905–1972) produced a dissertation which was published as *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought;* this was widely used as a textbook in French, English, and German.[76]

If it should occur to us that the bulk of these examples have come from the United Kingdom and France, it is easy to point out that American writers were also industrious in this post-war period. In this same era, a Reformed Church in America minister, Leroy Nixon, edited three sets of Calvin sermons for publication.[77] Having completed his doctoral studies at Zurich, Edward A. Dowey (1918–

[67] John Calvin, *Instruction in Faith (1537)*, trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949).

[68] All were the products of the Calvin Translation Society, established at Edinburgh in 1843.

[69] Adam Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin* (London: Clarke, 1950).

[70] Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1952).

[71] Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

[72] John F. Jansen, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (London: Lutterworth, 1956); Paul Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957). These titles, by American authors, are included in this largely U K grouping because they reflect research done in this period.

[73] Auguste Lecerf, *An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. S. L.-H. (London: Lutterworth, 1949).

[74] Jean Cadiér, *The Man God Mastered: A Brief Biography of John Calvin*, trans. O. R. Johnston (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960). This work was the first work on Calvin and Calvinism acquired by this writer.

[75] Pierre Charles Marcel, *The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, trans. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (London: Lutterworth, 1959); *The Relevance of Preaching*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963).

[76] François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1963); "François Wendel (1905–1972)," Musée protestante, https://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/francois-wendel-1905-1972-2/.

[77] John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ*, ed. and trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950); *The Mystery of Godliness*, ed. and trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), *Sermons from Job*, ed. and trans. Le-

2003) published his *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology.*[78] Shortly, the Calvinist constituency took special note of the release of John T. McNeill's *The History and Character of Calvinism* (1954), which provided a digest of Calvin research as of that time.[79] To say that this book has stood the test of time is something of an understatement; 70 years after its release, it is still in print from its original publisher. The Christian Reformed Church theologian, Jacob T. Hoogstra, assembled an impressive series of international and interdenominational essays for the 1959 Calvin celebrations, *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet.*[80] The Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia theologian John Murray (1898–1975) demonstrated his participation in this surge of scholarship with his 1960 study, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty.*[81]

Having reached the 1950s—in which we have seen that some contemporary conservative Calvinist observers were certain that the outlook was uniformly bleak (at least outside strictly conservative settings)—we must still reckon with one of the Christian publishing phenomena of that decade: the eventual release (commencing in 1954) in twenty-six volumes of the *Library of Christian Classics.* The classics were hard cover volumes, released simultaneously in London and Philadelphia, comprised of treatises (in whole or in part) from the whole sweep of the history of the church from the second through the sixteenth centuries. For our purposes here, we can simply note that of twenty-six volumes in total, four volumes were given over to the writings of Calvin. The two-volume edition of the 1559 *Institutes* was a scholarly edition complete with copious footnotes and indices.[82] It had to compete at its release with two nineteenth century editions, both of which were still in print, but it gradually established itself as the premier edition. A third volume, given the title *Calvin: Theological Treatises*,[83] provided the reader with a sampling of the writings which had earlier appeared in a three-volume Victorian edition which bore the name *Tracts and Treatises.* A fourth volume, edited by Joseph Haroutunian and entitled *Calvin Commentaries* (1958) provided excerpts from his renowned exegetical works.[84]

roy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952). I am indebted to I. John Hesselink's essay, "Calvin Studies in North America," in *Restoration Through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited*, ed. Henk van den Belt (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 223–24, for this data.

[78] Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). The book is now in its third edition.

[79] John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954). The book is still in print as this paper is written.

[80] Jacob T. Hoogstra, *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959). This volume reproduced the conference papers given at a meeting of the American Calvinistic Congress, described above.

[81] John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960). By 1964, Murray would release *Calvin as Theologian and Expositor* (London: Evangelical Library, 1964), a print version of the 1964 Evangelical Library lecture.

[82] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960).

[83] John Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954).

[84] John Calvin, *Calvin Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Joseph Haroutunian (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958). The release of Calvin's *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God,* also edited and translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth, 1961), seems to represent an extension of the editorial work Reid had done for the 1954 L. C. C. volume. Interestingly, Reid was another who had contributed to the *Evangelical Quarterly* in the 1940's. See for example his "The Church and the Modern State," *EvQ* 15.2 (1943): 91–118.

10. Implications of the Above

First, a caveat. The inclusion of an author or a title in this survey of twentieth century periodicals and writers carries with it no unqualified endorsement. Every reader of this essay will be able to identify one or more authors or titles about which serious questions might be asked. But with this acknowledged, please consider:

A. That the claim made for the "new Calvinism" that it is indebted to neither Grand Rapids nor Westminster, muddies a complicated question. There is in fact a largely-unacknowledged debt owed by the new Calvinism to earlier Reformed scholarship that has only been hinted at by passing references to the late R. C. Sproul (the one-time protégé of John Gerstner) and to Wayne Grudem, author of a widely-popular *Systematic Theology* (1994).[85] Grudem, for his part, has never disguised the fact that he is an alumnus of Westminster Seminary. [86] John Piper, in acknowledging his role as a senior figure in "new Calvinism," has spoken of the ways in which he is indebted to the same institution.[87] Our purpose is not to plead for the indispensability of that particular seminary (in fact it has played a lesser role in this paper than one might have anticipated) but simply to make the more general point that today's "new Calvinists" do regularly draw on the literature produced by Calvinistic scholars from the last hundred years but without necessarily grasping adequately what it represents. It was encouraging to see John Piper assisting in the republication of Parker's small *Portrait of Calvin* (1954) in conjunction with the 2009 Calvin celebrations.[88]

Even if one were to argue that this mid-twentieth century literature did not produce our modern movement, it cannot be denied that it resources it today. Acknowledging the usefulness of this legacy is not simply a matter of historical honesty; it is a matter of theological accountability. Acknowledgement of this debt can help "new Calvinists" to grasp the principle that there is, after all, a transmission history at work in Reformed theology. On the other hand, acknowledgement of this debt can help those loyal to an older Calvinism to recall that pure ecclesiology has not necessarily been the "sine qua non" determining what is and what is not useful scholarship.

B. The more conventional claim that the modern Calvinist resurgence is traceable to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his circle, and the efforts of the Banner of Truth movement contains important elements of truth but also elements of distortion.[89] The Princeton theological tradition that Lloyd-Jones discovered in 1932 by reading Warfield was not yet "on the ropes." There was, in fact, already in progress what David Bebbington has called "an international Calvinist revival."[90] Lloyd-Jones joined a movement already in progress. The editor of the *Evangelical Quarterly*¸ Donald Maclean, was in fact a kind of theological mentor to Lloyd-Jones (who, remember, had trained in medicine).[91] Lloyd-Jones was himself part of a much larger transatlantic network of persons, some older, some younger than himself. Lloyd-Jones demonstrated this relationship both by writing for the *Evangelical Quarterly* (whose

[85] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994). The current edition of Grudem's *Systematic Theology* claims that 500,000 copies of this work are in print.

[86] See https://www.waynegrudem.com/about.

[87] John Piper, "The New Calvinism and the New Community," *Desiring God*, 12 March 2014, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-new-calvinism-and-the-new-community.

[88] T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, reprint ed. (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

[89] Banner of Truth literature is just as popular among "new Calvinists" as among others.

[90] Bebbington, "Calvin and British Evangelicalism," 293.

[91] Bebbington, "Calvin and British Evangelicalism," 297.

editorial board he joined), attending post-war Calvinist Congresses organized by others, and following assiduously the American *Calvin Forum* from the launch of that publication in 1935.[92] There is no denying that Lloyd-Jones was a primary mover in the revival of interest in Puritanism but he should at the same time be seen as a participant in an international Reformed resurgence already in progress.[93]

Moreover, the movement which we see reflected in the *Evangelical Quarterly* cannot be simply equated with conservative evangelicalism, though no doubt this was the position of the periodical's initial editors and the majority of its early contributors. This inter-war movement was an alliance embracing evangelical Protestants of several stripes, including some early Protestant followers of the Swiss dialectical theology.[94] We need to consider what happened to this earlier alliance and ask whether we have not—in the decades since—been willing to draw the Calvinist circle too tightly, and this to the hurt of our own evangelical movements.[95]

Some evangelicals who participated in that early wider alliance became the heralds of the accelerating Calvinistic resurgence as the post-war era gave way to the cold war. In February 1959, Philip E. Hughes (1915–1990), the then-editor of *Churchman,* the UK Evangelical Anglican journal, described the state of Calvin and Calvinism in that country even as the American John Gerstner (in the same issue) addressed the question of Calvin's prospects in America.[96] Gerstner's answer had been, "They are not good. In fact, they are very, very bad." Hughes's answer to the question seemed to come from an entirely different universe than had Gerstner's:

Taking "Calvinism" in its broader and less precise sense of Reformed theology in general, however, there is much more that can be added to the picture, for, despite the prevailing climate of theological liberalism and, in certain quarters, of Anglo-medievalism, a pronounced revival of interest in the men and writings of the Reformation is discernible.[97]

Hughes, but not Gerstner, had been an early participant in the international post-1929 resurgence of international Calvinism. He had been a contributor to *Evangelical Quarterly* since 1940, had been on the teaching staff of Bristol's Tyndale Hall, been on friendly terms with Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and had

[92] Lloyd-Jones's involvement in the post-war congresses is described by Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, 155, 281. See his involvement in *Evangelical Quarterly* as early as 14.1 (1942). We have noted his appreciation for the *Calvin Forum* above at footnote 54 .

[93] Lloyd-Jones initially tried to see Puritan studies incorporated into the priorities of Tyndale House, Cambridge, but, failing in this attempt, worked with the assistance of the young J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson to launch the annual Puritan Conference at Westminster Chapel. See Alister McGrath, *J. I. Packer: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 50–51. That his interests extended beyond Puritanism is made clear by his reviewing of two volumes of the *Studies in Dogmatics* series by Free University of Amsterdam theologian, G. C. Berkouwer in *EvQ* 25.2 (1953): 107–10.

[94] After its founding in 1948, the *Scottish Journal of Theology* would serve some of the constituency which for the previous two decades had looked to the *Evangelical Quarterly.*

[95] It is highly interesting that journalist Collin Hansen, whose article (later a book),"Young, Restless, and Reformed," named at the outset of this essay, also contributed an intriguing article "Calvin for the Mainline," (*CT* July 2009), www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/julyweb-only/127–52.0.html. This took note of attention paid to the anniversary of Calvin's birth in the annual conference of the United Church of Christ.

[96] We have alluded to Gerstner's 1959 *CT* article above in this essay.

[97] Philip E. Hughes, "Calvinism in Great Britain Today," *CT* (February 1959), www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1959/february-16/calvinism-in-great-britain-today.html.

been a translator of French Reformed theological literature.[98] Hughes had acquired an international and trans-denominational perspective on the question.

C. Though they have been reluctant to admit it, these two modern strains of Calvinism ("new Calvinism" and the post-WWII Lloyd-Jones movement) are in fact intertwined in at least two senses. First, they are intertwined by the literature that they promote. It is the Banner of Truth movement which has made (for instance) the *Works* of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) widely available and affordable for both movements. Both movements are also keen on the writings of the English Puritans; the publisher supplies this material to both constituencies.

They are intertwined, second, by select individuals supple enough to be counted supporters of two or more strands of the movements described in this paper. The supreme example of this intersection of interest is provided in the career of J. I. Packer (1926–2020), who first "crosses the stage" (so to speak) in this paper as a contributor to the *Evangelical Quarterly*, in which he displayed views informed by the writing of B. B. Warfield. He was in the same years active in coordinating the annual Puritan Conferences associated with the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Packer was also welcomed as a presenter in the 1970s Philadelphia Conferences on Reformed Theology, guest-lectured in both the Westminster Seminaries as well as Reformed Theological Seminary, [99] and was also welcomed in the Desiring God conferences associated with the ministry of John Piper.[100] Packer's ability to contribute in so many settings is a tribute both to the catholicity of his evangelicalism and to the fundamental underlying unity of all these movement which have proceeded since the year 1929.

D. Finally, it should be clear by now that the two named streams of modern Calvinism which provided the starting point for this essay were never as solitary and never had the field to themselves in the way that many have imagined. The resurgence of Calvinism, which is still ongoing, is at least as old as the 1920's, has not been confined to the world of conservative evangelicalism, and has been multi-cultural and multilingual from the start. What is more, such discussion as has gone on about the origins of our current resurgence has especially slighted the contributions made by the Dutch Reformed branch of the Reformed family, in Europe, in North America, and beyond.[101] We have seen that Valentine Hepp was advocating for an international Calvinist alliance before anyone else was speaking about this. This heritage has been the soil from which so much fruitful thinking and writing has arisen on Scripture and on theology. When one surveys (for instance) the range of authors in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (commenced 1953) edited by Ned B. Stonehouse, such authors are visible in

[98] See Hughes's contributions to *Evangelical Quarterly* as early as 12.3 (1940); 14.3 (1942); 14.4 (1942) etc. Hughes was the translator of Pierre Charles Marcel's *Baptism: Sacrament of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Lutterworth, 1959).

[99] Established 1929 in Philadelphia and in 1979 in Escondido, respectively.

[100] John Piper's recorded gratitude for Packer is given here: "Thank You Letter to J. I. Packer, Celebrating 80 Years," *Desiring God*, 29 September 2006, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/thank-you-letter-to-j-i-packer-celebrating-80-years.

[101] This historical reality of significant Dutch involvement in the recovery of Reformed scholarship in the period to 1960 cannot be allowed to obscure the fact that there has been widespread theological decline in that constituency in more recent times.

numbers.[102] Consult the *New Bible Commentary* (1953)[103] and *New Bible Dictionary* (1962),[104] and again these contributors are there in plain view. This has also been the branch of the Reformed family which has taken most seriously the challenge of re-stating the Christian faith, as confessed at the Reformation, in the face of the secularization so characteristic of the twentieth century. Abraham Kuyper (d.1920) and Herman Bavinck (d. 1921) stand as the clearest examples of this readiness.[105] And across the twentieth century, this neo-Calvinism has provided a stimulus for the entire evangelical movement in thinking through questions about Christianity and art, Christianity and education, Christianity and politics.[106]

[102] In addition to the well-known volumes of Leon Morris (John), F. F. Bruce (Acts and Hebrews), William Lane (Mark), and Philip E. Hughes (2 Corinthians), there were notable contributions from South Africans— Geldenhuys (Luke) and Muller (Philippians)— and Netherlanders— Grosheide (1 Corinthians) and Ridderbos (Galatians). The volume on the Pastoral Epistles was supplied by Grand Rapids, MI, scholar Bastian van Elderen. Alongside this project can be added the *New Testament Commentary* series of William Hendriksen, completed by Simon Kistemaker.

[103] F. Davidson, ed., *The New Bible Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1953).

[104] J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962).

[105] Note especially the four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* of Herman Bavinck (1895–1901) presently available in English translation in four volumes: Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008).

[106] See, for example, Jessica R. Joustra and Robert J. Joustra, eds, *Calvinism for a Secular Age: A Twenty-First Century Reading of Abraham Kuyper's Stone Lectures* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2022).

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The Church as Sacrament of Salvation in Roman Catholic Theology

— Joshua M. Sims —

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Abstract: This article examines the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church as "sacrament of salvation" first formally introduced in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (1964). Starting with the pre-Vatican II exclusivist position, the article traces how this doctrine developed from the Church-Incarnation idea, where the church continues Christ's incarnational presence. The analysis reveals diverse Catholic interpretations ranging from conservative to inclusivist-universalist approaches. The article concludes with a reformed theological critique challenging three key aspects of the Roman doctrine: its universalist tendencies, its ontological rather than ethical understanding of salvation, and its diminishment of Christ's ascension. The article advocates instead for a covenantal ecclesiology that maintains clear boundaries and emphasizes Christ's completed work.

In 1964, in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* (*LG*), the Catholic magisterium spoke for the first time of the church as the "sacrament of salvation". In this article, we will first look at the Roman Catholic theological context that led to this statement, based on the idea of the church as a continuation of the incarnation of Christ. Second, we will look at the diversity of Catholic interpretations of the idea of the church as sacrament and look at the different ways that this doctrine is used in practice. We will show that, despite the more conservative interpretations, Catholic sacramentology leads to an inclusivist or even universalist interpretation of the idea of the sacramental church. Third, we will criticize this idea along three axes: its universalism, its ontological excesses, and its loss of sight of the meaning of the ascension.

1. Before Vatican II: extra ecclasiam nullam salus

As we shall see, the idea of the church as sacrament was not explicit until the Second Vatican Council. However, this doctrine has a double context: (1) the church as a continuation of the incarnation and (2) the church as the exclusive place of salvation. Henri Blocher explains how the idea of Church-Incarnation provides the necessary context for understanding contemporary Catholic ecclesiology:

At the heart of all Catholicism, as at the heart of its ecclesiology, it's easy to discern this thought: the Church is "Jesus Christ poured out and communicated," so much one with him that she subsists "as a second person of Christ," and in her is accomplished the extension, the prolongation of the redemptive incarnation. The expression is still used: it was promoted by the "ecclesiological renewal" of which the 19th-century Tubingen school (in reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the French

Revolution) was an important source, and the interwar period (in reaction against the drying up of post-Tridentine juridical ecclesiology) a time of magnificent flowering. If this time has passed, it remains relevant for Catholic ecclesiology in the 21st century.[1]

The idea of Church-Incarnation originated with St. Augustine, in his idea of *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, made up of the head as well as the Church, which is the body. Augustine was not satisfied with a metaphorical understanding of the Pauline passages on the Church as the body of Christ and sought to give them an ontological interpretation.[2]

Over time, this idea became dogmatized as an understanding of the Church as an extension of the incarnation of Christ. It possesses, like him, human and divine elements united in a single person/church. A certain modesty is preserved in the assertion that the divine elements do not belong to the Church in their own right but are hers only by virtue of her participation in Christ.[3]

This ontological link between Christ and the church leads naturally to a very high ecclesiology. The Roman Catholic Church, and her alone, is the body of Christ, and possesses qualities of exclusive mediation that prolong the exclusive mediation of Christ.[4] She alone dispenses the sacraments of Christ that are necessary for salvation. *Extra ecclesiam nullam salus* (Canon 1, 4th Lateran Council, 1215).

This very conservative line would remain the Vatican's even into the early 20th century, when dissenting voices were already being heard.[5] However, the Second Vatican Council marked a major shift in the direction of Rome's official dogma.

2. Vatican II: No One outside the Church?

For the first time, the Second Vatican Council spoke of the idea of the church as sacrament in documents pertaining to the Church's teaching magisterium. We will first look at what the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*), says, then we will turn to the question of its interpretation.

2.1. The Church as Sacrament in *Lumen Gentium*

The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, a normative and infallible document of the Second Vatican Council, mentions the idea of the Church-Sacrament in three paragraphs:

Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.[6]

[1] Henri Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1* (Charols, France: Édifac, 2022), 110, author's translation.

[2] Greg. R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 58–59.

[3] Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice*, 57.

[4] In Roman theology the mediation of the Church is not fundamentally other than the mediation of Christ, so there is no contradiction between the exclusivity of Christ's mediation and the Church's role as mediator.

[5] For an overview of this pre-Vatican II dissent, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700),* Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 5 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 368–69.

[6] "Lumen Gentium," 21 November 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity.[7]

[Jesus] sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.[8]

As is obvious to any observer, the references to the church as sacrament are not particularly numerous and never really define how we should understand the idea of church as sacrament. As we shall see, this leads to a diversity of interpretations.

Two things are clear, however. Firstly, the church is the Church-Sacrament by virtue of her bond with Christ (*LG* §1), and her sacramental mission is universal (*LG* §9, 48). The scope of this universality is not explicit in *LG*, but we'll come back to it later.

2.2. What Understanding of the Church as Sacrament?

Given the broad scope for interpretation that *LG*'s formulation seems to allow, it is not surprising to see a number of rival interpretations of the idea of Church-Sacrament emerging, following, once again, the dividing line between more or less conservative theologians.

On the more conservative side, let us note the remarks of Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI):

> Another aspect was the emphasis on the Church's sacramental character. "Sacramental" is used here in opposition to that superficial view which often enough tried to see the Church as established on the level of worldly legitimacy and to seek for the Church a place among worldly institutions. So, to demand that the Church acquire greater sacramental self-awareness was tantamount to a demand that it again consider and actualize itself as a sign. In St. Augustine's definition, sacramentum is the equivalent of sacrum signum—i.e., a holy sign. A Church that sees itself sacramentally understands that it partakes of the meaning of a sign, whose responsibility it is to point beyond itself. If the Church is a "sacrament," a sign of God's presence among men, then it does not exist for its own sake. Its responsibility becomes a responsibility of pointing beyond itself. It is like a window which best fulfills its function by allowing one to see greater things through it.[9]

What might be surprising on reading this paragraph is that it seems fundamentally compatible with an evangelical reformed theology! But this is precisely where we need to see a problem: Ratzinger here adopts a sacramental theology that is only part of the whole of Roman sacramental theology. By referring to the Augustinian definition, Ratzinger sets aside any discussion of transubstantiation or the communication of grace. No doubt many Catholics would agree with Ratzinger's very conciliatory assertions, but a fuller interpretation of the idea of Church-Sacrament must take account of Roman sacramentology and the wider context of the Church-Incarnation idea, two themes Ratzinger does not discuss here, and which will take us away from his relatively conservative position.

[7] "Lumen Gentium," §9

[8] "Lumen Gentium," §48

[9] Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist, 1966): 78–79.

Before departing completely from Ratzinger's interpretation, it is important to dwell on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, an important document but of lesser authority than *LG*, written under Ratzinger's supervision.

The mission of the Church-Sacrament is an extension of Christ's mission, in keeping with the idea of the Incarnation-Church:

> Thus the Church's mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.[10]

Strictly speaking, it is Christ himself who is the only sacrament (taken in the strong sense of *mysterium*); the Church is a sacrament in an analogical way, and has the same connection to the mystery of Christ as it has with the Incarnation:

> The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*. In this sense, Christ himself is the mystery of salvation: "For there is no other mystery of God, except Christ." The saving work of his holy and sanctifying humanity is the sacrament of salvation, which is revealed and active in the Church's sacraments (which the Eastern Churches also call "the holy mysteries").[11]

As a sacrament, the Church has a vertical role, to be the instrument of the union of men with God, and consequently it also has a horizontal role, to be the instrument of the unity of the human race.

> "The Church is, in Christ, in some way the sacrament, that is to say, both the sign and the instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*LG* 1): To be the sacrament of *man's intimate union with God*: this is the Church's primary goal. Because communion between men is rooted in union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the *unity of the human race*. In her, this unity has already begun, since she brings together men "from every nation, race, people and language" (Rev 7.9); at the same time, the Church is "sign and instrument" of the full realization of this unity, which has yet to come.[12]

These excerpts from the *Catechism* say more than Ratzinger did in his commentary on Vatican II but still leave some room for interpretation as to the exact role of the church's sacramentality in bringing about the union of man with God and the unity of man with man. We will now turn to interpretations of the church as sacrament that seem to us to be more representative of the general trend in Roman Catholic theology in the twentieth century and of an *ex opere operato* sacramentology.

First, for more liberal theologians, the idea of Church-Incarnation still plays an essential role. There has been, however, a shift towards an incarnationist soteriology, most notably in the thought of Karl Rahner:

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §738.
[11] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §774.
[12] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §775.

> Jesus Christ is the fact that manifests God's self-communication in the world…. But from now on, it is precisely the Church of Christ that is the lasting presence and historical visibility of this ultimate and victorious Word of God in Jesus Christ.[13]

For Rahner, the center of Christ's work is not his death and resurrection but rather the fact that through the incarnation he bears witness to God's self-communication.[14] Since this self-communication is the salvific event *par excellence*, the church becomes the sacrament that achieves the salvation of the world by prolonging this divine self-communication by the very fact that it prolongs the incarnation. By shifting the focus of soteriology from the cross to the incarnation,[15] sacramental presence takes on a soteriological value through the very idea of presence.

The French episcopate has produced a study report on the question of the church as sacrament.[16] According to this report, the doctrine of the church as a sacrament of salvation makes it possible to maintain a balance between sacramental theology (which requires participation in the sacraments for salvation) on the one hand and evangelism on the other, which wants everyone to enter into and participate in the church.[17] In this relationship, inclusivism is king, and the problem to be solved is how people can have access to salvation without taking part in the church's sacraments. The obvious solution is for them to participate, in one way or another, in the Church-Sacrament. Once again, the underlying sacramentology is indeed *ex opere operato*: "[The Church] is an event of salvation: she reveals and realizes the salvation that God grants to men."[18] In fact, the Church-Sacrament is the fundamental sacrament, which is subsequently broken down into seven sacraments.[19] In this sense, the seven sacraments are relativized and the church itself is brought to the fore.

How, in this inclusivist line, is it possible to maintain a demarcation between the church and the world? The key here is Vatican II's assertion that the church of Christ "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church (*LG* §8), i.e. that the church of Christ, the invisible church, is wider than the Roman Church, but only achieves full ecclesiality within the Roman framework. The Roman Church therefore has a role of witness and sacrament towards the wider invisible church (which can be understood to cover the whole of humanity). Alexis Rouiller describes the specificity of the Roman Church as follows:

> But one thing is impossible without the Church: God's grace must be present in the world … in the corporeal dimension of incarnation.[20]

He reminds us that this specificity is only made possible by the distinction between the church and the world:

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[13] Karl Rahner, *Traité fondamental de la foi: introduction au concept de christianisme*, trans. Gwendoline Jarczyk (Paris: Centurion, 1983): 421–22, author's translation.

[14] Note that in Rahner's thought, Christ bears witness to God's self-communication, but this is not restricted to the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit being the second "channel" of divine self-communication. On this subject see Camden M. Bucey, *The Triune Gift of Self: A Reformed Critique of Karl Rahner's Theology of Divine Self-Communication*, (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2014), 56–57.

[15] Strictly speaking, this is not a shift but rather taking a stand in ancient debates, the incarnationist position being in the lineage of figures like Athanasius or Duns Scotus.

[16] Robert Coffy, "Église-sacrement," in *Église signe du salut parmi les hommes, rapports présentés à l'Assemblée plénière de l'Épiscopat Français de Lourdes 1971* (Paris: Centurion, 1971), 1–91.

[17] Coffy, "Église-sacrement," 12.

[18] Coffy, "Église-sacrement," 32, author's translation.

[19] Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 116–17.

[20] Rahner, *Traité fondamental de la foi*, 461–62, author's translation.

> If the Church of Christ is called the sacrament of salvation, the word is to be understood by analogy with the sacraments of faith, the seven sacraments. Like them, the Church-Sacrament will be the effective and tangible sign of Christ's grace. This obviously presupposes that the Church of Jesus, in order to be a sacrament of salvation, will always present itself to the world without ambiguity, as visible, discernible, with precise contours. This also assumes that, if the Church is a sacrament for the world, it will never be the world, the whole world.[21]

The Church can be thought of as an iceberg, with believers forming the tip:

> Like an iceberg, the immense invisible part of the Church's mystery emerges sacramentally from its visible part, the believers. In the words of a contemporary Orthodox theologian, you can say where the Church is, but you can't say where she isn't. She is visibly in the sacramental and hierarchical organism of the people of God, but we cannot say where her invisible Mystery of grace is not, for only God searches loins and hearts.[22]

This concept is explicitly universalistic:

This simple truth does not absolve Christians from evangelizing all the time; on the contrary, it urges them to teach and baptize every nation, while at the same time giving them the certainty and hope that Jesus, through his Spirit, is already present and active before them. So they will not give in to the dangerous dualism of thinking of a visible Church, where the Lord dwells, and alongside it, and outside it, a poor world without God or grace.[23]

The Church's faithfulness is the guarantor of the salvation of those far away.[24]

> The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Sacrament-Church is in fact an impressive feat of theological gymnastics. On the one hand, it combines the historical exclusivism of the Roman Church (*extra ecclesiam nullam salus*) and the necessity of the sacraments for salvation with a universalism in which one can be saved without belonging to the church or partaking of the sacraments! The Catholic Church remains the only place where salvation exists, and only the Roman Church is the sacrament of salvation among men,[25] but the Church-Sacrament is also a fundamental doctrine for developing an ecumenism with universalistic tendencies: just as the sacrament is the instrument of the unity of the church, the Church-Sacrament is the instrument of the unity of all humanity in Christ.[26] Cyprian's expression "Outside the Church there is no salvation" was transformed by the Second Vatican Council to become not an exclusivist statement but a strongly inclusivist one, with the Church gathering together all men and women in more or less loose circles of belonging.[27] Taken to its logical conclusion, we should

[21] Alexis Rouiller, "L'Église, sacrement universel du salut," *Échos de Saint-Maurice* 69 (1973): 75, author's translation.

[22] Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *L'Église sacrement du salut des hommes* (Paris: Mame, 1994), 19, author's translation.

[23] Rouiller, "L'Église, sacrement universel du salut," 76–77, author's translation.

[24] Rouiller, "L'Église, sacrement universel du salut," 77, author's translation.

[25] Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, 61.

[26] Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, 63.

[27] Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 119–20.

not speak of the church as the sacrament of salvation for the world, but of the visible church as the sacrament of salvation for the invisible church.

3. A Reformed Critique: the Church in Covenant Relationship with God

Having provided an overview of the roman doctrine of the church as sacrament of salvation, we now outline a critique of this doctrine from the standpoint of reformed theology.

3.1. The Sacramental Church and the Temptation of Universalism

Before addressing the idea of the Sacrament-Church as such, it is useful to consider the inclusivism (indeed, universalism) that is the driving force and consequence of this doctrine. The appeal of a universalist doctrine is understandable: the Christian wants everyone to achieve communion with God. This desire must not prevent us, however, from taking account of the abundant biblical testimony concerning the eternal damnation of those who do not come to faith. The Bible proclaims with great clarity the existence of hell (see e.g., Isa 66:24; Mark 9:43–49; Jude 7; Rev 20:13–15). Furthermore, the idea often found in the mouths of Catholic priests that "yes, hell exists, but we can expect it to be empty" has no biblical support. On the contrary, Scripture presents the last judgment as a day when humanity is separated into two parts, between those who will be found in Christ and those who will be condemned (see e.g., Matt 24:40–41; 25:41–46).

In reality, Catholic universalism[28] stems from a theological movement with liberal tendencies which looks beyond the biblical text to locate the basis for its doctrine. The multiplication of biblical texts should therefore serve to convince the evangelical reader, but a wider discussion on the place of Scripture, its authority, and the nature of the evolution-progression of dogma is necessary to go further.

More broadly, the idea of the sacramental church tends, as we have shown above, to lead to a blurring of the church/world distinction, replacing it with a visible/invisible church distinction: outside the visible church are those who do not yet know they are members of Christ's church. A covenantal evangelical Reformed ecclesiology will insist, if not on separation, at least on the visible distinction of the covenant people from the world. Moreover, the invisible church is within the visible church, the visible people of the covenant, and not the other way around. It is a fundamental error to think that the church's mission is to make known to the world that they are already in Christ; rather, the church's mission is to make known to the world what Christ has already accomplished and the faith in him that is necessary to benefit from it.

3.2. The Church-Sacrament, the Incarnation-Church and the Ontological Gospel

The second point of criticism we wish to make against the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church as sacrament of salvation is to show that this doctrine is part of a Roman Catholic tendency to relocate everything in terms of ontological categories.

The doctrine of the church as sacrament, following on from the idea of the church as incarnation in the strongest sense, immediately takes on an ontological dimension. For Gregg Allison, this is an example of the Roman tendency to see nature as capable of contributing to grace,[29] i.e., the church does

[28] Catholic universalism is not universal! This idea is widespread but is not an official doctrine of the Roman Church.

[29] Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, 65.

not remain on the level of a human or even a divine institution but possesses the divine nature like Christ, conferring on it a role of mediation between God's grace and the world of nature comparable to Christ's mediation.[30] This ontological confusion in Catholic theology leads to a form of monophysitism when applied to Christology. Henri Blocher points out that in the church, the Creator-creature distinction is erased,[31] to such an extent that a more rigorous Roman Catholic theologian, such as Yves Congar, is obliged to admit that the two natures scheme is not valid in the church "when applied rigorously."[32]

Moreover, this is a fundamental soteriological error: the idea of the church as sacrament of salvation makes the incarnation the reason for salvation, not the death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ.[33] This soteriological error is made possible (and even necessary) by the tendency of Roman theology to see the gospel as responding to an ontological rather than an ethical imperative.

For Herman Bavinck, the most fundamental error in Rome's theology has its origins in the doctrine of creation: man is subject to an internal struggle with concupiscence, which is not a sin but of the order of creation.[34] To enable man to overcome this struggle, God grants an ontological grace, the *donum superadditum*.[35] The fall leads to the loss of this grace,[36] and redemption then takes on a strongly ontological dimension: sinful man has become subject to concupiscence, and to regain righteousness he needs an infusion of God's grace (still understood ontologically), an infusion made possible by the sacraments (which explains the centrality of transubstantiation in Roman doctrine). The sinful human being, reduced to the natural state, needs the infusion of divine grace in order to be able to perform works of salvific value.[37] The primary concern is not the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of communion with God; this objective disappears behind the divinization of man, who becomes like God.[38] Against this conception of redemption as the elevation of nature by grace, Bavinck, in line with the Reformation, reminds us that the important opposition is not between the natural and the supernatural but between sin and grace,[39] and thus "the operation of grace is and remains ethical."[40]

Beyond Bavinck's critique of this "ontological gospel," we would like to point to Michael Horton's more recent critique and proposal in his discussion of the nature of union with Christ published in *Covenant and Salvation*.[41] Horton criticizes what he sees as the Neoplatonic[42] model of union with Christ, which he calls "overcoming the distance"[43] (thereby taking up Paul Tillich's nomenclature) and

[30] Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology*, 57.

[31] Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 151–52.

[32] Yves Congar, *Sainte Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1956), 84; qtd Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 120, author's translation.

[33] Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 151–55.

[34] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 2:541.

[35] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:541.

[36] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:95–96.

[37] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:575.

[38] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:577.

[39] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:577.

[40] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:579.

[41] Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

[42] Horton finds the origin of this model in the works of St. Augustine (Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 193–94), which allows us to see it as a Neoplatonic influence that then spread into Roman theology and whose effects then survived the Thomistic paradigm shift to remain in Roman theology to this day.

[43] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 153.

which envisages union with Christ as an ontological transformation of man so that he can enter into communion with God. To this approach, Horton counters that sin introduces not an ontological distance between God and the sinner but an ethical hostility.[44] A proper understanding of what separates man from God must derive not from a general metaphysical system but from the covenant.[45] Horton then sets out to lay the groundwork for an "covenantal ontology."[46] Such a metaphysical construct places particular emphasis on the personal nature of union with Christ (not merely participation in Christ's benefits but union with his person through the operation of the person of the Holy Spirit).[47] This ontology is primarily forensic[48] before being participatory. Moreover, participation is conceived differently than in the Neoplatonic model; in the covenantal model, it is God's declaration that has efficient power: the declaration of justification brings about regeneration, sanctification, etc.[49] The consequences of a "covenantal ontology" do not stop at soteriology, but Horton applies them to ecclesiology[50]: the Church is not to be conceived as a continuation of the incarnation but as the bride of Christ, in covenant relationship with him, his counterpart constituted in his body by the forensic declaration of justification.

3.3. The Absence of Christ

With its twin doctrines of Church-Incarnation and Church-Sacrament, Roman Catholic theology runs the risk of stripping Christ's ascension of all theological significance.[51] For Henri Blocher, the ascension signifies the "end of Christ's work on Earth," an argument that has "enough to pierce Roman ecclesiology."[52]

It is important to note here that we are dealing with a complex system of differences. The non-bloody sacrifice of the Mass extends the work of Christ into Catholic sacramentology. This sacramentology becomes, through the idea of the sacramental church, a driving force of Catholic ecclesiology. This ecclesiology, in turn, emphasizes the role of the church in the pursuit of the accomplishment of salvation, especially through the non-bloody sacrifice of the Mass.

Furthermore, the present absence of Christ, who is already in glory, is key to an understanding of the present life of the church as being a life lived at the foot of the cross, suffering in the footsteps of Christ. An over-realized eschatology at this point, exaggerating the presence of the glorious Christ today, runs the risk of leading to a theology of glory.

A full critique of this system is beyond the scope of this essay, but our aim here is to highlight the fact that the reality of the accomplishment of salvation (all is accomplished!) is entirely incompatible with Catholic sacramentology and soteriology—and the conception of Christ's work they presuppose—and therefore also with the idea of the church as sacrament. The idea of the church as sacrament puts us back at the heart of the system of differences between Rome and the Reformation.

[44] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 154.
[45] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 154.
[46] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 181.
[47] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 183.
[48] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 198.
[49] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 201, 211.
[50] Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 202. Union with Christ is central to the application of salvation as well as to ecclesiology, which explains Horton's reasoning, which seeks to place these two elements in a covenantal framework.
[51] Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Studies in. Dogmatics: The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969): 61–62.
[52] Blocher, *La doctrine de l'Église et des sacrements, tome 1*, 153, author's translation.

4. Conclusion

After describing the context and the idea of the Church-Sacrament in Roman Catholic theology, we set out to provide a critique of this doctrine that highlights how the key Reformed category of covenant addresses these concerns.

In the place of the Church-Sacrament, the church lives in covenant relationship with its Lord, and that involves

- a distinction between the inside and outside of the covenant, so that the invisible church is in the visible church and not vice versa, against universalism (covenantal ecclesiology);
- an ethical rather than ontological approach to the gospel (covenantal soteriology);
- an expectation of the return of Christ, who is absent today (covenantal eschatology).

In light of these criticisms, we can see that while the idea of the church as sacrament could be appealing to protestants and might even be valid within their specific theological and sacramental framework, the Roman Catholic understanding of the church as sacrament is doubly incompatible with Reformed theology. It is incompatible due to its appeal to classic Roman Catholic ecclesiology and sacramentology that was at the heart of the Reformation 500 years ago, and it is also incompatible due to its leaning towards universalism, a tendency that has appeared in both Roman Catholic and non-traditional protestant theologies in more recent years. Therefore, while it might be possible to fit the Church-Sacrament conception within Reformed ecclesiology, it would appear best to avoid using this category altogether, as it already has a specific and problematic meaning in Roman Catholic theology. From the perspective of Reformed theology, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church as sacrament of salvation is theologically invalid.

Furthermore, this study on one specific aspect of contemporary Roman Catholic theology is illustrative of wider considerations when engaging aspects of Roman Catholic theology. By showing that, on the one hand, Roman Catholic ecclesiology is in line with the two key ideas of Church-Incarnation and the Catholic conception of the nature-grace relationship, and that, on the other hand, Reformed ecclesiology appeals to the category of covenant, we have in fact shown how this debate fits into a wider antithesis between two very different theological systems. While we hope that the refutation of the idea of Church-Sacrament proposed above may be convincing, we also believe that we have illustrated the fact that it is not always easy to compare Catholic and Reformed theologies in a "modular" way, given that both theologies form complex doctrinal systems with strong internal interconnections. Given the centrality of sacramentology in Roman Catholic theology, we hope to have illustrated here a structural element of this theological system, while also illustrating how the structural elements of Roman Catholic theology are evolving to take on new dimensions in the Vatican II era. A good understanding of these structural elements and their evolution should enable an analysis of Roman Catholic theology that is more sensitive to its true character and its various strands throughout history.

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The Role of the *Regula Fidei* in the Twenty-First-Century Religious Landscape: How the "Rule of Faith" Can Help Address the Existential Issues of the Postmodern Christian Community

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Abstract: This article offers a historical-systematic analysis of the role of the rule of faith in establishing and maintaining the Christian metanarrative and orthodox scriptural interpretation. It seeks to answer who is truly following the historic Christian faith in the contemporary postmodern milieu. The modern relevance of the rule is established in light of the work of two twentieth-century theologians, Paul M. Blowers and Robert W. Jenson, who respectively posit a narrative and linguistic function for the rule. Therefore, the rule provides insights for contemporary theological questions by supplying a framework of faithful guidelines through which to engage them fruitfully.

What constitutes a Christian community? This is a question as old as the faith itself, but in this postmodern milieu the question is again being asked by many and answered in a variety of ways. Some argue that the way forward is to look back and attempt, insofar as it is possible, to recapture a premodern faith, whereas others advocate for an entirely new expression of Christianity fit for a post-Enlightenment, postmodern, and increasingly pluralistic world. In the first instance people cannot, unfortunately, will themselves to be pre-Enlightenment—let alone premodern; just as the person who emerges from Plato's cave cannot unsee the sun, people cannot will themselves backward to ignorance. In the second instance, the way forward offered is nothing less than an attempt to remake Christianity in a postmodern image, an objective destined to fail because it is a forsaking of the church's first love, Christ (cf. Rev 2:4), who is the fullness of revelation both then and now (cf. Heb 1:1–3a). A solution to this existential problem lies, however, in the *regula fidei* ("rule of faith"), which "developed from the apostolic kerygma" about Christ.[1] The rule of faith, like Scripture, is a product of the apostolic preaching that reveals who Christ is and the doctrines to which Christians must hold. This essay therefore argues that the rule of faith should be the primary hermeneutical key for defining doctrinal

[1] Joseph F. Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," *Theological Studies* 29.3 (1968): 454–55.

language in the church, establishing central truths as boundaries for orthodoxy in submission to the authority of Scripture so as to faithfully preserve "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3 ESV). This rule of faith thus provides the foundation of the Christian metanarrative and the framework for orthodox scriptural interpretation. In other words, the rule of faith determines identity because it contains the content—the very substance—of Christianity.

This thesis will be worked out in four parts: first, I review the history of the rule of faith and discuss what makes it authoritative; second, I survey select modern interpretations of the rule of faith; third, I explore the use of the rule of faith in patristic and modern hermeneutics; and, finally, I argue for the contemporary use of the rule of faith. Before diving into the primary subject matter of this paper, however, some contextualizing background is necessary.

1. Background

Although there is some debate as to what initiated this iteration of the dispute over Christian identity, a good place to start is in the field of philosophy. The Enlightenment, with its hyper-rationalism, had already challenged the traditional Christian metaphysics which had guided the faith and interpretation of Holy Scripture for well over a millennium. Many thinkers over the course of the following centuries have tried to "rationalize" and "demythologize" Christianity and its sacred text in an attempt to shore it up. Naturally, this led to a plethora of issues that Christians are still reckoning with today—not least an incessantly pervading Deism, particularly among believers in the global north-west. As large as the existential threat of the Enlightenment was, however, to a thoroughly premodern faith like Christianity, the bigger threat did not reveal itself until the late-nineteeth and early-twentieth centuries. That threat is termed the linguistic turn:

> The linguistic turn was an unassailable and wholesale sea-change in twentieth-century philosophy that captured two fundamental insights: the claim that all knowledge is dependent upon its expression in language (all thought is language-dependent) … and the goal of philosophy is to provide an understanding of our conceptual schema in order to resolve problems that arise from the misuse of words.[2]

Philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein made the case that since philosophy is all about language, the discipline should be understood as "the primary tool of clarification of the process of thinking."[3] The result of such an understanding of philosophy was the upending of its traditional categories: instead of metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and so forth, everything was reduced to an exploration of language.[4] This exploration of language usually came in the form of "language games," the unfortunate result of which meant "that objective certainty does not exist, and no proposition is limited to a single meaning, because every meaning is dependent on its context."[5] Consequently, all human knowledge was effectively reduced "to a text and narrative," paving the way for the contemporary unholy matrimony

[2] Michael A Peters, "The Last Post? Post-Postmodernism and the Linguistic U-Turn," *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations* 12 (2013): 36.

[3] Aleksandar S. Santrac, "Untying the Knots of Thinking: Wittgenstein and the Role of Philosophy in Christian Faith," *In Die Skriflig* 49.1 (2015): 3.

[4] Santrac, "Untying the Knots of Thinking," 2.

[5] Santrac, "Untying the Knots of Thinking," 3.

of Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilism and Michel Foucault's understanding of power.[6] This marriage, which presupposes that there is no objective truth and that everything is ultimately about power and thus control over language and narrative, is arguably the progenitor of the existential question of Christian identity. Thus, Pontius Pilate's question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38a), could now essentially be answered, "Whatever I say it is." One need not search any further than the ideology-driven writings of the theology faculties of numerous academic institutions, the corresponding meteoric rise of alternative (heterodox) interpretations of Scripture, and the reversal of age-old doctrines by various ecclesial bodies, to see just what this linguistic turn has done. Subjectivism reigns supreme, just as in the days of the judges of Israel (cf. Judg 17:6)—the grand metanarrative of catholic, orthodox Christianity has seemingly collapsed.[7]

This naturally leads to the question, What use is the Bible, the Christian collection of sacred writings, if those writings can simply be interpreted however a person pleases? It is not hard to see why the contemporary church is in the midst of a hermeneutical and corresponding identity crisis.[8] In particular, this puts Protestants in an awkward spot because the entire Reformation is predicated on the doctrine of *sola scriptura*—Scripture alone—and the perspicuity of those Scriptures.[9] This is why Lutheran theologians like Mark Tranvik, among others, would say that "God's Word—preached and visible—is the remedy for the rampant subjectivism that plagues our culture and our congregations."[10] But how can this be the case when interpretation is seemingly at the whim of the hearer? In many ways this is the manifestation of the hermeneutical enthusiasm Martin Luther was keen to keep at bay.

The solution, according to some, is to point to an interpretative authority: a magisterium, defined as "an institution in the continuing life of the church that is credited with Spirit-led authority to discern the underlying scriptural and creedal truth."[11] For instance, the Roman Catholics claim the following:

> "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.[12]

Now, this of course makes any Protestant shudder, as it effectively puts Scripture and its interpretation in the control of a select few. It did not take long for this system to break down and for all sorts of false teachings to enter the church—hence the Reformation, which called for the magisterium to be subject to the Scriptures.[13] Ironically, many Protestants opted to keep a form of the episcopal magisterium in their own churches, and several of these have also led their flock into grievous, anti-scriptural error,

[6] Peters, "The Last Post?" 40.

[7] Paul Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," *TJ* 28.1 (2007): 85.

[8] Mark Randall James, "The Beginning of Wisdom: On the Postliberal Interpretation of Scripture," *Modern Theology* 33.1 (2017): 16–17.

[9] Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 265.

[10] Mark D. Tranvik, "Luther, Gerhard Forde and the Gnostic Threat to the Gospel," *LQ* 22 (2008): 415.

[11] Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 68.

[12] Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, eds., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 27.

[13] Luther, *What Luther Says*, 89.

particularly surrounding issues of human sexuality and gender identity. Even the Protestants that do not have episcopates have essentially turned their theology faculties into a quasi-magisterium, an approach that has proven dangerous in its own way, as theology faculties, too, are made up of sinful humans.[14] Regardless, the point remains that the solution does not lie in a magisterium, whatever shape it may take.

Another solution, then, is needed, and so across history some have claimed that it is the ecumenical councils which are the binding authority of the church and the final word on the right interpretation of Scripture, a viewpoint called Conciliarism. Unfortunately, this comes with its own set of issues. As Luther points out regarding the origin of ecclesial councils:

> [The Devil] raised a dreadful brawl about Scripture and created many sects, heresies, and factions among Christians. And since every faction claimed Scripture for its position and explained it in harmony with its view, it finally began no longer to rate as an authority and ultimately even acquired the name of a book for heretics, a book from which all heresy arises, because all heretics have recourse to Scripture…. He made Scripture so suspect among Christians that they regarded it as pure poison, against which they must defend themselves…. After Scripture had in this way become a torn net, so that no one allowed himself to be held by it but everybody broke a hole in the direction he wanted to go and followed his own interpretation, twisting and turning Scripture as he pleased, then Christians knew of no other way to remedy the matter than to convene many councils. In these they set up many external commands and ordinances besides Scripture in order to hold people together in the face of these divisions. From this attempt (although they meant well) comes the saying: Scripture is not enough; one must also have the commands and explanations of the councils and the fathers, because the Holy Spirit did not reveal everything to the apostles but reserved certain things for the fathers. This view spread until it finally developed into the papacy, in which nothing has authority except the commandments and comments of men in accordance with the shrine of the holy father's heart.[15]

Once again, the same problem arises as that in the magisterium; the councils, as great as they were and as much as they offered and continue to offer exceptional guidance in many matters of the Christian faith, are not infallible and did err because they are made up of fallen people. Hence why, early in the Reformation, Conciliarism was ultimately rejected along with the magisterium as an ultimate authority and was made subject to Scripture.[16]

So, what then is the solution? What authority can ensure the right interpretation of Scripture? The answer is that it is ultimately the believing community, the invisible church catholic, which determines the meaning of Scripture, because she alone has been enlightened by the Truth who is the hermeneutical key: Christ (cf. Jude 1:3).[17] This is where the rule of faith comes in. Without getting too deep into defining the rule of faith at this point, it is important to note that what is not meant is "Tradition" as articulated

[14] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 68.

[15] Luther, *What Luther Says*, 104. Much more of Luther's thoughts on this topic can be found in volume 41 of *Luther's Works*.

[16] Luther, *What Luther Says*, 89.

[17] James, "The Beginning of Wisdom," 10–11.

by the Roman Catholics.[18] What is meant by the rule of faith and how it is to be used, however, will be explored in the rest of this paper, beginning with a survey of its history.

2. The History and Authority of the Rule of Faith

It is important to begin by noting that "the Rule [of Faith] appears in an apologetic context addressing the question of Christian identity and normativity."[19] This is not the origin of the rule of faith, as if it did not exist before this point, but it is where what was implicit becomes explicit because of the challenges faced by the fledging Christian movement in the second century—particularly the threat of Gnosticism. Since the rule of faith was not necessarily definitively codified at this point, it can be difficult to define; however, it can be loosely understood as a "theological catchphrase" which encompassed "the totality of Christian faith/truth as set down in Scripture, baptismal confession, and apostolic teaching."[20] Or, even more broadly, "'the rule of faith' refers to any shorthand summary of 'the faith once delivered to the saints' (Jude 3)."[21] Accordingly, to the church fathers, to appeal to the rule of faith was to appeal to a condensed version of "the whole body of doctrines and beliefs comprising the Christocentrically interpreted Old Testament and the writings of the apostles, the kerygmatic, catechetical, and liturgical doctrinal elements of the Christian message," the sum and core of the faith.[22] As such, the rule of faith was never independent of Scripture; rather, there was an intimate and indissoluble relationship between the two in the patristic mind.[23] Scripture and apostolic teaching provided the substance of the rule of faith, and in turn the rule of faith helped guide the right interpretation of Scripture.[24] Although this appears on the surface to be little more than circular reasoning, a deeper dive into how the rule of faith was understood and utilized by the church fathers will reveal the profundity and nuance of this system of thought. Such an exploration must necessarily begin with none other than the great saint, Irenaeus.

Saint Irenaeus was bishop of Lyons during the tumultuous second century and was one of the fiercest critics of Gnosticism and an articulator and defender of what would eventually be considered orthodoxy in later centuries.[25] Gnosticism is hard to define because there is no single confession to point to; however, there are four beliefs that most Gnostics held in common: (1) they presupposed radical dualism, which divided spirit and matter and claimed that matter was "intrinsically evil"; (2) they did not attribute creation of the material world to the supreme deity but to a lower entity; (3) they

[18] Pope John Paul II and Ratzinger, *Catechism*, 25. "'In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them 'their own position of teaching authority.' Indeed, 'the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time.' This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, 'the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.' 'The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer.'"

[19] Tomas Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith: Tracing Its Origins," *JTI* 7 (2013): 237.

[20] Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith," 233–34.

[21] Scott R. Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed: The Role of the Church's Confession in Biblical Interpretation," *IJST* 14 (2012): 187.

[22] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 449.

[23] Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith," 249, 254.

[24] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 34, 41.

[25] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), 38–39.

believed every man had a spiritual element which desired to be freed from matter; and finally, (4) they believed in a mediator who would help them to ascend back to the spiritual world, their true home.[26]

Returning to Irenaeus, it is worth noting that he had an exceptional spiritual pedigree as he was trained by Saint Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who himself was a disciple of the apostle John. This meant that Irenaeus was only two generations removed from Jesus himself and only one generation removed from an apostle, meaning it is reasonable to assume that Irenaeus received the oral tradition of the Christian faith in virtually the purest form possible and likely had access to, or at least knowledge of, many documents that would eventually form the New Testament canon. As such, believers across the centuries have tended to take the writings of Irenaeus very seriously, and rightfully so, as in his works we clearly see the core of the Christian faith articulated—though obviously somewhat less refined. Take for example how Irenaeus summarizes the faith in *On the Apostolic Preaching*:

> And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct: God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all: this is the first article of our faith. And the second article: the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according to the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who, in the last times, to recapitulate all things, became a man amongst men, visible and palpable, in order to abolish death, to demonstrate life, and to effect communion between God and man. And the third article: the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs learnt the things of God and the righteous were led in the path of righteousness, and who, in the last times, was poured out in a new fashion upon the human race renewing man, throughout the world, to God.[27]

Even a relatively untrained layperson can see in this passage the archaic form of what would eventually become the codified beliefs of the church: namely, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Irenaeus knew the Christian faith and he knew it well, but how could he defend it?

As a result of the gnostic threat, Irenaeus was keen not simply to live out the faith but to articulate as precisely as possible its content.[28] One scholar points out that "Irenaeus knew very well that the Gnostics claimed to know secret traditions allegedly coming from the apostles, and by appealing to those traditions they twisted the Scriptures."[29] To counteract this, Irenaeus made the following appeal in his most famous work, *Against Heresies*:

> The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith…. The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she

[26] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 26.

[27] St. Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 1.1.6, ed. and trans. John Behr, Popular Patristics Series 17r (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

[28] St. Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, Preface:3.

[29] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 455.

> proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth.[30]

What Irenaeus is referring to here is none other than what Jude 3 calls "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."[31] Irenaeus is appealing to the rule of faith, which he claimed was "entirely public and accessible to everyone, transmitted by [the apostles] to the churches they had founded," contrary to the gnostic claim that some of the revelation about Christ was preserved for only a select few.[32] It was this apostolic, public, and universal rule of faith which could prevent distorted interpretations of Scripture: Scripture being in Irenaeus's mind "the foundation and pillar of our faith."[33]

This brings up an important question about the relationship between Scripture and the rule of faith (sometimes referred to as tradition, though not to be confused with the Roman Catholic understanding and usage of the word) in the mind of church fathers like Irenaeus. A particularly insightful answer to this can be found in the work of patristics scholar Joseph Mitros:

> If we ask what served for Irenaeus as the norm of the Church's teaching and the basis of her faith, the answer would be: both Scripture and tradition. Scripture is 'the basis and support of our faith,' and the tradition is substantially identical with the canon of the (apostolic) truth. Which of them is the superior or the ultimate norm? He never asked this question (as a matter of fact, no Father ever asked it); understandably, then, he never gave a direct and explicit answer to it. Indirectly, however, he seems to have used the Scriptures as the last court of appeal. As we have seen, he calls Scripture the foundation of Christian faith, defends orthodoxy by appealing to Holy Writ, and views even the canon of the truth as a condensation of Scripture.[34]

In other words, Scripture and the rule of faith in the patristic mind worked together because they were both deposits which preserved and expressed the same truth, and both had authority because they ultimately came from the same source, Jesus Christ.[35] That said, Scripture was the highest authority, but for church fathers like Irenaeus it had "to be interpreted in the light of tradition by the Church, which is the home of the Holy Spirit," otherwise readers and hearers could be led astray following their own imaginations rather than being beholden to truth.[36]

One of Irenaeus's contemporaries, Tertullian, also contended for Christianity by appealing to the rule of faith. Many of his arguments about and conceptions of the Rule of Faith, however, mirrored that of Irenaeus's, so for the purposes of this paper it would be redundant to cover him in detail.[37] Instead, there will be a concise note about an influential thinker from the succeeding generation named Origen. As one scholar states: "to Origen, the consensus of the belief of the church, based on the Scriptures and the oral tradition, was of paramount importance."[38] Like his predecessors, Origen recognized the centrality of the rule of faith, believing that "assent to it is the sole avenue of approach to the higher knowledge of

[30] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.12.1–2 (*ANF* 1:333).
[31] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.4.2.
[32] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 466.
[33] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 38–39; Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 445.
[34] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 455.
[35] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 457.
[36] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 448, 457–59, 462–63.
[37] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 39; Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 453.
[38] Albert C. Outler, "Origen and the *Regulae Fidei*," *CH* 8.3 (1939): 220.

God which reaches over and beyond simple faith."[39] As a result of this viewpoint, some have argued that trying to read and understand Origen is essentially impossible without first acknowledging the place of the rule of faith in his thinking.[40] In this way, Origen represents the further solidification of the rule of faith's role in Christianity, notably in the task of theology and scriptural interpretation.

A final church father worth briefly surveying is Saint Augustine because he will provide insight into the evolution and use of the rule of faith in a post-ecumenical council context as his life began after the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and his conversion and ministry was not until after the First Council of Constantinople in 381. As his predecessors did, Augustine affirmed that Scripture and the rule of faith had the same source, and he repeatedly utilized the rule of faith to combat the controversies and heresies of his own day.[41] In the words of one scholar, "the Rule of Faith very often functioned as an interpretive device for Augustine, in which the apostolic faith was summarized and could be brought to bear on pressing theological or exegetical questions."[42] This is very evident in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* where he asserts that "if, when attention is given to the passage, it shall appear to be uncertain in what way it ought to be punctuated or pronounced, let the reader consult the rule of faith which he has gathered from the plainer passages of Scripture, and from the authority of the Church."[43] Augustine did not believe, however, that the rule of faith could answer every question or hermeneutical problem; rather, it provided a reliable foundation and some sound boundaries to safeguard the core truths of Christianity, leaving a great deal of flexibility on other matters.[44] In other words, the rule of faith for Augustine functioned "as a limitation on interpretive fancy, while not prohibiting interpretive variety."[45] Obviously, given the status and influence of Augustine, this has a profound and lasting impact on the task of hermeneutics, at least in the Western church, effectively until the advent of modern hermeneutics. Having reviewed the history and authority of the rule of faith, as articulated in particular by Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine, I now turn to modern approaches to the rule of faith.

3. Select Modern Approaches to the Rule of Faith

Although there are a plethora of modern approaches and interpretations of the rule of faith, this paper focuses on two, in particular: first, a narrative approach as found in the work of Paul M. Blowers; and second, a linguistic approach as offered by Robert Jenson. After surveying a variety of other approaches to the rule of faith, in his article, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," Blowers posits,

> The Rule of Faith (which was always associated with Scripture itself) served the primitive Christian hope of articulating and authenticating a world-encompassing story or metanarrative of creation, incarnation, redemption, and consummation. I will argue that in the crucial 'proto-canonical' era in the history of Christianity, the Rule,

[39] Outler, "Origen and the *Regulae Fidei*," 221.

[40] Outler, "Origen and the *Regulae Fidei*," 218.

[41] Roland J. Teske, "Augustine's Appeal to Tradition," in *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 153, 172.

[42] Bryan M. Litfin, "The Rule of Faith in Augustine," *ProEccl* 14 (2005): 88.

[43] St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 3.2.2 (*NPNF*[1] 2:556–57).

[44] Litfin, "The Rule of Faith in Augustine," 89–90, 95, 97.

[45] Litfin, "The Rule of Faith in Augustine," 100.

> being a narrative construction, set forth the basic 'dramatic' structure of a Christian vision of the world, posing as a hermeneutical frame of reference for the interpretation of Christian Scripture and Christian experience, and educing the first principles of Christian theological discourse and of a doctrinal substantiation of Christian faith.[46]

What Blowers essentially says here is that the rule of faith, since the very beginning, functioned as a narrative by which Christianity, and thus Christians, could be identified. This storied apostolic kerygma included the core of Christian belief and provided those who heeded it their metanarrative.[47] Blowers asserts that through successive generations, the rule of faith has preserved the Christian story and offered believers a lens through which to properly interpret Scripture.[48] In a time where the canon was not yet entirely written and fully assembled, it was necessary to have an anchor in such an extremely pluralistic context—especially given the fact that even various early Christian communities struggled to find perfect agreement.[49] As such, Blowers states that "the Great Church committed itself not to a universally invariable statement of faith but to variable local tellings of a *particular* story that aspired to universal significance."[50] This did not of course mean that the rule of faith was subjective and could be modified any which way according to an individual, community, or locality's pleasure; rather, the rule of faith was understood to have some degree of flexibility in its expression and exposition without fundamentally changing its content.[51]

According to Blowers then,

> Early authorities like Irenaeus envision the church as by definition one catholic body receiving Scripture, already and always bound up in the process of interpreting Scripture, and not just the sum total of particular communities of interpretation standing equidistant from a body of sacred writ, entrenched in differences of language and tradition, and inevitably imposing their own peculiar readings. Far from being imposed on Scripture from without (in the manner that the Gnostics impose their own abusive hermeneutical rules on the Bible), the *regula fidei*—or "canon of truth" as Irenaeus sometimes calls it—bears out the true dramatic narrative of Scripture within the church universal, which is its ever-contemporary context.[52]

This is crucially important to understand. What Blowers is saying here is that Scripture does indeed dictate the values and lifestyle of believers and that the sacred text is received collectively by the body of Christ. What this means is that enthusiasm, the often eisegetical hermeneutical practice of those who believe God is revealing the proper interpretation of Scripture to them alone, is rejected. It also means that any sort of phyletism/ethnophyletism—the practice of treating nation, ethnicity, and/or language as the delineating mark of ecclesial bodies—is rejected. In rejecting these two practices in particular, Blowers argues that the church fathers were ensuring the preservation of a truly universal faith and Christian metanarrative: "the Rule in effect offers the believer a place in the story by commending a

[46] Paul M. Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," *ProEccl* 6 (1997): 202.

[47] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 213–14.

[48] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 205.

[49] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 203–4.

[50] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 208.

[51] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 207–8.

[52] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 210.

way of life framed by the narrative of creation, redemption in Jesus Christ, and new life in the Spirit. It immediately sets the believer's contemporary faith and future hope into the context of the broader, transhistorical and trinitarian economy of salvation."[53] This concept becomes very important in the application section of this paper.

Turning now to the linguistic approach of Jenson, it is important to note that he refers to the rule of faith as "creed" and that he always envisions it in tandem with the Christian canon.[54] Indeed, in Jenson's mind "Scripture and creed are ecumenical possessions"—meaning they belong to the universal church.[55] More than this, Jenson highlights the fact that "canon and creed appeared in the church's history as—or so the church has believed—Spirit-given reminders of what sort of community the church must be if it is indeed to be church."[56] What this entails is that not only are canon and creed relevant because the whole church possesses them, together they effectively establish the boundary markers of the church itself by providing her identity. To put it as bluntly as possible, what Jenson is arguing is that without the canon and creed there is no "church," at least not one that would be recognizable or orthodox as we have come to know it. From here, Jenson goes on to swiftly repudiate liberal historical-critical scholarship which has made the case "that creedal doctrine is the result of the 'hellenization of the gospel,'" by pointing out that such a viewpoint "has been often and conclusively debunked."[57]

Having delineated himself from the modern liberal scholarly camp, Jenson summarizes his understanding of the rule of faith in the following way: "the rule of faith, the *regula fidei*, was a sort of communal linguistic awareness of the faith delivered to the apostles, which sufficed the church for generations. This gift of the Spirit guided missionary proclamation, shaped instruction, identified heresy, and in general functioned wherever in the church's life a brief statement of the gospel's content was needed."[58] What Jenson is saying here is that the rule of faith offered, and continues to offer, the Christian community a common linguistic core which contains the truth as revealed by Christ and transmitted by the apostles who were empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to communicate the pure Gospel to the church. This is especially significant for the contemporary Western context given what was explored above regarding the linguistic turn and other movements in philosophy, specifically the philosophy of language, which has gravely endangered both the understanding and transmission of "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

To further reinforce his position, Jenson, following a similar line of thought as Blowers, argues that historically what "maintained the church's grasp of the narrative character of the gospel … was the rule of faith … for the rule in all its versions simply listed a set of events and specified their agent."[59] Ultimately, what this conceptualization of the rule of faith offers is a standard by which to measure continuity, for if there can be a general agreement of key terms and their definitions among Christians, then the true faith, and thus the church, is preserved. Furthermore, she can be defended against those who wish to rend her asunder with a varied arsenal of radical ideology, hyper-rationalism, syncretism (both religious and political), emotionalism/sensationalism, spiritual enthusiasm, and more. Indeed, it will be a combination of Blowers and Jenson's conceptions of the rule of faith which shall help the

[53] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 214.
[54] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 15.
[55] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 2.
[56] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 2–3.
[57] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 2.
[58] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 15.
[59] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 23.

contemporary community of believers navigate such a difficult era and preserve orthodoxy—the communal expression of the true revelation of Christ.

4. The Rule of Faith and Scriptural Hermeneutics

Given the deep relationship between the rule of faith and Scriptural interpretation—Jenson even going so far as saying "canon confirms creed, and creed confirms canon"—this paper would be incomplete without a section dedicated to this topic.[60] In order to address this, the use of the rule of faith in the interpretation of Scripture will be divided into two eras: patristic and modern. Beginning with the patristic era, it must be noted that "if the Fathers always viewed Scripture as a supreme wisdom and all-sufficient, they also always insisted that Scripture had to be interpreted in the Church and by the Church, since it was always assisted by the Holy Spirit and had at its disposal the living apostolic tradition supplying the rule of faith as an apt instrument of interpretation."[61] In other words, Scripture has always been supreme, but it is meant to be interpreted in the church, by the body of believers which has the "communal linguistic awareness" necessary to rightly read it.[62] This does not of course mean that the rule of faith can definitively address every hermeneutical query and solve every problem neatly, only that it can ensure the most salient and central points of Christianity are discerned and thereby preserved.[63] Beyond this, it should be made clear that "'built into the patristic understanding of exegesis is the conviction that the Christian's theological vision continues to grow and change, just as the Christian life is a pilgrimage and progress toward a destiny only dimly perceived. The framework of interpretation, then, does not so much solve the problem of what Scripture means as supply the context in which the quest for that meaning may take place.'"[64] Thus, the rule of faith functions as a sort of boundary marker in which to do scriptural exegesis in the church.[65] Therefore, it can be said that "confession of Jesus as the Christ was the result of the kerygma and the presupposition of biblical interpretation."[66]

The ultimate product of all of this is summarized well by the scholar Paul Hartog:

> The rule establishes a theological framework with boundaries. The narrative of the Rule of Faith recounts true history, but it is not simply relegated to the historical past. Early Christians were not interested in history for history's sake. Present life and reality is formed, informed, and transformed by this history. The Son became human for our sake and for our salvation. Christ came to renew humanity in all its present misery. The narrative had a meaning, and the meaning was theological. Therefore, exegesis was theological as well. The goal of interpretation was not simply the grasping of the original meaning of the text in its original historical context. The Fathers did not mean to deny the historical setting of the text. They, in fact, noticed most of the historical difficulties that have become "the stock-in-trade" of modern historical-critical study of Scripture.

[60] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 34.

[61] Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," 457–58.

[62] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 15; Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 78.

[63] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 66; Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 217.

[64] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 218.

[65] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 76.

[66] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 68, 75.

> But to concentrate on historical inquiries alone would be to analyze the beautiful setting of the table without partaking of the sumptuous feast. Biblical texts (including definable pericopes) are not so many beads randomly strung together. They are integrated by a theological vision encompassing the entirety of progressive revelation.[67]

In other words, the church fathers understood that the Scriptures were not just a collection of historical texts to be read with brutal literalness, to be subjected to the whim of particular and ever-shifting hermeneutical methodologies, or to be placed under the microscope to draw out the original meaning in its historical purity. Rather, the Scriptures provide the framework of Christianity for its readers to be genuinely changed as they believe and come to adopt the Christ metanarrative as their own, thereby making it eternally relevant.[68]

At this point, some more concrete examples of the patristic use of the rule of faith in scriptural exegesis would be helpful; so, the approaches of Saints Irenaeus and Augustine will be briefly surveyed. Irenaeus understood the rule of faith as providing unity and a single message to the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.[69] As one scholar highlights,

> For Irenaeus, then, the Rule of Faith is not identical with Scripture, nor does it trace Scripture's narrative plot. Rather, the Rule of Faith provides Scripture's *hypothesis*. This *hypothesis* concerns the unified actions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, most especially the salvific events of the Son, who brings all things to full consummation in and through his life, death, resurrection, and second coming. The result is that the various notes sounded by Scripture are brought together into a rich and satisfying harmony.[70]

Furthermore, though he acknowledged the importance of grammar and historical context, Irenaeus's hermeneutic was ultimately focused on the theological goals of Scripture.[71] This is because, as noted above, Irenaeus operates out of a fundamentally Christocentric interpretative lens: everything in Scripture was ultimately about Christ.[72]

As for Augustine—like Irenaeus articulated—the Scriptures were a divinely inspired unified whole which pointed to Christ; consequently, he posited that "the Old Testament and New Testament are not at odds, but mutually enlightening."[73] Augustine also viewed the rule of faith as a sort of boundary marker for those engaging in the task of exegesis.[74] In doing so, Augustine put "a limitation on interpretive fancy, while not prohibiting interpretive variety."[75] This belief in multiple meanings, many of which can find

[67] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 76.

[68] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 78.

[69] Thomas Holsinger-Friesen, *Irenaeus and Genesis: A Study of Competition in Early Christian Hermeneutics*, vol. 1 of *Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplements*, ed. Murray Rae (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 221.

[70] Nathan MacDonald, "Israel and the Old Testament Story in Irenaeus's Presentation of the Rule of Faith," *JTI* 3 (2009): 290.

[71] Holsinger-Friesen, *Irenaeus and Genesis*, 224.

[72] MacDonald, "Israel and the Old Testament Story in Irenaeus's Presentation of the Rule of Faith," 296.

[73] Philip Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine: Augustine's Approach to Scripture in *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Pro-Eccl* 26 (2017): 224–25.

[74] Litfin, "The Rule of Faith in Augustine," 97, 98, 100–101.

[75] Litfin, "The Rule of Faith in Augustine," 100. "On matters of non-essential doctrine, good exegetes can and should tolerate one another's differences. Likewise, multiple levels of spiritual interpretation are acceptable, so long as they stay in bounds. It is the church's *regula fidei* which keeps the interpreter within safe limits."

a place within the guardrails set by the rule of faith, resulted in a far more versatile and less restrictive approach to scriptural hermeneutics which ultimately works to humble the would-be exegetes of the world as even the greatest of them must admit they do not have a monopoly on right interpretation.[76] Above all, however, Augustine argues that it is love, in tandem with the rule of faith, which should guide the process of interpretation and is most likely to lead to an orthodox understanding of Scripture.[77]

Since the dawn of modernity, and particularly after the Enlightenment, the task of hermeneutics has evolved greatly. For one, the historical-critical method seemingly reigns supreme, and this is troublesome in part because the methodology it is predicated on is the unintelligibility of Scripture—that is, without complicated and highly specialized exegetical work usually undertaken by those elite few in the academy.[78] This has led scholars like Jenson to argue that the authority to interpret Scripture, at least among Protestants, has shifted from the church (the magisterium) to the faculties of universities, colleges, and seminaries—this not necessarily being a positive development.[79] In fact, it has even led scholars like Philip Porter to argue for a return to more antiquated approaches such as found in the patristic era as a corrective.[80] As other scholars point out, however, this is not as simple as it may seem: people cannot simply will themselves to be removed from their intellectual and cultural milieu and somehow bridge the very large chasm between the patristic era and modernity.[81] Beyond this, postmodernity has taught very clearly that "'there is no hope of a perfect hermeneutical key or control: pluralism is inevitable;" consequently, "perfect vision is … an eschatological prospect than a present possibility for faith."[82] This, of course, does not mean that any attempt at scriptural interpretation is hopeless or that it cannot provide tangible fruit that can find wide agreement among believers, it simply means that as long as there is more than one interpreter of Scripture, there will also be a variety of interpretations.[83]

It is for this reason that many modern scholars, particularly those who identify with the canonical approach to scriptural interpretation, have begun looking to the rule of faith as a hermeneutical guide, recognizing that the "'theological boundary markers'" it provides are essential.[84] As a Reformed scholar, Scott Swain, posits: "the rule of faith is an ecclesiastically authorized re-presentation of scriptural teaching whose hermeneutical function is to provide not only a starting point for biblical exegesis but also to direct exegesis to its goal, which is the exposition of each particular text of Holy Scripture within the overarching context and purpose of the whole counsel of God."[85] Ultimately, the use of the rule of faith returns interpretation to the church and to the province of believers, thereby shifting the focus "from the emphasis on authorial intent to 'divine meaning,' which implies a broadening of the

[76] Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine," 225–26.

[77] Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine," 226.

[78] Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine," 228.

[79] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 68.

[80] Porter, "Liberated by Doctrine," 220.

[81] Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," 82.

[82] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 224; John Lee Thompson, "At the Margins of the Rule of Faith: Reflections on the Reception History of Problematic Texts and Themes," *JTI* 7 (2013): 195.

[83] Adriani Milli Rodrigues, "The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Themelios* 43.2 (2018): 263.

[84] Rodrigues, "The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 262.

[85] Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed," 180.

concept of intended audience that is not restricted to the readers originally addressed by the author, but also includes the contemporary church."[86] Such an approach does not negate the work of historical-critical theorists, much of which has been useful and enriching, but it ensures the Bible is read as it was intended to be—as divine revelation.[87] In this way "the rule of faith functions for the Christian reader like a Kantian a priori: the rule of faith is not simply a truth that the interpreter thinks *about* when reading Holy Scripture; it is also a truth that the interpreter thinks *with* when reading Holy Scripture."[88]

Though some have made the case that relying on the rule of faith as a hermeneutical guide places the institutional church above the Scriptures, as is the case in Roman Catholicism for instance, a better case can be made which contends that "'the authority of the rule depends on its conforming to the Scriptures,' and 'the ultimate purpose of the rule of faith is to let Scripture interpret Scripture.'"[89] If the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* ("Scripture alone") is understood with this crucial contextualization, then it can continue to serve as a reliable foundation for Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy.[90] Jenson offers an application of this approach in the final part of his book *Canon and Creed*, affirming that indeed it is within the church that Scripture is rightly interpreted.[91] This is because, according to Jenson, "Christ—as the creed tells us—is God's agenda in Scripture, and it is God whom we should always try to discern, as what the text before us 'really' imports."[92] Only those who know Christ and believe in him can understand the Scriptures that are about him—Christ is the ultimate hermeneutical key (cf. John 5:39) not only for the Scriptures but for all of reality (cf. Col 1:16).[93] Having surveyed the effect that the rule of faith has on hermeneutics, both in the patristic era and today, this paper finally turns to further applications of the rule of faith for contemporary use.

5. The Rule of Faith for Contemporary Use

Before diving too deeply into the contemporary use of the rule of faith, it would be wise to heed Jenson's insight that "the church's theological tradition has always been less the transfer of a neat body of thought than a continuing discussion, or indeed continuing argument."[94] In other words, what the rule of faith can offer the contemporary Christian landscape is not some completely clear doctrine by which all people must abide, only the framework for conversations about what constitutes the faith and boundary markers to delineate who is "in" and who is "out." As Jenson says, "for the sake of its integrity through history, the church must always remember that canon needs creed and creed needs canon, and that it is permitted to govern its discourse and practice by their joint import."[95] The challenge remains

[86] Rodrigues, "The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 262; Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed," 182.

[87] Thompson, "At the Margins of the Rule of Faith," 194.

[88] Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed," 191. Emphases original.

[89] Rodrigues, "The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 267.

[90] Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed," 181.

[91] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 81.

[92] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 82.

[93] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 120. This is why Jenson asserts that "the gospel story cannot fit within any other would-be metanarrative because it is itself the only true metanarrative—or it is altogether false."

[94] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 86.

[95] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 117–18.

the same as it always has been, how can "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) be preserved while still contextualized in a meaningful way for each generation to hear anew?[96]

In this vast and extremely diverse twenty-first-century theological landscape, the biggest question now becomes "who is 'right' and how can they be identified as such"? If it is indeed true that outside of the church there is no salvation, then this question must be addressed, and urgently. Perhaps the single gravest mistake in attempting to answer this question would be by asking, as Pontius Pilate did some 2000 years ago, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). This is because Christians confess that the truth is not an abstraction, a concept, pure reason, or something in the Platonic world of forms; rather, truth is a person. So, the question is actually, "Who is truth?" and not "What is truth?" and the answer given by Christianity—both in the Scriptures and in the rule of faith—is Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6). Hence why the early church was so obsessed with Christological questions, because how Jesus's inquiry, "Who do you say that I am?" is answered ultimately determines what is believed (Matt 16:15). It was the rule of faith which helped the early church to answer these questions, and it will be the rule of faith which will help answer the questions of today. For the rule of faith, as a product of the apostolic kerygma alongside Scripture, reveals who Christ is and thus what is to be believed if a person wishes to be within the church.

Truth is not something that a person can claim to be in possession of; instead, truth possesses a believer. Therefore, it is apparent that the Person of the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role (cf. John 14:15–27). This is because the Holy Spirit of Christ, who removes the veil of Moses, allowing for Scripture to be read with understanding (cf. 2 Cor 3:14), is the same who grants believers eyes to see and ears to hear the rule of faith (cf. Matt 13:16), particularly as it has been instantiated in the ecumenical creeds.[97] The apostle John further reinforces this when he says, "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for uss" (1 John 4:13–16a ESV). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly a mark of a true believer in Christ. Jesus said that "'you will know them by their fruits'" (Matt 7:16), and the fruit which comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer is made clear by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22–26. Furthermore, as Jesus himself testifies: "'I am the vine, you are the branches. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" '" (John 15:5–6 ESV).

Indeed, and thankfully, it is not the fruit of the Holy Spirit which saves, but always and only the finished work of Christ—the Spirit's fruit is simply a by-product of what Christ has made available through faith, namely the forgiveness of sin and all the many other entailments of salvation. Consequently, however, those who do not exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit cannot make a serious claim of being in the church—for it is impossible to be beholden to Christ and not be changed (cf. Jas 2:14–26). That being said, given that believers are always simultaneously righteous in Christ and sinner in their own flesh, the fruit of the Holy Spirit will manifest but not perfectly. Sinful thoughts and behaviours continue

[96] Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," 228; Swain, "A Ruled Reading Reformed," 189–90.

[97] Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 43, 58.

unto death and this itself does not disqualify someone from being in the body of Christ, for if it did no one would be saved (cf. Rom 3:23).

What all this means for the contemporary use of the rule of faith is that, first, it is a necessary component for preserving the correct language and thus content of the Christ narrative within the church, and as such, the true church is always in alignment with it. Second, those who are not aligned with the rule of faith cannot rightly interpret Scripture, and therefore both interpreter and interpretation should justly be deemed outside the faith. Finally, the rule of faith, though incapable of answering every query arising from postmodernity, does provide an arena of orthodoxy in which important and relevant discussions can and should take place.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that the rule of faith is best understood in the framework of a linguistic and narrative inheritance that is a product of the apostolic teaching about Christ and thereby contains and preserves "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) alongside Scripture. Beginning with why this topic is worthy of exploration, this paper proceeded to offer a history of the development of the rule of faith in the patristic era with a special focus on the work of Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine. From here the approaches to the rule of faith of Paul Blowers and Robert Jenson, two modern theologians, were analyzed: the first positing a narrative understanding and the second hypothesizing a linguistic function. At this point we surveyed the ways in which the Rule of Faith was, and can continue to be, used to interpret the Scriptures both in the patristic and modern eras. Finally, we argued for the way in which the contemporary Christian community could utilize the rule of faith to preserve orthodoxy and help delineate between genuine and false teachings in a time of extreme subjectivism and revisionism. If anything, this paper reveals that the true faith is, and has always been, preserved within the community of believers: for it is among believers that Jesus promised he will be (cf. Matt 18:20; 28:20b), and where he is, so is truth.

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Angelic Fall Theodicy in Dialogue with Tolkien, Augustine, and Aquinas

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Abstract: This article explores the relationship between Tolkien's angelology, as reflected in his fictional writings, and classical angelology, particularly as represented by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Two aspects of classical angelology are examined: (1) the relation of angels to material creation and (2) the role of stewardship over material creation that God entrusted to angels. Particular attention is given to Augustine's discussion of whether the angels "inhabit" or merely direct the stars, as well as to Aquinas's teaching that all corporeal creatures are ruled by angels. It is suggested that classical theological reflection on angels in these areas can resource current articulations of angelic fall theodicy, especially those drawing from Tolkien. Specifically, classical angelology encourages ways of construing the relation of angels and material creation that may blunt the common charge of arbitrariness against the mechanism of angelic fall theodicy.

One of the most challenging aspects of the problem of evil concerns so-called "natural evil" that appears to exist for vast stretches of time prior to humanity. If, for example, death, disease, disorder, and decay in the natural world around us cannot be attributed to the human fall, then how do we account for it? Much contemporary theodicy has been concerned with this question, and there are an increasing number of "developmental" views of creation, arguing that death and suffering can be compatible with the goodness of creation. Perhaps a lesser-explored option is the so-called angelic fall theodicy, according to which natural evil was introduced to the world through the fall of angels.

Angelic fall theodicy is sometimes dismissed as fanciful or overly speculative. On the other hand, it has been taken seriously by significant Christian thinkers throughout the twentieth century, such as the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Reformed theologian Thomas Torrance, and the analytic philosopher Alvin Plantinga.[1] It has also been discussed in connection to the writings of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Lewis proposed it as a possible solution to the problem of pre-human natural evil in both *The Problem of Pain* and *Miracles*.[2] Lewis had read *The Problem of Pain* aloud to the

[1] See Gavin Ortlund, "On the Fall of Angels and the Fallenness of Nature: An Evangelical Hypothesis Regarding Natural Evil," *EvQ* 87 (2015): 125–30.

[2] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics, reprint ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 423; C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics, *reprint ed.* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 277.

Inklings, to whom he also dedicated the book, and he shared with Tolkien the basic angelology within which angelic fall theodicy makes sense. Tolkien, as we shall see, recounted something akin to an angelic fall theodicy in *The Silmarillion*.[3] Tolkien scholar Richard Purtill, discussing the reading of *The Problem of Pain* among the Inklings, suggests that "Lewis might have in some sense borrowed from Tolkien, or Tolkien from Lewis, or more likely, they arrived at the general idea independently out of their common Christian tradition."[4]

This article fleshes out Purtill's suggestion that Lewis and Tolkien were drawing from the "common Christian tradition" in their articulation of angelic fall theodicy. We argue that Tolkien and Lewis were indeed drawing from a classical angelology that was common throughout the tradition of the church (though it is less known and sometimes overlooked among contemporary Christians). We then suggest that this consideration of classical angelology may weaken one of the common objections to angelic fall theodicy, namely, that its mechanism for the introduction of natural evil is arbitrary. To this end, we offer a brief overview of Tolkien's account of angelic fall theodicy, followed by an exploration of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas as representative of a classical angelology.[5] We conclude with some reflections on the relevance of Augustine and Thomas's angelology for defending angelic fall theodicy today.

1. Angelic Fall Theodicy in Tolkien

Tolkien did not use the term, "angelic fall theodicy," or propose it in a philosophical context as a response to the problem of evil. Nonetheless, his fictional account of the creation of the world is highly relevant to discussion of this hypothesis today. Some might object to drawing *fictional* writing into contact with a real theological proposal, particularly in light of Tolkien's protests that his story had no allegorical significance.[6] Nonetheless, in Tolkien's non-fictional writings and letters, he makes it clear that his actual beliefs about angelology undergird and inform the "fictional metaphysics" he imagines for his story. For instance, in an important 1951 letter in which Tolkien responds to a request for a sketch of this "imaginary world," Tolkien correlates Eru (also called Ilúvatar), the supreme deity in Tolkien's world, with God; and he calls the Valar "angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres."[7] According to Tolkien, the presence of these creatures in his story is "the narrative device" designed to correspond to the "gods" of higher mythology, which he believes can be accepted by a mind that believes in the Trinity.[8] In this letter Tolkien also calls the "fall" that occurs in

[3] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 2nd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 15–22.

[4] Richard L. Purtill, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth, Mortality, and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 95–96.

[5] Jonathan S. McIntosh, *The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Faërie* (Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2017) has ably explored Thomas's influence on Tolkien's metaphysics. Less attention has been given to the influence of the broader Christian tradition on Tolkien's works (as will be evident from a consideration of Augustine's angelology).

[6] J. R. R. Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition," in *The Lord of the Rings*, reprint ed. (New York: Mifflin, 2004), xxiii–xxiv.

[7] Tolkien, "From a Letter by J. R. R. Tolkien to Milton Waldman, 1951," in *The Silmarillion*, xiv.

[8] Tolkien, "From a Letter by J. R. R. Tolkien," xiv.

the First Age of Eä—the universe in which Valinor, Beleriand, Númenor, and Middle-earth exist (where *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* occur)—"a fall of Angels we should say."[9]

Tolkien called the first section of *The Silmarillion*, entitled "The Music of Ainur," a "cosmogonical myth."[10] In it Tolkien recounts the agency of the Valar in creation. The essentially Christian structure of the metaphysics of Tolkien's world are evident in this work in ways that they are only implicit and in the background of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien recounts how in the beginning, Eru creates angelic-like beings called Ainur. These creatures exist with Eru prior to the creation of anything else.[11] By participating in musical harmony, they play a role in subsequent activity of creation. But one of the Ainur, Melkor, creates his own music that is in disharmony with that of Eru, earning his rebuke and becoming angry and ashamed.[12] In another of his letters, Tolkien refers to Melkor as the *Diabolos* (devil) of that world.[13]

In the *Silmarillion*, certain of the Ainur are then depicted as limiting their power to be contained within the world, taking leave of Eru and descending into it "to be within it forever, until it is complete, so that they are its life and it is theirs."[14] These are called the Valar, or "the Powers of the World," and they exercise a kind of territorial authority and governance over the world, among other roles.[15] In a later letter Tolkien refers to the Valar as "angelic beings appointed to the government of the world."[16] He also calls them in various letters "the angelic guardians"[17] and "regents under God."[18] The Valar play a role in both the creation and oversight of the world. (Tolkien clarifies elsewhere that he does not understand the stewardship given to the Valar in terms of creation proper but rather in terms of rule and governance.[19]) However, Melkor meddles with their work:

> But Melkor too was there from the first, and he meddled in all that was done, turning it if he might to his own desires and purposes; and he kindled great fires. When therefore the Earth was yet young and full of flame Melkor coveted it, and he said to other Valar: "This shall be my own kingdom; and I name it unto myself!"[20]

Tolkien then recounts the battle that rages between the Valar and Melkor, as the Valar seek to prepare the world for the children of Ilúvatar, while Melkor opposes their efforts. The Valar eventually succeed in their creative work, though the battle slows their progress and has destructive consequences along the way:

[9] Tolkien, "From a Letter by J. R. R. Tolkien," xv. For more on Tolkien's theology and how it informed his fiction, see Austin M. Freeman, *Tolkien Dogmatics: Theology through Mythology with the Maker of Middle-Earth* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022).

[10] This terminology is from Tolkien, "From a Letter by J. R. R. Tolkien," xiv.

[11] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 15.

[12] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 16–17.

[13] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (New York: Mifflin, 1995), 283.

[14] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 20.

[15] For instance, he also speaks of the Valar as mediating the knowledge of Eru. See Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 387.

[16] Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 368.

[17] Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 407.

[18] Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 411.

[19] Tolkien, "From a Letter by J. R. R. Tolkien," xiv.

[20] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 20–21.

> They built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raise them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it. And yet their labour was not all in vain; and though nowhere and in no work was their will and purpose wholly fulfilled, and all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had at first intended, slowly nonetheless the Earth was fashioned and made firm.[21]

There is much that could be explored about the role of the Valar in creation in Tolkien's world, but several initial observations will suffice for our purposes here. First, it is interesting that while the Ainur preexist the creation of anything else, some of them come to inhabit and remain *within* the universe. They have the specific charge of dwelling there as guardians and governors. Second, it is striking how significant of a role the Valar play in the creation and governance of the world. While elsewhere Tolkien distinguishes the work of the Valar from creation proper, they are nonetheless involved in building lands, carving mountains, hollowing seas, and so forth. Third, Melkor's presence in these events suggests a vision of creation as involving a kind of warfare between good and evil forces. It is not simply that Melkor harasses the work of the Valar; he gains territorial dominion over some regions for extended periods of time. Later, for example, Tolkien writes that for many years Melkor "held dominion over most of the lands of the earth."[22] It is also striking that his activity affects everything the Valar do; they progress despite his comprehensive opposition. This is evident from Tolkien's assertion that "nowhere and in no work was (the Valars') will and purpose wholly fulfilled, and all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had at first intended."[23]

The upshot of all this is that the activity of Melkor represents the presence of evil and opposition to God in the natural world *during the process of its actual construction*. As Purtill notes, commenting on this element of Tolkien's creation mythology, "the key point of Tolkien's 'myth' … is that the fall of the angels had an actual physical effect on the world, that some of the harsher and uglier aspects of the material universe may not have been in God's original design."[24] This is possible because there has been an earlier fall, prior to the creation of the world. As Tolkien described it in a letter, "the rebellion of created free-will precedes creation of the world (Eä) and Eä has in it, subcreatively introduced, evil, rebellious, discordant elements in its own nature already when the *Let it Be* was spoken."[25]

2. Tolkienian Angelology in Relation to Classical Angelology

The angelology reflected in *The Silmarillion* is not a purely literary imagination but accords well with how angelology was conceived for most Christians in earlier times. As an entry point into our exploration of this fact, it is worth referencing a commonly cited passage from C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The children meet a character named Ramandu who is a "retired star"—or, as he calls it, a "star at rest." Eustace says in response that "in our world … a star is a huge ball of flaming gas."

[21] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 22.
[22] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 31.
[23] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 22.
[24] Purtill, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 95.
[25] Cited in Purtill, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 94.

In response Ramandu declares: "Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of."[26] He then declares that the children have already met a star, a character named Coriakin.

What does it mean to think of stars as *personal* in this way? Strange as this way of thinking may sound to modern Christians, it is, like so much of Lewis's thought (as well as Tolkien's), simply an unpacking of earlier Christian ideas. All throughout church history, stars have been associated with angels (and at times glorified saints as well), drawing upon similar perceived associations reflected in biblical imagery (Job 38:7; Ps 104:4; Dan 8:9–10; Rev 9:1–2; 12:3–4). Saint Augustine, for example, assigns angels a significant role in the oversight of creation, particularly in their agency with respect to stars. At one point in his literal commentary on Genesis, he ponders whether the stars (and perhaps other heavenly bodies) are "enspirited" by angels, in a way analogous to how fleshly bodies are "ensouled," or whether they are merely "directed" on their course by the presence of angels without any such mixture.[27] Augustine calls this a "commonly asked" question, though he ultimately does not provide an answer to it, as Aquinas observes when he takes it up.[28] In his *Enchiridion* Augustine likewise confesses uncertainty both about the distinction between angels and archangels, as well as "whether the sun and the moon and all the stars belong to that same society, although some people think that there exist shining bodies that do not lack sense or intelligence."[29] What is striking is that, for Augustine, the only question is whether angels inhabit stars or merely direct them. That the life and movement of stars owe to angels in some way or another is simply taken for granted.

Augustine also emphasizes the location of angels within the material universe, including those rebellious angels who turned against God. At one point in his literal commentary on Genesis he speculates that perhaps angels resided in the "higher region of the air" and then after their sin "were thrust down into this foggy darkness," with catastrophic impact upon the climate.[30] These lower regions of the air serve as a kind of prison for demons, whom Augustine regards as now possessing "airy" bodies, to wait for judgment.[31] Later he asserts that "the angels that sinned were thrust down into this foggy atmosphere round the earth as into a prison, where they are being kept in order to be punished at the judgment,"[32] attributing this view to the faith of the apostles (likely drawing from 2 Pet 2:4). Similarly, in *The City of God* Augustine likewise envisages angels at their fall "thrust down to the lower parts of this world, where they are, as it were, incarcerated."[33]

Elsewhere in the literal commentary on Genesis, in explicating the hierarchical nature of creation and God's providential rule over it, Augustine asserts that not only do all things depend on God but that God has subjected physical creation to the spiritual rule of angels:

[26] C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, reprint ed., The Chronicles of Narnia 5 (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 522.

[27] Augustine, *On Genesis* 2.18.38(ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine 1/13 [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002], 214).

[28] See John Rotelle's discussion in Augustine, *On Genesis*, 214 n. 44, who identifies Origen and Jerome as proponents of the theory that heavenly bodies are enspirited by angels, and Basil and John of Damascus as proponents of the view that they are merely directed or governed by them.

[29] Augustine, *Enchiridion* 15.58 (in *On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Michael Fiedrowicz, The Works of Saint Augustine 1/8 [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005], 308).

[30] Augustine, *On Genesis* 3.10.14.

[31] Augustine, *On Genesis* 3.10.15.

[32] Augustine, *On Genesis* 11.26.33.

[33] Augustine, *The City of God* 11.33, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 377.

> To the sublime angels, who enjoy God in obedience and serve him in bliss, are subjected every bodily nature, every non-rational form of life, every will whether weak or bent. This is so that they may act upon or together with the things subjected to them, whatever the order of nature requires in all of them, on the orders of him to whom all things are subject.[34]

Augustine does not clarify what exactly he means in asserting that angels "act upon or together with" material things, but it is clear that he regards them as having a direct influence upon creation. Throughout this section Augustine emphasizes the importance of angels in executing God's government of the world: angels are internally assisted by God; he speaks to them; they gaze upon God; and they execute God's providential direction over the rest of creation.[35]

But do angels actually assist God in the work of creation proper? On this question Augustine makes a fine distinction, granting that they aid in the "production" of the world but are not properly called creators in the way God is: "Although they do, so far as they are permitted and commissioned, aid in the production of the things around us, yet not on that account are we to call them creators, any more than we call gardeners the creators of fruits and trees."[36] Thus, angels are given a significant role in the work of creation, but it is distinguished from the work of creation *ex nihilo*. Just a bit later Augustine admits uncertainty as to how exactly the angels assist God in creating things but insists that God has a role in creation proper only to himself.[37]

Angels play an important role in the thought of Thomas Aquinas as well. Questions pertaining to the placement and movement of angels in relation to material bodies occupy a particularly significant amount of space in his treatment of angelology in Questions 50–64 of Part 1 of the *Summa Theologica*. He considers it theologically important to maintain, for example, that angels cannot occupy two places at once, that two angels cannot occupy the same place at the same time, that the movement of an angel from one place to another is not instantaneous but requires a duration of time, and many other such views that assign angels a spatial existence in the physical world.[38] Like Augustine, Thomas also emphasizes that the current location of both angels and demons, until judgment day, is within "our atmosphere."[39]

In the context of addressing whether the angels were created before the corporeal world, Thomas acknowledges a diversity of views among the church fathers but favors the view that they were created along with the material universe. His rationale for this is that "the angels are part of the universe: they do not constitute a universe of themselves; but both they and corporeal natures unite in constituting one universe."[40] It is evident here that Thomas does not conceive of angels simply inhabiting the universe; rather, angels actually *constitute* the universe, in union with corporeal things.

Thomas thinks that angels were created in this manner in order to govern and rule over the physical creation. Thus, in affirming that the angels were created in the "empyrean heaven" (that is, the highest heaven of ancient cosmologies, supposedly composed of fire), Thomas writes, "Spiritual creatures were

[34] Augustine, *On Genesis* 8.24.45.

[35] Augustine, *On Genesis* 8.25.46–47.

[36] Augustine, *The City of God* 12.24.

[37] Augustine, *The City of God* 12.25.

[38] On these various points, see especially Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.52, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1948).

[39] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.64 a.4.

[40] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.61 a.3.

so created as to bear some relationship to the corporeal creature, and to rule over every corporeal creature. Hence it was fitting for the angels to be created in the highest corporeal place, as presiding over all corporeal nature."[41] Later, in his treatment of the government of the world, after establishing that angels exist according to hierarchies and orders, he writes, "As the inferior angels who have the less universal forms, are ruled by the superior; so are all corporeal things ruled by the angels."[42] In defense of this claim Thomas supplies an array of quotes from the church fathers, all asserting that all visible things are ruled over by angels. After this, Thomas argues that although corporeal bodies do not obey the mere will of an angel, they do obey the angels with regard to local movement.[43] To defend this claim, Thomas asserts that "the angels use corporeal seed to produce certain effects" and that this would be impossible without local movement.[44]

Like Augustine, Thomas understands this role of government over material creation given to the angels in terms of a hierarchical vision of creation. In his view, angels (as spiritual creatures) occupy a "higher" place than corporeal creatures, with humanity (a composite creature at once spiritual and corporeal) in a sort of mid-level position.[45] In turn, "the angels in their own nature stand midway between God and man."[46] As McIntosh puts it, angels "fill an ontological gap that would otherwise intervene between God and man if they did not exist."[47] Thus, Thomas argues that angels can know material things because human beings can know material things, and "whatever the lower power can do, the higher can do likewise."[48] Thomas consistently argues that the higher bodies influence and govern the lower ones. Later, for example, he insists that heavenly bodies are the cause of what is produced in bodies here below, such that the movement of physical things is caused by the movement of heavenly things.[49]

3. How Classical Angelology Can Blunt the Charge of Arbitrariness in Angelic Fall Theodicy

This high account of the role of angels in relation to God's physical creation stands at odd with how angels are often understood today. In contemporary theology, angels often function somewhat like an appendage: they are affirmed, but they do not do much work theologically (aside from occasional supernatural appearances). Augustine and Thomas, by contrast, consider them to play an integral role in creation, such that the particular quality of the world God has made cannot be understood without consideration of their agency.[50] They are the governors and preservers of the very structure of physical

[41] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.61 a.4.

[42] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.110 a.1.

[43] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.110 a.2–3.

[44] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.110 a.3.

[45] This is evident, for example, in how Thomas starts off the treatise on angels in Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.50.

[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.64 a.4.

[47] McIntosh, *The Flame Imperishable*, 187.

[48] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.57 a.1.

[49] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q.115 a.3.

[50] The general significance of angelology for Augustine can be seen in *The City of God*, where Augustine sets his two-fold division of humanity into good and evil in the broader context of the angelic division, such that there are not four cities (good angels, bad angels, good humans, bad humans) but simply two (Augustine, *The City of God* 12.1).

reality. Angels can be summarized as C. S. Lewis describes them in his novel, *That Hideous Strength*: "those high creatures whose activity builds what we call Nature."[51]

Contemporary Christians need not adhere to classical angelology in all its details (e.g., the ancient cosmology in which it is embedded) in order to appreciate its relevance to angelic fall theodicy. Two aspects of classical angelology are particularly worth identifying: (1) the relation of angels to material creation and (2) the role of stewardship over material creation that God entrusted to angels. Both points undercut the concern that angelic fall theodicy is arbitrary (a frequent charge from critics). For instance, angelic fall theodicy is sometimes unfairly represented as involving the direct, local activity of demons upon creation. Ronald Osborne, in his book *Death Before the Fall*, even references theories about "demonic biological experimentation or gene manipulation"—though he distinguishes such theories from the more thoughtful angelic fall theodicy of C. S. Lewis.[52] Shandon Guthrie thinks that angelic fall theodicies require the belief that "demons (with Satan being among them) can directly interact with and manipulate parts of the physical universe." Guthrie objects to this possibility on the grounds that "immaterial substances are incommensurable with material substances without there being a special provision for such interaction."[53]

This conception of the relation of spiritual and material substances is common in modern thought, perhaps the default of modern thought—but it is at odds with classical Christian ways of thinking about angels. For Augustine or Thomas, and the classical angelology they represent, spiritual and material substances are not incommensurable but inextricably intertwined, together constituting the nature of the created reality. Thus, angelic fall theodicy need not posit the direct or local activity of particular demons in order to account for natural evil, any more than young-earth creationists conceive of Adam and Eve directly harming nature through their actions in order to explain their understanding of the effects of the human fall on nature. Rather, it is the presence of evil *itself* that introduces inherently corrosive, destructive tendencies. These destructive tendencies cannot be limited to spiritual reality and hermetically sealed off from physical reality, since the spiritual and physical are interwoven from the beginning. Thus, the plausibility of angelic fall theodicy does not turn on the power of demons but the power of evil.

Osborn, following a criticism of John Polkinghorne, objects that the angelic fall theodicy of C. S. Lewis "remains very much unresolved since there is no clear answer to the question of how these dark powers originated and why God should have permitted them to wreak havoc for so long."[54] But if we approach angelic fall theodicy from the vantage point of the angelology represented by Augustine and Thomas, we are less likely to conceive of the matter in terms of God's *permitting* demons to wreak havoc upon the world. For if it is the natural province of angels to govern the world, it is more difficult to imagine how their fall into evil could *not* affect the status of creation. After all, if angels exist in tight interrelation to physical reality and are in fact charged with stewardship over material bodies, it is difficult to imagine that the bending of their wills to evil would have a purely benign effect upon physical reality. The general relation of "higher" created things (like angels) to "lower" created things (like atoms

[51] C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups*, reprint ed. (New York: Scribner, 2003), 199.

[52] Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 138.

[53] Shandon L. Guthrie, "A New Challenge to a Warfare Theodicy," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 5.2 (2017): 38.

[54] Osborn, *Death Before the Fall*, 150.

or stars) might be compared, as a point of analogy, to the relation of a pregnant woman and the child growing within, where alcohol or substance abuse affects not just her but the child as well.

None of this is intended to establish the exact truthfulness of the classical angelology represented by theologians like Augustine and Thomas, nor to respond to every other possible criticism of angelic fall theodicy. However, if the angelology of Augustine and Thomas (and, for that matter, Lewis and Tolkien) is accepted, then the charge of arbitrariness against the mechanism of angelic fall theodicy is reduced. In fact, it seems plausible that we will be sympathetic to the kind of creation account told in *The Silmarillion*, including the role it assigns to the evil Valar, just to the extent that we are in tune with these older Christian instincts concerning angels. In my own experience, I have observed it to be a nearly universal rule that those who scoff at angelic fall theodicy tend to be less familiar with Tolkien, while those who take it seriously tend to read him quite closely.

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Philosophical Foundations of a Transgender Worldview: Nominalism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism

— Anthony V. Costello —

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Abstract: Every social and political phenomenon has some prior, underlying philosophical basis. The phenomenon of transgender ideology is no different. To many, transgenderism seemed to explode on the scene, as if from nothing. But transgenderism is not an ideology created ex nihilo. Its radical ideas and aggressive activism are grounded in foundations laid by other philosophical views—three in particular—which have long been taken for granted in western culture. Recently, Christian philosopher Abigail Favale has identified major shifts in the transgender movement and given a biblical answer to transgenderism's claims. However, the underlying philosophical foundations of transgender ideology persist. Until these are addressed, we will find ourselves confronted by even more radical movements than transgenderism.

In her keynote at the 2023 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Christian philosopher Abigail Favale gave a penetrating analysis of the phenomenon of transgenderism. In the address, Favale covered various strains of twentieth-century social theory, mostly from feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. These historical streams of feminist thought have converged to provide a theoretical basis for the social and political movement of transgenderism.

The essential component of this theory is separating biological sex from socially constructed gender identities, but where the constructed identity is purported to be as real, or even more real, than the biological given. This move has generated an aggressive political campaign which demands new laws be tailored to accommodate these socially constructed identities over and against what is biological "fact." This has caused incredible social and political stress to an already staggered western culture. This was evidenced by the 2024 reelection of President Donald Trump, where transgenderism was revealed to be one of the central issues facilitating Trump's return to the Oval Office. Many political commentators on both sides suggested that America could not survive so radical an experiment as transgenderism and duly noted how it played a key role in the surprising electoral results. However, transgenderism is itself not a root problem. Rather, it is a symptom of more basic, philosophical errors that have long dominated the western, intellectual tradition. It is these errors that have antagonized the Christian revelation claim and the natural law that once established American jurisprudence, governance, and social morality.

As Favale pointed out at ETS 2023, transgender ideology is a shaky edifice. It is shaky, however, because it is built upon an unstable, philosophical foundation. This article first explicates Favale's own views on the transgender phenomenon and then elucidates three philosophical errors upon which transgender ideology is built. Unless these errors are not only addressed but *redressed* in the West, we should not be surprised to see transgenderism continue or even more incoherent and destructive social behavior emerge alongside it, together with the various legal dilemmas they engender.

1. The Gender vs. Genesis Paradigms

In her 2023 ETS address, and subsequent article, "Gender Identity Theory and Christian Anthropology,"[1] Abigail Favale argues there are significant, philosophical discrepancies between the social construct theory of gender and current gender activism. Considering this emerging paradox between gender constructivists on the one hand, and gender essentialists on the other, Favale then offers a Christian response as a means to resolve the internal tension: The Genesis Paradigm. The Gender Paradigm sides with gender essentialists on the given of maleness and femaleness, but offers a biblical interpretation of the meaning of that givenness, as well as the created purpose for males and females who possess said essences.

1.1. The Construction of "The Gender Paradigm"

Favale begins her analysis of the intellectual roots of gender ideology with Simone de Beauvoir's maxim that "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman."[2] For de Beauvoir, and later Judith Butler, what makes a member of the human species a "woman" is not a concrete, empirically verifiable, or immutable set of biological facts. What makes one a woman is the social contexts in which one lives and the norms, traditions, and roles associated with those contexts. De Beauvoir and Butler are, in this sense, radical nominalists—the first of the three philosophical errors. "Woman" is not a thing in the world for these feminist thinkers, it is a name we ascribe to a thing, i.e., to a body that acts or performs a certain way. According to Butler, however, even the biological stuff itself is a socially constructed "reality." Favale notes this important distinction between de Beauvoir and Butler:

> In the late 1980s, this neat sex/gender distinction [of de Beauvoir] began to unravel, thanks to the work of Judith Butler, the godmother of gender theory. Butler ups the ante of social constructionism, asserting that biological sex itself is a social fabrication:
>
> [According to Butler,] "'female' no longer appears to be a stable notion; its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as 'woman.'"
>
> Butler leans into many of the ideas asserted by Simone de Beauvoir taking them to new extremes. Near the end of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir proclaims, "nothing is natural." For Butler, that statement is a foundational premise. The idea that humankind is characterized by two sexes that are biologically complementary is a social fiction rather than a matter of fact.[3]

[1] in JETS 67.1 (2024): 125–33.
[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 273.
[3] Abigail Favale, "Gender Identity Theory and Christian Anthropology," *JETS* 67 (2024): 126–27.

As such, the idea of essences or natures is not only philosophically antiquarian for these feminists; it is considered an artifact of oppression, an abomination to their sense of what it means, or what it can mean, to be human. The idea alone that there are natural kinds that relate to being or behavior, let alone *human* beings and their behavior, is anathema to the founding mothers of gender theory. For if there are such natural kinds—i.e., essences that exist as such—prior to any act of the mind or will, then these might legitimately constrain our agency and limit our autonomy.

Rather, for de Beauvoir and Butler, socially constructed "realities" should be seen as just that: mental constructs. And to be entirely authentic, and subsequently liberated, one must follow the deepest desires of the autonomous will doing the constructing. On this view, the mind may capture something as given to us, says Favale, but it then defines into existence the world it desires. In this case, it is not merely the individual but the corporate world of culture, of society, that creates "reality." This act is what goes on to become known as "theory" in the world of neo-Marxist liberation thought. In a strange twist of etymological fate, "theory" no longer means what it does in the original Greek, "to look at or observe." Instead, for de Beauvoir, Butler, and their successors, theory now means "to build or create."

This idea goes back earlier to the putative father of critical theory, Max Horkheimer, who made a stark assertion about reality and the social world:

> The world which is given to the individual and which he must accept and take into account is, in its present and continuing form, a product of the activity of society as a whole. The objects we perceive in our surroundings—cities, villages, fields, and woods—bear the mark of having been worked on by man. It is not only in clothing and appearance, in outward form and emotional make-up that men are the product of history. Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life-process as it has evolved over the millennia.[4]

This conception of theory that Horkheimer and other Frankfurt School philosophers advocated is itself a modification of Hegel's understanding of the temporal unfolding of rationality itself or, as Hegel called it, of *Geist*. Reality, or *the real*, is an evolving social process for the critical theorist. There is nothing that is fixed, universal, or unchanging that exists apart from our historically conditioned perceptions of "the world." Reality as such cannot be reified; reality cannot be just one way. Thus, anything we call a "fact" of reality is not factual in the common-sense way we normally speak of facts:

> The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity, and yet the individual perceives himself as receptive and passive in the act of perception.[5]

Given this view of the world of "facts," what matters is not some pre-social reality "out there" that we endeavor to discover truths about. The individual may feel—i.e., perceive themself as—"receptive" or "passive" in taking in "the world," but they are not. What they perceive as reality has been acted upon, shaped, and interpreted by a historical-social process. Instead, what matters on this view is the degree of discrepancy between the individual's conception of themself, themself having also been acted upon, and the broader culture's perception of them. It is a discrepancy between one member of a socially constructed world and a larger set of members of a similar socially constructed world. This discrepancy

[4] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1975), 200.

[5] Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 200.

may undercut individual autonomy if the larger set of members, the societal "mainstream," exploits the difference between the two conceptions to its advantage.

What plays out then is a battle of socially conditioned and conditioning minds intent on creating a particular kind of social world. This battle over which minds get to define reality into existence is an inherently political one. As more and more minds choose to define into existence varying social realities, regardless of the apparent physical bodies they possess, or any so-called "givens" of nature, concrete changes to every facet of society must be made to accommodate each deviation from the prior social norm. In simple terms, this is a war of imaginations carried out in a world we have no real access to but find ourselves living in … *together*. In a democratic society, legislation must be made to fit each competing conception of reality. This basic idea was summed up by the late Justice Anthony Kennedy in his "mysterious" maxim, written in his decision on "Planned Parenthood vs. Casey":

> 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.[6]

Taken at face value, Kennedy's maxim restates the crux of de Beauvoir and Butler's theories, namely, that nature, or the world, itself has no authority over the autonomous human will to "define" it. Liberty is willfully defining what things are, to include ourselves. This is a conception of liberty antithetical to the classical tradition, in which freedom is understood as the liberty to pursue that which is objectively good or lawful or right. In other words, to *align* one's will with that which is already real, be it an intelligently designed natural environment or an eternal moral law. In Christian thought, this is construed as the soul being freed to pursue piety and godliness out of love for God and on account of Christ's sacrifice in our stead. Of course, the fundamental difference between these conceptions of freedom and that of de Beauvoir, Butler, or Kennedy, is deeply metaphysical.

Thus, this postmodern attempt at a corporate act of social construction is analogous to Kant's understanding of the categories of the mind, yet with one important difference. Kant's solution to Hume's skepticism about empirical knowledge of the world was to suggest that the mind is integral in imposing structure onto a physical reality we otherwise cannot know. For Kant, the categories of mind related to the most basic features of our perceptions, features like time, space, quantity, and causation (roughly Aristotle's ten categories of being, with some variation and addition). For Kant, however, the categories of mind are innate and universal. They are not willful or volitional acts of individual minds but properties shared by all minds. They are not under the control of the will; they come built in.

For de Beauvoir and Butler, however, these categories of mind are expanded beyond fundamental, empirical phenomena like space or number. Mental categories include features about human persons and societies. It is we who impose structure or form onto individuals, declaring rather than discovering what is a "woman" or a "man." What, or if, there are such things as actual women or men is, at best, unknowable. However, even the notion that there may be an actual substrate that fixes such identities is for Butler and de Beauvoir minimally distasteful, if not revolting.

1.2. The Shift from Gender Constructivism to Essentialism

This view that socially constructed gender identity is entirely separate and distinct from *any* substrate which might fix identity leads feminists like Butler to reject the biological substrate which

[6] Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania et al. v. Casey, Governor of Pennsylvania et al., 505 U.S. 833 (1992), https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/505/833/case.pdf (emphasis added).

common sense would declare the most obvious grounds for treating gender as binary. This is regardless of what terms we use for the distinct biological entities we encounter (e.g., the terms, "male" and "female," or "man" and "woman," are not what matter but the biological organisms they refer to and which we experience directly).

Favale points out, however, a paradox that emerges when current transgender claims are presented in light of this social construct view of gender. Favale notes that recent claims by transgender activists do not fit well with the social construct theories espoused by de Beauvoir and Butler (and carried out in grotesque experiments by men like John Money). Instead, the contemporary claim of the transgender person is one that seems to assume an essentialist view of gender, i.e., that gender *really is* real. According to Favale:

> The idea that gender is purely a social construct, something imposed upon us by society, is markedly different from the idea that gender is a real, innate, immutable identity that one accesses through self-perception. Those are two contradictory ideas. Of course, you could say that we internalize social constructs and they become innate identities, but that's not what gender identity theory claims. No, the claim is that "gender identity" is a truth so profound that you can realize [it] at a very young age, and your body must be brought into alignment with this inner truth—and that this inner truth might actually be *at odds* with your socialization as a girl or a boy.[7]

The transgender person today does not claim that their identity has been constructed by arbitrary social norms and values. Instead, he or she points to something deep within the self, something deeply male or female that they experience internally, but that for some reason fails to match up with the biological fact of their bodies. In other words, many transgender persons today do feel they are one or the other sex, either male or female, but they are a sex "trapped" in the *wrong* body. What this view suggests, unlike its predecessor, is that male and female identities are real things in the world. They are not just names given to things that are otherwise obscure. Favale explains this "essentialist" move by contemporary transgender activists:

> Gender identity theory makes realist, or essentialist, claims about gender (e.g., "she *is* a girl trapped in a boy's body"; "trans women *are* women"). There's a reification turn happening here. To "reify" means to "make real." The radical social constructionism of Butler dethroned the reality of sexual difference. This anti-realism cleared the way for a new "realism" based not on the objective, intelligible, sensible world, but on one's subjective sense of self.
>
> We're seeing two moves in this unfolding conceptual revolution, deconstruction and reification: First, what is taken to be real—sex as immutable—is dismantled through Butler's anti-realist gender theory. Then, in its place, a reconfigured understanding of reality is asserted.[8]

For the transgender activist today, the problem is not necessarily with socially constructed identities but with their actual, sexed body. One's body is not an ambiguous or unknowable organism that needs to be socially "re-constructed." It is simply the *wrong* body. For these transgender activists there are two

[7] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 127.
[8] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 127–28.

fixed realities: their given sexed body and the deep internal sense of their "real" sex. The problem is that these two fixed realities are not in alignment. To use the parlance of substance dualism, the sex of their soul does not match up with the sex of their given body. A switch must occur, and, given our present technology, this can be done. At least it can be done with regard to cosmetic presentation.

While there may be legitimate socially constructed norms, roles, or associations that surround gender—e.g., "pink" being for girls and "blue" for boys—de Beauvoir, Butler, and Money's theories of gender as constructed "all the way down" are not really valid for today's transgender movement. Nature and essences are reasserting themselves in our postmodern-ish culture. As will be pointed out below, this is a positive development. It is against this "Gender Paradox" that Favale offers a biblical alternative, the Genesis Paradigm, as a holistic answer to this profoundly disruptive phenomenon.

1.3. The Given of The Genesis Paradigm

Favale's Genesis Paradigm grounds human identity in the Genesis narrative. The Genesis narrative answers the challenge of the Gender Paradox by supplying answers to fundamental anthropological questions: questions of origins, of nature, and of purpose. As to origins, Favale reminds us:

> In Genesis 1, Creation unfolds as an integral, interconnected whole: a cosmos. Each stage of this unfolding, each nested layer, is pronounced by God as *good,* reaching an apex with the creation of human beings in the image of God. Moreover, Genesis recognizes the natural duality of humankind, male and female; this difference is part of the goodness of creation, and both sexes share fully in the divine image and the commission to tend the earth.[9]

This account of creation emphasizes creation's goodness. Creation, that which is given, is not an accident, nor is it something imposed on reality by our contingent, and historically conditioned minds. It is the articulated expression of a divine Mind who had mindful intent when he made it. Reality itself, according to Genesis, is a gift of the Creator.

> But in Genesis, reality is a *gift*. There is a givenness to the world, to the nature of things, that is not created by us, but intrinsic to the way things are. Reality is not under our total control, but we have been entrusted with its care—not to recreate it in our own image, but to tend it, to attend to its givenness that is endowed by God.[10]

On the Genesis view, the origin of matter really matters. It orients us properly to matter. Moreover, it tells us not only about the material stuff of which we are made but also the spiritual. Favale reminds us of what Thomists might call our hylomorphic duality:

> We are physical creatures; our bodies are integral to who we are. Yet we are not *merely* matter, because God's breath enlivens each of us with an animating spirit. This is one of the foundational principles of a Christian anthropology: every human being is a unity of body and spirit.[11]

[9] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 128–29.
[10] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 129.
[11] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 129.

Finally, knowing who made us, and understanding what he made, Genesis also reveals to us why we are made in this way. Favale points out two aspects of human sexual differentiation that tell us about our purpose as either men or women in the world:

> What, then, is the sacred meaning of sexual difference? Clearly it holds profound temporal significance as the sole means by which human beings come into existence. But this earthly meaning points to a deeper spiritual meaning: sexual difference serves a sacramental purpose; it is an integral part of how we "image" God.[12]

Sexual differentiation is the means for humanity to create more of its kind. But the kind of being created is significant, for with each new person, each novel body-soul composite, a new image bearer of God is called into existence. Sexual differentiation is the means by which God enables us to create more human beings in his image. This is profound or, per Favale, "sacramental."

> I want to make clear that this *sacramental meaning* of sexual difference is proclaimed by the body of every man and every woman. We are living icons of divine realities in the very structure of our nature, whether or not we become mothers or fathers, or brides and bridegrooms in the literal, temporal sense. We all participate in this higher, eternal meaning.[13]

In summary, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. Their bodies are intentionally diversified— two are made out of one—but without severing the commonality of the image or the shared likeness. Eve is still as much in God's image as Adam, even if her physical construction is other than her husband's. Finally, there is a teleological aspect to each of the given bodies; they are both meant for something, but it is a something that they must do together: procreation.

When placed neatly side by side, the Genesis Paradigm and the Gender Paradox clearly conflict. When compared to the social constructivist view of gender, what is said to be inherent to human beings according to Genesis—a metaphysical status which cannot be graded, altered, or changed, the *Imago Dei*—is labeled a mere fable by constructivists. Man's most fundamental identity is, on the former view, a construction of men, not a given of God. When compared to the newer, essentialist view, there has been a mistake, an error, by God in giving the body one possesses. Thus, it falls to us to fix the problem between body and soul. What follows from either view, therefore, is that all other aspects of human persons become malleable, their constitution as well as their purpose, so long as the individual desires to go through the process of error correction and , as we shall see, practical arrangements can be made.

However, Favale's biblical model is not really an answer to the Gender Paradox, not in the strict sense of the term "answer." After all, it is not as if there is something unknown to gender identity theorists, some lack of knowledge or information gap that needed to be addressed or filled in. Rather, the Genesis Paradigm is the known that is simply rejected in favor of the Gender Paradox by those who dislike the Paradigm. The underlying assumption by gender theorists is a much graver one, namely, that the Genesis Paradigm, even if true, is still unacceptable. The reason for this is simple: that which is given cannot bring the happiness human beings seek (Gen 3:1–7).

The rejection of the Genesis Paradigm is not an intellectual one. It is, as are all rejections of the *revealed* nature of things, an issue of the will. In Romans 1:18–32, the apostle Paul makes it quite clear that when it comes to reality it is we who *choose* not to see. Of course, it only follows that if one exercises

[12] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 130.

[13] Favale, "Gender Identity Theory," 131.

one's will in opposition to that which is ultimate and necessarily real, namely, to God, it becomes that much easier to exercise one's will against any subordinate part, subset, or successive layer of his creation. Conversely, the more we submit and align the will to God, the more we will understand how to interact with the givenness of his world.

2. Philosophical Assumptions of Gender Theory

There are more general intellectual and social considerations that need to be addressed if Favale's Genesis Paradigm is going to reassert itself as the true way forward (or way back) for a culture that has lost its sense of reality. These considerations have to do with what are the overarching, or underlying, metaphysical and moral presuppositions made by gender theorists, and Westerners in general. It is these presuppositions that enable particularly bad ideas about things like human sexuality to emerge. I have already alluded to a few of these presuppositions above. The first, and most central to the issue at hand, is the metaphysical doctrine of nominalism. The second is the ethical theory that most naturally results from nominalism, utilitarianism, as well as another ethical theory that aligns best with both, pragmatism. A brief sketch of each and how they relate will help to understand why gender theory has only, or for the most part, emerged in the West. It is these philosophical assumptions that Christians in the West need to undermine if we are to break their intellectual hegemony and avoid further manifestations of "theory."

2.1. Radical Nominalism and Constructivism

Philosopher R. Scott Smith opens his book on constructivism, the philosophical starting point for both de Beauvoir and Butler, this way:

> Since at least William of Ockham's rejection of universals in favor of nominalism, that ontological view of properties has remained powerful, if not dominant, in the West.[14]

Given the social, academic, and political power and pervasive scope of Critical Gender Theory, which relies on a radical form of nominalism to develop its assertions about constructed "realities," it is reasonable to think either that nominalism is the dominant metaphysical view in the West or, perhaps, if it is not the dominant view with regard to numbers, that it is the dominant view held by the social, academic, and political elite who, being elite, have a disproportionate kind and degree of influence in western society. Likely, both are true. But what is nominalism, and why does Critical Gender Theory so naturally emerge from its shadows?

Nominalism, in layman's terms, is the idea that there are no real essences or natures of things. This means that when we talk about things in the world (e.g., the "desk" in front of me, a "dog," or "a woman"), we are doing nothing more than developing useful linguistic tools—i.e., making up names—which enable us to navigate our way through an otherwise unknown and unknowable environment. Another way of saying this is to say that when I talk about "dogs" I am not talking about a real thing in the world, "dogs", but simply assigning a name, a made-up category, to a series of independent, individual, and particular creatures—a discrete set of sense perceptions that only appear similarly. On this view, Fido, Rover, Lassie, et al., may all exist, but what we call "dogs" does not. "Dog" is a stand-in for that particular,

[14] R. Scott Smith, *Exposing the Roots of Constructivism: Nominalism and the Ontology of Knowledge* (London: Lexington, 2023), 1.

animated thing that runs around my leg, barks incessantly, and that I and others refer to as "Fido." While Fido, Rover, and Lassie may share some resemblances which allow us to construct useful categories or classes, they otherwise have nothing in common, nothing *universal or essential* that applies to all of them and of which they are particular examples. In other words, they do not share in something we might be tempted to believe exists, something like "doggyness." The same applies to any objects of our experience, to include human persons.

Smith traces nominalism back to Ockham, although one will certainly find it in seminal form amongst the Greeks, particular among the Sophists. Constructivism, the result of nominalism, is the idea that all names we give to things are nothing more than provisional, socially devised descriptions of otherwise concrete particular things. What these things are, on the other hand, is inscrutable. Thus, only the names we give them matter. Smith traces constructivism back as early as Hobbes (1588–1679), culminating in the enlightenment period with the empiricism of David Hume (1711–1776).[15]

The critical move in constructivism comes, however, between Kant and Nietzsche. Kant (1724–1804), as alluded to above, presupposed certain categories of mind that were universal and innate to all people but that impose, involuntarily and mechanically, a kind of unity onto an external world that, in itself, remains obscure. Nietzsche, however, takes the basic nominalist idea and turns it into acid, calling into question the reality of the categories themselves, which, according to Nietzsche, are also nothing more than constructed names. What Kant saw as fundamental constituents of the mental—causality, sequence, reciprocity, number, etc—are for Nietzsche empty terms. Smith explains:

> Nietzsche (1844–1900) sharply criticized Kant and attempted to move constructionism to the conscious realm. Moreover, he denied that reality had any general character. Like Hume and (later) Derrida, Nietzsche continued down the nominalist path, for he denied the reality of any numerical identities. Rather, we construct things by taking them to be identical, but in reality, they are only similar. Thus, there cannot be any real universals; everything is particular.… Furthermore, things like 'cause, sequence, reciprocity, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and purpose' are all notions we have devised. There are not even truths of reason, truths due to how the world actually is.[16]

Thus, Nietzsche reduces the entire quest for knowledge down to two basic things: the will and the word. And it is this radical nominalism, or constructivism, that is the seedbed for all theories of gender construction (or racial construction, or any identity construction). Twentieth-century forms of nominalism would be articulated by both analytic philosophers (e.g., Wittgenstein), and continental ones (e.g., Derrida). But the fundamental rejection of essences is the same in both, even if expressed in different linguistic registers.

Thus, the first and most central philosophical idea that needs to be recovered in the West and that must regain dominance if we are to survive (or at least survive and remain *sane*) is that of ontological realism, i.e., that there are real essences to things and, if real essences, real meaning to the words we use about them. Moreover, to reestablish our understanding of words as genuine referents to realities is to further reestablish an intellectual culture that predicates itself on truth, and genuine debate over truth, as opposed to one that treats all claims as merely power plays or tools of an ambiguous and obscure

[15] Smith, *Exposing the Roots of Constructivism*, 40–43.
[16] Smith, *Exposing the Roots of Constructivism*, 44.

"oppressor" class. This is, in no small part, the first step toward the renovation of our universities and system of education.

Fortunately, a shift seems to be occurring. It is not just in the area of metaphysical realism but even in that of moral realism, among philosophers. Further, outside the West, both in academic communities and in common-sense ones, realism is still prevalent. Primarily because realism is our common sense, pre-theoretical understanding of the world. It is also why most normal people—most farmers, plumbers, lumberjacks, firefighters—in spite of the social and political indoctrination that continually presses down upon them, still know that a man dressed up as a woman is still a man, and, as such, should stay out of the girls' locker room. There is something that all particular men share that all particular women do not share, even if it may be hard to articulate.

2.2. Utilitarian Ethics and The Pursuit of Happiness

What is interesting, however, is the apparent reemergence of "essentialist" thinking among transgenderists that Favale references. If anything, this apparent shift from a more constructivist view of gender to an essentialist one provides additional evidence that ontological realism is true and nominalism false or, at least, probably false. As we will see later, practical or pragmatic concerns related to a philosophical view, i.e., how something plays out in real life, can provide evidence for or against the truth of the view. Apparently, nominalism is hard to live by and, while this may not refute it, it certainly counts as a strike against it.

Returning to GIT, the contemporary transgenderist seems to be moving away from the radical nominalism of de Beauvoir and Butler. But, if that is the case, then why do we still have the problem of transgenderism? Is it not enough to recognize that there is something essential about "being a man" or "being a woman" or that we all possess a human "nature"? Is not the mere recognition that these essences are both real and meaningful sufficient to not only ground our language but also guide our behavior? Apparently not.

This brings into question the second philosophical assumption of the current transgender movement, namely, the assumption of a utilitarian ethic as the default moral system. Utilitarianism also goes back effectively to Hobbes, at least in the modern era, and possibly as far back as Epicurus. It finds its most elaborate articulation in the nineteenth century with John Stuart Mill, godson of Jeremy Bentham, who articulated a "principle of utility" after reading the political philosophy of Joseph Priestly.[17] Utilitarianism has only been revised since and has retained its hegemony in western society to the point of becoming part of what philosopher Charles Taylor has termed "the social imaginary."

In short, utilitarian ethicists argue that what makes an act morally good, as opposed to morally bad, is the kind or degree of pleasure it brings to the greatest number of people in a given society. When we talk of any act being morally "good," what we mean, therefore, is not that it is good in the sense of instancing some universal "goodness" in a particular moment or event but just that we call the act "good" because it results in pleasurable mental (physical) experiences.

Alongside any utilitarian ethic, then, is some form of hedonism, psychological or ethical. Psychological hedonism is the idea that all human beings do is follow their own self-interest. Ethical hedonism adds to that by making a positive value judgement about this unalterable mode of behavior, saying it is right and good to follow self-interest. Hedonism here means simply that pleasure, or happiness, is the only

[17] See Fredrick Copleston, *Utilitarianism to Early Analytic Philosophy*, A History of Philosophy 8 (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 5.

goal in life. The modern understanding of hedonism, however, must be distinguished from Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia,* which, as Peter Kreeft points out, "was not just a subjective feeling but [an] objectively real human perfection, the actualizing of our human potentialities for completeness, like a complete work of art, which acts as the end or final cause of the process of creating that work of art."[18] Again, given radical nominalism, it is fruitless to speak of human happiness in any objective sense. As Smith points out, "if qualities cannot be preserved on nominalism, then … moral principles and virtues will not have any qualitative content."[19] Happiness, if taken as a moral principle (as utilitarians do), has no objective content to it. It can refer to anything that gives the individual a sense of pleasure or a feeling of happiness; and that means *anything.*

Given the nominalism that dominates our western, intellectual culture, the only ethical theory we can operate under is some form of utilitarianism, namely, top-down attempts to plot out what kinds of actions might lead to the greatest kind and degree of mental happiness for the greatest number of embodied minds. Of course, the problem of nominalism is even more corrosive than this, because, as Smith points out, by eliminating "intrinsic moral qualities" from the world, nominalism also calls into question the utilitarian claim about the goodness of pleasure or happiness being the proper goal of man. At most, on nominalism, we could say that while we seem to pursue pleasure, we have no real knowledge about it being good to do so. In fact, we are clueless.

Still, in practical, non-theoretical day-to-day living, it is a simple, utilitarian hedonism that our culture continues to embrace as the only real end of man. We hear it articulated by non-theists every time "human flourishing" is invoked as the fundamental moral principle, or when transgender activists claim their existence is threatened by laws that might curb or restrain what they do with their bodies.

Thus, if something like a reinvigorated Natural Law ethic—one which takes essences as real and that presupposes deeper meaning and purpose for natural objects, to include human subjects—cannot reassert itself as the basis of governance and jurisprudence, then we should expect to see more projects like that of transgenderism or ones even more extravagant, more aberrant, and more incoherent than *it*. After all, what limits are there on the human imagination and our ability to manipulate language if maximizing pleasure is our only end?

2.3. Pragmatism and Technological Solutions to Theological Problems

If it is hard to imagine what exactly the limits are on our imaginative faculties and the words, or images, we can employ to express them, it is also not easy to discern what would constrain our willfulness to impose such constructed images and neologisms onto the social world. There is one thing, however, that does seem to limit the external expression of our inner fantasies. That is physical reality itself or the basic laws of nature. This is where the final "philosophical foundation" of transgender ideology comes into play, namely, pragmatism.

Pragmatism in its simplest form states that whatever works is good, or true. Two American philosophers normally associated with pragmatism are William James and John Dewey. I will not explicate their entire doctrine here but just summarize the main points, focusing on Dewey.

According to Peter Kreeft, of these two most famous American pragmatists, while "James has had the most influence on American philosophers, Dewey has had more influence on non-philosophers,

[18] Peter Kreeft, *Contemporary Philosophers*, Socrates' Children 4 (Elk Grove, IL: Word on Fire, 2023), 135.
[19] Smith, *Exposing the Roots of Constructivism*, 83.

especially in education."[20] And it is in education and our educational institutions that I am most concerned with here. Kreeft summarizes Dewey's "revised" utilitarianism, which became known as pragmatism:

> Like the utilitarians, Dewey believes 1) that goodness is not an essence inherent in things, 2) that it is not the same for all individuals or generations, 3) that it must be discovered by trial and error, 4) that the methods of science are the best way of discovering it, and 5) that an act is good if it produces satisfactory consequences.[21]

Dewey is not quite a subjectivist, however, like Nietzsche. He still holds that values can be objective in that nature is a certain way and, as such, right actions will bring the subject in line with nature and its law-like processes. Science as the evaluator and interpreter of nature is the means to bridge the gap between subject and object. If anything, in Dewey's pragmatism, there is only one thing: the objective; and, if anything, the subjective is illusory. Dewey's basic worldview is naturalism, and he sees human life through a specifically Darwinian lens. As such, all thought for Dewey is "a highly developed form of the relation between stimulus and response on a purely biological level."[22]

Thought as biological response is therefore "stimulated by a problematic situation," and its function is to "transform or reconstruct the set of antecedent conditions which gave rise to the problem or difficulty."[23] Thought is for Dewey in this sense purely instrumental. It is a biological adaptation of evolution, a means for the organism to fit more conducively within its ever-changing environment. Of course, alternatively, there can be thought responses that are irrational in that they do not facilitate a solution to an environmental problem but, instead, create more problems or exacerbate the problem at hand. For example, if I think of hitting my computer keyboard because it is on the fritz, this is not a "good" thought response in that it will not lend to the problem of the unreliable keyboard being resolved but only make the problem worse.

For Dewey, this kind of instrumentalism is not reserved just for daily activities; it is also the primary function of science. Given this view of science, the theoretical sciences collapse into applied science, or technology. Long processes of theoretical scientific inquiry using abstract symbols and the operations of math are still pragmatic, if they wind up solving practical problems of ordinary living.

The great influence of Deweyan instrumentalism can be seen throughout American education in the twentieth century in its marginalization of the humanities and its overemphasis on STEM and common core. Its main principle of problem-solving as the primary function of thought and, subsequently, education was eventually translated into the social sciences as well. As Frederick Copleston points out, when Dewey speaks about "change in the environment" he is not talking about using technology to change the actual physical constituents of nature but rather the cultural, or social, environment.[24]

In other words, Dewey's pragmatism made way for seeing gender theoretical concerns as mere technical problems which, given advances in the applied sciences, could eventually be overcome. If one feels like a woman but has a man's body, it is not an issue of essences or natures, it is an issue of engineering. Or, even if it is an issue of essences and nature, it is still a problem of engineering. As such, once the medical technology is available, the "right" thing to do is to solve the problem. Once the

[20] Kreeft, *Contemporary Philosophers,* 92.
[21] Kreeft, *Contemporary Philosophers*, 97.
[22] Copleston, *Utilitarianism to Early Analytic Philosophy*, 354.
[23] Copleston, *Utilitarianism to Early Analytic Philosophy*, 354.
[24] Copleston, *Utilitarianism to Early Analytic Philosophy,* 355.

problem is solved via instrumental thought and the corresponding external technologies, the organism can return to a state of "security" or equilibrium until the next problem arises. This cultural presumption of pragmatism is evidenced every time another report is produced that tries to show whether or not people who have transitioned feel more or less stable than they did prior to their medical treatments.

Dewey's instrumentalism does not require nominalism per se. One can assume his view of moral and ethical problems as practical or technical ones and apply that to essentialist views of gender, that is, so long as utilitarian hedonism is also presupposed. As such, if Favale is right and the transgender discourse is moving away from constructivism and back toward essentialism, there is still no reason for the gender essentialist to not see the problem of being trapped in the wrong body as merely a technical issue, one that, if it can be fixed, is worthy of pursuing given the prior assumption of utilitarian hedonism.

3. Conclusion: Today's Culture Wars and The War to Come

Given the analysis so far, one can make a general conclusion about the way our current system runs in America: American governance and jurisprudence operate mainly from a philosophical confluence of nominalism, utilitarian hedonism, and pragmatism. As such, our institutions function with an almost exclusive aim: to create and enforce laws tailored to maximize the amount of subjective happiness among individual members of society by solving technical problems associated with the attainment of that happiness. In a world without any eternal laws, truths, or purposes, this might be the best we could hope for.

While this all may sound quite abstruse, it is, in a very real sense, the essence of what today often goes under the term "culture wars." For the opposing view of what our institutions should be is quite incompatible with this one. That view, alternatively, argues that our institutions of education, governance, and jurisprudence are meant to instruct members of the society in the pursuit of objective virtues (regardless of quantitative calculations of pleasure or pain) for the sake of creating laws that correspond to values that are eternal. They are eternal, and universal, because they are either necessary and uncreated in themselves or because they are the given of a necessary and eternal Creator.

There are, of course, dangers in both views. On the former (current) view, life reduces to pure action. It is a constant experimentation with little to no need for reflection, contemplation, or theory (in the classical sense). This is a world of pure politics. On the latter view, activity, concreteness, and embodiment can be sacrificed for a life of disengaged abstraction. This world is that of the cloistered and privileged "pure thinker." The church must always be aware of this dichotomy, never abdicating too much of its life and message to one or the other. Until the tide turns in favor of the latter view, however, we should only expect more and more aberrant ideas about humans and their behavior to emerge, transgenderism being just one experiment among many possible experiments.

At the time of Favale's 2023 ETS lecture, transgenderism was front and center in the dialogue on theological anthropology (the theme of the 2023 conference). More recently, however, the concern has shifted, and rightly so, to what seems to be the more overarching, and more egregious, threat to humanity. That threat is transhumanism. In fact, some, myself included, have begun to see transgenderism as little more than a moral and political stepping stone to this grander vision of, to use C. S. Lewis's phrase, the abolition of man. But that technology is advancing to the point where an ungodly synthesis of man with "intelligent" machine is no longer a story for the fiction section of our online bookstores. Still, if we are

to address *this* paradox, we will need to tackle the same philosophical foundations that have given rise to the Gender Paradox.

This work, of course, is not one of evangelism but pre-evangelism. It is the attempt to return culture back to rational conditions more congruent with the gospel and the givenness of God's world. That said, we dare not discount the more direct route, which is the work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts and minds of men—the spiritual awakening to the given of the Genesis Paradigm. At the same time, we are also not called to be passive as the Spirit does his work in the world. God has always provided his church with intellectual resources to aid in the spiritual battle that rages, and it is because of the Divine Logos of God that we can properly reason as men.

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Empathy and Its Counterfeits: Navigating *The Sin of Empathy* and a Way Forward

— Jonathan D. Worthington —

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Abstract: In our families, churches, or neighborhoods; in political discussions, situations of accused abuse, or racially charged conversations; in polarizing times, compassion must be wed with *relational exegesis*, the well-established name for which is *empathy*. Empathy involves three primary components: *understand, resonate, self-differentiate*. When we dismiss or silo empathy research in favor of a popular but bastardized form of "empathy," which Joe Rigney has done in his recent book *The Sin of Empathy*, a hamstringing of pastoral insight runs rampant. Rigney, swallowing a pop-culture definition of "empathy" against good research practices, has provided a counterfeit to empathy that leaves pastoral counsel about practical and cultural issues mostly impotent. This review article provides sound research on empathy, a helpful perspective on research itself, and therefore a responsible way forward in such polarized times.

In polarizing times, we need more and better *relational exegesis*.

In our families,churches, or neighborhoods; in political discussions, situations of accused abuse, orracially charged conversations; we need robust compassion wed with relational exegesis.

Choosing compassion *or* exegesis is choosing a hand *or* arm. Imagine feeling a *compassionate, sympathetic gut-level urge* to help a daughter who was dumped, an ethnically misunderstood friend, an accused pastor friend, or an abused congregant friend. Wonderful! And (not "But") *how do you know* precisely what would truly help? *How do you gain* particularized insights for this person or these persons in such a messy situation so that your compassionate urges and actions are wed with appropriate wisdom?

The answer is relational exegesis. There is a well-established name for this. Empathy.

1. Empathy as Relational Exegesis

I'm blessed to train pastors and teachers in the Majority World who have little or no access to theological education. In our curriculum, we include these core aspects of biblical exegesis:

1. **Understand**: Find and truly understand *the author's* point—his *cognitive point*—getting into *his* mental shoes (or sandals), so to speak.
2. **Resonate:** Be attuned to and even resonate with *the author's* emotions—his *affective punch*—such as feeling David's or Paul's desperation or joy or anger or comfort or disgust or hope, which are inextricably wed with how and why they write.
3. **Self-Differentiate**: Conduct these explorations while maintaining some sense of *distinctiveness*, knowing we cannot simplistically apply the author's cognitive point and affective punch immediately to our own lives, context, and people. God intentionally governs the times, places, languages, cultures, technologies, etc. between his text and us. (As others say, you'll need to "exegete" your audience too.)

The author's (cognitive) point. The author's (affective) punch. Your distinctiveness. *Understand, resonate, self-differentiate*. This rhythmic mantra captures the heart of exegesis.

Shift to empathy. General summaries of empathy say something like *understanding and sharing the emotions and perspectives of others*. Such are rightly directed but simplistic.

Jean Decety, a leading empathy scholar for four decades, often writes about "the *affective*, *cognitive*, and *regulatory* aspects of empathy."[1] He and Philip Jackson explain:

> Empathy is a complex form of psychological inference in which observation, memory, knowledge, and reasoning are combined to *yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others*…. There are many definitions of empathy, almost as many as there are researchers in this field…. But regardless of the particular terminology that is used, there is *broad agreement on three primary components*: (a) an *affective response* to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person's emotional state; (b) a *cognitive capacity* to take the perspective of the other person; and (c) some *regulatory mechanisms* that keep track of the origins of self- and other-feelings.[2]

Empathy "yield[s] insights into the thoughts and feelings of others"—i.e., relational exegesis. More specifically, empathy involves the same *three exegetical aspects* as above!

Decety and Jackson's "broad agreement" was noted in 2004. In 2021, Jakob Eklund and Martina Meranius analyzed fifty-two review articles from 1980 through 2019 on the state of empathy studies. Though "most articles and books about empathy begin by claiming that there is far from a consensus on how empathy is to be *defined*," nevertheless there is "*a developing consensus* among neuroscientists,

[1] Jean Decety, "The Neurodevelopment of Empathy in Humans," *Developmental Neuroscience* 32.4 (2010): 260 (italics added). Below, italics are added unless otherwise noted.

[2] Jean Decety and Philip Jackson, "The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy," *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience* 3 (2004): 73. Self-regulated self-differentiation is now a standard aspect of empathy, so researchers explore *dynamics* of *how* "the regulatory mechanisms of empathy" interact with each other and affective and cognitive dynamics: see Ke Jia and Xiuli Liu, "Regulating Empathy: Exploring the Process through Agents and Strategies," *Promotion* 25.12 (2023), 1265–85; cf. Nicholas Thompson, Carien van Reekum, Bhismadev Chakrabarti, "Cognitive and Affective Empathy Relate Differentially to Emotion Regulation," *Affective Science* 3.1 (2022): 118–34; Shannon Spaulding, Rita Svetlova, and Hannah Read, "The Nature of Empathy," in *Neuroscience and Philosophy*, ed. Felipe De Brigard and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022). Spaulding, Svetlova, and Read not only discuss affective, cognitive, and motivational aspects, but also engage the self-regulated self-differentiation of empathy.

psychologists, medical scientists, nursing scientists, philosophers, and others that empathy involves *understanding*, *feeling*, *sharing*, and *self-other differentiation*."[3]

Eklund and Meranius's "understanding" and "self-other differentiation" align with Decety and Jackson's "cognitive capacity" and "regulatory mechanisms that keep track of the origins of self- and other-feelings,"[4] respectively. But Eklund and Meranius separate "feeling" another person's world from "sharing" it, while Decety and Jackson combined those under "affective response to another person" since the affective aspect of empathy "often, but not always, entails sharing that person's emotional state." The third primary component of empathy—self-regulated self-differentiation—may be the least known among laypeople. But at least since the 1940s, empathy researchers have observed that *empathy itself involves* the connected aspects of *self-regulation* of one's own emotions and *self-differentiation* from the other's experiences.[5]

My heuristic tripartite summary of exegesis can be applied to empathy:

1. **Understand**: Find and truly understand *the other's* point—his or her *cognitive point*.
2. **Resonate:** Be attuned to and even resonate with *the other's* emotions—his or her *affective punch*.

[3] Jakob Eklund and Martina Meranius, "Toward a Consensus on the Nature of Empathy: A review of reviews," *Patient Education and Counseling* 104.2 (2021): 300.

[4] Cf. Benjamin Cuff, Sarah J. Brown, Laura Taylor, and Douglas J. Howat, "Empathy: A Review of the Concept," *Emotion Review* 8.2 (2016): 144–53; Amy Coplan, "Will the Real Empathy Please Stand Up? A Case for a Narrow Conceptualization," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49 Supp. (2011): 40–65; Jean Decety and Meghan Meyer, "From Emotion Resonance to Empathic Understanding: A Social Developmental Neuroscience Account," *Development and Psychopathology* 20.4 (2008): 1053–80; Suzanne White, "Empathy: A Literature Review and Concept Analysis," *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 6.4 (2007): 253–57; John Deigh, "Empathy and Universalizability," *Ethics* 105 (1995): 743–63.

[5] For a *tiny* sample cf. Nicholas Thompson et al., "Empathy and Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Account," *Progress in Brain Research* 247 (2019): 273–304; Judith Hall and Rachel Schwartz, "Empathy Present and Future," *Journal of Social Psychology* 159.3 (2018): 225–43, esp. 235; Buffel du Vaure et al., "Promoting empathy among medical students: A two-side randomized controlled study," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 103 (2017): 102–07; Robert Eres et al., "Individual Differences in Local Gray Matter Density Are Associated with Differences in Affective and Cognitive Empathy," *NeuroImage* 117 (2015): 305–10; Arnaud Carré et al., "The Basic Empathy Scale in Adults (BES-A): Factor Structure of a Revised Form," *Psychological Assessment* 25 (2013): 679–91; Jean Decety and Margarita Svetlova, "Putting Together Phylogenetic and Ontogenetic Perspectives on Empathy," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience* 2.1 (2012): 1–24; Hannah Bayne, "Training medical students in empathic communication," *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* 36 (2011): 316–29; Decety and Meyer, "From emotion," 1053–80; Jean Decety and Sara Hodges, "The Social Neuroscience of Empathy," in *Bridging social psychology: Benefits of transdisciplinary approaches*, ed. Paul Van Lange (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 103–09; William Ickes, *Everyday Mind Reading* (New York: Prometheus, 2003); Nancy Eisenberg, "Emotion, Regulation, and Moral Development," *Annual Review in Psychology* 51 (2000): 665–97; Sara Hodges and Daniel Wegner, "Automatic and Controlled Empathy," in *Empathic Accuracy*, ed. William Ickes (New York: Guilford, 1997), 311–39; Mark Davis, *Empathy: a Social Psychological Approach* (Westview, 1996); Daniel Batson, "Empathic Joy and the Empathy-altruism Hypothesis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61 (1991): 413–26; Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social-Psychological Answer* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991); Carl Rogers, "The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 21.2 (1957): 95–103; Theodor Reik, *Listening with the Third Ear: The Inner Experience of the Psychoanalyst* (New York: Grove, 1949). Reik's fourth aspect of empathy, "detachment," regards withdrawing from affective and cognitive exploration to engage in "detached" reasoning processes in order to better help.

3. **Self-Differentiate:** Conduct these cognitive and affective explorations while maintaining clear *distinctiveness*, knowing that you are under *no* obligation to identify the other person's thoughts or emotions as *your own* or as *right*. God created you as different—connected, but different—people, and his truth is bigger than any of us fully recognize.

The other's (cognitive) point. The other's (affective) punch. Your distinctiveness. *Understand, resonate, self-differentiate*. This rhythmic mantra captures the heart of empathy.

2. Is There a Problem with "Empathy"?

In his recent book, *The Sin of Empathy*,[6] my friend and former colleague Joe Rigney appears to be waging war on empathy. He is not. He just thinks he is. (Sort of.)

2.1. Is Empathy Itself the Problem?

Rigney explains:

> Pity, of course, is a good thing…. But unmoored from what is good and right, pity becomes destructive. Compassion degenerates into untethered empathy, leaving destruction in its wake. And given the prevalence of appeals to empathy in our society, *it is vital that we learn to distinguish good from bad, healthy from toxic, the virtue of compassion from the sin of empathy*. (p. xiv)

Let's exegete Rigney. Here he includes no category of good (tethered) empathy such that it (rather than compassion) could degenerate into "untethered empathy." (Unless Rigney is conflating good empathy into compassion without saying so, which would be problematic.) Instead, his wording easily suggests that empathy is merely debased compassion and by nature untethered. Instead of distinguishing virtuous from sinful forms of empathy, Rigney constructs a dichotomy between "the virtue of compassion" ("compassion the virtue"?) versus "the sin of empathy" ("empathy the sin"?) and implies that empathy is merely a counterfeit of compassion.

Rigney recently clarified that he does "prefer," thinks it "best," to use "sympathy and compassion for the virtue and *empathy for the corruption*."[7] And it shows:

> The world has sought to give compassion an upgrade, to improve it and make it more loving. Enter *empathy* ("All rise"). This book is about that shift—the shift from compassion to *empathy*—and how it *wreaks havoc* on families, churches, relationships, and societies. (*The Sin of Empathy*, xix)

> The argument of this book is that the shift from "with" to "in" [regarding the shift in Heb. 4:15 NIV from Christ *sympathizing*, "suffering with," to *empathizing*, "suffering in"] is of more than philological importance. At stake is the difference between virtue and *vice*, goodness and *sin*. (p. 2)

[6] Joe Rigney, *The Sin of Empathy: Compassion and Its Counterfeits* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2024). Citations of *The Sin of Empathy* are indicated in the body of the article.

[7] Joe Rigney, "Once More Unto the Empathetic Breach," *American Reformer*, 7 May 2025, https://americanreformer.org/2025/05/once-more-unto-the-empathetic-breach/

> A deficiency of compassion is apathy.… On the other hand, *empathy is an excess of compassion*, when our *identification* with and *sharing* of the emotions of others *overwhelms* our minds and *sweeps us* off our feet. *Empathy loses sight of the ultimate good*, both for ourselves and for the hurting. (p. 14; cf. pp. 31, 89)

Yet in the foreword Rosaria Butterfield claims, "Joe Rigney is *not against empathy*" (p. x). I chuckled. But something else *is* going on.

2.2. Defining "Empathy"

Remember, empathy according to the myriad scholars who study it involves *understanding, resonating, self-differentiating*. When Butterfield says Rigney is "not against empathy," she's defining it as "the ability to appreciate and respect the feelings of another" (p. x). While terribly truncated, that *is* a sliver within empathy's affective aspect.

Rigney, though, specifies two ways *he* will use "empathy" in his book:

> [I]n this book, I will use the term "empathy" in one of two ways. The first is simply as "emotion-sharing." Emotion-sharing in itself is neither virtuous nor vicious. It's simply a common feature of human relationships. In this sense, it is a natural emotion, and not necessarily a virtue.[8]
>
> The second and more negative use is the sin of (untethered) empathy, which is the excessive and overpowering form of this passion. (p. 12)

In relation to the ABCs of empathy—(a) an affective response, (b) a cognitive capacity, and (c) some regulatory mechanisms—Rigney's definitions fail badly:

- In Rigney's first definition, he truncates (a) into only emotion-sharing (which is often part of affective empathy but not always), and he deletes (b) completely. (This helps Rigney's agenda against emotions trumping reason—see below.)
- In Rigney's second definition, by far his predominant one (49 to 1), he presents the contradiction of (c).

Rigney doesn't mind truncating, deleting, and contradicting empathy research when defining empathy, and we'll explore why in §3. For now, observe a quirk in Rigney's book.

2.3. Inadvertently Commending Proper Empathy

Set aside for a moment Rigney's *rhetorical patterns*, *definitions*, and *main use* of "empathy" (§2.1–2). Notice in Table 1 that throughout his book, Rigney actually commends each primary component of empathy.

[8] Closing the parallelism would be balanced: "neither virtuous nor vicious … not necessarily a virtue [or a vice]."

Table 1: Three Elements of Empathy that Rigney Commends

Empathy Researchers	Rigney in *The Sin of Empathy*
(a) an affective response to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person's emotional state;	"It's good to feel the same emotions as other people—to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15)" (p. 7, which Rigney recognizes as part of empathy, cf. p. 5). And "this is a God-given blessing… vicariously experiencing the emotions of another—can be a wonderful thing in its place. It fosters connection and bonding" (pp. 79–80, there called "empathy"; cf. pp. 12, 104).
(b) a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person;	"It's good to try to understand others, to see things from their point of view, to recognize their 'felt reality'" (p. 7, which Rigney recognizes as part of empathy, cf. p. 5).
(c) some regulatory mechanisms that keep track of the origins of self- and other-feelings; the self-regulation of one's own emotions and the connected self-differentiation from the other's emotions, experiences, perspectives.	One of Rigney's main drives in this book is to help people "cultivate the moral strength and stamina to resist the inevitable emotional sabotage and manipulation while offering true care and compassion" (p. 100), which is only possible through "self-definition and self-regulation" (pp. 32–33). "Such differentiation and self-regulation on our part enables us to then rightly feel for others, care for others, identify with others, and respond to others" (p. 35).

This observation is for uncritical readers—that is, those who will uncritically swallow Rigney's perspective *and* those who will uncritically spew out everything Rigney's writes. Notice: *it is good*—even according to Rigney—to *understand, resonate, and self-differentiate*. Rigney (unwittingly) commends true empathy.

But, yes, questions of authorial intent enter here. What exactly is Rigney *trying* to say?

2.4. The Importance of Self-Regulated Self-Differentiation

Rigney is against emotional manipulation (pp. xiv, 23, 28, 61). But the main thing Rigney critiques is *being* emotionally manipulated, i.e., having or practicing certain qualities that make it easy for people to emotionally manipulate you (and others through you).

Specifically, Rigney critiques "identifying with" and "sharing the emotions" of others *to such an extent* that *the mind becomes overwhelmed* (p. 14). In Butterfield's words, Rigney takes issue with "an emotive connection that *exceeds and overpowers reality and good judgment*" (p. x; cf. pp. 32–34, 61–62, 72, 75, 99). Rigney says he's against "a concern for the hurting and vulnerable that is *unmoored from truth, goodness, and reality*" (p. 77; cf. pp. 91, 98).

As noted in Table 1, Rigney recognizes that resistance and thus proper care is virtually impossible for someone with poor or no "self-definition and self-regulation" (pp. 32–33). Rather, "such differentiation

and self-regulation on our part enables us to then *rightly feel* for others, *care* for others, *identify with* others, and *respond* to others" (p. 35).[9] That is:

> Ensuring that our feelings are directed in the right place requires that we maintain the *appropriate emotional boundaries* so that we can *think clearly and rightly* about our particular situation. In other words, compassion, with its *insistence on self-differentiation* and *concern for long-term good*, is what is needed. (p. 39)

Recite Rigney's quote again, but with one tweak: "In other words, [proper empathy], with its *insistence on self-differentiation* and *concern for long-term good*,[10] is what is needed."

That would resonate with empathy researchers, who regularly put forward two related points. First, *being swallowed* by someone else's emotions and *simply swallowing* their perspective of their own experience are:

- "*dysfunctionality* in the face of others' emotions,"
- "*maladaptive* traits," and even
- "*neurotic* tendencies."11

Yikes! Don't do *that*, please—say empathy researchers. Rigney unwittingly stands *with* empathy scholars in this. (His unwittingness is due to a fundamental error in his approach to the research—see §3 below.)

Second, empathy scholars regularly and explicitly state that such relational malpractices—i.e., losing one's sense of truth and self in another—are not only *maladaptive* and *not part* of empathy, but *oppose* a key aspect of empathy.

The wealth of empathy resources is at Rigney's disposal, but he contents himself with using the term "empathy" to critique maladaptive, neurotic, *anti-empathic* interpersonal malpractices. C. S. Lewis even calls Rigney's type of rhetoric "dangerous." It's like when the bastardized[12] version of mercy (which has been corrupted to become *un-merciful*)[13] or the bastardized version of love (which has "*cease[d]* to be love" and is now actually "a complicated form of *hatred*"—Rigney's words, p. 18)[14] are nevertheless *still called the same name* as the beautiful thing—at which point they are "all the more dangerous."

Rigney himself says "As with mercy, so with empathy" (p. 45), yet he doesn't follow through with Lewis's perspective. Because for Rigney, while love can be changed to become *un-love* (even *hatred*), and while mercy can be changed to become *un-mercy*, empathy becomes…"the sin of empathy." Why not *un-empathy*?

Rigney's rhetoric is "dangerous" not least because it *will* turn people against *real empathy*—which he commends (Table 1 above)!—*and* against the dysfunctional, *un-empathic counterfeits* of losing

[9] These four italicized aspects are closely associated with Rigney's four points of compassion (see pp. 104–5).

[10] Empathy *is* oriented toward long-term good, even enabling practical activity toward such: see §§2.3 and 3.1–2 of Jonathan Worthington, "Navigating Empathy""Navigating Empathy," *Themelios* 46.3 (2021): 503-21.

[11] Hall and Schwartz, "Empathy Present and Future," 230. Interestingly, Hall and Schwartz are two of the three empathy scholars Rigney cites (*The Sin of Empathy*, 2–5).

[12] Cambridge Dictionary explains "to bastardize" as "to change something in a way that makes it fail to represent the values and qualities that it is intended to represent" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bastardize).

[13] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on THeology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper, reprint ed. (New York: HarperOne, 1994), 326–27; see Rigney, *The Sin of Empathy*, 44–45, 121–22.

[14] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, reprint ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2017).

oneself and truth in another. A more accurate title, which simultaneously doffs the hat to C. S. Lewis, would be *The Sin of Un-Empathy*.

2.5. Exiling "Empathy" to Corruption Reveals Two Lacks

Rigney *wants* "to use sympathy and compassion for the virtue and empathy for the corruption,"[15] but in his book he still uses "empathy" in a not-quite-wholly negative way. Why?

> I've attempted to create room for those different contexts (popular vs. medical vs. academic) and for those who wish to continue to use the term "empathy" to refer to "compassion that is tethered to truth."[16]

This shows *two significant lacks* that need to be addressed.

First, this shows a lack of understanding regarding how academic studies should contribute to lay understanding. Creating silos for "empathy" (popular vs. medical vs. academic) is like expelling the academic study of Biblical Theology from how pastors and other laypersons use that term or concept.

Second, creating room for using "empathy" to refer to "compassion that is tethered to truth" shows a lack of awareness of the richness of empathy as relational exegesis. Empathy and compassion are an arm and a hand, functioning best when working together and not usurping the other's gifting. Both lacks will now be addressed.

3. Empathy "Properly" Understood and Applied

Some readers will have long since pulled their retorts out of their holsters and pointed them at my use of *proper*, *real*, and *true* empathy.

3.1. Is There a "Proper" Understanding of Empathy?

But wait! some will say. *How can you say "empathy properly understood"? Haven't you read Rigney's statements: "the term has no agreed-upon definition" among scholars (p. 4); "there is so little agreement about its proper definition" (p.5); "there is no single, standard definition of empathy" (p. 120)? He even quotes "a leading psychology professor in* Scientific American*" saying scholars don't agree (pp.2–3)!"*

Rigney takes the "challenge of definition" (pp. 2–5) as freedom to define "empathy" how he wants to use it. After all, Rigney explains, he's "concerned first and foremost" with the use of "empathy," "not with the 'true' definition" (p. xx; cf. pp. 5–6, 120).[17] This is a destructive false dichotomy; Christians are better equipped to confront popular "uses" precisely by being sound and robust in definition and understanding. But Rigney thinks that if he is "careful" to clarify what he means (p. 120; cf. p. 12), then the admittedly different pop-culture version is fair game since researchers can't agree anyway—right? No.

[15] Rigney, "Once More."

[16] Rigney, "Once More."

[17] This is from Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury, 2007), 137.

3.2. Lack of a Standard Definition Does Not Mean There Are No Patterns

Rigney has (misunderstood and therefore) misrepresented how academic research works. From there he launches into irresponsible thinking and damaging rhetoric.

For instance, take Rigney's "leading psychology professor" (*sic*), Judith Hall and Mark Leary, in their 2020 opinion piece, "The U.S. Has an Empathy Deficit." He quotes:

> Empathy is a fundamentally squishy term. Like many broad and complicated concepts, empathy can mean many things. Even the researchers who study it do not always say what they mean, or measure empathy in the same way in their studies—and they definitely do not agree on a definition. In fact, there are stark contradictions: what one researcher calls empathy is not empathy to another.[18]

Ask yourself: How can they accuse the U.S. of "an empathy deficit" if they have *no idea* what *empathy really is* because of no agreed-upon definition? They *do* have an idea.

Recall: Decety and Jackson observed "broad agreement" among empathy researchers regarding its ABCs even after admitting "there are many definitions of empathy, almost as many as there are researchers in this field"; Eklund and Meranius observed how "most articles and books about empathy begin by claiming that there is far from a consensus on how empathy is to be *defined*," yet there is nonetheless "a developing consensus among neuroscientists, psychologists, medical scientists, nursing scientists, philosophers, and others."

(Interestingly, scholars such as D. A. Carson and Edward Klink and Darian Lockett have long confessed—though not as long as empathy scholars—the same thing in Biblical Theology research: no agreed-upon definition, debates and contradictions, still definite patterns and known non-options.[19])

Empathy (and Biblical Theology) scholars all point out what Rigney does but come to the opposite conclusion. Why? There are *definite patterns* even within debates (as above).[20] And what *definitely is not meant* is also known.

3.3. Clear Non-Options Are Known Even with No Standard Definition

Diverse aspects of research fit a *relatively narrow sphere* that excludes certain *practices*. Hence those pop-practices ("losing oneself" and "losing truth" in another's emotions) are not only *malpractice* and *unhealthy*; they are also very much *not empathy*. Don't give proper empathy a bad name by perpetuating that bastardized version of the term! You'll turn people off from the real thing, which has so much to offer.

Imagine a parallel: a blogger counts "love" (574x) and "Holy Spirit" (94x) in the NIV, argues, "Love is obviously more important than the Holy Spirit," and calls this his "Biblical Theology of Love." Over eleven years, his animated video accrues 22 million views, and people reduplicate his "Biblical Theology" method.

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[18] Judith Hall and Mark Leary, "The U.S. Has an Empathy Deficit," *Scientific American*, 17 September 2020, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-us-has-an-empathy-deficit

[19] D.A. Carson. "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 89–104; Edward Klink III and Darian Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 13.

[20] See Daniel Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 3–15.

People will agree (in parallel with empathy studies): *That pop-project ("Biblical Theology of Love") is not only malpractice and unhealthy; it is also very much not Biblical Theology. Don't give proper Biblical Theology a bad name by perpetuating that bastardized version of the term! You'll turn people off from the real thing, which has so much to offer.*

A concluding connected critique of Rigney's reasoning regarding research is necessary. Imagine someone reasoning: *That blogger has 22 million views and many others are now doing it, so I will relegate the research on Biblical Theology to the realm of academics—they cannot agree on a single, standard definition anyway!—and use the term "Biblical Theology" the way the blogger does so I can critique them by talking about "the sin of Biblical Theology."*

This is Rigney's approach to "empathy." And there are consequences.

4. Consequences for Cultural and Pastoral Advice

Due to his poor treatment of empathy research, Rigney has hamstrung his own pastoral navigation of certain difficult issues within his book.

4.1. Consequences of Rigney's Research for Cultural Advice

Why are some pastors retrospectively accused of abuse? To answer, Rigney rails against following a "concept creep" and "inflat[ion] beyond all recognition" of the terms abuse and trauma (cf. pp. 57, 59, 61)—even while investing a whole book in following a bastardized-beyond-all-recognition version of "empathy"—but he fails to explain why the expansion is bad. And he fails to consider how, first, some truly abusive practices may not previously have fit the narrower application of "abuse" but can finally be rightly labelled as such now; and second, how some recipients of truly abusive treatment may need to get out of the situation and debrief (for years!) to actually see it clearly. (Yes, even while other practices now labeled "abuse" should not be.) *Digging deeper with relational exegesis would have opened more options than he assumes to adequately explain the situation.*

Concerning church conversations on complex racial dynamics—to which we majority culture Americans are often relatively blind[21]—Rigney stops short of asking next-level relational exegetical questions. Yet such questions would have helped him plumb deeper cultural dynamics embedded in his and the black congregants' ways of thinking, feeling, and offering help (pp. 57–59). Markers to the deeper layers were present in their responses to Rigney's hypothetical pastor; he just didn't recognize them as prompts to further humble exploration. So, he dismissed them as mere corrupt progressivism. *Consistent practice of more and better relational exegesis would help.*

4.2. Consequences of Rigney's Research for Gender Advice

What's more, Rigney reduplicates his approach to empathy research in a damaging way in his treatment of how women and men relate to emotions, logic, theological discussions, leadership, and empathy (chapter 5). (And I say this as a natural *and* ideological complementarian who finds that reduction itself needs better exegesis and research.) Writers he quotes as a basis for (or confirmation of?) his opinions show the same poor research practices as Rigney as they summarize and apply "research"

[21] Jonathan Worthington, "Jesus and Power Plays," *ABWE Magazine*, 26 Oct 2023, https://abwe.org/blog/jesus-and-power-plays/.

in a way that betrays the very research cited (e.g., see p. 80). *Practicing better exegesis (and not eisegesis) of research sources would help.*

4.3. Consequences of Rigney's Research for Pastoral Advice

Rigney's treatment of empathy even hamstrings his generalized pastoral counsel in his book's practical climax: his four points of "compassion" (chapter 6).

You feel a *compassionate, sympathetic gut-level urge* to help the suffering. Even at a glance you can tell *it's hard*—which Rigney commends as his first point of compassion. But a limit faces you: you don't know *how* hard or *why*. How might you find out? Relational exegesis (empathy).

You can compassionately see that *they feel a certain way*—Rigney's second point. Another limit confronts you: details are fuzzy and you can't yet really appreciate the weight they're under. What could help? Relational exegesis (empathy).

Third, you will *stand with them* to help them through—Rigney's third point of compassion (in which "some measure of emotion-sharing" appears, p. 104, which is *sometimes* a sliver of empathy's affective dimension). But you're not exactly sure the *wisest way* to stand with them, not least since you're unclear about the details and weightiness of #1 and #2. What could help? Relational exegesis (empathy).

Fourth, you *have hope* to offer—Rigney's fourth point of compassion. A limit stalls you: you are not yet sure *how* to make the offer in a *mature* rather than clichéd way. What could possibly help? Relational exegesis (empathy).

I expect Rigney will surely say he *does* appreciate all the relational exegetical questions and points I added above. Remember, sprinkled throughout his book Rigney does commend *understanding, resonating, and self-differentiating*—which constitute true empathy (§2.3). Nevertheless, Rigney's agenda blinds him into whipping "empathy" after having *swallowed* a pop-culture *definition* of it (even though he *is* critical of *practicing* said version). So, he *ends up* offering pastoral counsel that *has some truth* but is *relatively impotent* for the complexities of communal life.

5. Conclusion

What we really need is proper empathy training. It would provide not only Rigney's goal of self-regulated self-differentiation, but *so* much more—and without the confusion and damage. We need *the richness of the relational exegetical (empathic) process* and thereby the *particularized insights* needed for specific people and situations alongside Rigney's compassion.

Here is my proposal for moving forward in a healthier direction.

(1) Don't give *empathy* (relational exegesis) a bad rap, even in a desire to critique pop-culture malpractice and bastardizations.

Why?

(2) Because *humble, careful relational exegesis* (proper empathy) really is *needed* in our relationships in family, church, neighborhood, society, ethnic tensions, politics… and the list goes on.

Therefore,

(3) Get and then give *proper empathy training*.

Robustly *understand*. Caringly *resonate*. Carefully *self-differentiate*. That is, humbly *empathize* with enemies as well as friends—as did our Lord, Jesus himself, in his incarnation.

Book Reviews

— OLD TESTAMENT —

— NEW TESTAMENT —

— HISTORY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

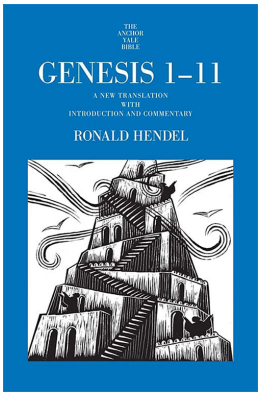
— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

— ETHICS & PASTORALIA —

— MISSION & CULTURE —

— OLD TESTAMENT —

Ronald Hendel. *Genesis 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024. xv + 466 pp. £70.00/$85.00.



The first eleven chapters of Genesis offer a richly textured guide to understanding the world as a meaningful cosmos designed by an all-powerful, omniscient God who deeply cares about his creation. These chapters establish foundational theological concepts—such as sin and judgment—while also laying the groundwork for Scripture's narrative of redemption/salvation via covenant. Yet, these chapters remain a focal point of acrimony, dispute, and debate(s). Enter Ronald Hendel's *Genesis 1–11*, a new addition to the esteemed Anchor Yale Bible commentary series.

The book begins with an in-depth introduction covering the "standard" topics (pp. 3–58). These include areas such as "Text," a recognized and notable specialty of Hendel, the "Ancient Near East," "Sources," and "Contextualization." An extensive bibliography (pp. 61–90) and three thorough indices ("Subject," "Author," and "Ancient Sources") round things off.

Hendel divides Genesis into eleven sections: "Creation" (1:1–2:3), "The Garden of Eden" (2:4–3:24), "Cain and Abel" (4:1–26), "Generations from Adam to Noah" (5:1–32), "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Humans" (6:1–4), "The Flood According to J" (6:5–8:22), "The Flood According to P" (6:9–9:29), "The Curse of Canaan" (9:18–27), "The Table of Nations" (10:1–32), "The Tower of Babel" (11:1–9), and "Generations from Shem to Abram" (11:10–32). The commentary proper includes four main sections: "Translation," "Textual Notes," "Notes," and "Comments."

Concerning Hendel's translation, different typefaces signify different sources: **boldface** = "P" (Priestly source), roman type = "J" (Yahwist source), and *italics* = "R" (the "redactor[s]"). Herein, Hendel highlights the "supplementary hypothesis" by claiming this approach is justified by "the principle that apart from the main sources there have been all kinds of growths" (p. 13, cf. p. 6).

The translations themselves are often quite "bold" and dynamic. For instance, Hendel translates Genesis 6:3 as follows: "Yahweh said, 'My breath will not be strong in humans forever, inasmuch as they are also flesh.'" A more extended example is offered below:

In the beginning, when God created heaven and earth—the earth was desolate chaos, and darkness was over the face of the ocean, and a wind of God was soaring over the face of the water—God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was evening and there was morning, one day. (Genesis 1:1–5)

As expected, the "Textual Notes" are exceptionally robust. In fact, when combined with the insightful comments about "Text" within the introduction, I would be hard-pressed to find another commentator who provides more clarity. However, without access to *BHQ* and Hendel's *The Text of Genesis 1—11: Textual Studies Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), most students (and possibly even some scholars) will struggle to unlock this section's full value.

Hendel's "Notes" demonstrate a thoughtful and measured engagement with GKC, *IBHS*, and Joüon-Muraoka on grammatical matters. Hendel also draws from various lexicons, including BDB, *HALOT*, *TDOT*, and *TLOT*—although (regrettably) he does not leverage *DCH* or *DCHR*.

With respect to the verbal system, each stem is handled on its own terms (free from exegetical fallacies). It is, however, Hendel's engagement with the subtle differences between the various phases (or chronolects) of Biblical Hebrew (see p. 15) that makes the "Notes" shine.

To be clear, Hendel identifies four phases: (1) Archaic Biblical Hebrew; (2) Classical Biblical Hebrew, which (according to Hendel) characterizes the "J" and "E" (Elohist) sources; (3) Transitional Biblical Hebrew, characteristic of the "P" source and a few other texts in Genesis; and (4) Late Biblical Hebrew—which does not appear in the text of Genesis explicitly but does often occur in the linguistic updating of certain forms in the Samaritan Pentateuch and some MT vocalizations.

For example, consider the following note by Hendel on Genesis 6:3:

> The relative particle *ša* is an old form, found in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and elsewhere. In Classical Hebrew the equivalent form (although etymologically related) is *'ăšer*. In Late Biblical Hebrew the dominant form is *še*, which may be a clipped form of *'ăšer*.... The old relative *ša* occurs in archaic Hebrew poetry (Judg 5:7, and probably Num 24:3, 15) and in frozen form in names (*mətŭšā'ēl*, "man of God," Gen 4:18; and *mîšā'ēl*, "who is of God?," Exod 6:22), and probably persisted in the northern dialect of Hebrew.... The compound form *ba'ăšer* (Gen 39:9, 23) is equivalent to *bəša*-here. The corresponding Late Biblical Hebrew form is *bəše* (Eccl 2:16). The effect of this archaic-sounding compound preposition, in conjunction with the unique verb *yādôn*, is to color Yahweh's speech as lofty and archaic. Yahweh speaks in a high register here, befitting his divinity and antiquity, but with an aura of obscurity. (p. 269)

In his "Comments" sections, while Hendel treads on familiar ground, I appreciate his careful study of some controversial topics. For instance, with respect to cosmology, Hendel states:

> The often elusive intricacy of Genesis 1 makes it difficult to specify in detail the picture of the cosmos.... Some commentators infer that the cosmos implicit in Genesis 1 is not a physical picture at all, but a symbolic expression of cosmic and theological principles.... These reservations may be valid if one tries to synthesize or harmonize descriptions of the cosmos from a variety of sources or eras, or when dealing with symbolic religious iconography in seals or reliefs. But Genesis 1 describes a cosmos that seems in every respect a physical, material structure. (p. 144)

There are also not a few well-crafted, clear tables and charts. Special mention, though, should be made of the exquisite drawings by William H. C. Propp, including (among others) depictions of Leviathan, Marduk's Dragon, the Cosmic Imagery of Egypt, the sun god Šamaš, the Tower of Babel stele, and the world according to the Table of Nations.

Lastly, it should be noted that Hendel uses SBL's "academic" (and not "general-purpose") style of transliteration, but that the actual rubric is not provided within the AB volume itself, which is (at times) quite bothersome and a nuisance.

To conclude, Ronald Hendel's *Genesis 1–11* in the Anchor Yale Bible commentary series was worth the wait. With over thirty years of research, his analysis deepened my understanding of Biblical Hebrew

and offers fresh perspectives on much "established" scholarship. It is a valuable resource for anyone engaging Genesis on a serious level. Highly recommended!

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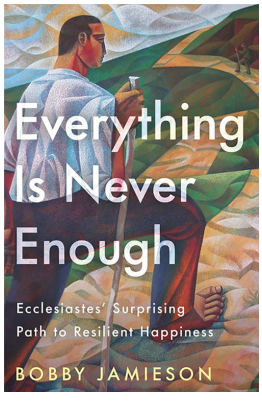
Bobby Jamieson. *Everything Is Never Enough: Ecclesiastes' Surprising Path to Resilient Happiness*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2025. 288 pp. £15.99/$17.00.



In my final year of seminary, I decided to preach through Ecclesiastes as I provided pulpit supply for various churches. One day I shared my decision with a seasoned pastor and confessed how difficult I was finding it. The puffing of his cheeks and commiserations confirmed the challenge that I faced in attempting to preach through the remainder of the book. My youth made me ambitious enough to tackle Ecclesiastes, my friend's maturity confirmed the mammoth task that lay ahead of me. Bobby Jamieson is older than I was then and yet younger than my friend the seasoned pastor, perhaps just young enough to have the ambition to take on Ecclesiastes and yet wise enough to manage the nuances of the book. At least, what he has produced suggests this is the case. *Everything Is Never Enough* is an astonishingly good book.

Jamieson holds degrees from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv, ThM) and University of Cambridge (PhD), and he served as Associate Pastor in Washington, DC, before recently moving to plant Trinity Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He is therefore well placed to tackle Ecclesiastes with pastoral sensitivity.

Initially, I was a little confused with both the publisher and the structure of the book. It seemed to me that a logical exposition of Ecclesiastes published with a more recognized Christian publisher such as Crossway or IVP may have been a more obvious choice. But on reading, I quickly discovered that I was wrong. Rather, Waterbrook (as an imprint of Penguin) provides a breadth of readership that the more recognized publishers might not enjoy, and the intriguing structure invites the reader to explore its world.

The book is structured in three unequal parts, which matches Jamieson's suggestion that Ecclesiastes should be viewed as a house with three floors. Part 1 is the longest. This is the ground floor of the house—how Qohelet views things "under the sun." This section serves as smelling salts, triggering a reaction that awakens the reader to the absurdity of this world because of humanity's inability to control it. The section is bracketed by two chapters that define and elaborate on the crucial term הֶבֶל which sandwich several thematic chapters ("Gain," "Work," "Knowledge," "Pleasure," "Money," "Time," "Enough," "Power," and "Death"). Jamieson's sane and temperate—almost dispassionate—treatment of these themes in Ecclesiastes has an accumulatively forceful impact. There is no denying that all that the world pursues under the sun fails to truly satisfy. In part 1 Jamieson offers a devastatingly accurate diagnosis for the lack of satisfaction endemic in our world.

Part 2 is slightly shorter; it is the middle floor, noting the seven passages in which Qohelet declares certain things good. This section is like a map and information leaflet picked up at the entrance to a

zoo or theme park. It offers direction and instruction on how to make the most of your visit; it lists times and events that you do not want to miss. Jamieson outlines how Qohelet instructs his readers to recognise the limitations of God's good gifts, and in doing so to find enjoyment in them (chapter titles are: "Gift," "Enjoy," "Lot," "Eat and Drink," "Toil," "Wealth," "Marriage," and "Resonance"). This section reflects the more positive declarations threaded throughout Ecclesiastes. In the end, enjoyment is only possible when we embrace limitations, remain present in the moment, and accept gifts as signposts to God, the giver of gifts. In part 2 Jamieson promises that there is a glimmer of hope.

Part 3 consists of only two chapters and is the top floor. From here things look very different. This section is like a debrief after an event or trip—having been there and done it, we can see things more clearly. While the chapter titles—"Fear" and "Judgement"—do not immediately suggest hope, these final chapters do offer hope, hope that there is a God who is bigger, grander, and kinder than we can imagine, and that judgement is related in some way to God's gifts to humanity. It helps make sense of the apparent conflict between Parts 1 and 2—divine gifts in a depraved world will always create tension. In part 3 Jamieson pierces the sky to let the light in, concluding, "Everything is never enough, but Jesus is. Jesus is enough to satisfy God's judgment on your behalf. And Jesus is enough to satisfy your soul forever. Jesus alone is God's answer to your life's absurdity" (p. 211).

Everything Is Never Enough is a remarkable achievement. In my estimation, the best use for this book is as an evangelistic tool, especially for seekers who are readers and thinkers. It accurately diagnoses symptoms and clearly explains the frustrations of this world as it is and, after a long a tortuous journey with Qohelet, proposes that resolution to all of it can be found only in Jesus. In this way, Jamieson (alongside Qohelet) confronts the reader with the reality that this world is never enough. For this reason, I think it could also be used profitably in student and young adult ministries as fodder for discussion. So many young Christians get caught up in rat races dictated by the world—this exposition of Ecclesiastes, if heeded, would help many avoid common pitfalls.

It was a pleasure to read. Indeed, I think it is reminiscent of Lewis or Chesterton—the book feels timeless. While this is bound in some way to the timelessness of Scripture, and Ecclesiastes in particular, it is in no small part due to Jamieson's continued perfecting of the writing craft. And in this, I think it stands alone as a contemporary popular-level exposition of Ecclesiastes. If one wants a logical exposition published with a more recognized Christian publisher, David Gibson's *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017) or Philip Ryken's *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) would be most suitable. Jamieson, however, offers an original treatment that deserves to be read widely.

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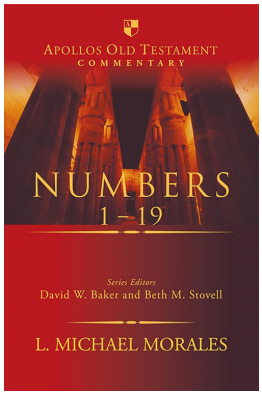
L. Michael Morales. *Numbers 1–19*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 4a. London: Apollos, 2024. xxii + 502 pp. £39.99/$53.99.



Martin Noth is well known for concluding that the book of Numbers displays "confusion and lack of order" (*Numbers: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1968], 4). That sentiment, frequently reiterated since, is persuasively challenged by L. Michael Morales in this latest addition to the Apollos Old Testament Commentary series. Morales, longstanding professor of biblical studies at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, spent the best part of a decade producing this volume. The fruits of that long labor are everywhere present. Where others find disorder, Morales carefully extricates plan and purpose. This, in turn, proffers exciting new possibilities for discerning theological and rhetorical significance. Indeed, as one works through the commentary, it becomes increasingly clear why the New Testament writers so often evoke the themes and ideas of Numbers. Hence, the volume admirably achieves the series' twin aims of producing "tools of excellence for the academy" and "tools of function for the pulpit" (p. xi).

A substantial introduction orients readers to the book of Numbers (pp. 1–74). While typical matters like authorship and structure are addressed (pp. 61–73), these are preceded by a penetrating theological and literary evaluation of the book. Fundamentally, Morales claims that Numbers is about the covenant community, brought into relationship and life with YHWH, and arranged as a camp (p. 12). Within the Sinai material, therefore, Numbers 1–10 functions as the telos to a wider literary movement. That progression, outlined on pp. 14–17, charts how YHWH enters a covenant relationship with Israel (Exod 19–24), descends to dwell within the tabernacle (Exod 25–40), and makes that dwelling place a functional tent of meeting (Leviticus). Israel's encampment in Numbers, therefore, constitutes "the flowering of YHWH's engagement with Israel at Sinai" as the tribes gather around the divine presence for the first time (pp. 13, 18). The camp thus functions as an organizing principle for Numbers and becomes the paradigm for the ideal covenant community (pp. 19–21). With all its cosmological symbolism, it also becomes the earthly correlate to YHWH's heavenly host (pp. 22–27) and a means of conveyance for YHWH's glory (pp. 27–34). In turn, the structural and purity boundaries of the camp set theological lines that explain the arrangement of subsequent material: the nature of testing during the wilderness sojourn (Num 11–25) and anticipation of the nation's life in the land (Num 26–36; p. 42). Therefore, while users of commentaries sometimes gravitate towards consulting only a select portion of the work, Morales's introduction provides an essential theological prolegomenon that makes sense of later interpretative decisions.

The commentary proper follows the layout of the Apollos series. Morales provides his own translation (with notes) for each textual unit. Although readers may find this to be a little clunky at times, it does give non-specialists a good sense of the contours, emphases, and repetitions of the underlying Hebrew. Translation forms the basis for discussion of the passage's form and structure as well as detailed comment on its content. A final Explanation section acts as a summary and considers the purpose of the unit within the flow of the book. The volume is supplemented throughout with helpful diagrams, and several excurses explore important tangential issues (e.g., how to interpret the census figures, pp. 100–108).

Throughout, *Numbers 1–19* evinces the careful scholarship and theological acumen that have become a hallmark of Morales's work on the Pentateuch. Astute observations abound. So, too, do intriguing possibilities, including the combined function of the "strayed woman" (Num 5) and Nazarite (Num 6) pericopes to portray alternate pathways for the YHWH-Israel relationship (p. 149), and the literary placement of Numbers 19 to mark the cleansing of the second generation from the corpse-impurity of the first that died in the wilderness (p. 499). As one might expect in a commentary of this size, Morales interacts with a wide range of contemporary secondary literature. Crucially, however, he also listens to a plethora of older voices. This not only grants readers insight into rabbinic and medieval Jewish exegesis of Numbers but demonstrably adds depth and nuance to Morales's own interpretation. The result is a culturally rich exegesis of Numbers that manages to avoid some of the excesses and oversights of modern approaches and Western predilections. This extends to Morales's willingness to read Numbers as a constituent component of a final-form Torah. Tacit acknowledgement of this literary complex enables a more contextually aware reading of details within Numbers, including the evident intertextuality that shapes meaning at crucial junctures (e.g., parallels between Num 16–18 and the story of Cain [Gen 4], pp. 432–33).

In this, the first of a two-volume set, Morales has produced an exceptional resource for studying the book of Numbers. Readers can be confident of being expertly led through a fascinating landscape by a commentary that deserves to appear on the shelves of preachers and academics alike.

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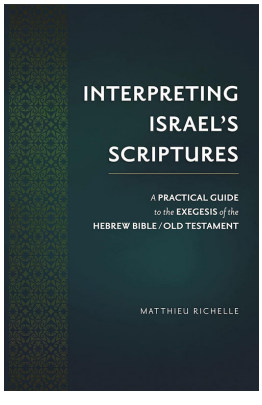
Matthieu Richelle. *Interpreting Israel's Scriptures: A Practical Guide to the Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*. Translated by Sarah E. Richelle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2022. 432 pp. £32.99/$49.95.



Matthieu Richelle's *Interpreting Israel's Scriptures* provides readers with a comprehensive, clear, and practical introduction to methods for Old Testament exegesis. Originally published in French in 2012, this edition has been translated into English and updated significantly. The book is divided into three parts: chapters focused on the making of the text, chapters focused on facets of the text, and chapters focused on readers of the text.

The first part covers translation, textual criticism, and compositional strategies behind the text. In the first chapter, the reader finds an overview followed by a method for dealing with challenges in the text, followed by numerous examples and finally a series of exercises to reinforce the topics of the chapters. This format continues throughout each chapter of the book. Interspersed throughout are additional bibliographies, definitions, and help for related topics that may arise in the examples. The two chapters on compositional criticism introduce students to "scribal activity" through discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as issues like linguistic dating. Although Richelle will challenge students with statements such as, "traditional ideas about authorship are just that: traditional, not biblical" (p. 76), he will also point readers to works by conservative Old Testament scholars like Kenneth Kitchen alongside those by Konrad Schmid, Thomas Römer, and others (p. 109). Although conservative,

evangelical views may be challenged at points, Richelle takes an ecumenical posture that values each reader's perspective. This posture allows him to introduce a variety of methods in a charitable manner.

Having addressed matters behind the text in the first part, the second part focuses on facets of the text and includes chapters on literary genre, literary context, historical geography and background, structure, poetry, narrative, and intertextuality. Readers will find that Richelle strives both for clarity and practicality in his examples. The examples in each chapter helpfully explain the methods introduced and prepare the reader well for the exercises at the end of the chapters. A few psalms, portions of Isaiah, as well as portions of Genesis 1–11 appear at different sections of the book as examples. This allows readers to see how viewing a single text using different methods can deepen their understanding of it. Richelle will often use scholarly terms but will also explain what the terms mean. The chapter on poetry stands out in this regard. He explains the various terminology needed to assess biblical poetry and does so through practical examples.

The final part moves from a focus on the text to a focus on the reader. It includes chapters on reception history, feminine and gender studies, and postcolonial criticism. The chapter on reception history gave several helpful examples of how Old Testament texts were interpreted and reinterpreted in the Second Temple period, by the church fathers, and in medieval rabbinic exegesis. The chapter stood out in its bibliographic references that point readers to further studies in this broad topic. The chapter on feminine and gender studies unpacks the complexities of its diverse and often conflicting methodologies. As a lecturer in a postcolonial context, I found his measured acceptance and critiques of postcolonial interpretations in his final chapter helpful. These reader-oriented methods, which remain common in academic discussions, are presented fairly. However, conservative evangelical scholars may not find them as helpful due to presuppositions that seek to reconstruct or rehabilitate the text (p. 322), with some rejecting or revising biblical authority altogether (p. 326).

In the introduction, Richelle suggests that the book will present an "irenic, ecumenical, and interreligious spirit" (p. 5). The book succeeds in this goal. The bibliographies include not only critical scholars, but also Jewish, Catholic, and evangelical scholars. When Richelle notes the majority position on a topic, he respectfully acknowledges dissenting views and allows readers to assess the data on their own within their own perspective.

However, this ecumenical spirit also limits the book. Unlike standard evangelical handbooks, which typically address biblical and canonical theology, typology, and theological interpretation, this book stays within the boundaries of an interreligious approach. This limitation could make the handbook less useful in an evangelical classroom.

Richelle also notes in the introduction that part 1 assumes a basic knowledge of Hebrew (p. 3). While true at points, I would suggest that readers without any knowledge of Hebrew would still find quite a few helpful notes in these chapters and should still read them.

I would heartily recommend this work to pastors who have a seminary education and would like to study academic exegetical methods more deeply. Students of biblical studies, particularly those focused on the Old Testament, should own a copy. The clarity and practicality will reinforce their education in exegetical methods. The ecumenical nature of the volume will challenge them and may help to understand better those with whom they disagree. But I conclude with a dilemma. Despite my endorsement, I am unsure where this book fits within a standard evangelical seminary curriculum. It may not be ideal for general biblical interpretation courses due to its exclusive Old Testament focus

and lack of discussion on matters of theological interpretation. It could serve, however, as a valuable supplement in advanced Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis courses.

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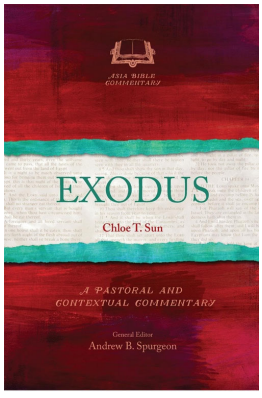
Chloe T. Sun, *Exodus*. Asia Bible Commentary. Carlisle, PA: Langham Global Library, 2024. xv + 354 pp. £22.99/$34.99.



Chloe T. Sun is professor of Old Testament and program director of the Chinese Studies Centre at Fuller Theological Seminary. She and Charlie Trimm are contracted to write the NICOT commentary on Exodus. Sun engages with the book of Exodus from the perspective of her personal experience within the evangelical Chinese diaspora journeying from Vietnam to Los Angeles. She writes, "The Exodus narrative invites us to look beyond our present circumstances and discern God's greater purpose at work, finding meaning in our diasporic experiences as we participate in God's grand missional narrative" (p. 10).

Sun frames her commentary around the theme of identity formation, treating the text in four sections:

Part I: Identity conversion out of Egypt (1:1–15:21)

Part II: Identity confusion during the in-between space (15:22–18:27)

Part III: Identity construction at Sinai (19:1–24:18)

Part IV: Identity conformation to worship (25:1–40:38).

She sets out "to interweave the themes of diaspora, memory, and journey to present a fresh reading of Exodus that informs and transforms readers within their unique contexts" (pp. 29–30). She discusses sixteen topics in highlighted asides.

Much of her commentary involves a highly readable recount of the narrative and summaries of God's laws and instructions. In Part 1 Sun discusses the way in which Moses's signs and the plagues challenge the claims of the Egyptian gods (pp. 94–116), drawing out elements of irony in God's polemic against Pharaoh (pp. 73–74). She offers a helpful discussion of God's constant purpose to unite peoples under his rule (pp. 127–28) as exemplified by the inclusion of non-Israelites in the exodus and Passover celebrations.

In her discussion of Exodus 19–24, Sun pictures "the 'law' (*torah*) … as God's finger, pointing to the path along which God expects and desires Israel to walk" (p. 184). She notes that Israel's treatment of others "demonstrated their new identity as the people of God." Identity "would be realised through God's revelation of the law and Israel's obedience to it" (pp. 184–85). She states further that "God's affection for Israel defines their identity. Identity is not about how Israel sees themselves but how Israel sees themselves through God's eye" (p.190). In a pregnant statement that could easily be missed, Sun observes that "these laws are also future-oriented, akin to prophecies" (p. 228).

Diaspora experience confronts one with a log and splinter awareness of the cultural and lifestyle challenges of God's word (Matt 7:3–5; Luke 6:41–42). In seeing the faults of the alien or dominant culture, one faces the greater challenge of hearing the rebuke, corrections, and instructions of the

Scriptures with respect to one's own (2 Tim 3:16–17). Sun's treatment, however, tends to domesticate the book of Exodus rather than investigate its challenges to either Asian or American culture. For example, given the strong Chinese tradition of filial piety, it would have been helpful to engage in a more rigorous discussion of how "Children must … show respect to their parents without compromising their faith" (p. 212).

With respect to the historicity of the exodus and the accuracy of the biblical account, Sun concludes that "we can say that some form of the exodus event has taken place, though the evidence is inconclusive" (p. 15). She reads the text with a human-centered eye, thus, "the name of God … implies that God 'is' or 'will be' whoever we need him to be" (p. 65). The laws of Exodus are discussed within the categories of human (p. 185), animal (p. 252), and women's rights (p. 259).

In her discussion of the case laws of Exodus 20:22–23:33, Sun asserts that "not all of them are relevant to contemporary audiences" but that the two Confucian virtues of righteousness (*yì*) and kindness (*rén*) "summarize the essence of the OT law" (p. 196). There is little here that would locate these case studies within God's redemptive work in restoring his good design for life through the work of Jesus. These are "Israel's ethics" (p. 225). She leaves the question open as to whether they were influenced by the Code of Hammurabi (pp. 225–26). With respect to Exodus 21:22–25 she concludes that "Both Scripture and the law of the United States remain ambiguous regarding what constitutes a human person or at what stage of development a fetus is regarded as a person" (p. 238). Citing another scholar's imaginative re-writing of Exodus 24:8, she states that "it is unthinkable Moses would sprinkle blood on the people" (p. 264). The overall effect is to neutralize the text.

In what must be a typographical error, the timing of the Festivals of *Sukkot* and *Shavuoth* are reversed (p. 257). In her treatment of Exodus 25–40, she discusses the formation of Chinese churches in other lands and cities, but there is no attempt to see Christ's church as multicultural (see Mathew Kuruvilla, *Church Without Borders: Growing a Multiethnic Community* [Macquarie Park, Australia: Morling Press, 2019]). She writes, "The scattered will be brought together once again through the establishment of local ethnic and immigrant churches in new lands" (p. 22).

This short commentary is an easy read and has the integrity of being written within the experience it addresses. Sun's framework and the issues raised will open eyes and raise questions for believers of all backgrounds.

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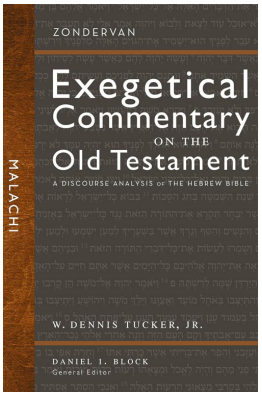
W. Dennis Tucker Jr. *Malachi*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024. xxi + 202 pp. £30.00/$39.99.



While the book of Malachi holds a prominent, memorable position at the end of the Old Testament in our English Bibles, "the book itself remains relatively obscure to most readers of Scripture" (p. 5). W. Dennis Tucker Jr. concedes that while brief passages on divorce (Mal 2:16) and tithing (Mal 3:10) receive frequent attention, "most of the book remains largely absent from our preaching and teaching" (p. 5). He aims to address this neglect through this commentary. Tucker serves as professor of Christian Scriptures at Baylor's Truett Seminary and is best known for coauthoring (with Jamie Grant) the second volume on the book of Psalms in the NIVAC series.

The commentary opens with a twenty-page introduction, followed by eight chapters that focus on the text of Malachi itself. The introduction covers the expected areas: author and date, historical analysis, literary analysis, theological message, and outline of the book. Regarding the author, Tucker believes there are "compelling reasons for understanding" Malachi to be a proper noun (p. 6), and he situates the book itself in the post-exilic period, most "likely written prior to the visits of Ezra and Nehemiah" (pp. 7–8). In a somewhat curious decision, the briefest of all the chapters, chapter 1, covers only Malachi 1:1, the superscription of the book. Chapters 2–7 address the six disputations (1:2–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6–12; 3:13–4:3), while the final chapter deals with the final three verses (4:4–6), described by Tucker as the closing appendices.

Each chapter includes six components: "Main Idea of the Passage," "Literary Context," "Translation and Exegetical Outline," "Structure and Literary Form," "Explanation of the Text," and "Canonical and Theological Significance." The "Explanation of the Text" is the lengthiest and appears in a double-column format; the other sections are presented in a single column with a generous outside margin. A unique design choice was made with the "Translation and Exegetical Outline" section. To read this section, the reader will need to rotate the book ninety degrees because the publisher sought to make the most of the extra two inches afforded by the height of the book by placing this section in landscape format. This layout accommodates three columns side-by-side—the Hebrew text, Tucker's English translation, and an outline—while still allowing the font to be largely legible. Having to rotate the book in this way can be cumbersome and may not be worth the slightly larger font that resulted from this decision.

Tucker's work reflects a command of the current literature on the book of Malachi. As would be expected, he is fully conversant with Joyce Baldwin, Ray Clendenen, Andrew Hill, James Nogalski, Ralph Smith, Pieter Verhoef, and Karl Weyde, though this reader was surprised to see no reference to Eugene Merrill, other than a brief citation from a dictionary entry (p. 74 n. 104).

In the Series Introduction, the general editor admits, "The way this series treats biblical books will be uneven" (p. xi). In other words, larger books of Scripture will not receive a full treatment of their entire contents—but the reader can rest assured that in this volume Malachi receives the deluxe treatment! Moving from this volume to another in the series that treats a longer OT book would most likely leave the reader disappointed. This would be due to Tucker's entry modeling so well what this series seeks to accomplish, as well as his thoroughness with Malachi that might not be permissible with longer books.

Tucker demonstrates an understanding of the interpretive options of obscure passages. He fairly presents each view alongside its advocate(s), then argues convincingly for his own position. He applies this approach to key phrases like "among the Gentiles" (1:11), "holiness of the Lord" (2:11), the explanation for covering the Lord's altar with tears (2:13), the identity of those speaking in 3:13–16, and others. Concerning one of the most discussed passages in Malachi, Tucker contends for rendering Malachi 2:16a as "If one hates [and] divorces [his wife]." He prefers this reading on the bases that it avoids having to emend the person of the first clause, it bypasses the "potential awkwardness posed by a shift in subjects," and it coheres with the manner in which the verbs "hate" and "divorce" are used together in other biblical texts (p. 102).

Still, two areas of improvement may be noted. First, the reader of this commentary will be best served by having some background in Hebrew, at least a year of formal study. Tucker frequently references Hebrew words, themes, and syntax. He also uses the Hebrew versification for the end of the book, where 4:1–6 in our English Bibles becomes 3:19–24 in the Hebrew Bible. Some slight adjustments here could have made his work more approachable for a much broader audience. Second, while the "Canonical and Theological Significance" sections effectively draw out implications for faithful life and ministry, they lack warmth and depth. Expanding these with practical applications would better equip preachers and teachers of the word of God.

We live in a golden age of biblical commentaries, and in Tucker's treatment of Malachi few stones are left unturned. In fact, this reviewer would need to do a thorough search back through the book to attempt to find a single undisturbed stone! Those preaching or teaching the book of Malachi will be richly rewarded by time spent in this volume by Tucker on the final book of the Twelve.

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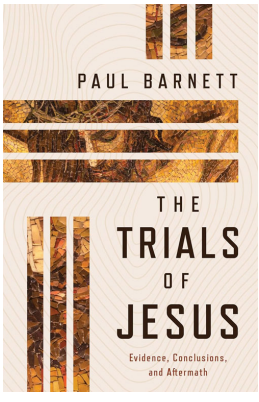
— NEW TESTAMENT —

Paul Barnett. *The Trials of Jesus: Evidence, Conclusions, and Aftermath*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. viii + 224 pp. £19.99/$24.99.



In *The Trials of Jesus*, Paul Barnett offers a wide-ranging and accessible survey of the historical and political circumstances surrounding the Jewish and Roman proceedings against Jesus. The heart of Barnett's argument is his assertion that Jesus was crucified not merely as a religious dissenter but as a political and financial threat to the ruling Jewish elites—specifically, high priests Annas and Caiaphas. These leaders, according to Barnett, perceived Jesus's popularity and influence as endangering both their authority and their advantageous relationship with the Roman occupiers. To neutralize this threat without provoking civil unrest during Passover, the high priests leveraged their wealth and influence—as well as Pontius Pilate's political vulnerabilities—to orchestrate Jesus's execution at Roman hands, thereby shielding themselves from direct culpability.

The book comprises twenty-seven brief chapters, most of which are six pages or fewer in length, and is divided into four main sections. The brevity of the chapters sometimes comes at the expense of depth and thematic development. However, the structure gives the work a digestible format that is accessible for general audiences and useful for quick reference.

The first section, titled "The Dynastic Background," provides historical context for the world in which Jesus lived and was ultimately tried. Here, Barnett traces the succession of foreign powers in Palestine from the time of the Babylonians to the Romans. Seven chapters in this section address Persian, Greek, Maccabean, Roman, and Idumean influences that shaped Jewish political and religious life. This material effectively situates the reader within the complex landscape of Second Temple Judaism and sets the stage for the trial narratives.

The second section, "Kings, High Priests, and Other Officials," is more narrowly focused on the immediate historical context of the passion narratives and key figures like Herod the Great, his son Archelaus, Herod's grandson Herod Antipas, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pontius Pilate. Barnett explores their personal ambitions, political alliances, roles in maintaining the status quo in Judea, and the intricate web of relationships that underpinned Jewish and Roman authority during Jesus's ministry.

In the third section, "The Trials of Jesus," Barnett turns to the trials themselves. He examines the Jewish proceedings and the synoptic and Johannine accounts of Jesus's Roman trial. He also briefly considers Jesus's appearance before Herod Antipas and discusses Josephus's *Testimonium Flavianum*. Although these five chapters aim to bring the earlier background material to bear on the events of Jesus's final days, they tend to recapitulate content rather than develop new insights. Notably, Jesus's appearance before Herod Antipas receives less than a full page of attention, which is surprising given the episode's canonical and theological distinctiveness.

The final section, "After Jesus: The Birth of the Church," extends the discussion beyond the crucifixion. Barnett surveys the persecution of Jesus's followers, the eventual downfall or political demise of the various officials involved in his trials, and the emergence of the early Christian community. These chapters link the political implications of Jesus's death with the founding of the church.

While *The Trials of Jesus* succeeds in presenting a compact and readable introduction to the broader historical and political environment of Jesus's trials, its utility for academic audiences is limited. The book touches on critical scholarly questions but does not engage them in depth. This may reflect the author's deliberate prioritization of accessibility and clarity for lay readers. However, scholars seeking rigorous analysis or fresh interpretive frameworks will likely find the book wanting in these respects. Such readers are also more likely to prefer fewer chapters with deeper explorations focused more squarely on New Testament reports of Jesus's trials and their various issues.

Despite its limitations, Barnett's volume represents a helpful entry point for students, ministers, teachers, and interested laypersons seeking to better understand the world of the New Testament, especially backgrounds relevant to the ministry and trials of Jesus. While the book's title suggests a narrow focus on Jesus's trials, the book is better appreciated as a general handbook on the socio-political background of Jesus's final days. In that vein, it offers valuable context and insight, even if it stops short of providing the critical depth that more advanced readers might anticipate.

In sum, *The Trials of Jesus* is a readable and informative resource that sheds light on the intertwined political and religious forces that shaped Jesus's path to the cross. It is not a comprehensive academic

treatment, but it fills an important niche as a primer on New Testament backgrounds and is recommended for serious non-specialists interested in the historical underpinnings of the gospel narratives.

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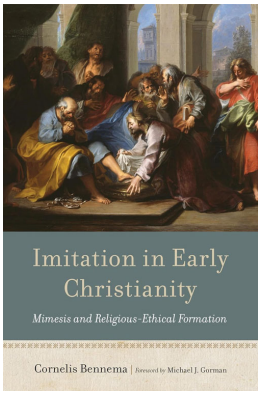
Cornelis Bennema. *Imitation in Early Christianity: Mimesis and Religious-Ethical Formation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025. xviii + 446 pp. £47.99/$60.99.



Cornelis Bennema, who teaches New Testament studies at the London School of Theology, has focused his career on research into issues of character and imitation in the NT, so with this latest contribution he brings together much of his earlier research. His aim is to provide "a literary, historical, and theological study of mimesis as a religious-ethical concept in early Christianity" (p. 25). His thesis is that "*early Christian mimesis was a dynamic, participatory, creative, and cognitive process within the context of divine family education with the goal for Christians to represent and resemble Christ in character and conduct*" (p. 24, emphasis original).

He specifies that by labeling his work as, in part, an "historical" study of the theme, he is signaling his intention to seek "the historic origins of the early Christian concept of mimesis in the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions" (p. 23). The first of the three parts of this book, chapters 2–3, surveys these historical origins. He concludes that the Greco-Roman traditions had an explicit category for ethical imitation, whereas in the Hebrew Bible ethical imitation is implicit at best. It was the later influence of Greco-Roman traditions on Jewish understanding (e.g., LXX, Philo) that "germinated" (p. 99) the seeds of imitation found in the Hebrew Bible.

By "literary," he signals his intention to pay close attention to the literary sources, and by "theological," his desire to show that the theme of imitation in the NT "belongs to the realm of Christian ethics" (p. 23). These aspects of the study are seen throughout parts two and three. The literary aspect is the main focus of part two (chs. 4–8) and the theological is the main focus of the concluding chapter of the book (ch. 10). Aside from the NT, he also discusses mimesis in the apostolic fathers (ch. 8).

There are numerous reasons to commend this book. First, given the author's career-long focus, he brings expertise, clarity, and precision to the discussion. This is especially seen in his careful attention to the texts in view. For example, in his discussion of 1 Peter, he pushes against such scholars as E. J. Tinsley and Stephen Smalley (citing, e.g., 1:14, 2:2, 5, 11, 25) who are too hasty in seeing imitation in 1 Peter while affirming that 1 Peter 2:21 is a clear case of imitation.

Second, he is careful to distinguish imitation/mimesis from reciprocity. He gives three reasons to draw this distinction: (1) the former provides an example to follow (cf. John 13:15) whereas with the latter "a benefit" is bestowed on another person (John 3:16, reciprocation of belief); (2) the former goes in one direction (one person imitates another) while the latter is circular (one person gives a gift and the recipient returns the favor); and (3) the former aims for "moral transformation" whereas the goal of the latter "is to maintain social relations" (p. 22). The author's careful distinction here is vital, given

the impact that the notion of the gift has had on NT and especially Pauline studies following John M. G. Barclay.

Third, the distinction between imitation and analogy helps the reader to understand precisely what imitation is. Bennema defines analogy as "a correspondence, resemblance, or parallel between persons, actions, or objects that are otherwise different" (p. 19). Although he recognizes that imitation is a specific instance of analogy, he provides four ways to distinguish the former from the broader category of analogy. To begin with, analogy is discerned by a third, "external" (p. 20) person, whereas imitation is intentional on the part of the exemplar and the one imitating the example. Also, imitation entails that an action is offered that is worth imitating, whereas with analogy one may behave like others "without being emulated" (p. 20); and it follows that for an act to be imitable it must be "tangible or perceptible" (p. 20), yet analogy can make a correspondence between ideas without implying an act to be perceived. Lastly, imitation is for the purpose of moral transformation, whereas analogy can be merely explanatory.

The above distinction bears upon how we understand language that appears to hint at imitation. For example, although Matthew 12:40; 13:40; and 24:27, 37 use the "ὥσπερ … οὕτως construction" (p. 134) usually suggestive of mimesis, only one of these four, Matthew 12:40, is arguably an example of imitation, whereas the rest are examples of analogy.

Given the author's cataloguing of the various strengths of each occurrence of mimesis, he concludes that, of the NT, the Johannine and Pauline corpora evidence the clearest instances of imitation as a central and vital aspect of Christian ethics. In contrast, the remainder of the NT, while differing by degrees, shows mostly traces of imitation, and thus, for these portions of the NT, imitation is not a significant category. This both gives the reader a sense of the unity between the different books of the NT and recognizes the diversity, helping the reader to appreciate the unique perspectives of John and Paul on the Christian life. In addition, the result of his investigation explains how, through memory and writing, even absent persons can serve as an example and compellingly argues that "early Christian mimesis was not about literal replication … but a creative, cognitive, and transformative didactic instrument that shaped the conduct and character of early Christians" (p. 373). This book is essential reading for anyone desiring to have a fuller understanding of NT morality and the specific value of imitation.

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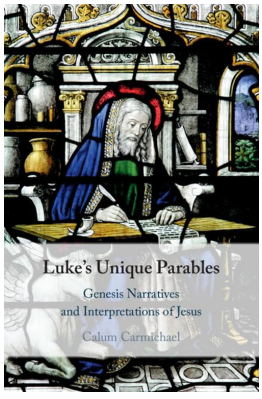
Calum Carmichael. *Luke's Unique Parables: Genesis Narratives and Interpretations of Jesus.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2025. xii + 195 pp. £90.00/$120.00.



Carmichael is emeritus professor of Comparative Literature at Cornell University and author of numerous books such as *The Book of Numbers: A Critique of Genesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). With this monograph, the author seeks to offer an exploration of Luke's parables (all but one unique to Luke) that connects them to narrative episodes in Genesis.

The book is divided into fifteen chapters. Aside from the introductory and concluding chapters (chapters 1 and 15, respectively), the chapters cover thirteen Lukan parables as they appear in Luke. Thus, chapter 2 discusses the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7:36–42, and the penultimate chapter (chapter 14) explores Luke 20:9–18.

Each chapter has the same basic structure: the passage of the parable in view in its context, followed by a running commentary of the parable in conversation with narratives in Genesis. We will highlight one parable discussed in the book to give the reader a sense of the author's argumentation and exegesis.

In his discussion of the Good Samaritan parable, Carmichael follows the lead of an article written by Preston Sprinkle to argue that the primary OT text lying behind the parable is not Leviticus 19:18 but rather Genesis 42 and its context. He makes the compelling case that the Levitical commandment—"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18)—draws from the earlier story of Joseph forgiving his brothers rather than seeking revenge.

In addition, by connecting this parable to Genesis 42 and its context, he makes the case that the contrast between the Samaritan and the Levitical figures in the parable (the priest and the Levite) alludes to the division between Joseph and his brothers, with the former as the ancestor of the Samaritans and the latter, personified by Levi's descendants, as the ancestor of the Jewish people who sought to distance themselves from the Samaritans on the basis of cultic purity. In other words, this connection provides another layer of support for those who see the division between the Samaritans and the Jewish people lying behind the parable. Along these same lines, Joseph is both able to identify with the victim in the parable as well as the rescuer since he was both victim and rescuer.

Carmichael's treatment of the Good Samaritan parable is a positive example of his overall discussion, as it supports his thesis that the Lukan parables are created from the Genesis narratives. This especially reflects the author's conviction, discussed in the introduction, that earlier interpreters (citing Joseph and Philo, among others) derived law from narrative. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is another positive example of his thesis. Here, the author argues that this reflects the antagonism between Esau and Jacob, with the appearance of Abraham in the parable (16:29) explicitly connecting this parable to Genesis. However, despite these positive test cases for this thesis, there are several problems with the author's overall treatment.

In the introduction, the author provides numerous reasons for connecting Luke's parables to the Genesis narratives. First, he argues that just as later parts of the OT connect to earlier parts (e.g., the reference in Amos 5:15 to "the remnant of Joseph"; the connection of the book of Daniel to the Joseph story), so also are Luke's parables connected to Genesis narratives. Luke's use of Genesis, it is argued, is corroborated by, for example, the retelling of Genesis and Exodus in the book of Jubilees.

Second, it is plausible for Luke to make such connections because Luke's "original audience," including "knowledgeable Pharisees" (p. 8), would have been very familiar with the Genesis stories. Third, not only would Luke's audience have been familiar with Genesis narratives but also, given Luke 16:29 among other passages, "Jesus requires the listener to understand his existence and mission in terms of the Old Testament" (p. 8). Fourth, he writes that "the Greek word *parabolē* refers to how one story is thrown … alongside another to capture some aspect of it" (p. 13).

While some of this is well and good, especially since the first three points are often argued by scholars working in the NT's use of the OT, "precise" (p. 13) connection between the thirteen parables explored and the Genesis narratives has not been sufficiently demonstrated. To begin with, Carmichael shows no awareness of the taxonomy pioneered by Richard B. Hays regarding the NT's use of the OT, which places such connections on a spectrum, with echoes on one end and direct quotations on the other. Had he integrated the insight of Hays and others, such as G. K. Beale, into this book, he would have discovered that, in the main, most of the connections he makes are echoes, at best, even faint echoes at times. Echoes, we would argue, do not qualify as "quite precise" (p. 13) connections.

Further, it appears that the author's insistence that law always derives from narrative and that parable always means one story is compared with another (i.e., the Genesis narratives) forces him to see connections that are not necessarily there. In summary, the rigor of the author's argument is lacking. Though there are some insights found in this book, we would recommend the reader consult more solid forays into the OT connections found in Luke's parables, such as Kenneth E. Bailey's *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

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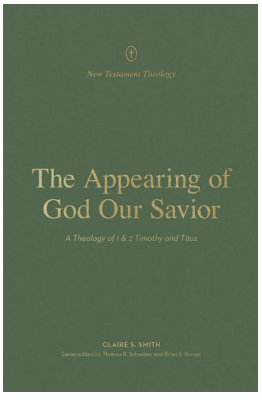
Claire S. Smith. *The Appearing of God Our Savior: A Theology of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.* New Testament Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025. xxii + 168 pp. £15.99/$21.99.



An hour up the expressway from where I live is an open plains zoo, where animals roam free. Visitors meander through the park on a bus, feeling completely safe from animals that could potentially eat them. They are afforded some wonderful closeups and at different points along the way the tour guide will stop the bus to highlight something important or special. Claire Smith's new book, *The Appearing of God Our Savior: A Theology of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, provides a similar experience of the letters to Timothy and Titus (LTT).

As Smith notes in her introduction, the LTT "divide readers perhaps more than any other books in the New Testament" (p. 1), and at the heart of these conflicts is the issue of authorship. She therefore advises all who study the LTT to have an interpreter's understanding of authorship clearly in mind as they read that interpreter's work. We can follow her advice, knowing that she regards the LTT as genuinely Pauline.

The book is not a commentary but aims to highlight the main theological themes of each letter. Smith chooses to treat each letter separately and allocates five chapters for 1 Timothy, four for 2 Timothy, and three for Titus, with each chapter focusing on an important theme. This approach is a strength

of the book, allowing each letter to speak on its own terms. There are also paragraphs highlighting the similarities and distinctives between the letters as the book unfolds, but these only underscore the strength of Smith's approach. As such, this book is an excellent complement to previous thematic approaches to the LTT, avoiding some of the unfortunate difficulties of conflating these letters together without any nuance.

Smith argues that the focus of each letter is not church leadership but the triune God (chs. 1, 6, 10). God initiates and superintends his plan of salvation focussed on Jesus, and this salvation is applied by the Holy Spirit (chs. 2, 7, 11). This salvation is now available to all people who live between the first and second comings of Christ as it is revealed in God's gospel, the word of truth (chs. 3, 8). Salvation in Christ is profoundly transformative, as God's saved people live out their new identity as chosen, redeemed, and heirs of eternal life. In other words, theology drives ethical living, including the functioning of the church of God (chs. 4, 5, 9, 12). As Smith explains each letter, she moves from God to salvation to revelation to ecclesiology and ethics. As such, there is an unmistakeable logic to the ordering of the material. It also demonstrates how the various theological themes are interwoven with each other.

In keeping with her previous work, Smith shows she is particularly attuned to specific words, titles, and phrases (e.g., ch. 3 and the various terms associated with the word of God). Her skill in assessing their contribution to Paul's argument provides depth and nuance in understanding the flavor of each letter. The net result is a clear sense of the big ideas in view.

One "big picture" highlight of the tour is the analysis of "Suffering and the Gospel" (ch. 9). Smith draws out the shape of suffering, reasons for it, how it is modelled, and for what purpose. In doing so, she not only shows the unique contribution of the theme to 2 Timothy but also demonstrates the intimate connection between gospel ministry and suffering.

Even though the book focusses on the dominant themes, there are still occasional stops along the way to examine details that might sometimes be missed. For example, there is a very good discussion on sin in 1 Timothy (pp. 25–27) and the God-man who gives himself to ransom sinners (pp. 30–32). Similarly, the person (pp. 114–15) and work of Christ (pp. 122–23) in Titus also receive attention.

Claire Smith writes clearly and concisely, making the argument understandable and straightforward. Crossway should also be congratulated on the formatting and layout that enhances the reading experience.

I have two quibbles with the book. My reaction when I first picked up my copy was, "It's a bit thin." Even though Smith's writing means she packs a lot of good content into a short space, I was still left wanting more.

The "Recommended Resources" list at the end of the book is commendable. However, for a student new to studying the LTT or a pastor returning after a number of years away in other parts of the Bible, some guidance would be helpful. Given the proliferation of commentaries and studies on the LTT in recent years, it can be difficult to know where to start. Perhaps some relevant suggestions could be placed at the end of each chapter.

Nonetheless, a book can only be measured against its stated aim. At that level, if you are preparing some form of Bible teaching from one of the LTT, Claire Smith's book will prove to be a very good tour guide for your journey.

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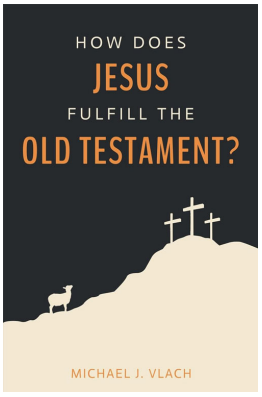
Michael J. Vlach. *How Does Jesus Fulfill the Old Testament?* Theological Studies Press, 2005. iv + 96 pp. £8.26/$10.95.



"Show your work!" Math teachers everywhere scrawl this message across their students' homework. This book by Michael Vlach, an ardent and articulate defender of dispensationalism, could be summarized as an attempt to respond to that challenge. Jesus fulfills the OT; that is the answer. How? To answer this question is to show the work. Vlach attempts to demonstrate that Jesus is not the fulfillment of the OT so much as he is the *means* by which all the details of the OT are fulfilled (p. 6).

First, Vlach refutes "Christocentric hermeneutics," which he labels "metaphysical personalism" (p. 12). He defines this view as the claim that "major Old Testament promises, prophecies, and covenants vanish, dissolve, transform, or absorb into Jesus in such a way that the details of these will not be accomplished" (p. 11). To show he has not misread the literature, he cites several scholars who use this exact language (pp. 12–15). Ultimately, he finds this view exegetically, theologically, and philosophically wanting because it misinterprets fulfillment language, implies unfaithfulness in God, and spiritualizes the text (pp. 16–17). The remainder of the book is a constructive attempt to answer the titular question.

Vlach begins with an analysis of three key texts to establish his thesis. First, he argues that Matthew 5:17–18 presents Jesus not as the fulfillment of the OT but as the agent who accomplishes its fulfillment (pp. 19–25). Second, he argues from Romans 15:8–9 that Jesus accomplishes this task in varied ways, based on different promises to Israel and the Gentiles (pp. 25–28). Third, he suggests that the phrase, "to fulfill all righteousness," in Matthew 3:15 relates to the transformation of the earth through the establishment of a righteous kingdom at his second coming (pp. 29–31). For Vlach, this seems to imply the continuance of the land promises to Israel, not their dissolution in Jesus.

Vlach proceeds to sketch six ways Jesus fulfills the OT, but these can be simplified to three. First, Vlach notes that some passages are fulfilled rather straightforwardly. These include specific messianic prophecies like Jesus's birth in Bethlehem (p. 35) and general messianic expectations like his rule over all nations (pp. 44–46). Second, Vlach argues that some OT texts are fulfilled through correspondences between events or persons rather than predictive prophecies. To illustrate this point, he focuses on correspondences between Israel's Exodus and Jesus's childhood (pp. 59–71) and correspondences between the sufferings of Jesus and the sufferings of David (pp. 73–77). Third, using the language of shadow and substance, he argues that certain features of the Old Covenant adumbrated the person and work of Christ. He highlights Israel's festivals and ceremonies (pp. 79–86). He concludes with a chapter that catalogs promises and prophecies that either remain to be fulfilled or were fulfilled after Jesus's earthly ministry.

There is much to appreciate in this book. For example, I found Vlach's refutation of "metaphysical personalism" compelling. I also appreciated his evaluation of the correspondence between Jesus and David. He noted with admitted surprise the frequency with which events in Jesus's life were said to fulfill events in David's life, particularly in his sufferings (p. 73). I believe this is one of the best ways to show that the OT spoke beforehand of Christ's sufferings. Should not the Son of David be like his father, that righteous sufferer?

Nevertheless, I would grade Vlach's work as incomplete for two reasons. First, he rarely engages with opposing scholarship, thus leaving the false impression that there are only two views on this subject: dispensationalism and his opponents' metaphysical personalism. One alternative I wish he would engage concerns the identity of Israel and its relationship to the church. John Carpenter has shown an OT expectation that Israel would be multinational ("Genesis's Definition of Israel and the Presuppositional Error of Supersessionism," *TrinJ* 42 NS [2021]: 17–34). Moreover, Jason Staples has shown that modern scholars conflate the Jewish people with *all* Israel when the NT writers recognized them as only that subset of Israel associated with Judah (*The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021]). This conflation is evident in Vlach's work (p. 28). I wonder how engagement with these scholars would affect the work of Vlach and other dispensationalists.

Second, while Vlach places Christ at the center of his explanation, he often leaves Christ's death and resurrection at the periphery. Accordingly, his work lacks a principle to unify the diverse expectations of the OT. Luke provides that principle when he declares that Jesus fulfills all the written things through his death, resurrection, and the Gentile mission (Luke 18:31–34; 24:44–47). Too often, Vlach neglects to show how Christ fulfills the OT by way of the cross. This lack is especially glaring in his discussion of the New Exodus and the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Thus, he does not fully answer the titular question.

Ultimately, Vlach's book is not helpful as a guide but as a challenge. It challenges pastors, students, and scholars to focus on the details and show their work as they attempt to explain how Jesus fulfills everything that is written.

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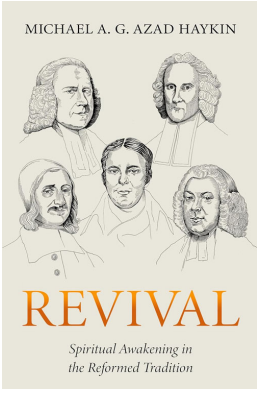
— HISTORY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Michael A. G. Azad Haykin. *Revival: Spiritual Awakening in the Reformed Tradition.* Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2024. 167 pp. £17.99/$18.00.



Few scholars, if any, have focused as much attention on the evangelical revivals of the "long eighteenth century" as Michael Haykin. Aware that drawing lessons from spiritual renewal is irregular in academia, Haykin nevertheless sees this task as a calling. In *Revival: Spiritual Awakening in the Reformed Tradition*, the author affirms the late Martin Lloyd-Jones's thesis that the history of the church "is a history of ups and downs" (p. xi) and gives his own slightly altered proposal: the history of the church is a history of revival and times of declension (p. 147). Accepting this paradigm behooves a reader to explore the Awakenings in the Anglo-American context from the 1730s to approximately 1830. Haykin hopes that the principles his book provides will "stimulate ardent prayer for God to revive his church in the midst of these trying times" (p. xiii).

Revival is divided into nine brisk chapters with a three-page conclusion listing eight theses on revival. It also contains two appendices: a 1754 letter by the Anglican William Grimshaw and a circular letter by the British Baptist John Stutterd (1750–1818). Haykin also provides a list of ten reflection questions of a practical nature, which hint at the book's devotional scope.

Chapter 1, "When the Spirit Shall Be Poured Forth Plentifully," considers instances of proto-revival among English Puritans in the seventeenth century. Haykin includes the conversion of the Anglican John Rogers (1570–1636), the Kirk O Shotts revival in Scotland in 1630, and the well-known reformation of Kidderminster under the ministry of Richard Baxter. Additionally, he includes several vignettes from Baptist figures during the period, namely Joseph Collett (1684–1741) and Abraham Cheare (1626–1668). These comparatively smaller revivals reveal that the eighteenth-century awakenings did have promising antecedents.

In chapter 2, "God Is Doing Marvellous Things," Haykin provides the social and spiritual context among the churches in England during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Citing several scholarly works showing high rates of alcoholism, poverty, sexual promiscuity, and low church attendance, Haykin positions the reader for the startling volte face that began with the first Methodists, two of whom were the Welsh Anglicans Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland. Both men experienced startling evangelical conversions in 1735. The vigor and danger of early Methodist preaching is legendary, and Haykin considers whether Howell Harris's head injury, incurred after a mob attacked him while preaching in Bala, North Wales, contributed to the erratic and even scandalous behavior that discredited his subsequent ministry (pp. 27–28). As students of this period are aware, such violence against preachers was not uncommon, a fact that should temper any romantic notions we may have about the eighteenth century.

In chapter 3, "Come to This Life-Giving Stream," Haykin considers the renowned evangelist George Whitefield, whose name is synonymous with revival. Whitefield was the most controversial evangelist during his lifetime and remains a subject of controversy. Haykin notes Whitefield's introduction of slavery into Georgia and the Wesley brothers' opposition to it, and he considers whether Whitefield would have "come to see the error of his thinking about slavery," as the subsequent generation of

Methodists in England did (p. 51). Whitefield's popularity with African slaves and the warm elegy Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) published in memory of the evangelist militates against the patent dismissal of the evangelist (p. 49).

In chapter 4, "He Carries Fire Wherever He Goes," Haykin recounts the life and ministry of William Grimshaw, whose conversion famously featured an "uncommon heat" emanating from a copy of the Puritan John Owen's *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (p. 60). Grimshaw is perhaps the least known of the Anglican evangelicals, yet his inclusion in *Revival* is warranted. Historian Frank Baker claimed he had a "more potent influence than any other leader of his time" (p. 62).

A full thirty pages are devoted to Jonathan Edwards. Chapter 5, "The Theologian of Revival," gives a succinct biography of Edwards, his role in the Northampton Awakening, and the interplay between westward expansion, education, and missions. Chapter 6 considers Edwards's outstanding paradigmatic work, *Religious Affections* (1746), and its "twelve marks of genuine revival." Haykin's focus on Edwards is significant as the contemporary renaissance of Edwardsean scholarship has passed its zenith.

In chapters 7–9, Haykin shifts from Anglicans and Congregationalists to British Baptists. Like the Church of England, though for different reasons, Particular Baptists at that time experienced stagnation, largely due to their theological captivity to High Calvinism. As with *Revival*'s first chapter, Haykin looks to countervailing examples of spiritual vitality, including Benjamin Francis and the poet Anne Steele in chapter 7, "We Are a Garden Wall'd Around." Andrew Fuller and his influential ministry are the focus of chapter 8, "Impress Thy Truth upon My Heart with Thine Own Seal," particularly his book, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785), and a circular letter exhorting Baptist congregations to seek revival. The culmination of spiritual renewal—chapter 9, "The Lord Is Doing Great Things, and Answering Prayers Everywhere"—comes with the "concert of prayer," a monthly prayer meeting inspired by Jonathan Edwards's *A Humble Attempt at Extraordinary Prayer* (1748) and promoted by John Sutcliff. Haykin notes that the Baptist Missionary Society was established in the prayer call's wake in 1796. In terms of empirical measurement, the number of Particular Baptist churches doubled in less than fifty years (p. 142), a dramatic improvement that the participants, no less than William Carey himself, attributed to their decision to pray monthly.

In an age of diminished reading, in quantity and quality, *Revival* has sufficient brevity so as not to discourage the potential reader otherwise intimated by lengthy critical works such as George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards* or Henry Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast*. The book may well whet one's appetite for deeper reading on the period. It is difficult to imagine writing, much less inspiring a reader, without believing in and longing for revival. The crisp, succinct book provides light as well as heat, as its author has written as a lover, not a bystander.

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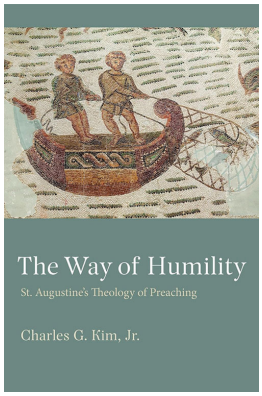
Charles G. Kim Jr. *The Way of Humility: St. Augustine's Theology of Preaching*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2024. xlvi + 205 pp. £63.00/$75.00.



The past fifteen years has seen a welcome and necessary clarification of Augustine's significance in church history and theology. Back in 2001, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann could dismiss his sermons as 'short and scrappy.' Other academic writings dismissed Augustine's preaching as 'banal.' When I began work on a PhD in Augustine's theology of preaching in 2007, there were no full-length English studies of that topic. Subsequently, numbers of works have been published recognising that the theology and life of Augustine is not fully appreciated if his preaching is overlooked. Examples of these include that by Paul Kolbet, Anthony Dupont, J. Patout Burns Jr., and Michael Glowasky.

Given that so many of Augustine's unedited sermons are available, along with the commentaries that derive from the sermons, it may be surprising that so little attention had been paid to them in earlier generations of scholars. That situation has now been effectively addressed in the academy. The volume under review adds to recent renewed interest in Augustine's preaching by explicating the doctrinal and ethical assumptions that shaped his preaching. Specifically, the thesis is that Augustine's preaching was empowered by 'humility, not only as a concept, but also as a practice' (p. xxxii).

The first half of the book considers a contextual frame for Augustine's preaching; the second half reflects on Augustine's preaching from three vantage points: his Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology. The opening chapter utilises Speech Act Theory to contextualise Augustine's preaching as a 'species of action' (p. 38) distinguished from classical rhetoric by the preacher's humility. Speech Act Theory derives from J. L. Austin's book, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). The insights it offers are true, but perhaps less significant for understanding Augustine's preaching than the wider doctrinal framework examined in the rest of the book. Central to this is the virtue and ethos of humility, which enabled Augustine to 'speak at a level which any could understand and all could enjoy' (p. 120). The fourth chapter on Augustine's Christology makes clear that the form of preaching must be humble if it is to present a Christ who is humble. When people get to know the humble Christ, they long to know more: 'What Augustine the preacher wants is for his people to pray rightly and he wants to stir within them a desire for understanding' (p. 161).

The concluding chapter on soteriology emphasises that for listeners to understand and benefit from a sermon, God must act:

> It is through sharing in the humility of Christ that one has the possibility or power to see with deified eyes. Augustine teaches the virtue of humility, which he learned from Christ, through his words and deeds as preacher. The preaching moment also presents the possibility to rely humbly on God to give the increase, both for the preacher and the parishioner. (p. 177)

The book successfully demonstrates that Augustine had a doctrinal vision of preaching, which he sought to live out in the sermons he delivered. Humility was a core commitment in his vision of preaching. This meant that Augustine was able to utilise pagan insights to hermeneutics (for understanding Scripture) and rhetoric (for communication). Augustine was not too proud to learn from others, but

the insights he gained had to be submitted to, and refined by, the message of the Bible. Humility was thus necessary in the preacher.

It was also what Augustine's preaching aimed to cultivate in—and required from—listeners. Augustine wanted people to depend not on their own good works but the grace of the triune God. For this to be so, listeners would need to humbly accept the grace held out in sermons. Preacher, Scripture, and listeners were together united in their appreciation of humility. The great value, then, of this book is its consistent highlighting of the centrality of humility in Augustine's preaching.

It is good to see academic dissertations such as this being produced that are of sufficient value to the church that they can be published. This study of Augustine's preaching not only adds to our appreciation of Augustine's preaching, but it also challenges our approach to preaching in general. Too many today view preaching as in effect merely a pragmatic or intellectual exchange of information. The role of the modern preacher is then to sell and market his interpretations. That this study places our focus on the spiritual virtue of humility reminds us that preaching cannot be adequately practised as a technique. It is rather a spiritual discipline that requires the humble Christ to be known in a heartfelt way by the preacher. Many of our contemporary efforts to train preachers implicitly appeal to and promote the idea that the preacher has within himself special skills and abilities. It is easy to imagine that one is on a higher spiritual plane than the congregation. Preaching well becomes an effort to draw upon inner strength and skills of interpretation and communication. Augustine therefore stands as a challenge to us: more foundational than skills or technique is the preacher's humble dependence on God for insight. Cultivation of humility before God is needed before we deploy rhetorical skills in his service. If this book is right to see humility as central to preaching, then the preacher must be aware that how one views self and wider areas of life have a bearing on the health of one's preaching. Congregations also need to cultivate humility to benefit from preaching. The sermon is not an opportunity to puff oneself up or engage in hyper-critical evaluation. A humble spirit will open listeners' hearts to God's Spirit as his Word is preached.

The renewed appreciation of Augustine's preaching in the past 15 years is demonstrated in the fact that, while *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* once dismissed the sermons as of little value, in May 2025 they were recognised as so vital for understanding Augustine that they were granted their own standalone Cambridge Handbook (edited by Andrew Hofer). There are lessons here for the evangelical church: we can also recommit to valuing the work of preaching as a crucial spiritual exercise discharged for the good of the church and glory of God. A good step towards that would be reading and pondering sermons from Augustine. They are available in eleven volumes of a contemporary translation (Saint Augustine, *Sermons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine* [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–1997]) and for those who wish to dip into them, there is a one-volume selection of sermons available (*Essential Sermons*, ed. Daniel E. Doyle, The Works of Saint Augustine [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007]).

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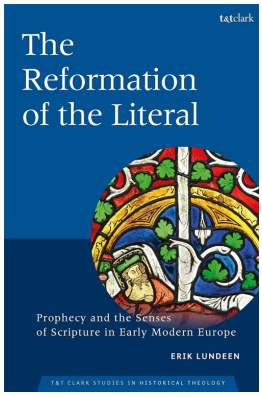
Erik Lundeen. *The Reformation of the Literal: Prophecy and the Senses of Scripture in Early Modern Europe*. London: T&T Clark, 2025. 219 pp. £85.00/$115.00.



Nearly thirty years ago, Richard Muller lamented that many works on Reformation-era hermeneutics "make no attempt to tell us whether or not the exegesis of Luther or Calvin is original or highly traditional on a particular text or issue in Scripture" (Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], p. 5). This deficiency is exacerbated among lesser-known Reformers. Erik Lundeen's *The Reformation of the Literal* addresses this lacuna through an exploration of Johannes Oecolampadius's commentary on Isaiah that compares the Basel Reformer to a wide range of Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation-era interpreters. Two primary concerns mark Lundeen's analysis: the referentiality of Isaiah's prophetic oracles and the variety of positions among the Reformers on the nature of the Bible's literal and spiritual senses. Ultimately, Lundeen claims that "in the Reformation, there was no shared notion of what constituted Scripture's *sensus litteralis,* nor a shared approach of how to go about establishing it" (p. 211). With this, Lundeen reminds us that, while the Reformers agreed on the principle of *sola scriptura*, a shared hermeneutic eluded them.

The initial chapter of *The Reformation of the Literal* studies the relationship between Johannes Oecolampadius—the seminal Reformer in Basel in the early sixteenth century—and the Dutch humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Lundeen explores this relationship to reveal Erasmus's crucial influence upon Oecolampadius's early hermeneutical approach. Four areas of exegetical continuity between the two are given detailed attention: the concept of Christ as the *scopus* (the goal or target) of the entire Biblical canon, careful engagement with the church fathers on matters of biblical interpretation, the pursuit of an exegetical approach to theology, and the embrace of both the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture.

Lundeen then surveys the continuities and discontinuities between Oecolampadius's reading of select texts from Isaiah with three patristic authors: Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, and Chrysostom. Not only does this comparison disclose a high degree of continuity between Oecolampadius's hermeneutic and that of the church fathers, but Lundeen claims that the Basler was not afraid to "push even further" than his patristic counterparts in his spiritual interpretations of several texts in Isaiah (p. 76). Lundeen also compares Oecolampadius with several other Reformers. This analysis further substantiates the author's thesis that sixteenth-century opinions of allegorical interpretations varied significantly, "with no discernible pattern or unanimity" (p. 79).

Lundeen subsequently moves his comparative exegesis into the Middle Ages. Oecolampadius's reading of five passages in Isaiah containing prophecies about the Virgin Mary is analyzed alongside commentaries by Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Lyra. Despite his departure from previous tradition regarding the veneration of Mary, Oecolampadius's interpretation of these texts demonstrated "significant continuity with the majority of medieval Christian interpreters" (p. 118). Nevertheless, in an intentional move away from much of the focus within recent Reformation scholarship, Lundeen also highlights how Oecolampadius's understanding of the literal sense in Isaiah differed from traditional Christian expositions. These discontinuities are, in part, explained by the influence that Jewish notions

of coherence and contemporaneity had upon the Reformer's reading of prophetic literature. In other words, along with medieval Jewish interpreters, Oecolampadius understood prophetic texts to embody a literary coherence—they are best understood when interpreted as entire literary units "that addressed a single subject matter" (p. 126). Likewise, before discerning Isaiah's relevance to later Christian dogmas, Oecolampadius appropriated the Jewish concern of uncovering a passage's contemporaneity—its meaning for the original audience.

The author then reviews Oecolampadius's reading of Isaiah 40–66, prophetic oracles that are notoriously difficult to situate historically. Lundeen again notes the lack of uniformity among Lutheran and Reformed exegetes by focusing upon the diversity of Reformation-era interpretations regarding three key hermeneutical debates: the proper literal understanding of Isaiah's figures of speech, the nature of New Testament quotations from Isaiah 40–66, and the questions of literary coherence and historical contemporaneity. The following chapter similarly argues that Lutheran and Reformed interpreters of Isaiah "held to strikingly different understandings of prophecy's potential referentiality" (p. 185). For example, Lutheran commentators commonly understood Christ to be the sole referent of many of Isaiah's prophecies. The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, generally understood Christ to be one of many legitimate referents within such texts. Between these two confessional traditions, Lundeen posits that Oecolampadius was a transitional and trailblazing figure in his understanding of prophecy's literal sense. He also argues that several important Reformed interpreters (Calvin, Musculus, and Pellikan) followed and expanded upon Oecolampadius's "pioneering" (p. 192) understanding of Isaiah's multi-layered referentiality.

Because he compares Oecolampadius's exegesis to so vast a number of interpreters—patristic, medieval, Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed—Lundeen occasionally limits himself to cursory reflections. At times, a reader would be justified in feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of commentators and exegetical traditions examined. By narrowing the commentators that are compared to Oecolampadius, Lundeen could have contributed even more to the dearth of research on lesser-known Reformers and the perception of the multiple senses of Scripture found within Reformation commentaries.

Lundeen's work, nonetheless, embodies well-researched and honest history. Such honesty can be seen chiefly in his refusal to force a tidy resolution to his frequently repeated claim that the Reformers embodied little to no unanimity concerning the nature of the Bible's literal sense. Regarding Oecolampadius specifically, Lundeen highlights insightfully the Reformer's novel combination of Christian and Jewish concerns in his approach to the nature of the literal sense, as well as his pivotal influence upon subsequent Reformed and Lutheran hermeneutics. Anyone seeking to understand the field of Reformation hermeneutics has, in *The Reformation of the Literal,* another innovative, worthwhile volume to consider.

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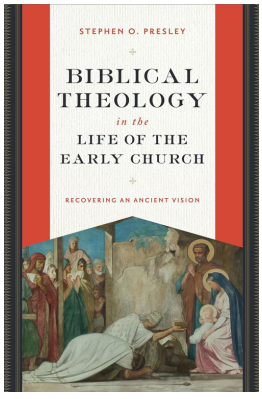
Stephen O. Presley. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. xi + 204 pp. £19.99/$24.99.



In this volume, church historian Stephen O. Presley offers a sequel—or better, a prequel—to his proposal in last year's *Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World like the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024). Where that work called us to retrieve the early church's approach to bearing witness in a hostile pagan world, this year's follow-up digs deeper into what such a recovery entails: "an entirely different view of reality" (p. ix).

The early Christian "view of reality" was, of course, derived from Holy Scripture. Yet to make sense of the approach to Scripture found in Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, and others, Presley contends, we must advance the conversation beyond hermeneutical "methods" to "fundamental assumptions" (p. ix). Only by examining early Christian convictions about the nature of Scripture itself, the God who speaks through it, and the Christian life that it guides, can we be delivered from the sterilized, critical dissection of the text which has infiltrated modern (post-Enlightenment) biblical studies (p. 4).

To be clear, Presley is appreciative of the still-flourishing, modern, "biblical theology" movement, which reacted against these trends through a renewed emphasis on the unity of the canon. Yet even these presentations rarely engage with what the fathers regarded as primary—"the realm of metaphysics," or ultimate reality (p. 6). For early Christians, Scripture was not an object for intellectual scrutiny but the all-encompassing self-revelation of God, laying metaphysical foundations and giving rise, in turn, to distinctive modes of thinking (epistemology) and living (ethics). For them, "biblical theology is not a discipline but a way of life that reads the Bible as a culture-shaping text" (p. 6).

The "culture" that it shapes is, of course, the believing community of the church. In chapter 1, Presley calls for an "ecclesial biblical theology" (p. 7), one which embraces the "synergy" between three essential elements: Scripture, the rule of faith, and the church's liturgy (or spiritual life, p. 17). The rule, as the apostolic proclamation of the triune God and his economic activity in creation and redemption, arises from Scripture as a summary of its teaching and also establishes boundaries for its proper interpretation, in a "cyclical relationship" (pp. 21–27). Meanwhile, the church's liturgy cultivates the habits and virtues necessary for spiritual participation in this ultimate story: baptism, eucharist, prayer, and devotional life (pp. 28–32).

Chapters 2–6 illuminate various facets of this ecclesial biblical theology. Presley begins in chapter 2 where modern hermeneutics refuses to go—the spiritual sense, which is indeed "the primary sense and purpose of reading Scripture" (p. 37). The church fathers universally assumed that the ultimate "referent" for Scripture's many "signs" is the God confessed in the rule of faith (p. 39). This truth demands certain interpretive postures from the reader, such as deriving meanings consistent with the confession of faith, assuming the Scriptures' internal harmony, relying on the Spirit's illumination, and submitting to Scripture's divine authority (p. 50).

Yet the primacy of the spiritual sense does not displace the literal sense for early Christians, as is often thought. On the contrary, Presley insists in chapter 3 that tracing the overarching narrative of the literal sense, where modern biblical theology has "shined," is indispensable to the spiritual sense. It is the only framework for contemplating the redemptive activity of God centered around Christ and its implications for the spiritual life (p. 68).

This leads to chapter 4's argument that the fathers regarded Christ himself as Scripture's interpretive locus. While modern discussions have bogged down in debates over terms (typology, allegory, etc.), early Christian exegetes discern Christ in all of Scripture from three broader perspectives: the personal (reading through a Trinitarian lens to identify the divine person of the Son), the prophetic (recognizing his fulfillment of prophecy across his two advents), and the partitive (distinguishing descriptions of his divine and human natures without losing sight of their unity). Together, these perspectives "reveal what has existed all along"—Scripture's unified witness to Christ (p. 117).

Presley turns in chapter 5 from the text to the interpreter, reflecting on the role of the virtues in biblical exegesis. For premodern Christians, the moral character of the reader is both a prerequisite and a goal of the study of Scripture as guided by the Spirit (p. 123). Moreover, the ethic which constitutes "the good life" arises out of the metaphysical vision which Scripture casts and, in a sort of "feedback loop" (p. 131), further shapes the interpreter as an "active participant" in its ongoing story (p. 145).

Presley's closing chapter returns to the church as "the primary locus for reading Scripture" (p. 149). Through its catechesis (or instruction), its liturgy (or public worship), and its proclamation (or preaching), the church alone can instill the fundamental assumptions that were vital, as Presley has shown, to early Christian efforts to interpret Scripture in a manner appropriate to the God who speaks through them.

Presley makes a bold case in suggesting that the hermeneutical "methods" revered by moderns are, at best, in serious need of supplement and that "the proper context for biblical theology … is not canon or historical context or even salvation history; it is the Christian community formed through the intertwining threads of confession and liturgy" (p. 172). This extensively documented historical survey is formidable, and its lively and accessible presentation warmly invites biblical interpreters of all stripes to reflect thoughtfully on these disparities between ancient and modern assumptions. Of course, by Presley's own argument, there is no setting more appropriate for doing so than the community of the local church itself!

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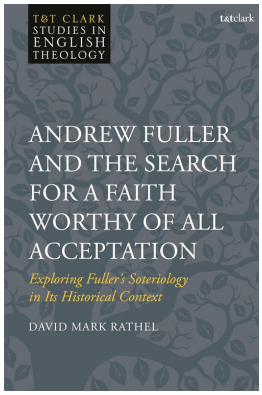
David Mark Rathel. *Andrew Fuller and the Search for a Faith Worthy of All Acceptation: Exploring Fuller's Soteriology in Its Historical Context*. T&T Clark Studies in English Theology. London: T&T Clark, 2024. 192 pp. £85.00/$115.00.



What does an obscure eighteenth-century Baptist theological debate have to do with the spread of the gospel? Far more than one might assume. As David Mark Rathel of Gateway Seminary skillfully argues in *Andrew Fuller and the Search for a Faith Worthy of All Acceptation,* a theological shift in one small-town pastor's thought would have massive ramifications for the spread of the gospel among the nations. Indeed, the debates swirling among English Calvinistic Baptists during the long eighteenth century (1680s–1830s) concerning the duty of unbelievers to receive the gospel (also known in that time as the Modern Question) had a profound impact on their spiritual health and gospel witness.

Yet, Rathel contends that researchers have not given adequate attention to the historical background of the debate. At the center of the argument was Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), who served as the pastor of Kettering Baptist Church from 1783 to 1815. In addition to his pastoral labors and secretarial duties for the Baptist Missionary Society, Fuller published several works. *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785) was Fuller's most contentious and consequential. By surveying "the historical development of eighteenth-century hyper-Calvinism in Northamptonshire," Rathel seeks to "demonstrate how such a survey contextualizes Andrew Fuller's theology and illuminates his proposals about the human response to the gospel" (p. 11). Rathel does not stop there, however. He proposes "that existing accounts of hyper-Calvinism are deficient because they do not adequately document the diversity found in the movement." In response, Rathel offers "a new interpretation of hyper-Calvinism that accounts for its complexity" (p. 11).

Rathel sets out to orient readers to the debate's major contours and contributors. At the heart of what Fuller (a Calvinist himself) labeled "false Calvinism" was a concern to preserve God's sovereign grace in salvation. Sometimes referred to as "high Calvinism" or "hyper-Calvinism," false Calvinism rejected the idea of gospel-offers to unbelievers. The question is, What doctrinal commitment led to this conclusion? Covenant theology, the *pactum salutis*, and eternal justification are some of the more popular suggestions. Yet, Rathel proposes that scholars have misread the debate. Focusing on more prominent figures such as John Gill (1697–1771) and Joseph Hussey (1660–1728), researchers have largely neglected men such as Lewis Wayman (d. 1764), John Brine (1703–1765), and John Johnson (1706–1791), even though, as Rathel contends, they had a greater impact on the Modern Question debate (p. 5).

In chapters 1–2, Rathel explores Hussey's and Gill's theology. He concludes that Gill modified "traditional accounts of soteriology" through the "Hussey-inspired theology of his youth." "This theology," argues Rathel, "diminished human agency to the point that it denied universal offers of the gospel and the obligation of all people to respond positively to the gospel" (p. 87). At the core of both men's Calvinism was the doctrine of eternal justification (p. 80).

Fuller, however, did not aim at eternal justification. As Rathel explains in chapter 3, with a survey of the historical background to the Modern Question debate, Fuller drew upon the arguments of men like Matthias Maurice (1634–1738) and Abraham Taylor (d. 1740) to address the issue of Adamic inability. "To address objections raised during the modern question debate," argues Rathel, "hyper-Calvinist

theologians [like Wayman, Brine, and Johnson] broadened their tradition by arguing that prelapsarian Adam had no ability or obligation to accept the gospel. From this point, they asserted that contemporary audiences likewise have no capacity or duty to accept the gospel" (p. 91).

Rathel unpacks this point in chapter 4 by comparing a recently discovered Fuller manuscript entitled *Thoughts on the Power of Men to Do the Will of God* (1777 or 1778) and *The Gospel Worthy* (the former appears to be the inspiration for the latter). As Rathel contends, Fuller even used Gill against his fellow hyper-Calvinists, since he did not (consistently) hold to Adamic inability (p. 140). To this end, he focused on distinguishing between natural ability and moral ability, a distinction that most researchers conclude he borrowed from Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Rathel, however, gives evidence of indebtedness to Gill (p. 138). Finally, Rathel helpfully concludes his work with a summary of findings and suggestions for further research (pp. 159–162).

Rathel's work deserves high praise. By surveying the primary sources behind the Modern Question, Rathel lays a solid foundation to provide a more precise construction of Fuller's response to hyper-Calvinism. Researchers will greatly benefit from Rathel's labors to bring clarity to what has been a theological conundrum in Baptist studies. The bibliography alone is well worth the reader's investment. While Rathel boldly criticizes previous research, he nevertheless supports his claims with careful theological, historical, and literary analysis. Especially fascinating is his examination of Fuller's reading and use of Gill (see pp. 136–42).

There are a few minor typographical mistakes along the way, such as a missing word on page 140, footnote 40. There also seems to be an oversight in the fact that Joseph Hussey, who published his work, *The Glory of Christ Unveiled*, in 1706, could not have depended on Isaac Watts's 1722 work, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity,* as Rathel suggests (see p. 35). None of these issues, however, significantly detracts from the author's thesis.

Overall, *Andrew Fuller and the Search for a Faith Worthy of All Acceptation* provides scholars and pastors with the theological and historical background necessary for rightly understanding Fuller's unique contributions to a debate that would have far-reaching implications. Indeed, one might argue that Fuller's shot at hyper-Calvinism was heard, not only in England but, more importantly, around the world.

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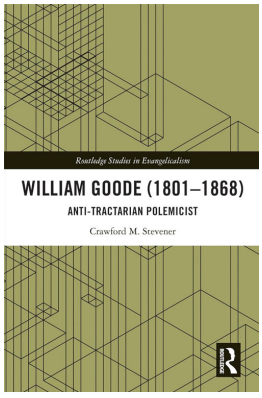
Crawford M. Stevener, *William Goode (1801–1868): Anti-Tractarian Polemicist*. Routledge Studies in Evangelicalism. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2025. 200 pp. £145.00/$190.00.



Twenty-first-century evangelical Protestants are far more indebted to the Anglican evangelical tradition than they know. Every reader of *Themelios* has some familiarity with a recent line of scholar-preachers which (moving from present to past) might include Tom Wright, Alister McGrath, Gerald Bray, John Webster, Alec Motyer, Leon Morris, J. I. Packer, and John Stott. But these are all names that came to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. We have much less to say about the previous half-century. What of G. T. Manley (d. 1961), the polymath who compiled *The New Bible Handbook* (1947)? There was, we recall, W. H. Griffith Thomas (d. 1924), the preacher-theologian highly admired on both sides of the Atlantic. Will anyone mention scholar-bishop Handley Moule (d. 1920)? By the time we have reached the better-known bishop J. C. Ryle (d. 1900), we have nearly reached our limit in identifying stalwart evangelical leaders within the Church of England.

But such a perspective is short-sighted. Crawford Stevener's study of mid-Victorian preacher-theologian William Goode (1801–1868) draws deserved attention to the career and significance of the man who did more, from a literary and polemical point of view, to preserve a place of theological integrity for evangelicalism within the Church of England than any man of his generation. Faced with the multiple challenges posed by Irvingism (the 1830s claim that the charismata had been restored) and the Oxford Movement (an 1830s movement led by John Henry Newman which claimed that the Church of England had always been intended to more fully align with Rome), Goode took note and then wrote. When the Cambridge Camden Society sought to promote the building of Gothic revival churches and the renovating of others to conform to that idea, and when an obstreperous bishop obstructed the installation of a minister who would not affirm baptismal regeneration, Church of England evangelicals looked to William Goode for literary and theological leadership. American evangelical Episcopalians were also paying close attention (pp. 20, 57).

Goode did not disappoint. He regularly produced weighty tomes (too weighty in the judgment of many readers!), rich with patristic and Reformation learning. He is remembered especially for *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* (1842), *Altars Prohibited by the Church of England* (1844), and *The Doctrine of the Church of England on the Two Doctrines of Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (1864). Goode churned out these authoritative volumes while a functioning minister and in the same years when his personal life was thrown into confusion by a house fire (which destroyed a manuscript near completion), the death of two sons, and the loss of his wife. In recognition of his titanic labors, he was appointed to important London pastorates and eventually made the dean of Ripon Cathedral.

The reviewer maintains that it is unwise for today's evangelicals (especially Anglicans, but others also) to be ignorant of Goode and others like him. He agrees with the author, Stevener, that the scant attention given to Goode by more recent authors Peter Toon (*Evangelical Theology 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism*, *New Foundations Theological Library* [London: Westminster John Knox, 1979]) and Elizabeth Jay, ed. (*The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979]) has scarcely done justice to the man. Why is this ignorance unwise? Evangelical distinctives such as the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith, the finality of the

priesthood of Christ (such that we have no priests any longer), the absolute necessity of personal faith in Christ, the irreducible role of faith in the profitable reception of both baptism and the Lord's Supper, and gospel simplicity in the interior furnishing of churches—these are convictions which have been preserved down to our time because Goode, with associates, labored so hard to articulate them in the Victorian period. Like a spreading virus, these same issues would eventually vex many denominations beyond Anglicanism before the Victorian age ended. Goode must be recognized as in the vanguard, championing distinctives of the whole evangelical family.

Some readers of this review might respond to these assertions by insisting instead that the battles Goode waged were battles that arose *precisely* because it was theologically comprehensive churches (like the Church of England) which were content to be elastic, permitting a range of views beyond what was biblically defensible. More strictly bounded churches ought to have been free of such tugs of war. But this is not how the past century and a half have in fact unfolded. Today's evangelical churches (free, they think, of the ambiguities which kept Goode's pen so busy) are increasingly dabbling in the kinds of practices which agitated Goode and his peers. The keeping of Lent and associated "holy" days, an openness (by some) to think of pastors in priestly terms, a growing interest in clerical garb, and a surging interest in printed liturgies suggest a creeping "Anglicanization" within branches of evangelical Protestantism. These trends, in America at least, are traceable to the career of the late Robert E. Webber (d. 2007) and, still earlier, Thomas Howard (d. 2020). This reviewer considers himself deeply indebted to Anglican evangelicalism; what troubles him is evidence of undiscerning dabbling in the Anglican and Anglo-Catholic tradition as if no road maps existed to guide this enterprise. Men like Goode have already traveled these roads.

Crawford Stevener, having gained the Manchester PhD for the research underlying *William Goode: 1801–1868,* is now Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church East Side in Manhattan. He has put us all in his debt with this timely study, the contemporary applications of which are many.

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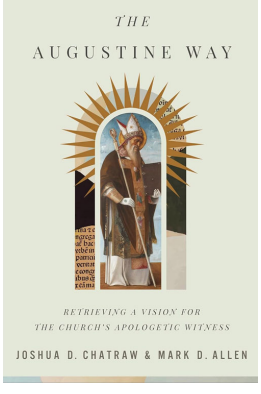
Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen. *The Augustine Way: Retrieving a Vision for the Church's Apologetic Witness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. x + 197 pp. £17.99/$22.99.



The most prominent Roman Catholic person in the world—newly elected Pope Leo XIV—is an Augustinian priest, which makes Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen's *The Augustine Way* particularly timely. Chatraw and Allen's newest contribution, which expands on their earlier *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), seeks to recover Augustine's mature apologetic voice in order to address the challenges encountered by the church today. The authors successfully engage the reader in Augustine's *Confessions* and *The City of God* before bringing the fourth-century bishop into the present and imaginatively extrapolating how the greatest Christian theologian would speak to contemporary apologetics within its late-modern context.

Chatraw and Allen argue that the "encyclopedic rationality" (p. 140) Christian apologetics has maintained over the past 200 years is no longer viable. They reason that the dominant apologetic methods are "insufficiently contextual and anthropologically thin" (p. 37) because they neglect what philosopher Charles Taylor has termed the social imaginary. This results in an "apologetic malpractice" (p. 39) that ignores "cultural contingency" (p. 64) by relying solely on rational tools and syllogisms without considering how secular late moderns reinterpret the very axioms (logic and reason) upon which these analytical methods are built.

In contrast to reductionistic anthropologies, which treat people either as thinkers or believers, Augustine suggests people are primarily doxological and models an integrated apologetic method that speaks to the whole human person. This leads the authors to make what might be their most crucial point: wholistic apologetics cannot be separated from the ecclesia, which is not only where apologetics happens but is an apologetic. Moreover, the necessary apologetic posture—epistemic humility—is developed through participation in the local church community, where discipleship is reunited with apologetics so that rehearsing God's story through Scripture, song, and sacrament produces apologists characterized by both virtue and skill. The church is to be a missional hospital where seekers are not only taught truth but also shown how to believe, love, and reason: "a healing community" that "redirects disordered loves and longings toward the love of God" (p. 99).

Thus, the authors propose a new approach to apologetics: a "meta-apologetic strategy" (p. 182) aimed at "holistic persuasion" (p. 141) that incorporates narrative, history, psychology, and logic in two steps. First, an immanent critique (pp. 148–54) engages with a social imaginary by deconstructing it internally. Augustine demonstrates how to "reason with modern-day pagans" (p. 154) by appealing to his opponents' sources and exposing weaknesses within their culture-making narratives as well as teasing out their existential implications. Rather than destroying the opposing worldview, this step is an "exploratory surgery" (p. 148) through which apologetic questions lay bare the patient's wounds in hopes to prepare him or her "to be willing to try out the medicine of Christ as the cure for their ailments" (p. 156). Second, Augustine's way delivers "holistic therapy" by inviting the other into a better story by showing how answers to their deepest questions and longings are answered in the Christian story. While the pastor-theologian-apologist redirects his audience towards Christ, he provides ad hoc arguments (evidence to strengthen his claims as well as responses to critics) just as a doctor might need to pivot in order to address complications that arise during surgery.

Fundamentally, the common denominator in Augustine's apologetic structure is his central aim to convert and to cure rather than to convince. Chatraw and Allen repeatedly describe the Augustinian approach as nimble—which aptly encapsulates the elasticity in Augustine's multidimensional approach. Flexibility, the authors posit in their concluding remarks, is also required in adapting the Augustine way today because the bishop has provided us with "a trajectory" rather than a destination: "resources to build on" and an adaptable "rhetorical strategy" to employ in multiple contexts (p. 174).

Notably, Chatraw and Allen embody their philosophy; their communication style integrates symbolic and narrative elements into their logical arguments, addressing the whole person. For example, a composite character in the rural American South shows, rather than tells, socio-cultural parallels between Augustine's time and ours, and popular streaming hits Ted Lasso and The Morning Show serve to illustrate late-modern longings. Similarly, the authors use Augustine's principle that apologetics is always contextual and involves real people, illustrating this with Rhett McLaughlin's deconversion story to highlight the problems of a simplistic understanding of human nature. Another

key strength of this book is its inclusive vision. Following C. S. Lewis's non-denominational approach in *Mere Christianity*, Chatraw and Allen present Augustine as a common denominator and a key voice in all church traditions. Even though their critical assessment seems to target predominately North American evangelical apologetics, the authors generally apply an ecumenical approach, as they amass Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant philosophers and theologians to make their case and to highlight how these diverse thinkers embody Augustine's methods and posture.

Though *The Augustine Way* is clear and concise in its overall structure and style, the last chapter, "A Therapeutic Approach," is, at times, rather dense. Furthermore, Chatraw and Allen's predisposition to provide historical background to apologetic methodology questions, such as the lengthy segment on Alasdair Macintyre's 1987 Gifford Lectures, may disrupt an otherwise streamlined reading experience.

Chatraw and Allen successfully revive Augustine's wisdom for pastors, theologians, missionaries, and all Christians engaged in modern apologetics, offering readers a practical approach to sharing the gospel. Augustine's influence is undoubtedly needed in contemporary Christianity, and this short but weighty volume may prove instrumental in this timely endeavor.

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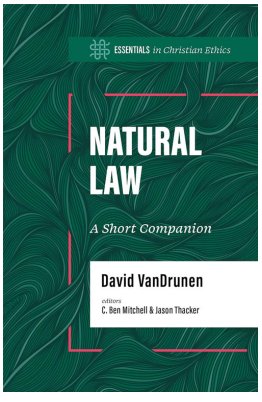
— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

David VanDrunen. *Natural Law: A Short Companion*. Essentials in Christian Ethics. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023. xvi + 135 pp. £19.99/$19.99.



David VanDrunen's *Natural Law: A Short Companion* is a concise yet theologically rich introduction to the concept and function of natural law, written in a style accessible to both students and informed lay readers. For those newly curious about the resurgence of Protestant interest in natural law over the past two decades, this book serves as an ideal entry point. For more seasoned readers, it offers a distilled presentation of VanDrunen's broader body of work—including *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), *Politics After Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), and the more popular *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010)—highlighting the least controversial and most foundational aspects of his argumentation.

VanDrunen's signature clarity and organization are evident from the outset. In the opening chapter, he succinctly defines natural law as "the law of God made known in the created order, which all human beings know through their physical senses, intellect, and conscience, although they sinfully resist this knowledge to various degrees" (p. 1). He carefully distinguishes natural law from two related concepts. First, unlike "natural revelation," which encompasses God's revelation of both himself and his moral

will, natural law pertains exclusively to the latter (p. 8). Second, he differentiates it from "natural law theory," which refers to human reflection upon the content of natural law. In contrast, natural law itself is not synonymous with human reason but is best understood as divine revelation. VanDrunen argues that this interpretation aligns more closely not only with the actual writings of Thomas Aquinas but also with the dominant understanding of the early Protestant Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, and their successor, Francis Turretin (pp. 10–14).

Chapters 2–4 then establish biblical support for this conception of natural law as inherited by the Reformers. Chapter 2 explores the created order, the *imago Dei*, the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9, and the teaching of Proverbs and the prophets. VanDrunen emphasizes that God created a world filled with "meaning, purpose, and order" (p. 30) and that humans, made in God's image, are called to discern and live in accordance with this moral structure (p. 23). While modern and postmodern thought often denies the possibility of moving from "is" to "ought," Scripture affirms that this capacity is inherent in humanity, though impaired—not obliterated—by sin (pp. 25–27).

Chapter 3 expands the argument by examining scriptural evidence that all people, not just members of God's covenant community, possess some awareness of divine moral demands. These include a general sense that "there is a God who should be feared" and that there are certain "things that ought not to be done." Chapter 4 grounds divine judgment in natural law, citing both Old Testament prophetic oracles and New Testament texts like Romans 1–2. Such passages condemn both the denial of God's existence (hubris) and the rejection of God's moral standards (injustice). The chapter concludes by outlining ways in which natural law serves as a foundation for the gospel.

The final two chapters shift from theological exposition to practical application. Chapter 5 explains how natural law functions in daily Christian life. It is especially necessary, VanDrunen argues, because Scripture does not address every moral scenario in explicit detail (p. 82). Moreover, natural law elucidates why certain behaviors are forbidden: they contradict the moral grain of the created order. The Proverbs, though not exhaustive, instruct readers in acquiring this moral discernment. When we act contrary to this order, we are not merely wrong but also "stupid" and "destructive," living against the grain of divine design (p. 85). VanDrunen also contends that natural law is more immediately applicable to contemporary moral reasoning than the Mosaic law. When questioned about divorce, for example, Jesus "pointed his Jewish listeners not beyond the Mosaic law to its fulfillment in him but before the Mosaic law to what God did in creation" (p. 93).

Chapter 6 addresses the use of natural law in the public square. VanDrunen observes that "people learn the natural law in much the same way that they mature in wisdom," through prolonged habituation and instruction by the morally wise (p. 101). This leads him to minimize the role of sophisticated argumentation, and he also cautions against both "naïve optimism" and "nihilistic pessimism" in public discourse—expecting too much or too little from natural law persuasion. He concludes with three prudent strategies: Christians should promote humility, appeal to shared moral intuitions among fellow citizens, and use empirical evidence judiciously, lest it inadvertently undermine otherwise sound moral arguments (pp. 113–17).

As the resurgence in Protestant natural law thinking continues, this book will not only be useful to new students but also as a helpful summary on many points of present Protestant consensus. It also indicates important questions for those seeking to carry the conversation forward. How should we conceive and speak of the relationship between acquired and infused virtue touched on in the discussion of the natural law's habituation? What is the role of formal church authority in relation to acquired

virtue, and, related to this, what are the boundaries, if any, for the church when speaking authoritatively on matters drawn from natural law rather than Scripture? Are other frameworks more promising for resolving such matters? An introductory volume should not be expected to address the details of such complex questions, however, and this book will serve as an excellent guide to the contours of their foundations.

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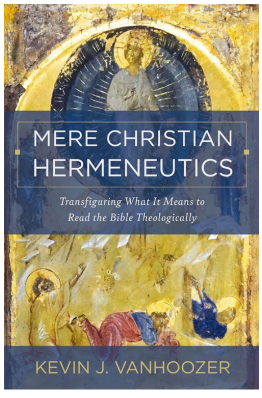
Kevin Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. xxiv + 424 pp. £30.00/$39.99.



Kevin Vanhoozer's *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* is a creative undertaking to reconcile and integrate biblical studies and systematic theology with a renewed vision of faithful biblical interpretation. Vanhoozer imaginatively invites his readers to ascend a holy mountain, coopting the word, "transfigure," to describe both the method and the telos of reading. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* is thorough, expansive, and provocative. It is destined to bristle both the exegete and the theologian, yet its comprehensiveness and bold integration will likely make it a standard text for the study of hermeneutics.

Vanhoozer attempts to give a theologically adequate definition of the so-called literal reading of Scripture, a notorious hermeneutical hot potato. Some wield a literal reading of Scripture as a badge of authenticity. Others see the text as only words, up for critical dissection. The difference, Vanhoozer argues, arises in our reading cultures, the social spaces that frame and shape one's interpretation. Contra the immanent and disenchanted frame of modernity, a Christian social imaginary reads the Bible from a peculiar eschatological space, a reading culture that is created and sustained by the Word. Beyond analyzing the text, readers must situate themselves in the enchanted world of the text. Both the reading cultures of biblical studies and theology thus need to be formed by the church "with a distinctly theological interest: to know and love God" (p. 102).

Divergence over the literal interpretation is, therefore, the result of different frames of reference. Vanhoozer defines a necessary eschatological frame of reference that maintains the form and content of Scripture as divine address and pertains to God's real presence in the midst of history. To do justice to the letter of the text is to allow the "scriptural imaginary" to rule. This is the eschatological frame of reference that ultimately discovers a "Christ-bound literal sense" (p. 142) as its supreme norm and eschatological fulfillment. Indeed, the Bible itself demands a theological reading. Playing on the parts of the word "trans" and "figure," Vanhoozer describes a reading that is "trans-figural" (pp. 167–80). Rejecting both the immanent frame of early and late moderns, Vanhoozer proposes a figural interpretation that corresponds to the scriptural story and imaginary itself, informed by a theological vision.

Mere Christian Hermeneutics is a figural reading of the Bible that thickens the literal sense. In other words, it is no less than literal, but with a frame of reference that is historical-eschatological, in which the reader looks at "the way in which biblical figures connect 'across' times and testaments so as to make

up a coherent unified narrative centered on Jesus Christ" (p. 167). Vanhoozer explains: "Trans-figural interpretation takes its bearing from the letter of the text, following the divine authorial intent in its canonical context, on its redemptive-historical trajectory to its Christological destination." (p. 177). Indeed, a literal reading necessitates a theological interpretation.

Vanhoozer pivots in part 3 on a hyphen. Adding to a "trans-figuring" sense, readers must read "transfigurally" in the economy of light and pattern of Christ's transfiguration. The transfiguration, which overshadows the entire project and metaphorical mountain climb, comes to full light in chapter 7. Vanhoozer contends that the change in Jesus's figure "is emblematic of the changes required in our reading, and in us as readers, when we read the Bible theologically" (p. 226). There is a stark analogy between Jesus's body transfigured and the letter of the biblical text read theologically. Just as Jesus's humanity is not diminished in his glorification, so, too, the letter of the biblical text is not diminished by a mere Christian hermeneutic.

The author shows that reading transfigurally not only shines light on the text but transforms the reader. Because theological interpretations engage the Scripture as dialogue with its living divine author, transfiguring interpretation will culminate "in the transformation of the reader effected by beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ" (p. 351). A faithful reading requires a willingness to "expose oneself to the white-hot light" (p. 332) of Scripture and thus be changed.

In his conclusion, Vanhoozer calls for biblical exegesis and systematic theology to work in tandem, beholding the radiant face of Christ in the text, "reading for the glory of the literal sense with both historical and eschatological frame of reference" (p. 368). With a plea for reformation of reading cultures, Vanhoozer asks, "Into what kind of reading community are we socializing seminary students and churchgoers, and with which frames of reference?" (p. 368). It is the vision of "mere Christian hermeneutics," Vanhoozer believes, that will produce the readers who can bear a faithful and bright witness to the light of Christ.

Vanhoozer's argumentation might be criticized for an overstretched wordplay and convoluted argument. Further, the problem of the accused immanent frame is a problem most pertinent to the secular West. Yet *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* remains a compelling vision, and Vanhoozer's comprehensive survey of the history of interpretation and extensive research, coupled with bold and innovative ideas and novel terms, has provided an essential and timely resource for the church. He rightly calls attention to unhealthy chasms in biblical and theological disciplines and charts a compelling vision forward of transfigured reading communities, handling the Scriptures as what they truly are—divine discourse. Further work might address what such a reading means for preaching and teaching. How does a "transfigural" reading pertain to discipleship or Bible study in the church? Without offering answers, Vanhoozer's questions are profoundly helpful and will serve the church and the training of exegetes and theologians for many years to come.

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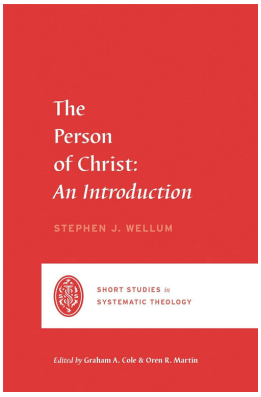
Stephen J. Wellum. *The Person of Christ: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 206 pp. £13.99/$18.99.



Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" This is the central question of Mark's Gospel. It is also the central question of the entire Scriptures and the most important question that hangs over each individual life. The late theologian and pastor R. C. Sproul was repeatedly asked what he thought was the biggest issue faced by today's church. His answer was always Christology. Christ's question to his disciples in Mark 8:38 is one of perennial importance and contemporary urgency.

Stephen J. Wellum helps the church wrestle with this question in *The Person of Christ: An Introduction*. Wellum is professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and is well poised to provide readers with a lay of the land where christological issues and their controversies are concerned. In this addition to the Short Studies in Systematic Theology series, Wellum gives a robust articulation of classical Christology.

The book is divided into three sections: Biblical Foundations, Theological Formulation, and Theological Summary. The first section displays how a high Christology emerges from the pages of Scripture. Wellum unabashedly writes a Christology from above, from the perspective of the Scriptures and creedal tradition, as this "provides warrant for the Bible's and the church's theological confession of Christ" (p. 28). Wellum contends that a Christology from below, from a historical-critical perspective, "never leads us to faith in God the Son…" (p. 31). The second section is a brief but intensely detailed overview of the theological formulations that occurred in the early centuries of Christianity. The major issues and players are described, as well as the major heresies which led thinkers astray. It is here that students or interested readers can get a good grasp of terms and definitions that the early church deliberated so intensely upon. Wellum shows how necessary it is to go beyond the Bible's vocabulary, as this helps safeguard the Bible's witness to the central question of the person of Christ. His concluding section describes a robust orthodox Christology which is faithful to the Scriptures and consistent with the councils of the Patristic era. The three-section structure of the book succeeds at presenting the case for an orthodox Christology. While biblical studies and systematic theology are often, sadly, at odds, Wellum positions them as horses pulling together in the same direction toward his central question: Who do we say Jesus is?

It is hard to find things to dislike in this short volume, as Wellum so capably covers the major issues of Christology. He explores certain topics in detail, such as post-Chalcedonian developments and the distinction between *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* (pp. 109–14). At other points, he gives only a passing glance to aspects of Christ's person, for example, his role as the agent of creation. Any weaknesses of *The Person of Christ* can be attributed to its brevity and not to the quality of its reasoning. Its slender profile, however, constitutes an advantage. This volume, as with others in the series, is perfectly suited for theological students and learned laypersons. It provides a good grounding in the broad contours of christological thought and controversy. It is, after all, intended—along with the rest of the series—as an introduction. One can easily imagine *The Person of Christ* serving as a launching pad into the broader field of Christology and thereby into more comprehensive books on the subject.

Wellum does not shy away from asserting his own positions regarding things like whether Christ's humanity is fallen or unfallen. According to him, it is unfallen, though he does not delve far into this discussion. The fallen view is not so easily dismissible, though, as it has been held by T. F. Torrance, Karl Barth, and possibly even Athanasius. Wellum perhaps passes too quickly over this debate. He does, however, press into the issue of Kenotic Christology and the various views on what it means for Christ to have "emptied himself" as in Philippians 2:7 (pp. 127–44). Chapter 7, "Current Challenges to Christological Orthodoxy," is one of the book's main highlights. Wellum thoroughly shows various kenotic theories to be misaligned with Chalcedonian commitments. This demonstration is particularly apt, as it might be surprising to encounter an Arian-style denial of Christ's full divinity in evangelical pulpits. However, it is not uncommon to hear some form of kenoticism articulated there.

Wellum ultimately helps us see Christ—the One who questions each one of us: "Who do you say that I am?" Through *The Person of Christ* we see Jesus Christ portrayed as completely unique, worthy of all obedience, and as the appropriate object of all our adoration.

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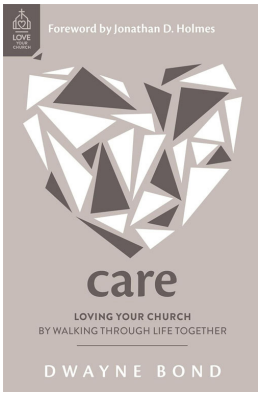
— ETHICS & PASTORALIA —

Dwayne Bond. *Care: Loving Your Church by Walking through Life Together*. London: The Good Book, 2025. 144 pp. £9.99/$16.99.



The issue of soul care has gained increasing attention in recent times, with several books on the subject coming out in 2024 and more expected in 2025 and 2026. One of this year's noteworthy publications is *Care: Loving Your Church by Walking through Life Together* by Dwayne Bond, Lead Pastor of Wellspring Church in Charlotte, NC, and former Director of Pastoral Care with the Acts 29 Network. In it, Bond sets out to challenge churches to move beyond "mere surface-level interactions" and toward "an authentic culture of understanding, kindness, and generosity" (p. 13). His aim is to help churches fill in critical gaps in the *watchcare* that is taking place between church members.

As Bond is aware, several obstacles need to be overcome for this aim to be achieved. The reality is that material like this is often overlooked by both church leaders and church members. The need to learn the "whats" and "hows" of caring for one another is simply not appreciated in many Western churches. There is also the problem that many who are motivated to read this book will do so because they already care about the subject. But this book is written precisely for those who are not yet at a place in their Christian lives where they understand the call to care for fellow church members.

Another obstacle this book could face is that some readers may dismiss it too quickly because of Bond's focus, particularly in chapter 2, on the theme of idolatry. The author, of course, is entirely correct that disobeying the command to "love your neighbor" is ultimately due to our loving something other

than God (p. 29)—e.g., being more concerned to get home to watch a football game than to build the Lord's church. There are also forms of the sin of partiality that infect people's decision-making. At the same time, chapter 2 could have gone further. For instance, there is no attempt to discuss the fact that some people struggle to serve others because of fear. Most people are aware that the issues in people's lives are complex and multifaceted. Stepping into those issues means risking some part of your own life getting complicated and messy. "What if I make it worse?" "What can I do?" "I'm sure there are better people to help." My point is that Bond's approach could be strengthened by showing how fear and idolatry are connected and by suggesting some diagnostic questions: "Is the reason you are afraid to help that it could be messy and might spill over into your life?" "What is it that you find so important to protect that it makes you reluctant to care for this fellow church member?" "Could that rightly be called an idol?"

Nevertheless, Bond's book is biblically-based and the Scriptures are handled well throughout. In chapters 3 and 4, for example, the scriptural motivations for members to care for one another—essentially because our Father has commanded us to and because of the grace that has been shown us in Christ—are clearly and consistently laid out. It is a difficult task to keep the balance between being motivated by understanding God's love for us and by understanding that sometimes it is simply about doing what God has called us to do. But Bond does this well, especially in the "help" and "hindrance" section in chapter 8.

Chapter 7 shifts the book's focus from cultivating care within the church to encouraging outreach. Bond's treatment here is more of a call to evangelism and to letting outsiders see the kind of love that should mark relationships between believers. He builds his case on the incarnation of Jesus and shares stories and tips on how Christians can show their love to non-Christian neighbors and look for opportunities to share the Gospel. While there's nothing in the chapter to disagree with, it might have felt more connected to the rest of the book if Bond had tied it to passages like Galatians 6:10 and others that call us to do good to all. Without that bridge, the chapter feels disconnected from the book's central focus.

Along the same lines, chapter 6 could prove more of a distraction than a help. Racism is certainly a topic that needs to be addressed by churches, whether it's overt or subtle. But the chapter does not feel like it fits or, at the very least, there is not enough content to make it fit in this book. That said, while some forms of partiality, like racism, undeniably contribute to church segregation, it is also true that many Koreans, Latinos, and others attend ethnically specific churches because, as Bond notes, "every ethnic group and culture interprets life through their own grid" (p. 86). That reality can make it challenging to integrate. There are certainly practical challenges, as he points out. But for some, it might simply be more helpful to sit under the teaching of someone who is from, or at least understands, the spiritual challenges specific to that culture. At the same time, the author hits on something vitally important in this chapter. The problem of tokenism. In the current American culture, people attain a sort of self-righteousness if they have friends who are, or are in a group that includes, members of ethnic minorities. The desire to be in a multiethnic church should come from our theology, not from a hunger for cultural approval.

Lastly, the book has action steps at the end of each chapter. Most of these are very helpful and are also very doable. Making lists of the spiritual fruit evident around you is a good way to remind yourself that God is actively working in other people's lives. It can be easy to lose sight of that and become discouraged, or allow ourselves to become what Bond warns against in chapter 1, people who

are friendly in person but gossip behind closed doors. However, there are a couple of times when the action step is vague. For instance, looking for ways to "move closer" to others in church is a good goal. But there are those in the church who genuinely do not know how to do that. Providing a few specific suggestions would have been helpful.

Despite these limitations, Bond's work makes a valuable contribution to the conversation around soul care. The action steps are useful not just for individuals but also for small groups wanting to discuss what needs to be done in their church or cultural context. There are also extra discussion questions at the end of the book. The brief but insightful section on how a divided culture tries to defeat unconditional love (pp. 68–69) is one of many reasons this book deserves careful reading and reflection.

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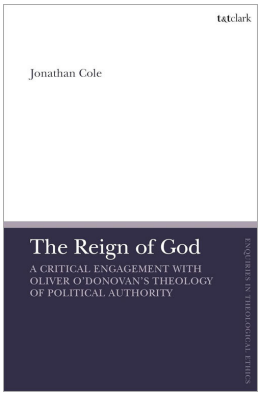
Jonathan Cole. *The Reign of God: A Critical Engagement with Oliver O'Donovan's Theology of Political Authority*. T&T Clark Enquiries in Theological Ethics. London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022. 155 pp. £22.99/$30.95.



Few living theologians have shaped contemporary discussions of political authority more than Oliver O'Donovan. Jonathan Cole's *The Reign of God* sets out to shake those foundations and see what still stands. It is a bold and vigorous but, in my view, flawed critique of O'Donovan that, despite missing the mark, will drive attentive readers to deeper engagement with O'Donovan's work and, even more significantly, with the constitutive conditions of evangelical political theology.

Jonathan Cole is the director of the Centre for Religion, Ethics, and Society at Charles Sturt University in Australia. He has a background working in the Australian federal government, including stints in two of Australia's Intelligence Agencies. *The Reign of God* is a reworked version of his PhD thesis. At the point of publication, Cole's book could claim to be the only book-length critical engagement with O'Donovan's theology of political authority (p. 2).

The book has nine chapters. The first two are largely descriptive: an outline of O'Donovan's position within the intellectual constellation of political theology and, second, a sketch of O'Donovan's concept of political authority as it appears in *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos, 1986); *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and *The Ways of Judgement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

O'Donovan's work is often a gateway for theological students into studying political theology, and so the first chapter is helpful in discussing O'Donovan's evangelicalism, his sympathetic and careful reading of Roman Catholic moral theology, and his intellectual debt to Paul Ramsey. Contextualizing O'Donovan helps us appreciate (or at least speculate about) why he leans into some ideas and not others.

The deft sketches of the second chapter are an impressive achievement given the just reputation of the three books for conceptual density. Cole's decision to start with *Resurrection and Moral Order*

(*RMO*), rather than diving into the more explicitly political volumes, provides him with a wider-angle lens on the foundations of "authority" in O'Donovan's work. This becomes significant later when Cole remodels O'Donovan's concept of political authority on alternative foundations.

The foundations of Cole's critical engagement are set in chapter 2. Cole extracts six "theorems" from a survey of *Desire of the Nations* (*DoN*) and *Ways of Judgment* (*WoJ*) intended to distil Israel's experience of God's kingship. Cole observes that the first two do the heavy lifting while the subsequent four are not repeated or referred to again. The two key theorems are: (1) "political authority arises where power, the execution of right and the perpetuation of tradition are assured together in one coordinated agency" (p. 23); and (2) "That any regime should actually come to hold authority, and should continue to hold it, is a work of divine Providence in history, not a mere accomplishment of the human task of political service" (p. 24). These theorems supply what Cole calls the "essence-of-authority" and "providence" theses that underpin the whole edifice.

Cole then sets out O'Donovan's account of how the coming of Christ transfigures this conception of political authority. In his ascension, Christ assumes all political authority as creation's rightful Lord. He then "re-authorises" political authority with the sole function of the "execution of right" (also referred to as "judgment"). This discussion, alongside the earlier two theses, leads Cole to three foundational claims, which he will test in later chapters: the "essence-of-authority" thesis, the "re-authorisation" thesis, and the "providence" thesis.

Readers of the first two chapters are well served with a crisp overview and introduction to O'Donovan's political thought. These descriptive chapters are followed by a bracket of three chapters (chs. 3–5), each of which raises a critical question about O'Donovan's core theses based on perceived hermeneutical failures and lack of exegetical warrant. These chapters are then followed by another brace of three chapters (chs. 6–8), each critiquing O'Donovan's theses for various failures at the level of conceptual cogency. It's an acerbic draught. Cole's tone is unsparing.

In summary, throughout these chapters Cole builds a cumulative case against O'Donovan with the following claims.

(1) The "essence" thesis—the triad of power, right, and tradition fused in the Davidic monarchy—lacks the scriptural warrant O'Donovan's own method demands and arbitrarily canonises a brief royal episode amid Israel's diverse, often ambivalent, political history.

(2) The "re-authorisation" thesis is similarly not drawn from Scripture (although O'Donovan claims to draw it from Rom 13) but is imported from Paul Ramsey to rescue the already dubious triad.

(3) A salvation-history hermeneutic does not of itself require O'Donovan's conclusions.

(4) The "providence" thesis may entail the conclusion that every regime that coheres power, right, and tradition is God-installed, such that North Korea must be credited to providence—a theodicean absurdity.

(5) O'Donovan's framework has no sufficient explanation and offers little guidance in navigating the apparent reversal of Christ's triumph in post-Christendom societies where secular liberalism appears to eclipse the church.

(6) There is an ontological rift between the foundations of political authority in *RMO* (on the one hand) and *DoN/WoJ* (on the other) that, in Cole's view, undercuts O'Donovan's whole edifice. In *RMO* political authority is explicitly "natural": it arises from created authorities (might, injured-right, tradition) that constitute human action as free and intelligible. In the later works, the adjective "natural" vanishes, and political authority is relocated to the realm of providence. Cole argues the two accounts

cannot both be right: if authority is purely providential it can no longer evoke free, intelligible, collective human action and thus cannot explain stable political orders.

(7) Finally, it is unreasonable to suppose that Scripture can function as a criterion for judging the truth of the concept "political," given that Scripture never defines the term and that it is inherently contestable and definitionally variable. In practice, he suggests, O'Donovan's conception of "political" is derived from outside Scripture and is theologically arbitrary. He concludes that "this might be a source, perhaps *the* source, of the problems that undermine the tenability of his foundational theses regarding the *theology* of political authority. In light of the untenability of these theses, as I have argued is the case, one is entitled to ask whether O'Donovan's core problem is that he is simply looking for something in Scripture that is not there: a theory of political authority" (p. 121, emphasis original).

In this final point, we have Cole's fundamental beef with O'Donovan: the methodological commitment that true political concepts must be derived from and authorised by Scripture.

This short review is not the place to engage in a point-by-point debate with Cole. However, while he throws a lot of punches in this book, in my judgment few of them truly land. An instructive example, albeit relatively minor, is his discussion of O'Donovan's salvation-historical hermeneutics. Cole proposes that we view G. E. Wright's conception of "recital" as a parallel with O'Donovan's conception of salvation-history as "proclamation" (pp. 72–73). To a significant degree, Cole's critique in chapter 5 rests heavily on his assumption of this functional hermeneutical equivalence. But in reality the two are miles apart. Wright treats Scripture as a pluri-vocal *human* witness to God's action, whereas O'Donovan's more evangelical conviction is that Scripture is *God's* normative speech (through human agents).

The failure to appreciate this difference is instructive because many of the faults Cole alleges in O'Donovan's work seem to flow from unacknowledged or unrecognized differences of hermeneutical intuition. When it comes to political authority, Cole and O'Donovan hold differing convictions about the relation of both Scripture and political authority to God. Thus, toward the end of the book, Cole acknowledges that he does not see the need for scriptural warrant for true political concepts, nor anything more than a natural foundation for political authority (pp. 120–30). What is unacknowledged is that this difference may be shaping the evaluative standards by which Cole critiques O'Donovan's work throughout. He claims merely to be holding O'Donovan to account for his own convictions. But frequently, Cole seems to be measuring O'Donovan against his own.

In chapter 9, Cole provides an attempt to rescue O'Donovan's theology of political authority by grounding it in creation, seeing it as redeemed in Christ, and viewing Christian liberalism as its providential outworking in history. This, he claims, preserves O'Donovan's biblical instincts while curing the "essence," "re-authorisation," and "providence" problems diagnosed in earlier chapters.

Cole's key move is to suggest that power, tradition, and injured-right are natural authorities embedded in the world; what providence does is conjoin them, contingently, into a single form of agency we call political authority. This enables him to redraw the ontology of political authority: its *esse* is the conjunction of that natural triad; its *bene esse* is the triad redeemed by Christ and channelled toward freedom, merciful judgment, natural right, and open speech (witnessed in Christendom); its *male esse* (disordered or corrupt condition) is the same structure perverted by sin (e.g., North Korea).

This distinction, he believes, gives O'Donovan a theodicy-safe way to explain wicked regimes without making God their author. Cole then proposes revising the "re-authorisation" by viewing Christ's rule as redeeming humanity's capacity for the full conjunction of the natural authorities that constitute political authority in creation. Similarly, Cole proposes reframing the "providence" thesis by linking

God's providence not to the bare fact of government but to the historical flowering of a specifically "Christian liberalism" (freedom, merciful judgment, etc.) that appeared in late-medieval Christendom. Those liberal goods are the *bene esse* made visible in history. With these refinements, and a number of other suggestions (which he describes as re-modelling O'Donovan's foundations), Cole believes that O'Donovan can keep his triadic account of political authority as a gift of creation, read Romans 13 as describing a more expansive vision of government, and assign providence to the rise of Christian-liberal goods in history rather than to every existing regime.

Cole's reconstruction is clean and clever, but it inhabits a different theological universe to that of O'Donovan. It requires surrendering O'Donovan's convictions about Scripture's normativity and Christ's active kingship as regards political authority. Scripture becomes witness rather than norm, and Christ's role is more perfecter and redeemer than ruler. Consequently, it is hard to avoid feeling that this amounts to a loss of those things that made O'Donovan's original project distinctive.

None of this renders Cole's work unhelpful; he is a sharp interlocutor who forces readers to see where O'Donovan's argument really bites and where it needs further elaboration. Readers sympathetic to O'Donovan will find the book a rigorous stress-test rather than a replacement blueprint. And if that shaking sends us back to confront questions and elaborate answers that bear on the essential viability of an *evangelical* political theology, Cole will have rendered us a bracing—indeed invaluable—service.

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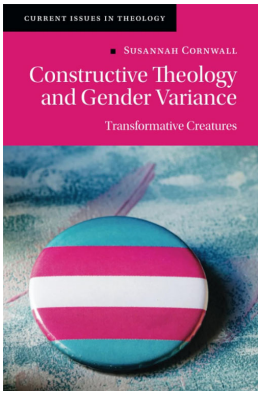
Susannah Cornwall. *Constructive Theology and Gender Variance: Transformative Creatures*. Current Issues in Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 419 pp. £26.99/$34.99.



Susannah Cornwall is professor of Constructive Theologies at the University of Exeter, UK, publishing extensively on issues of sexuality and gender. Cornwall is an Anglican theologian and was recently a member of the Theology Working Group for the Church of England's *Living in Love and Faith* project. In *Constructive Theology and Gender Variance*, Cornwall weaves together the doctrines of creation, humanity, Christ, and the last things to argue that humans are "transformative creatures." As "transformative creatures," gender is something we inherit and receive (for we are animal creatures), while also being something we shape and hone (for we are co-creators with our Creator God). Consequently, every human should enjoy the dignity of agency to self-determine one's gender identity. Christian theology has the required resources to cast a compelling vision for church and society, where gender becomes the "locus of euphoria rather than dysphoria" (p. 12).

Obstructing Cornwall's euphoric vision for gender variance stands the strange axis of "conservative evangelicals" (she lists Oliver O'Donovan, Mark Yarhouse, Denny Burk, Peter Sanlon, Andrew Walker, among others) and "gender-critical radical feminists" (e.g., Kathleen Stock, Sheila Jeffreys, and Joanna Williams). Both groups oppose gender diversity because they are entranced by an insidious "biologism," namely, the unjustified fetishization of the biological body over the autonomous mind. Indeed, the axis's appeal to "'common-sense' biology" troubles Cornwall as arbitrary, for such "biologism" inconsistently

ignores the "irreducible or incontrovertible" biology of intersex people. The axis stubbornly and "ardently reject[s] the complex realities presented by the scientific consensus" (p. 66). Conservatives and feminists may trot out detransition stories and trans-related rape cases, but these amount to scaremongering smokescreens that distract from the real hurt experienced by concrete trans individuals.

The energy invested in such tactics reveals that the supposed sex/gender binary is not as secure and stable as often assumed. In Shakespearean key, the axis "doth protest too much." They do not interrogate what they presume is "common-sense truth" because they cannot handle the actual truth. They have too much to lose, religiously, socially, and politically (p. 140). It remains easier for traditionalists to gaslight trans individuals that their "self-understanding is not in fact trustworthy" (p. 134), a move that she contends shares worrying parallels with "hierarchized race ideology" (p. 287). In short, we often fail to interrogate common-sense biology properly "for fear of what will crumble if we do" (p. 287).

To expose the conceit of a sex/gender binary, Cornwall explores several deeply theological questions: What really counts as the "givenness" of creation? How do we determine "licit limits" within creation from which humans may legitimately alter or augment the body? Why do we often give the body greater "authority" over the mind, insisting that the mind must align with the body? Is not the mind (including brain sex) part of the body? If Christian conversion represents a change in spiritual identity, could it offer a legitimizing parallel for gender transition?

Constructively, Cornwall marshals evidence from Scripture (esp. 2 Cor 5), tradition (e.g., Irenaeus and Nyssen), and experience to argue for a "gender theology in the optative mood" (p. 251). Creaturely existence is not constrained by a rigid creational blueprint. Rather, "To be human *is* to be in motion, continually in the process of constituting others as they also constitute us" (p. 211, emphasis original). Cornwall emphasises the inherent generativity of creatures, where God designs humans to exercise autonomy creatively. Importantly for Cornwall, this is no gnostic rejection of creation but the means to live into creation more authentically (p. 130). Her argument thus climaxes with a repeated refrain: "In Christ, *everything* has changed, even that which appears to have stayed the same" (p. 366, emphasis original).

Cornwall's case is passionately argued, well researched (in terms of the breadth of literature surveyed, even if depth of engagement is somewhat lacking in places), and attempts to give various interlocutors a fair trial. Given Cornwall's involvement in the *LLF* process, Anglicans would do well to read a clear account of Cornwall's constructive theology to understand better some of the theological heavy lifting that undergirds more progressive accounts of gender and sexuality.

At the heart of Cornwall's case lies a crucial question for our (and every) age: what is the dogmatic function of (human) nature from creation to consummation? Methodologically, given Cornwall's Anglican moorings, whose historic formularies repeatedly emphasise the supreme authority of Scripture (e.g., Article 6; Canon A5), it is jarring how firmly she maintains that questions of "nature" and "givenness" are best interpreted through human experience. But Cornwall is adamant: personal experience offers the authoritative lens through which to read Scripture. As such, it is no surprise that when Scripture gets mentioned, it is typically a few verses divorced from their immediate literary and redemptive-historical context. Other Anglicans may justifiably wonder whether Article 20 may offer Cornwall sage advice, namely, that it remains hermeneutically illegitimate to "expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another"!

Heeding such wisdom, we may discern how the Bible consistently witnesses to the enduring moral authority of the created order, running from creation through to consummation. In creation,

"Adam and Eve" function literarily and theologically as prototypes of fixity rather than mere parents of fecundity, an exclusive norm for all humans, not just the statistical majority. Before sin and death entered the world, a sexual correspondence exists between "male and female" (Gen 1:27). Humans were formed for fruitfulness (not exhausted by but certainly including procreative fruitfulness), where sexed form founds function and function fits form. Tragically, this structurally ordered peace of unambiguous sexual dimorphism was spiritually, socially, and somatically misdirected (although not destroyed!) in the fall, spiritually and socially redirected in redemption through Christ the theandric Lord (the one and the same Creator and Redeemer who valorises the vocation of singleness), and will be somatically transformed in the consummation, a restorative transformation contoured by original creation (1 Cor 15:35–58). What this reveals is that the metaphysical "structure" of sexual dimorphism endures throughout the divine drama of creation to consummation—a witness to the goodness of creation and the faithfulness of the Creator.

Susannah Cornwall's work raises important theological questions that require careful theological attention. Cornwall's caveat against assumption remains salutary, even if her case remains unconvincing. More euphorically, the scriptural story encourages us that we can know *who* we are and *what* we are when we know *whose* we are and *where* we fit within his story.

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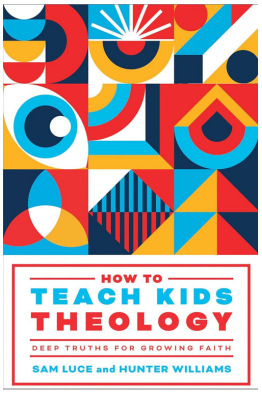
Sam Luce and Hunter Williams. *How to Teach Kids Theology: Deep Truths for Growing Faith*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2025. 208 pp. £14.64/$18.99.



How to Teach Kids Theology, by Sam Luce and Hunter Williams, is the book we didn't know we needed. For every church member who has been "volun-told" to work in children's ministry, this is the ideal how-to guide to put into their hands.

Luce and Williams introduce the book with an all-too-familiar problem: once children come of age and can make decisions for themselves, they are leaving the church in astounding numbers. Even more concerning than this mass exodus is the discovery of a 2022 Barna Group study that the vast majority of children's ministry workers are uncomfortable sharing theological truths with children (p. 2). Linking these findings together, Luce and Williams conclude that a lack of clear and applicable theological education is the main reason children leave the faith when they enter adulthood. This book seeks to remedy this problem by supplying leaders with the "principles and practices needed to teach biblical passages and stories to kids with theological conviction and competency" (p. 3).

In order to accomplish their goal, the authors, who have decades worth of experience ministering to families, structure each chapter in three parts: (1) "The Problem," which describes the concern to be discussed in the chapter; (2) "The Principle," which lays out their main point in the given area; and (3) "The Practice," where Luce and Williams show how the principle can be applied in the church setting. The authors helpfully provide a working definition of theology as "the application of God's revelation to all of life" (p. 18). They draw an important distinction between over-simplifying truth to the point of

untruth versus distilling theological concepts for children. They also stress the role of orthodoxy and charity when doctrinal distinctions arise and doctrinal precision matters. Attention is then given to what a longitudinal plan may entail for achieving the goal of helping young people stay in the church. Finally, the last chapter discusses the coordination that must take place between the church and the home for Bible-based children's ministry to be effective in the long term. Several helpful appendices are included that provide templates for Bible studies, lessons, and ministry trajectory plans.

The book's primary audience is those lay leaders in children's ministry teams who find themselves with a desire to give teaching of substance to the children in their care but are struggling with how to implement this ideal. Discussion questions are included at the end of each chapter to guide the reflections and conversations of leaders who may be using the book as a training tool in a group setting. Parents, too, may benefit from many of the topics included in the book (particularly each chapter's "Problem" and "Principle"), but the primary arena of application ("The Practice") is a local church setting in which ministry to children is separate from ministry to adults. Both pastors and seasoned children's ministry leaders will benefit from the call to incorporate the doctrines with which they are familiar into the theological education of children.

The book has a gentle tone and clarity of expression that allows readers to engage with the text at their own pace. While more experienced theologians may find it a quick read, contemplation and careful consideration of the implications of each chapter is recommended. Luce and Williams are skilled communicators with a demonstrable understanding of both the Scriptures and the real-world experiences of children's ministry. They humbly tell their own stories of both success and failure, especially highlighting the ways in which they could have been more proactive in the use of theology in their ministries. Drawing on a variety of church historians, theologians, and modern writers, Luce and Williams prove their awareness of the theological landscape and bolster their claims with appropriate quotes.

While Luce and Williams helpfully demonstrate practical ways of introducing theology to children, the deeper theological reason for providing such teaching deserve more attention. Laying out the statistical data of young people leaving the church is a helpful spur to do a better job of teaching theology to children, but the vast array of scriptural supports and encouragements to engage in this task are more important still. To be fair, many Bible passages that speak of the ideals of godly family life are sprinkled throughout the book's chapters, but they are not foundational to its argument. Of course, the main purpose of the book is practical, not theoretical—which is why it is called "*How* to Teach Kids Theology," not "*Why* to Teach Kids Theology*." Nevertheless, in my view, strengthening the biblical foundations for the theological education of children would have made the book's practical applications even more valuable.

Additionally, in terms of its ideas for implementation, the book displays a strong tendency toward the cerebral. There are a few passing references to the disciplines of holiness or kinetic learning, but most of the proposed practices for teaching theology rely heavily on an informational model of learning. Children's ministry leaders who implement the ideas in this book would do well to further consider the reality of a child's developmental stage and the dynamic of embodied souls, as they seek to train not only the minds but also the affections and actions of children to a deeper understanding of God.

Overall, I found *How to Teach Kids Theology* to be a breath of fresh air and a welcome addition to the genre of children's ministry resources, as many books in this vein are either theologically simplistic or practically unapplicable to the lived experience of children's ministry workers. This book is neither.

Luce and Williams do an admirable job explaining to the next generation of children's ministry leaders how to plumb the depths of God's word for themselves and how to bring it faithfully to the children in their care.

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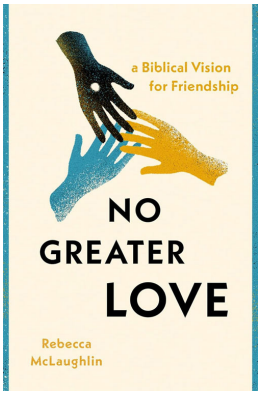
Rebecca McLaughlin. *No Greater Love: A Biblical Vision of Friendship*. Chicago: Moody, 2023. 176 pp. £15.99/$15.99.



While not her most recent book, and oddly one that seems to have flown under the radar, Rebecca McLaughlin's *No Greater Love: A Biblical Vision of Friendship* is much needed today. It is both important enough and accessible enough that it belongs in that class of books that should be read by as many Christians as possible. This is not because the biblical theme of friendship has been entirely neglected—see, e.g., Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship: The Relationship That Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joys* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018) and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Iron Sharpens Iron: Friendship and the Grace of God* (Bridgend, UK: Union, 2022). But there is a need for both *further* work and *fresh* work, which *No Greater Love* helps to meet.

As McLaughlin points out in the introduction, many studies of friendship begin by drawing on C. S. Lewis's chapter on *philia* in *The Four Loves* (1960). Yet while Lewis's analysis is thoroughly Christian, its mode is more philosophical and experiential than biblical or theological. Furthermore, those treatments that do engage with Scripture more overtly, often focus on Old Testament examples of friendship (notably, David and Jonathan) to see what can be learned from them. Without discounting the value of these approaches, McLaughlin's method is stronger still: "to anchor our understanding of friendship on Jesus Himself, and the examples of deep Christian friendship we find in the New Testament" (p. 13).

Accordingly, the starting point in chapter 1 is Jesus's (new) commandment to "love another as I have loved you," which in John 15 is immediately followed by the statement, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12–13). The fact that Jesus then says to his disciples, "You are my friends" (v. 14), completes the picture. Out of love for his "friends," Jesus will lay down his life for them, and because "their love for one another [is] to be *just like* His love for them" (p. 22, emphasis original), his disciples ought to be true friends to each other, willing to die for one another.

The other paradigmatic element of Jesus's friendship love that chapter 1 highlights is the fact that its ultimate display is in a context of *weakness* (the disciples in Gethsemane), *betrayal* (Judas in Gethsemane), and *denial* (Peter in Caiaphas's courtyard). Thus, the love Jesus commands is

> a love that is prepared to die for one's friends, despite their failure. It's a love that lives vulnerably even toward those false friends who may be finally exposed as only wanting to be with us for what they can get. It's a love that does not easily give up on friends who let us down, because the greatest friend of sinners has not given up on us. (p. 29)

Chapter 2 ("Nontraditional Family") looks at "church as family" and argues that "healthy Christian friendship grows on the trellis of Christian family love" (p. 32). Behind this lies the fact that "the church is not just *like* a family. It *is* a family. Our first identity as followers of Jesus is not biological. It's theological" (p. 35, emphasis original). This has implications for Christian hospitality, how families relate to those who are unmarried, and even where (and with whom) we sit in church!

Chapter 3 ("My Very Heart") demonstrates that there is "ample precedent for full-blooded, nonromantic, deeply rooted friendship love in the New Testament." In this context, McLaughlin also makes a compelling biblical case for reclaiming both "the language and the physical expression of deep friendship love" (p. 48). Chapter 4 ("Comrades in Arms") then investigates why "mission is the throbbing heart of Christian friendship, and how we get close to one another not by running after friendship but by marching into battle together" (p. 60).

In chapter 5 ("The Inner Ring"), McLaughlin proposes that the antidote to exclusion is to stop asking "Who will love me?" and instead to turn "toward those who are left out" (p. 76). Chapter 6 ("Bodybuilding") examines how the biblical metaphor of the church as Christ's body impacts Christian friendship, helping us to "recognize our need for one another, what our role in one another's lives should be, and how we should respond when we are envious of someone else's gifts" (p. 90).

Chapter 7 ("Your Unexplored Self") turns to "the inbuilt differences between" friendship and marriage, arguing that these "are vital for both relationships" (p. 104). It also contains a particularly valuable section on codependency, noting the way in which friendship "can lean toward idolatry when we seek one friend to meet all our emotional needs" (p. 111). This highlights that while marriage is "locked in and exclusive," friendship isn't (p. 112). Nevertheless, if the two are allowed to complement rather than compete with each other, "our closest friendships can be just as close as spousal relationships." Indeed, "healthy friendships can save marriages" (p. 113).

Chapter 8 ("Brothers and Sisters") explores the possibilities of "meaningful male-and-female friendship" and the parallel set of opportunities and challenges faced by "Christians who experience same-sex attraction" (p. 118). Here Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 5:1–2 is vital. For while the fictive familial relationships he encourages are "not sexual," they are "deeply loving" (p. 119). This, of course, is no guarantee of immunity from temptation. But "while we must flee from sexual immorality, we must be careful not to run away from gospel-centered friendship based on fear" (p. 124). McLaughlin is surely right: "the antidote to sexual sin is not relational starvation. It is love" (p. 127).

Chapter 9 ("Loving Neighbors") develops the theme of friendship between Christians and non-Christians and "the importance of extending hospitality to those with whom we disagree" (p. 132). McLaughlin's rationale is clear: if we truly believe that salvation is found in Christ alone, "we cannot say we love our friends and not want them to come to Him" (p. 135). The final chapter ("Life Together") addresses the reality of sin in our friendships and "how we might live together in a world of shattered dreams." Consequently, it deals with "what role forgiveness plays in Christian friendship, whether it is ever right to end a friendship, and how we can move forward when we've lost trust in each other or—perhaps yet more distressingly—in ourselves" (p. 148).

No Greater Love is marked throughout by a refreshing and disarming honesty, with McLaughlin sharing openly about her own sins, weaknesses, and sometimes profoundly painful friendship failures. Each chapter also includes helpful personal anecdotes and practical real-life applications. Moreover, aware of the dangers lurking on either side of the truth, her discussions are always appropriately nuanced, while never shying away from speaking plainly and biblically about difficult matters such as

betrayal, abuse, and church disciple. Nevertheless, for all the mess we can make of our friendships, her central conviction remains undisturbed: when patterned after Jesus's example, "all the different kinds of human love are precious pointers to the love God has for us—refracting its blinding light in different ways" (p. 164).

For all these reasons, *No Greater Love* is a book for every believer. But it will have a particular salience for anyone who has ever asked, "Would we be better off withdrawing from the field of friendship, bandaging our wounds, and saying to ourselves, 'I've learned my lesson and I'll never risk my heart with friends again?'" (pp. 10–11). To this question, McLaughlin's answer is a resounding "No!" In fact, she believes that, as followers of Jesus, we are called to step back into the arena and, guided by Scripture, to continue learning "to better navigate the contours of this glorious and hazardous gift called friendship" (p. 11).

I am personally grateful for this book and believe it will prove to be a precious gift to Christ's church. Take and read!

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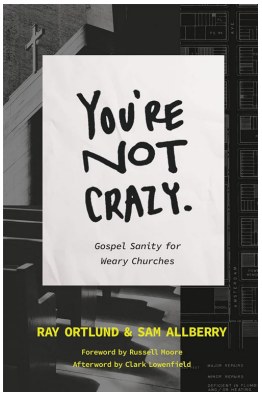
Ray Ortlund and Sam Allberry. *You're Not Crazy: Gospel Sanity for Weary Churches*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. 147 pp. £12.99/$17.99.



Do you believe that it is possible to deny the good deposit by our deeds, to contradict the gospel at the level of church culture, and to unsay with our works what we say with our words?

Ray Ortlund and Sam Allberry, co-authors of *You're Not Crazy: Gospel Sanity for Weary Churches*, do. They know it is possible from personal, pastoral, and at-times painful experience.

To put the same "not-crazy" conviction at the heart of this book positively, consider these claims:

- "a church's culture always reveals whatever the people most deeply believe" (p. xvii)
- "the beauty of Christ" should "shape every aspect of our churches" (pp. xvii–xviii); and
- the category of faithfulness demands "gospel doctrine creating gospel culture" (p. xviii).

The message of *You're Not Crazy* is that gospel doctrine and gospel culture belong together. They must, insist the authors, for both the truth and beauty of Christ to shine in and through his people.

The book began as a Crossway-supported podcast, launched in late 2021 while the world (and the church) was still trying to make sense of life during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was Ortlund, seasoned pastor to pastors at Immanuel Nashville, who was first approached by The Gospel Coalition to host a podcast for younger pastors. Ortlund teamed up with Allberry (associate pastor at Immanuel), and so the gospel culture conversations began.

Interestingly, while the subtitle to the podcast started out as "Gospel Sanity for Young Pastors," it soon became apparent that it wasn't just younger pastors who were listening and benefitting. The

subtitle for the book, *Gospel Sanity for Weary Churches*, reflects a further expansion of the intended audience.

This is a book for every believer who refuses to settle for sub-Christian life together. Gospel culture creates Christlike communities that are truly beautiful and beautifully true. It is brief and accessible enough to be placed in the hands of either a church ministry team or an interested lay person.

After a foreword written by Russell Moore and an introduction from the authors, the opening chapter ("What Is Gospel Culture, and Why Does It Matter?") defines and provides a biblical basis for the concept of "gospel culture." Ortlund and Allberry lay out three convictions and three key passages to make the case for why our gospel convictions must be expressed and embodied in our common life. The third conviction—that "*gospel doctrine creates gospel culture*" (p. 7)—is explained as follows:

When the gospel is taught clearly, and when the people of a church believe it deeply, it does more than renew us personally. The doctrine of grace also creates a culture of grace. In such a church, the gospel is both articulated at the obvious level of doctrine and embodied at the subtle level of vibe, ethos, feel, relationships, and community. (p. 7)

The following six chapters "(broadly) follow an order of service," with the aim of helping us think about "how we might try to reflect the beautifying impact of the gospel from our opening welcome to the way we're sent out at the service's end" (p. xviii). While both Ortlund and Allberry now have Anglican affiliations, the book is pitched to Reformed evangelical readers from a range of denominational and liturgical backgrounds.

In chapter 2 ("Open the Doors, Open Your Heart"), the authors return to Romans 15:7 ("Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God") to establish a culture of gospel welcome. In one of the pair's many pithy sayings, "The finished work of Christ on the cross is not God's way of saying to us, 'You're free to go now' but 'You're free to come now.' He's not sending us off but inviting us in" (p. 25).

Chapter 3 ("Come into the Light") encourages churches to develop *a culture of gospel honesty*, marked by deep, robust confession. In chapter 4 ("See the Glory"), the authors model outdoing one another in cultivating *a culture of gospel honor*. This includes a deeply moving transcript of a phone call with an older saint that Ray and Sam were seeking to honor.

Chapter 5 ("Let Christ Preach") focuses on platforming *a culture of gospel invitation* in our preaching. Chapter 6 ("Leave Behind LordItOver Leadership") calls for *a culture guided by gentle shepherds*. And chapter 7 ("Make Your Church's Love Obvious") lifts our eyes to esteem *a culture fueled by renewal and mission*.

Each chapter is well-structured, peppered with helpful subheadings; closes with discussion questions; and is capped off with a relevant excerpt from one of Ray and Sam's conversations. For those of us familiar with the podcast, it is impossible not to hear their voices and feel their warmth for one another throughout the book.

You're Not Crazy has much to commend it. While the main thrust is convictional, the tone is pastoral—from start to finish, you know you are in the company of friends. The book is also devoid of data-driven, outcomes-based ministry philosophy. For some the lack of focus on results may frustrate; for others, like me, it liberates and relieves. Readers, like the authors, may be struck by "how full the category of *faithfulness* really is" (p. xviii, emphasis original). Preachers and Bible teachers will also appreciate the general and Scripture indexes at the end.

A book this readable and concise inevitably has some gaps and aspects that would benefit from further development. For example, where else outside of the select range of biblical texts cited do we find evidence of gospel culture in the Scriptures? Likewise, is the concept of *culture* a twenty-first century buzzword, or is it a category we can expect to encounter throughout church history, even if it goes by other names? Again, despite the worthy focus on local churches, what might it look like to cultivate gospel culture in other spheres—whether at the personal level, in the household, or within leadership teams? Finally, what might it look like to seek to recuperate or revive gospel culture where conflict is present or where the gospel has been absent?

Later episodes of the podcast address some of these questions. But as it stands, *You're Not Crazy* has been transformative for my wife (Bec) and me in our life and ministry. It has impacted the shape of our Sunday services, from the opening welcome to the way we do our notices. We have built gospel culture terminology into our parish vision and mission. I have led devotions with a visiting mission team based around standout chapters in the book. Most importantly, Ray and Sam have helped us to love Christ more, in all his truth and beauty, and to better prize the gospel and the culture it creates in our personal faith, family home, and public ministry.

In the book's foreword, Ortlund and Allberry are commended as "a couple of trusted friends" who will come alongside you and say, "You're not crazy; we see it too. You're not imagining how hard it is. And you're not wrong about how overwhelming it is. But here's what we've found, and here's how you can find it too" (pp. xiii–ix). It was our prayer to share the gospel and our lives with people in places that others might miss that first gave Bec and me the crazy notion of taking our family into full-time vocational ministry in all sorts of far out places. It is the kind of convictions and exhortations contained in this book that have the power to keep us here.

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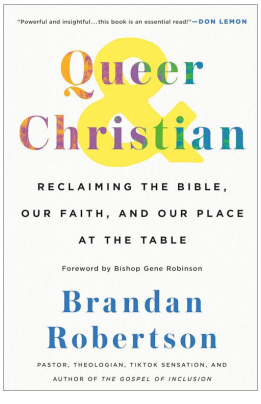
Brandan Robertson. *Queer and Christian: Reclaiming the Bible, Our Faith, and Our Place at The Table.* New York: St. Martin's Essentials, 2025. 288 pp. $30.00.



In *Queer and Christian: Reclaiming the Bible, Our Faith, and Our Place at the Table*, Brandan Robertson aims to provide an accessible guide for those who identify as queer to understand what the Bible truly says about queer sexuality and gender. He also offers a path toward reclaiming the Bible as a source of empowerment and inspiration for queer people. In essence, Robertson argues that God is queer and that queer inclusion is woven throughout the Bible. Therefore, he seeks to help "queer Christians" reclaim the Bible as a tool for love instead of fear, promoting full inclusion for LGBTQ individuals in the church.

Robertson makes his argument for queer inclusion in three ways: (1) from personal experience; (2) by denying that queerness is condemned in Scripture; and (3) by pointing to affirmations of queerness in Scripture.

Robertson begins by sharing his experience of finding Jesus as a teenager and wrestling with his queer "identity." He became a Christian in a fundamentalist Baptist church and, initially, viewed the

Bible as God's inerrant word and believed that a queer lifestyle was wrong. However, when he continued to have strong desires for romantic relationships with other men, even after years of conversion therapy and pleading with God to change his desires, Robertson started to question what the Bible taught about sexual ethics in general and homosexuality in particular.

If his desires were sinful, Robertson wondered why God would allow him to continue struggling with unchosen and unwanted feelings. This led him to explore interpretations of Scripture from scholars and pastors who "loved Jesus and were deeply committed to the Bible while also concluding that being gay was not a sin" (p. 27). It was this discovery of LGBTQ-affirming interpretations that enabled him to "stumble out of the closet" and fully embrace his queer identity (p. 32).

Despite this apparent affirmation of scriptural authority, Robertson insists that the Bible is not God's inerrant and authoritative word; rather, it is a book of wisdom written by fallible men. Not surprisingly, it is self-contradictory. Consequently, the Bible does not "have a clear position on anything [including sexual ethics] because it does not speak with one voice" (p. 47). Therefore, while Robertson refers to the Bible as "inspired by God," all he means is that the writers of Scripture were motivated by their relationship with God, just as we can be inspired to exercise by the encouragement of a friend. In fact, Robertson goes so far as to say that the Bible contains many inaccurate stories and even things we should "rightfully condemn as unethical and wrong." Its authority, then, is not found within it, but "within the communities that hold it as sacred and interpret it" (p. 47).

This view of biblical authority allows Robertson flexibility and freedom for fresh interpretations of the biblical text, based on the (supposed) historical and cultural contexts in which Scripture was written, and that he believes go back to the early church. Robertson walks through the typical passages that speak against homosexuality, which he refers to as "clobber passages," and presents three main arguments against their contemporary relevance. First, the prohibitions against homosexuality in the Old Testament are explicitly tied to pagan worship and were given to Jewish people living under the Old Covenant, not to Christians living under the New Covenant (pp. 58, 66, 71–76). Second, any condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament refers to idolatry, pederasty, prostitution, or sexual abuse, not to consensual and loving same-sex relationships (pp. 101–13). Third, the biblical authors had no concept of same-sex orientation and queerness as an identity. Therefore, any condemnation of homosexuality was directed against the practice (but only in cases related to idolatry, abuse, or prostitution), not against true homosexuality or a person's gay identity (pp. 53–55). To this, Robertson adds that through its teaching on the inclusion of the Gentiles (e.g., Acts 10–11), the Bible anticipates the full inclusion of all types of people, including queer people.

Contending that neither the Bible nor Jesus ever "spoke a single word in condemnation of queer people" (p. 91), Robertson concludes his argument by highlighting many positive affirmations of queer saints throughout biblical history. He suggests that Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Joseph, Jesus and Lazarus, and the Ethiopian Eunuch were all queer and engaged in queer relationships. He bases this upon the love expressed between these characters, assuming it was romantic and erotic love. He also classifies these saints as queer by claiming that the term can describe anyone who "defied sexual and gender assumptions in their culture and era," or anyone who was simply different or misunderstood. Since Jesus defied cultural and religious expectations for women, refused to marry, and loved many men, he too was queer (pp. 159–61).

Robertson's case is passionately argued and stems from his experience as a person who identifies as queer and has faced significant abuse and rejection for embracing this identity. As such, his book serves

as a warning to the church to do better in addressing vulnerable youth who are grappling with same-sex sexual desires. Perhaps if Robertson had received better guidance on the process of sanctification and the lifelong struggle faced by every Christian with sinful desires of various kinds (including same-sex sexual desires), he might have come to very different conclusions.

Nevertheless, as it stands, Robertson's argument contains three fundamental flaws. First, as numerous affirming scholars concede (e.g., William Loader and Luke Timothy Johnson), his assertion that the prohibitions against homosexual practice pertain only to pagan worship or sexual abuse is untenable. Scripture is clear: same-sex sexual acts not only contradict God's will but are contrary to created nature (Lev 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:26–27). Therefore, while it is true that God issued these commands so that his people might stand apart from those who worship other gods, their purpose is so that we might imitate his holiness and maintain a sexual ethic that aligns with creation order. That means confining sexual expression to the one-flesh covenant union between a husband and wife. All sexual activity outside of this context stands condemned and is a potential ground for exclusion from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10).

Second, as already noted, Robertson advocates contradictory views of the Bible's authority. Many times, he claims that Scripture has no authority over our lives and that we can eat the meat and spit out the bones of whatever we like or dislike. But this begs the question: if the Bible is not verbally inspired, then why is his interpretation of it any more authoritative than any other? Yet, when making his case for God's acceptance of queer people, he not only claims biblical authority but, on that basis, concludes that "we don't need to defend our right to be a follower of Jesus or to be a part of the church-God has welcomed us in, and that's the final word" (p. 227). This, however, not only ignores the role of repentance in entering God's kingdom but as argued in the previous paragraph, badly misunderstands both the nature of and reasons for the Bible's prohibitions against homosexual practice.

Third, while Robertson makes room for LGBTQ people at the table, it is not the table of historic Christianity. Despite repeatedly claiming that the early church had no consensus on sexual ethics and that it was never an essential part of the Christian faith (p. 35), he provides little evidence to support this contention. To the contrary, and on the basis of Genesis 1 and 2 (cf. Matt 19:4–5), the historic church has been in agreement that God created humanity male and female, and that marriage is only between one man and one woman. Indeed, this remains the predominant view today. So, while Robertson is right that queer people who believe their way of life is holy and honoring to God have "created a table of their own" (p. 243), the problem is that this table is not in the biblical and historic Christian church but in the church of "queer Christianity," a church which stands opposed the good word of the Triune God in Scripture.

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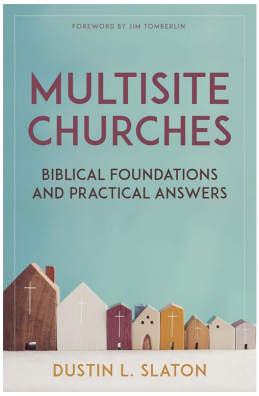
Dustin Slaton. *Multisite Churches: Biblical Foundations and Practical Answers*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2023. 317 pp. £19.43 / $22.99.



Few aspects of contemporary evangelical ecclesiology have generated as much polarized reaction in recent times as the multisite model of church, a phenomenon that emerged in the 1990s and has experienced significant growth throughout the past three decades. Proponents of this model (or perhaps, better, models—given the diversity of practice expressed under the banner of multisite) often highlight its perceived success as a missional strategy. Critics typically point to the paucity of exegetical and theological arguments for it; indeed, the notion of a multisite church (singular) is typically considered by those opposed to the multisite strategy to be an ecclesiological misnomer.

Addressing this lacuna, and in the process aiming to "provide a simple theological foundation that gives credibility to multisite churches as a legitimate, biblical church model, not simply another fad of a consumeristic church" (p. 33), stands as the worthy motivation behind Dustin Slaton's *Multisite Churches: Biblical Foundations and Practical Answers*. No armchair advocate, Slaton's interest in this model came through direct exposure while serving as a campus pastor at a multisite church in Texas. Nor does he present himself as an uncritical proponent: from experience, he describes having observed numerous "positive and negative aspects of multisite ministry" (p. 23), not to mention definitions of multisite church that fail to conform to congregational principles.

Despite his immersion in the world of multisite churches, and having been challenged by the critiques offered by, most notably, Jonathan Leeman in *One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Models* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), Slaton's search for sources that attempt to biblically substantiate this model of church governance uncovered what he styles a "disheartening" absence of "in-depth theological consideration" (p. 24). While acknowledging his indebtedness to the efforts of Greg Allison and John Hammett to provide a principled theological rationale for multisite churches—both notable exceptions to the pragmatic rule—Slaton nonetheless asserts that even these "have not yet provided a holistic defense of the multisite model, nor have they provided a fully formed ecclesiology for multisite churches" (p. 32).

In part 1, after surveying the (limited and largely pragmatically oriented) existing scholarship on multisite churches, Slaton's effort to fill this gap begins by observing echoes of multisite church practice throughout history, especially aspects of Wesley's Methodist Societies in the eighteenth century and the Sunday School movement that began in the nineteenth century. He nonetheless affirms the undeniable: that "the modern multisite movement in the United States is very young" (p. 65). This relative lack of historical precedent notwithstanding, Slaton proceeds to affirm the multisite model on the basis of a number of recommending qualities: it "fulfills a great commission purpose"; it "is a biblical model" (in particular, conjecturing that "the multisite model can be seen in an undeveloped form in the early church gathering in both large groups and small groups"); it "practices good stewardship"; and it "is the most effective model for multiplication and evangelism"—though not a "replacement for other multiplication methods" (for example, church planting; pp. 89–95).

The core of the multisite model's appeal for Slaton is his belief that it best enables and encourages the growth of healthy churches: "structured rightly," he argues, it is "a valid [congregational] church

structure and can be used effectively to reach more people with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ" (p. 25). In fact, the task of "Building Healthy Multisite Churches" occupies the entirety of part 2 (and the bulk of the remainder of the book), as Slaton explores how expository preaching, the administration of the ordinances, church membership, church discipline, corporate worship, discipleship, prayer, evangelism, missions, stewardship, and community might fruitfully be enacted in a multisite setting. Writing unabashedly from the vantage point of convictional Baptistic-flavored congregationalism—an excursus on "The Southern Baptist Convention and multisite churches" betrays his predominant, though not exclusive, ecclesiological target audience—his chosen categories reflect an assumed familiarity with, and endorsement of, Mark Dever's *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Clearly conscious that the bulk of the most strident criticisms of multisite churches have emerged from the 9Marks stable—criticisms less "about the purity of multisite churches' missional intentions" and more "about the wisdom of their processes" (p. 92)—Slaton turns to addressing these challenges head on. In response to the charge that gathering (in its entirety) is intrinsic to a local church's identity and essence, Slaton's definition of a multisite church as "one church whose members ordinarily gather at multiple campuses and ideally gather together as a whole church occasionally" (p. 279) is a creative attempt to temper what he sees as the non-negotiability of whole-membership gathering in Scripture with the caveat that this need only occur periodically. Multiple campuses and church unity are not mutually exclusive categories in Slaton's thinking; instead, he argues that the gatherings of disparate campuses, "united by covenant to carry out the biblical responsibilities, functions, and ministries of a church," are a legitimate way of expressing the biblical injunction to enact togetherness.

Critics of multisite churches might well applaud Slaton's effort to preserve the importance of the gathering of a whole church as crucial to its existence but nonetheless query his decision to limit this to periodic occasions. Indeed, over and above the exegetical tussling in this final section, Slaton's commitment to the normative principle—and with it a belief that "Scripture does not present clear direction" when it comes to church governance, instead allowing "Christians to incorporate in their worship forms and practices not forbidden by Scripture, provided they promote order in worship and do not contradict scriptural principles" (p. 25, citing Daniel Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], pp. 2–3)—stands in irreconcilable tension with the regulative principle embraced by critics like Leeman, Dever, Jamieson, and company.

Overall, readers will find much to appreciate about Slaton's nuanced commendation of multisite churches, regardless of their ecclesiological precommitments. His efforts to assuage the suspicion that this model is inevitably driven by an impoverished approach to church polity—one that privileges pragmatics over biblical principle—is broadly successful, even if one is not ultimately persuaded by the conclusions he reaches. Multisite churches have long lacked an extended biblical and theological justification for their existence, and Slaton's book is a worthy contribution to this developing discussion.

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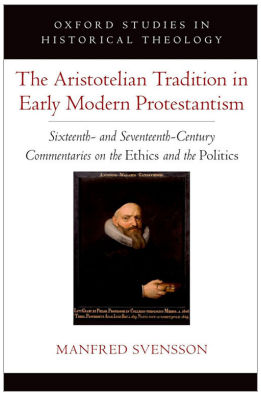
Manfred Svensson. *The Aristotelian Tradition in Early Modern Protestantism: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Commentaries on the* Ethics *and* Politics. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. xiv + 212 pp. £80.41/$90.00.



Early modern Protestant reception of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* might appear to be of marginal interest. It is still not unusual for historians and ethicists to view Protestantism as marking a decisive turn away from Aristotelian approaches to ethics. Indeed, according to some interpretations, an undue interest in Aristotle's ethical and political writings runs a severe risk of undermining the gospel and damaging our souls. After all, in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (1517), Luther called Aristotle's ethics 'the worst enemy of grace'.

In this volume, Manfred Svensson, Professor of Philosophy at the Universidad de los Andes, Chile, demonstrates that this is a profound misunderstanding. Far from repudiating Aristotle and his ethics, early modern Protestants embraced him. Indeed, so ubiquitous was his influence that an exhaustive presentation of Protestant Aristotelianism would be impossible, because 'Aristotle is everywhere' (p. 10). Instead, Svensson focuses more narrowly on Protestant commentaries on the closely related *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, published between 1529 and 1670. The earlier date marked the first Protestant commentary on the *Ethics* by Philip Melanchthon. After the latter date, there was a hiatus until the end of the eighteenth century. But the intervening 140 years saw fifty-five Protestant commentaries on the *Ethics* and fifteen on the *Politics*, often in multiple editions. This is to say nothing of vast numbers of disputations on Aristotelian ethical themes and the presence of those themes across other Protestant ethical writings.

Svensson's work represents an application of the historiography of Richard Muller to Reformation and Post-Reformation Protestant ethics. After an introduction, the first chapter locates the commentaries within the intellectual contexts of humanism and medieval traditions of commentary on Aristotle. Chapter 2 then introduces the most important institutional locations across Europe of Protestant Aristotelianism and the commentators themselves. Most of the Protestant commentators were philosophers, but some theologians also wrote commentaries, most notably the Lutheran Melanchthon (1497–1560) and, among the Reformed, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and Antonius Walaeus (1573–1639). The latter is of particular interest because, as a member of the theology faculty at Leiden, he was also one of the authors of the *Synopsis of a Purer Theology* (1625).

Chapters 3–6 then examine in some detail the substance of Protestant ethical Aristotelianism. Chapter 3 considers the relationship of Protestant Christianity and natural philosophy and notes how the law-gospel distinction enabled Protestant ethicists to treat moral philosophy as a relatively autonomous discipline, albeit one that was incomplete and ultimately crippled without Scripture and the gospel. Chapters 4 and 5 treat important themes from commentaries on the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, before chapter 6 analyses the question of the relationship between theoretical reason and practical reason. Each of these chapters provides insight into important questions of the interpretation of Aristotle's moral philosophy and would be a useful orientation for those wanting to begin thinking about Aristotelian approaches to ethics and politics. Svensson offers carefully nuanced and historically aware readings, while never getting bogged down in details—the prose is admirably lucid. What becomes clear is that early Protestant interpretations of Aristotle were conducted in conversation with a wide

range of scholarship and marked by an intellectual sophistication that parallels early Protestant work in dogmatics and the reading of Scripture.

Svensson demonstrates that Protestant commentators did not always feel obliged to evaluate Aristotle according to Scripture, although some did, notably Vermigli and Walaeus. Others compared him more closely to other ancient philosophers, for example, the Roman jurists on the question of justice and law, or Plato on the relationship of theoretical and practical knowledge. Others simply offered careful interpretations of the meaning of Aristotle's writings considered in themselves.

Svensson establishes beyond doubt that, at least until 1670, Aristotelianism of one form or another was ubiquitous in Protestant ethical teaching. This does not mean that Protestant readings and appropriations of Aristotle's ethical writings were uniform, nor that differences can be mapped along confessional lines, nor that approval of Aristotle's ethics entailed a wholesale acceptance of his metaphysics. Moreover, the prevalence of Aristotle among early Protestants should not be taken to mean that early Protestants were all Thomists. In Svensson's summary, 'the study of Aristotle did not automatically turn everyone into a Thomist. Protestant Thomism was important; Protestant Aristotelianism was omnipresent' (p. 9). Nevertheless, the early Luther aside, no Protestant regarded Aristotle's *Ethics* as an enemy of grace. The myth of the Reformation as a repudiation of Aristotle's moral philosophy is simply untenable; no serious interpreter of Reformation thought, or of the history of moral philosophy, has any excuse to treat it as anything more than an assertion based on ignorance of the primary sources.

Readers of this journal might naturally be led to ask whether early Protestant deployment of Aristotle's moral philosophy should be reflected in contemporary ethical teaching. Each of us will have to draw our own conclusions. But a purely 'biblical' approach to ethics—even if such a thing be possible—was not the historic Protestant approach. This does not mean that contemporary Protestant ethicists are obliged to be Aristotelians. But it does mean that none of us should short-circuit careful reflection on the relationship of moral philosophy and moral theology and the relative contributions of philosophical, exegetical, and theological modes of reasoning to the task of evangelical ethics. And, as Svensson observes, those of us who are drawn to the contemporary revival of virtue ethics already have a rich and vibrant Protestant tradition on which we can draw.

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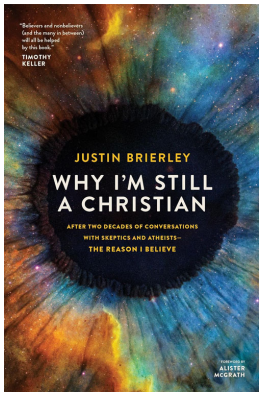
— MISSION & CULTURE —

Justin Brierley. *Why I'm Still a Christian: After Two Decades of Conversations with Skeptics and Atheists—The Reason I Believe*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2025. xii + 207 pp. £12.99/$18.99.



Justin Brierley's *Why I'm Still a Christian* builds on the speaker and broadcaster's two-decade-long experience hosting conversations between leading Christian and atheist thinkers to create a compelling case that "Christianity makes the best sense of the world we inhabit" (p. 188). Serving both skeptics and Christians seeking to get equipped in their apologetic ministry or personal walk with God, Brierley provides an invaluable resource in this revised update to his 2017 book, *Unbelievable.*

The ten chapters of this book are divided into four main thematic movements. First, Brierley opens with a chapter on creating better conversations between people who inhabit opposing worldviews—a skill the author excels at in contemporary apologetics. Then, Brierly launches into three chapters covering empirical, philosophical, and intuitive theistic arguments to posit that God best explains human existence, value, and purpose.

Having argued God's existence in general, Brierley moves to Christianity in particular through historical arguments. Both "The Evidence for Jesus" and "Facts That Only Fit the Resurrection" rank among the strongest chapters in the book. Brierley enlists such authoritative voices as Gary Habermas, Michael Licona, Josh McDowell, and Peter J. Williams to debunk "Jesus Mysticism" and to apply the "Minimal Facts" approach to demonstrate how Christianity best explains the historical data on Jesus.

Third, the author engages with the most common atheistic objections to Christianity with an emphasis on theodicies addressing questions related to evil and pain, as well as a practical chapter on answering popular atheist internet memes, such as the classic "You don't believe in Zeus, Thor, or Odin. Well, I just believe in one less god than you" (p. 155).

Fourth, and equally valuable, is "Deconstruction, Reconstruction & Building a Durable Faith." This new chapter not only directly addresses those struggling with their Christian convictions but also instructs believers on lovingly coming alongside their brothers and sisters during their deconstruction and reconstruction processes. Leaning on C. S. Lewis (whose influence is present throughout the book), Brierley suggests a "mere Christianity" approach that allows one to distinguish between non-negotiable "primary" theological truths and "secondary" doctrinal issues comparable to non-load bearing walls which might be altered without causing one's Christian convictions to fall "like a house of cards" (p. 172).

In his concluding chapter, Brierley brings it back to conversations that matter as he invites seekers and skeptics to "move from examining the outside of the building to walking up to the front door and taking a step inside" the Christian story of reality (p. 198).

Brierley's principal strength lies in his accessible tone and ability to communicate complex ideas in everyday language, yet another way the author emulates C. S. Lewis. Indeed, Brierley is a curator, cleverly arranging not only his impressive interview partners' concepts and contributions but also ordinary people's stories and personal anecdotes in order to illustrate his points.

What sets this book apart is that the author also includes objections and criticisms to Christianity. Featuring atheist thinkers alongside his Christian sources and including counterarguments in this way mirrors the format he cultivated in his groundbreaking apologetic radio show. Brierley models how to have good conversations by expressing respect and admiration even to those diametrically opposed to his views. Furthermore, he practices modesty when he acknowledges his limited knowledge on certain topics or admits times when he had to change his mind on theological questions or a particular apologetic argument's validity, thus earning the reader's trust.

Why I'm Still a Christian is more tightly argued and (despite the additional chapter) more succinct than its 2017 predecessor. Although this new edition omits some autobiographical and humorous elements, it nevertheless maintains a personal and conversational tone, while adding more weight to the actual apologetic arguments and the ideas discussed rather than the author's experience in interacting with them. Additionally, its organization with shorter subchapters and clearer subheadings allows the reader to easily locate the most relevant parts, thus highly improving the reading experience.

While Brierley generally succeeds in rendering complex arguments concisely and comprehensibly, this brevity works against him in his chapter on "the atheist's greatest objection" (p. 135). Five theodicies are given, when his case might have been improved by presenting only one or two to develop his ideas with more nuance. Furthermore, his second *apologia,* based on a cosmic spiritual battle, helps believers, but not atheists, grapple with pain, even though the challenge is posed as an atheistic argument. Lastly, some believers might disagree with the doctrines Brierley deems secondary, and his annihilationist view on hell or his elastic approach to biblical inerrancy might raise conservative eyebrows.

However, these minor grievances will not deter Christians or non-Christians from seeking to engage with pressing worldview questions about God's existence, reality, and the human experience. From seekers and skeptics to believers on the spectrum between deconstruction and reconstruction over to apologists-in-the-making, this book provides a highly readable introduction to apologetics, while simultaneously modeling how to engage in these crucial conversations. For these reasons, *Why I'm Still a Christian* is highly recommended. Brierley's work has served and further equipped me in my cross-cultural ministry in the Middle East. I trust it will serve you well also.

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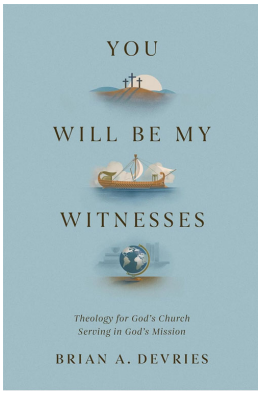
Brian A. DeVries. *You Will Be My Witnesses: Theology for God's Church Serving in God's Mission*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. xxii + 292 pp. £17.99/$24.99.



What is God's mission, and how are God's people called to participate in it? It is both surprising and perhaps even concerning how little agreement exists among evangelical missiologists today on such foundational concepts. Some take an expansive approach to argue that the mission of God's people is synonymous with God's work in the world, such that wherever Christians partake in what God is doing, they are "on mission." Others are much more particular, framing it exclusively as an international, cross-cultural, evangelistic endeavour among unreached people groups. Of course, there are many positions and postures between these extremes. Downstream from these debates can be found questions about the role of social action in mission, the balance between its local and global dimensions, and the urgency of the task. Discussions abound regarding the definitions—and even biblical legitimacy—of words such as mission, missions, missionary, and *missio Dei*. Indeed, evangelical missiological discourse can sometimes be a rather fraught and fragmented space.

In *You Will Be My Witnesses,* US missiologist Brian DeVries (principal of Mukhanyo Theological College, South Africa) attempts to cut through some of this confusion by distinguishing between "mission" as God's broad redemptive work in the world, and "witness" as the church's response to and participation in God's mission. He argues that God's people, as beneficiaries of his redemptive mission in Christ, are called to live as witnesses of Christ (*noun*) in identity and are also called to witness to Christ (*verb*) in vocation. DeVries explains, "It is helpful, for the sake of clarity, to speak of the *witness* of the church instead of the *mission* of the church: the church's witness serves within God's mission" (p. 116). In his conclusion, DeVries again argues that "*witness* is the best term to describe the church's role in a way consistent with Scripture, which does not combine, obscure, or disconnect God's work from ours" (p. 244). This distinction represents a bold and largely successful attempt to untangle several knotty missiological debates.

The author builds his case with precision and care through a three-fold structure to the book: (1) an Old and New Testament biblical-theological overview focusing on the redemptive narrative of God's mission from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 (chs. 1–4); (2) a concise description of Christian activity in church history highlighting some major themes of Christian witness over the centuries (chs. 5–6); and (3) a theological reflection on the church's contemporary witness in the world today through the fourfold lens of gospel presence, gospel message, gospel response, and gospel community (chs. 7–10). Keen observers will note that this biblical-historical-praxeological structure echoes that of two of the most important and influential missiological works of recent decades: David J. Bosch's magisterial *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991) and Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder's *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis, 2004). However, DeVries's evangelical presuppositions differ markedly from theirs (Protestant ecumenical and Roman Catholic, respectively), and thus so do his conclusions; for whereas they believe that the theology of mission is so contextually bound that its practice should be broadly divergent across time and space, DeVries unashamedly contends that the contemporary witness of the church can be so biblically founded and grounded that its practice should be broadly consistent across time and space.

Readers looking for extensive coverage of contemporary missiological questions, such as people group paradigms, rapidly multiplying church planting movements, or the polycentricity and globalization of mission today, may find little that directly addresses their interests here. However, careful study of the theological principles outlined and explained in this book will provide robust frameworks to discuss these issues and many others faithfully and fruitfully. That said, the third part of the book (on the church's contemporary witness) at times felt frustratingly non-committal about essential shifts in the twenty-first century, such as migration, majority world Christianity, and the digital revolution; these must inevitably shape—and not only be shaped by—the concept of "witness." A follow-up volume with more extended attention to these themes would, no doubt, be illuminating, insightful, and important in shaping missiological discourse.

I was especially pleased to see a whole chapter dedicated to "The Mission of the Holy Spirit" (ch. 3). The crucial role of the third triune person in the mission of God and the witness of God's people are understood in full and rich ways throughout the New Testament, but this has rarely been reflected within Reformed missiology. *You Will Be My Witnesses* is a much-needed corrective to this detrimental blind spot.

DeVries writes in clear, professional prose. There is little in the way of personal experience, anecdote, or illustration; at times, several substantive topics are addressed within relatively brief sections. Readers would derive the greatest benefit from a patient and studious approach. The engaging study questions at the close of each chapter mean that the book lends itself to communal, small-group study.; potential contexts might include a thoughtful missions committee, a pastor's fellowship, a mission organization staff team, or a seminary classroom. However, whether read privately or corporately, this book will influence and impact any conscientious reader, and thus, it seems likely to remain relevant and widely studied in the years ahead.

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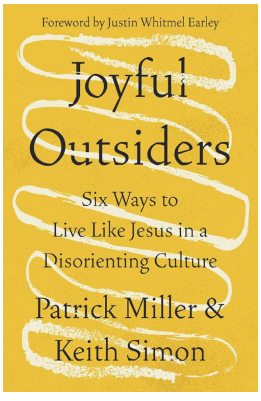
Patrick Miller and Keith Simon. *Joyful Outsiders: Six Ways to Live Like Jesus in a Disorienting Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025. xvi + 244 pp. £14.99/$19.99



For the past several years, Pastors Patrick Miller and Keith Simon have been helping the church fight against the tribalism rampant in her ranks today, highlighting that our ultimate allegiance is not to a political party or agenda, but to Jesus himself. Their previous book, *Truth Over Tribe: Pledging Allegiance to the Lamb, Not the Donkey or the Elephant* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2022), and current podcast of the same name provide sound biblical insights and strategies for how to live with a Jesus-first posture in our politically polarized age.

In their new book, *Joyful Outsiders*, the authors broaden their scope to help the church work through the various means by which we engage the culture at large, not only in politics, but in business, art, education, creation care, sports, etc. Their paradigm for cultural engagement is six ways or callings through which followers of Jesus live as citizens of the kingdom of God rather than as citizens of Babylon (the biblical

symbol for all other earthly empires). Being in Babylon is challenging because we are not citizens of Babylon and we are tempted to live according to her ways rather than Jesus's ways. By discerning which of the six ways God calls each of us to live and by boldly embracing that call, we stand joyfully outside Babylon, even as we live within Babylon.

The following summarizes the six categories (chs. 6–11) by which Miller and Simon propose Christians can engage the culture around them. Also listed is the biblical character(s) the authors present as an exemplary model for each way:

- Trainers show others how to practice their faith so that we are ready to withstand the temptations of Babylonian culture (e.g., Ezra).
- Advisors aim to be "in the right room with the right people at the right time" (p. 104) so they can influence outcomes big and small for the kingdom (e.g., Daniel).
- Artists create beauty, not for pragmatic or ideological ends, but to showcase the deep pain in the world, while inviting people to the true hope of God's ways in the world (e.g., Zechariah and Haggai).
- Ambassadors embrace the spiritual reality that the only way to change Babylon is by inviting people to have their hearts changed by a relationship with Jesus (e.g., Paul).
- Protestors challenge the principles and practices of Babylon that bring hurt instead of help, that violate humans instead of valuing them (e.g., Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego).
- Builders cultivate the community by constructing institutions that serve the common good of everyone rather than selfishly serving the interests of the few (e.g., Nehemiah).

Miller and Simon remind readers that we tend to see our particular calling as the most important. The authors close their argument with the vital truth that unity in diversity should characterize the church's life, and they urge believers to be open to callings other than the one(s) they are currently experiencing. These pastors express their hopeful, prayerful charge by stating, "I hope you feel freedom knowing that there is not one rigid approach to Babylon but many faithful approaches. I pray that as you face the challenges ahead, you will learn to practice all six ways, putting on whatever outfit the moment calls for: the trainer, the advisor, the artist, the ambassador, the protestor, or the builder" (p. 178).

In an otherwise consistent and coherent book, the authors seem to contradict their message at a few points. For example, when unpacking the role of the artist as one who lives between "heaven and earth, life and death, hope and despair," Miller and Simon state, "When an artist unveils heaven on earth, it's less like a cheesy Thomas Kinkade watercolor and more like Jesus weeping over Lazarus' body and then roaring him back to life" (p. 113). I am no fan of Kinkade's work, but I know many brothers and sisters in Christ whose faith is strengthened by his paintings, revealing that God is using them to develop others into joyful outsiders. In another instance, as they spell out the character and purpose a builder should possess when developing, molding, and directing institutions, Miller and Simon state, "If you can't confidently say that your institutional purpose glorifies God, serves the institution's internal and external community, and pursues a Christ-centered bottom line, then your institutional purpose lacks character" (p. 168). Since Jesus's followers are the intended readers of this book, this statement is true. However, in a book that regularly discusses the common good and encourages Christians to value and serve the citizens of Babylon, claiming that no non-Christian institution can have character may foster a separationist and isolationist attitude that I do not believe the authors intend.

Despite these sporadic moments of inconsistency, the book stands out as a powerful challenge that individual Jesus followers, local churches, and ministry organizations should heed. As citizens of

God's kingdom in the midst of a culture unaligned with Jesus's vision of human flourishing, we need examples and inspiration to live kingdom life faithfully. Miller and Simon provide just that, exhorting readers to more deeply understand the Bible's missional call to take the good news of Jesus to everyone, everywhere, using means that the Bible lays out for us. The final chapters contain a personal inventory, by which readers can discern their primary joyful outsider calling, and further resources for developing that calling. Far from being filler material, as such "additional resources" can sometimes be, they genuinely assist the reader in discerning just who God calls us to be.

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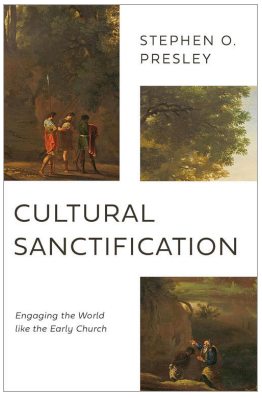
Stephen O. Presley. *Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World like the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. x + 220 pp. £18.99/$24.99.



In his new book, *Cultural Sanctification*, Stephen O. Presley seeks to answer the question, "How did the early church engage culture?" Contemporary discussion about Christian cultural engagement tends to divide between two attitudes, often pitted against each other: isolation or attack. Presley posits the concept of cultural sanctification as a way to bridge these two tensions and hold them in better balance. "Cultural sanctification recognizes that Christians are necessarily embedded within their culture and must seek sanctification (both personal and corporate) in a way that draws upon the forms and features of their environment to transform them by pursuing virtue" (p. 12). Cultural sanctification is comprised of three components: "defending the faith"; "sharing the good news of salvation found in Christ"; and visibly embodying Christian virtues in a persuasive manner (p. 12). According to Presley, the early church is a valuable example and guide on cultural engagement as Western Christians today find themselves amidst a new, though not unfamiliar, paganism.

Catechesis and liturgy firmly established the identity of early Christian churches and new converts and served as the foundation of the process of cultural sanctification. "Catechesis entailed a long period of examination to form new believers in the contours of the church's doctrine and morality" (p. 25). Through this catechesis and the unique rhythms of the church's liturgy (or worship), the early church crafted "a communal identity" that drew "sharp theological and moral contrasts with the world" (p. 20). Through this patient, intentional work, early Christians sought to form their identities around Christian doctrine and the Christian story. Presley argues that any cultural engagement must first begin by "cultivating our Christian identity" through a "kind of slow steady discipleship that builds a bulwark of faithful followers who do not live in fear or anger but in holiness" (p. 54).

Chapter 2 examines early Christian political and public theology, which was built on an unwavering commitment to the doctrine of providence. This commitment to the providence of God meant that "the early church had a positive view of the state even amid persecution" (p. 63). Yet, early Christians recognized that the state could not hold ultimate authority over their lives. They developed an "active political dualism," which became a "precursor to the modern pluralism or divided sovereignty that covers the political landscape today" (pp. 68–69). In addition to a robust political theology, the early church also

engaged intellectually with the pagan culture (ch. 3). Early Christian intellectuals "organically emerged" from within the ranks of the culturally marginalized church to "challenge the very basic assumptions of the surrounding culture" (pp. 90–91). These early intellectuals eventually fostered a Christian vision of education and learning in which "everything was oriented toward the study of the Scriptures for growth in holiness and godliness" (p. 101).

The church's social witness forms the subject of chapter 4. "Christians were called to live lives of virtue among their neighbors and to demonstrate the beauty of holiness through their public witness and service" (p. 21). For Presley, this commitment to embodied virtue may be the greatest lesson we can learn from the early church. The development of virtue meant that Christians had a "culturally discerning spiritual life" that involved "contingency, sanctification, and improvisation" (p. 117). Christians were "actively indigenizing in the world around them while navigating between the virtues and vices in every situation" (p. 138). The fifth and final chapter reflects on the essential component of early Christian cultural identity: hope. "Christian hope was, and is, defined by two key tenets: the future kingdom of God, and eternal life or beatitude" (p. 143). Faithfulness to the doctrine of the resurrection and the final judgment sustained Christians in the assurance of future reward so that they could live godly, virtuous lives within their current culture. This hope helped early Christians navigate difficult cultural situations and circumstances without surrendering to fear or despair.

Though presented as a way to unify debate, Presley's concept of cultural sanctification needs more clarity. Questions linger about what "sanctification" means and to whom or what the term is applied—individual persons or the culture generally. Perhaps this ambiguity is intentional. If so, greater clarity about why this ambiguity is beneficial should have been provided. The early church's relationship to power should have received greater attention. In *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford, 2010), James Davison Hunter has persuasively argued that cultural influence comes largely through institutions of power. Therefore, marginalization from these institutions decreases the ability of people to change culture. According to Presley, the pre-Constantinian church "was engaged in a slow and steady process of living faithfully and seeking sanctification both personally and corporately in ways that transform[ed] the culture" (p. 20). From "the time of the apostles to the rise of Constantine," Presley writes, "the church lived rooted within the culture, hoping to transform it through their presence" (p. 20). However, without access to real centers of cultural power, did the early church actually transform culture? That the early church explicitly set out to transform culture may be a modern reading of their history. An acceptance of martyrdom seems to have characterized the early church more than overt efforts at cultural transformation.

Still, pastors, lay leaders, and historians should take *Cultural Sanctification* seriously. Presley argues that effective cultural witness must begin by forming virtue within the lives of individual Christians, churches, and institutions. "If the early church has anything to teach us, it is that virtue and the spiritual life are more important than all hopes of financial and professional prestige" (p. 124). The current cultural climate should not be the cause of ultimate alarm. Instead, we should remember that "the church survived and even thrived in times like our own, and God was faithful through it all" (p. 169).

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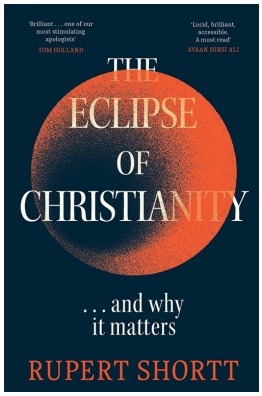
Rupert Shortt. *The Eclipse of Christianity: And Why It Matters*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2024. 368 pp. £12.99/$19.99.



The Eclipse of Christianity: And Why It Matters by Roman Catholic journalist Rupert Shortt extends the growing bibliography of works on the social impact of Western secularization. Shortt's book is not alarmist in tone but provides social criticism from a theologically liberal perspective on a wide range of issues for the West—especially Britain. In a high-brow journalistic style that knits together anecdotal evidence and interviews, deep reading in theology and philosophy, and important threads from his earlier works on Rowan Williams, Benedict XVI, the New Atheism, and Christian persecution, Shortt weaves considerable material into this book.

The Eclipse of Christianity contains three parts: "Faltering Faith," "Earthen Vessels," and "Cultural Fabric." These provide an account of secularisation followed by ecclesiological and missional reflections before concluding with a forward-facing look at how the church can engage with topics such as AI and DEI. While arguing that "Europe's historic faith deserves a more serious hearing than it usually receives from the mainstream" (p. 9), Shortt also makes liberalizing proposals to the church, including "[a] revisionist but theologically solid pro-gay case" (p. 187). Ultimately, Shortt's liberal theological footing—confessing that the ethics of the world should shape church teaching—does not enable him to mount a robust Christian critique of "secularising impulses across contemporary British culture" (p. 8).

The opening chapter, "A Flight from Enchantment," considers both reasons for and ways of understanding secularization. Two sociological factors that Shortt identifies as being behind the decline of British churches are welfarism and pluralism. He articulates how social structures relate to Christian faithfulness within society and how some social transformations have considerably eclipsed Christian witness in Britain. Shortt's view of the subsequent challenges to social cohesion and personal freedom in the modern West is hued with Catholic Personalism. He calls for Christianity to have "some kind of anchor-like role" for society (p. 32). In important respects, it already does—tethering our national history, legal system, and so on—yet Shortt's concern is sin and the conscience. Without Christian influence upon the individual conscience, "we lack something crucial" (p. 32). Shortt's focus on sin is significant. He advances apologetics through cultural criticism in a theological register—his critique is not centered on "economic inactivity" or "democratic participation"—the stated concern is "sin" and its social consequences. This connects to his interest in ways of understanding secularisation. "Better forms of historiography," Shortt writes, are developing an understanding of religion in Britain neither beholden to the secularisation thesis nor naïve about "ebbing numbers" (p. 23). These forms of historical writing, sensitive to both decline and renewal, must be informed by theological-hermeneutical concepts such as sin, judgement, and grace. However, this illustrates the tension in Shortt's writing between the theological focus (sin) and the liberal philosophy of religion paradigm, implying Christianity is a mode of "enchantment."

The tension remains when Shortt observes the Christian underpinnings of an egalitarianism that implicitly supplied John Rawls's liberal political theory in chapter 2. He notes that "the Rawlsian paradigm is now unravelling" under "wokeism" (p. 41) and explores a parallel with the circumstances of the displacement of paganism by the cultural ascendency of the church in the fourth century. This

is an oft-made but ill-judged comparison because—despite its success in institutional capture—it seems unlikely that poststructuralist critical theory will support a civilization for millennia. Yet Shortt confesses, "Christians (myself included) may say that they are liberal enough to welcome aspects of the new order, and to even accept its Christian roots" (p. 41). The welcome becomes warmer as the book progresses. Two chapters later, discussing the common good, Shortt acclaims Rowan Williams's calls for procedural secularism and "interactive pluralism" (p. 108). He affirms Acton's dictum, "every man shall be protected in doing his [religious] duty" (p. 108), but fails to see how this conflicts with his concerns that liberal relativism lacks "grounds … for opposing the suicide bomber who believes that by murdering others he is securing his place in paradise" (p. 106). How can the Actonian liberal rebut the suicide bomber who believes this act is his religious duty?

In part 2, Shortt addresses the Roman Catholic Church's "pig-headed reluctance to accept LGBT equality" (p. 187). This frustration is the outworking of interactive pluralism, wherein "both Church and state can be influenced by a cross-fertilisation of debate" (p. 110). Shortt suggests, "Social consensus pushes the Church to rethinking aspects of its doctrine. This can be a blessing, a major example being the acceptance of same-sex relationships" (p. 110). Here, Shortt is not critiquing secularizing impulses, he is energising them. When he discusses transgenderism in part 3, he opts for a "middle course," left of Francis's encyclicals which condemned gender theory (p. 291). Instead, Shortt celebrates that transgender people embrace a binary identity and argues that their "inclusion in the life of the Church" facilitates their exploration of identity (p. 292).

Shortt's three aims were to critique the "secularisation thesis" and "secularising impulses" yet also "map aspects" of "religious development" (p. 8). Overall, the book gives an accessible summary with some added texture to existing critiques of the secularisation thesis. Its challenges to secularizing impulses are lacking and the theological proposals are often counterproductive—interactive pluralism undermines the authority of the Bible and leaves the church swayed by the ethics of the surrounding culture. Readers should consult mapping of the religious landscape that tends to blend the terrain's description with a theologically liberal prescription of what it should be.

While *The Eclipse of Christianity* tries to pull the church away from important ethical commitments, it also pulls the growing conversation about secularization into theological territory. This is timely, as AI-driven social disruption seems near. Chapter 9 considers AI, quoting laypeople who say, "we're not psychologically equipped for it" and "unless we give people very deep support, they're not going to make it" (p. 266). Interestingly, if the certainties and comforts of late twentieth-century social structures eclipsed faith, then who knows what might happen as they fall?

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